

# Opportunities for New “Cultural Common Sense” About Economics & Health

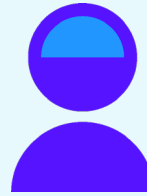
Presented at the National Academies of Science  
By the Topos Partnership  
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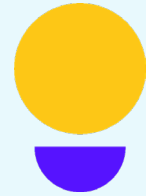
# About Topos



**Culture Change  
Strategy**



**Expertise in Social &  
Cognitive Sciences**



**Organize the Field  
around Strategies**





## Cultural Common Sense

# What “Everybody Knows”

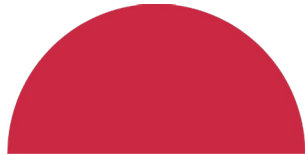
- “We have to live within our means.”
- “Business is more efficient than government.”
- “Taxes harm the economy.”
- “Politicians don’t understand us or care about us.”



**Cultural Common Sense**

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**Shared narratives**





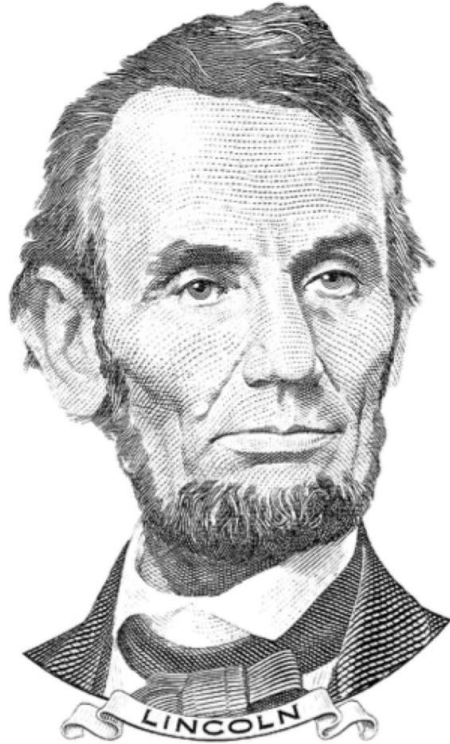
# Cultural Common Sense

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## Shared narratives

*Strategic communications may seek to change the CCS, by adding, highlighting, refining narratives*

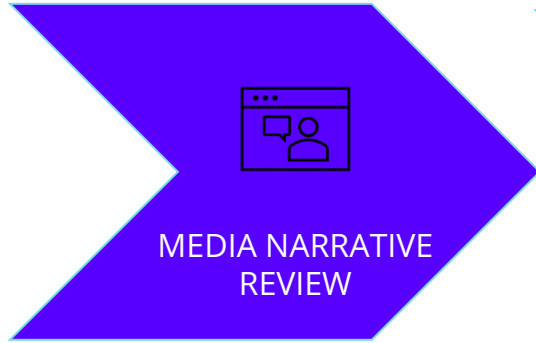
*OR, to tap into aspects of the CCS ...*



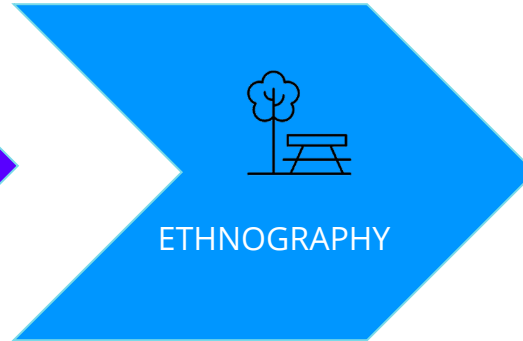
*Public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail. Without it, nothing can succeed.*

– Abraham Lincoln

# Sample Research Approach



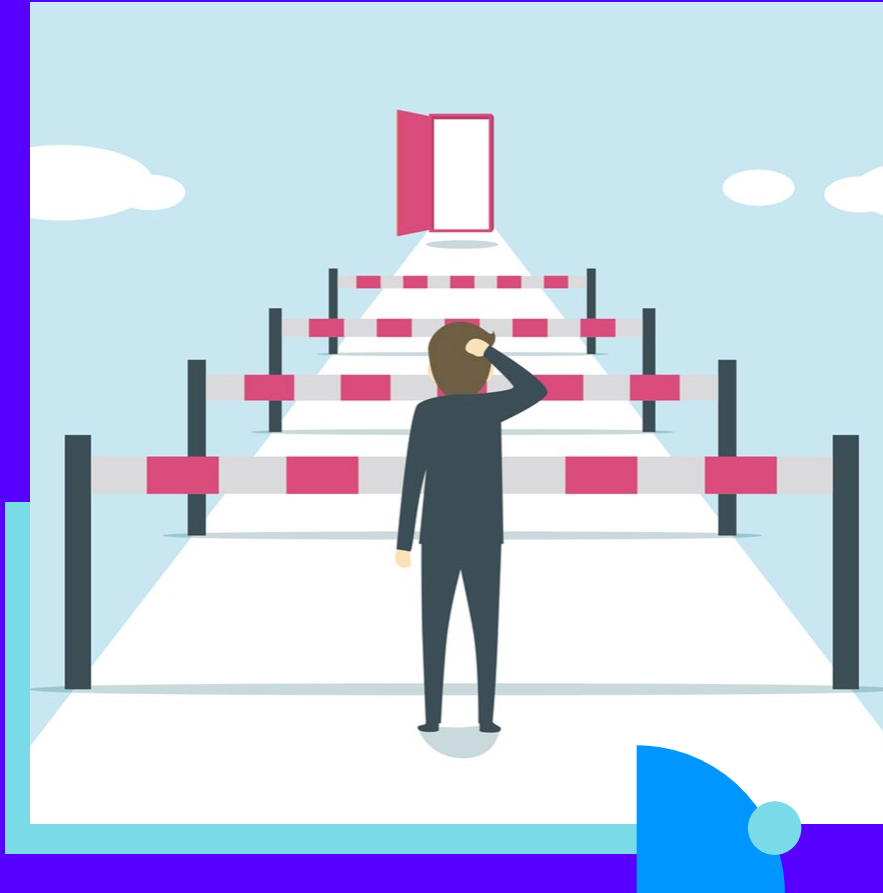
- Identify explicit and implicit narratives — helpful and not



