

## commentary

# Special Issue of *Health Psychology* Highlights Interface of Health and Social Psychology

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Some of the most robust theory development, theory testing, and empirical work in health psychology is done by or in collaboration with social and personality psychologists. The longstanding tradition of the merging of broadly applicable theories and methods of social and personality psychology with the domain of health has origins that date back more than half a century. As one example, in the early 1950's, the United States Public Health Service was keenly interested in why more people did not avail themselves of preventive screening and vaccination. Three social psychologists, Godfrey Hochbaum, Irwin Rosenstock, and Stephen Kegels, were tasked with determining how best to increase the use of these services. Hochbaum, Rosentock, and Kegels were trained in the Lewinian tradition, and thus it is not surprising that "the orientation of the work would be toward developing a theory not only useful in explaining a particular problem, but also adaptable to other problems" (Rosenstock, 1974, p. 329). Indeed, as the "father" of social psychology, Lewin himself conducted research in a health context, working during World War II to encourage the eating of non-traditional meats. Although these examples reflect early work in the United States, perhaps nowhere has the integration of social and health psychology been stronger than in Europe, where leading social psychologists bring their strong empirical and theoretical traditions to bear on questions of health significance.

Understanding how far the rich collaborative

relationship between social and health psychology has come, where it stands now and the challenges and opportunities of the future was the underlying motivation for a recently published special issue of *Health Psychology* entitled "Theoretical Innovations in Social and Personality Psychology and Implications for Health" [Volume 32, Number 5, May 2013]. Guest editors William Klein, Alex Rothman, and Linda Cameron have structured a compendium that brings together three distinct types of articles, including excellent work by European social psychologists. First is a section of Conceptual Articles that highlight the state of the science in the broad fields of social/personality psychology and judgment and decision-making. The goal of this section was to elucidate current theories that are either already informing work in a health context or, perhaps more importantly, are ripe for extrapolation to the area of health. For example, Paschal Sheeran, along with colleagues Peter Gollwitzer and John Bargh highlight the relevance of nonconscious processes to health behavior. A second section features some outstanding empirical articles. In this section, Natalie Schüz, Benjamin Schüz and Michael Eid highlight the role of self-affirmation in mitigating defensive reactions to threatening health information in the context of skin cancer prevention. Finally, commentaries from leading scholars view the intersection of health and social/personality psychology through the lens of the future. Included is a commentary by Susan Michie, Robert West, and Bonnie Spring exploring the fertile ground and important challenges of

realizing the potential of the theory to practice cycle in social, personality and health psychology.

In sum, this Health Psychology special issue is an excellent compendium of current empirical work and theorizing at the intersection of social, personality, and health psychology. It was partially sponsored by the National Cancer Institute, and a limited number of free printed copies of the journal are available (to request a copy, please contact Juanita Cox at [coxj@efdb.nci.nih.gov](mailto:coxj@efdb.nci.nih.gov)). As readers of *The European Health Psychologist* are well aware, the major causes of morbidity and mortality in the western world are chronic conditions that are the direct result of human behavior; either lack of healthy behavior or excess in unhealthy behavior (Fisher et al., 2011). This Health Psychology special issue is thus timely and important. If we hope to have a meaningful impact on public health, the science of health behavior change—merging the theory and methods of social and personality psychology with the applied questions and contexts at the core of health psychology—will most certainly be at the forefront.



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