

Introduction to

HEALTH BEHAVIOR THEORY

SECOND EDITION

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Preface

Theory is the foundation for professional practice and, as such, is an essential component of professional preparation at any level. However, this does not make the teaching and learning of theory any easier, it just makes it necessary. Of all the subject matter in health education and promotion I have taught in my more than 25 years in professional preparation, theory is often the most difficult for undergraduate students to comprehend. It is difficult because they do not have a reservoir of knowledge from which to draw as they do for, say, math or history, English, or the sciences. This text is written for these students.

The purpose of this text is to provide an easy to understand, interesting, and engaging introduction to a topic that is usually perceived as difficult, dry, and boring. The language used and depth and breadth of the information were intentional. It is not meant to be a comprehensive tome on theory, but rather an *introduction* to theory. It is meant to be the headwaters of that reservoir of knowledge.

While written with the undergraduate in mind, this book would also be of value to graduate students or practicing professionals whose own “reservoir” of theory knowledge and understanding could use a refill. It would be an excellent text to use along with others in preparing for certification examinations in which health behavior is included.

The text begins with an explanation of what theory is, how theories are developed, and factors that influence health behavior. Chapters 2 through 10 cover the more frequently used health behavior theories. New to this edition, each theory chapter includes an “In the Beginning” section that explains the origin of the theory. This is followed by the concept and constructs with multiple examples

from the literature used to demonstrate how the theory is used in practice. While some examples are related to college students, many are purposely not, for a few reasons. This book is intended for students in professional preparation programs, so the examples used are meant to demonstrate how theories are used in a variety of settings, with different populations, addressing an assortment of health issues. Secondly, because many examples were taken from the literature, students have an extensive reference list at the end of each chapter that contains numerous citations of both health education research studies and programs in which the theory was used.

Each theory chapter also contains a *Theory in Action*—a full-length, peer-reviewed journal article. The articles included were found to best present a complete picture of how theory was used to address different health issues among different populations. The articles are the basis for a class activity included in each chapter. All of the articles have been replaced in this second edition.

Each theory chapter also contains a *Theory Essence Sentence* and a *Constructs Chart*. The *Theory Essence Sentence* reduces the complex theory to one sentence—that is, the essence of the theory. Presented at the beginning of the chapter, it prepares the student for the more detailed discussion that follows. The *Constructs Chart* at the beginning of the chapter provides an overview of the theory's main ideas.

The final chapter in the book, Chapter 11, “Choosing a Theory,” answers the often asked question, “How do I know which theory to use and when to use it?” This chapter provides a framework to help answer that question and a *Theory Chart*. The chart groups the theories by levels and is a compilation of the *Theory Essence Sentence* provided in each chapter and the *Constructs Chart*.

PowerPoint slide presentations and examination questions have also been developed for this edition.

In no way does this book purport to cover all of the theories that could be used to explain health behavior, nor does it claim to provide an in-depth, exhaustive discourse of the theories it does contain. It does, however, provide an introduction to the more commonly used theories in health education and health promotion practice. It is my hope that students will find this book interesting and engaging enough to read it, and that it will entice them to read further, more deeply filling their theory reservoirs.

Acknowledgments

This book certainly would not have been written if it were not for all of my former students who struggled to understand theory. They were the reason I stopped trying to find the right book for them, and decided to write it myself.

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Finally, I’d like to thank my husband, Roger, for his understanding of the time I spent in “Qup’s garage” completing this edition, and Salty Dog for keeping my lap warm the whole time.