- In-person community visits
- Public spaces, workplaces, homes, etc.
- Authentic dialog with people otherwise not heard from in research
- Explore current narratives & potentially helpful narratives



- Multiple methods
- Qualitative & quantitative
- “TalkBack”
- “Ethnographic field testing”
- Attitude shifts



# Key Challenges in Default Thinking



# Health

## “Health is about individual choices, behaviors”

- Diet, exercise, smoking, etc.

## Focus on healthcare

- Important, but “downstream”



“

*So if you choose to do bad things and put bad things in your system and that really screw you up, that's your choice. Right?*

”

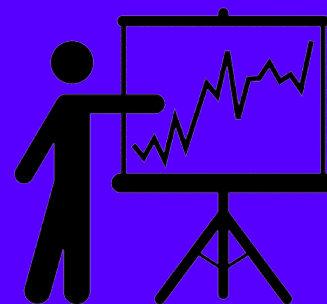
# Economy

## Business-centric View

- Job creators
- Tough competition → We shouldn't "interfere"
- Bosses know best

## We all navigate (individually) the best we can

- Individual trajectories
- Skills, effort, etc.
- "If you want a better job, work for it ..."



# Society

## “Government can’t/doesn’t do much to solve problems”

- General skepticism (motives, confidence)
- Policy off the radar

## Reluctance to focus on race

- Many downplay racism - especially older/conservative white people.
- Some POC avoid focus on “victimization.”
- Even when introduced (as a topic), often ignored/dropped



“

*People always bring race into it. I don't see why. The issue is much more about money.*

”



# Key Opportunities

Related to thinking about Economy-Health connections

Based on ideas/narratives Topos has tested - potential for shared common sense across groups



# Key Opportunities in Current Thinking

Based on ideas/narratives Topos has tested - potential for shared common sense across groups

**“Yes, our physical and mental health are impacted by our economic situation”**

- Can/can't afford: good food, easy transportation, medicines, gym ...

**“Yes, *STRESS* has a big impact on our health ...**

- Strongly established in Cultural Common Sense
- Economic factors obviously linked to stress

**“Yes, some groups experience more stress than others”**

- Helps connect the dots between race, class, place, health.
- Opening for factors like income, safety, discrimination, etc.

“

*I feel like there's not enough help out there in the communities for people with mental health problems. ... a lot of people ... turn to drugs because ... they might have addiction that runs in their family or they're depressed or **stressed**.*

# Key Opportunities in Current Thinking

Based on ideas/narratives Topos has tested - potential for shared common sense across groups

## PLACE:

**“Yes, others/leaders make decisions that make it harder/easier to be healthy in different places ...”**

- PLACE as a helpful focus (concrete, takes focus off individuals)
- Economic factors, in addition to more obvious ones (pollution, etc.)
- Leaders have tended not to be like / understand “the rest of us”
- Decisions have depended on **race** of people in the place



# Key Opportunities in Current Thinking

Based on ideas/narratives Topos has tested - potential for shared common sense across groups

**PEOPLE-DRIVEN ECONOMY: “Yes, the economy does better when we/people are doing better - we can *contribute* more**

- We can contribute energy, ideas, etc.
- We can spend
- SO: we should prioritize making sure **ALL** people are doing OK

**“Yes, we (govmt) could be making things more manageable for regular/working people ...”**

- Role for public policy, “public money”
- Housing costs and other areas
- Not INSTEAD of hard work

**“Yes, employees should have the right to stick together”**

- A commonsense discussion of collective bargaining
- A way of talking about power

# Key Opportunities in Current Thinking


Based on ideas/narratives Topos has tested - potential for shared common sense across groups

**“Yes, we all want/need the same things ....”**

**“Yes, people in different groups (by age, health, economics, race) face serious challenges we can help with ...”**

- E.g. seniors who can't afford meds, workers in remote areas without transportation
- Embeds race in commonsense idea all audiences can relate to

**“Yes, government should protect people from racial discrimination, and correct where past actions have clearly advantaged one group over another”**

- E.g. Japanese families losing properties during WW2
  - E.g. Black families prevented from buying houses up through recent decades
- 



# Bottom Line

**There are opportunities for compelling new understandings of the economy, political economy, and connections to health.**

- Many voices, channels needed
- Connections to concrete (policy) change
- Strong central actor(s)
- Active role for communities
- ...



# Thank You!



[www.ToposPartnership.com](http://www.ToposPartnership.com)



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