Integrating Social and Behavioral Theory into Public Health

LAB 4: Decision-making

The overall purpose of this lab is to integrate various theories of health behavior change by walking through a health-related decision of your own.

Task 1: Preparation (Think about this before you come to lab)
Prior to coming to lab, do the following:

1. Review the health behavior theories presented in class to date (from the “intrapersonal” talks)
2. Think about the health behavior change that you were undertaking in the first quarter; this is your “decision” – to carry out the change (Example: I am deciding to floss my teeth daily.)

Brief background about decision aids:
Interest in helping people make decisions comes from a number of directions. One is the ever-evolving view of health care or public health decision-making that focuses on self-determination. Another is the recognition that many health and public health decisions are not clear-cut – people and communities with varying values may rationally make different decisions. Finally, individuals (or communities) who make decisions after clarifying their expectations and motivations and recognizing their needs for support seem more likely to either stick to those decisions or regard them with less chagrin afterwards. Researchers at the University of Ottawa have developed several guides for people faced with difficult or complicated health-related decisions (http://decisionaid.ohri.ca/decguide.html). Decision guides try to help people clarify factors related to perceived susceptibility and decisional balance, but also to help them feel more empowered to make the decision itself.

Task 2: In the lab session
In pairs, administer the Ottawa guide to each other. When both people in the pair have completed the instrument, review and identify elements that correspond to the theories we discussed in class. Not everything will match up, but a lot will.

As a group, talk about whether the experience of working through the guide helped you feel any more confident about making the decision, or if it perhaps led you somewhere else. Was anything missing from the guide? How might you change it?

Task 3: Individual lab journal entry to upload
Tell us a story about how you came to make the health behavior decision that you worked on in the first quarter. What are some characteristics of good stories? They usually start with some engaging situation – often we find the narrator (or protagonist) in an interesting
predicament or at a decision point. Then there is often a bit of background or other information that we want to tell the reader/listener – the initial situation is the hook that gets them to pay attention, while they wait for the resolution of the story. Then we tell the outcome, and finally, often, a “lesson” or take-away point.

Think about the rubric at the beginning of this guide to:
- tell a complete (enough), coherent story so that the end seems to follow from the beginning
- be as explicit and rich in detail as you can – this “thick description” is both captivating but it also builds trust in the story-teller
- link feelings to events – in the end it’s how we evaluate the meaning of events
- balance use of positive and negative emotional words
- reveal insights

We will have time to talk about these narratives and how you might turn them into spoken versions.