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Incentives and Motivation

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Promoting socially important behaviors is a challenge frequently faced by clinicians, health professionals, educators, employers, doctors, parents, governments, and others. Incentive interventions have proven to be effective in promoting a wide range of socially valuable behaviors in diverse populations and settings such as preventive health care (Bassani et al., 2013; Kane, Johnson, Town, & Butler, 2004), work productivity (Bucklin & Dickinson, 2001), abstinence from drugs (Lussier, Heil, Mongeon, Badger, & Higgins, 2006), medication adherence (Defulio & Silverman, 2012), HIV prevention (Operario, Kuo, Sosa-Rubi, & Galarraga, 2013), smoking cessation (Cahill, Hartmann-Boyce, & Perera, 2015), health behaviors (Haff et al., 2015), and physician behavior (Town, Kane, Johnson, & Butler, 2005). Under incentive interventions, individuals receive some tangible and desirable consequence (e.g., money or privilege) contingent on emitting some observable and verifiable behavior. Incentives have been used all around the world from the United States, to Africa, to the United Kingdom, and many other countries. Some have questioned the appropriateness of using incentives to promote desirable behaviors, yet incentives have been adopted and applied throughout whole countries to address socially important problems (Lagarde, Haines, & Palmer, 2007; Lagarde, Haines, & Palmer, 2009; Pilling, Strang, Gerada, & NICE, 2007; Ranganathan & Lagarde, 2012). No application of incentives has been more widespread than in the use of Conditional Cash Transfer programs, which have used incentives to promote health and education and to reduce poverty in low income families around the world (Bassani et al., 2013; Lagarde et al., 2007; Lagarde et al., 2009; Ranganathan & Lagarde, 2012; Rasella, Aquino, Santos, Paes-Sousa, & Barreto, 2013).

Incentive interventions have been applied by psychologists and other professionals from diverse theoretical and conceptual backgrounds. Incentive interventions are rooted in an extensive body of basic research in non-humans and in humans that suggests that much of human behavior is influenced by its consequences (Cheney & Pierce, 2013). Basic research

on operant behavior is particularly relevant and provides a rich scientific foundation for the development, refinement, and improvement of incentive interventions. The operant principle of reinforcement underlies all incentive interventions. Reinforcement is a basic principle of operant behavior in that certain consequences of behavior increase the future probability of that behavior. Consequences that have that effect on behavior are called reinforcers and the process by which reinforcers increase the probability of a behavior is called reinforcement. This fundamental principle of behavior has been demonstrated in a wide range of organisms, from the simple sea slug (Brembs, Lorenzetti, Reyes, Baxter, & Byrne, 2002) to insects, fish, reptiles, birds and mammals (Grossett, Roy, Sharenow, & Poling, 1982). Through hundreds of studies, we know quite a bit about factors that determine how reinforcement affects behavior (Cheney & Pierce, 2013). The principle of reinforcement has been applied in a variety of ways to address important social problems, but it has been applied very directly and with great effectiveness through incentive interventions. In the language of operant conditioning, incentives are intended to serve as reinforcers that increase the probability of the behavior on which they are contingent. Research on the development, improvement and evaluation of incentive interventions to address intractable societal problems represents a productive and important area of translational research, by translating basic principles of reinforcement to address important social problems with incentive interventions.

For this special issue on “Incentives and Motivation,” we invited manuscripts of original research, reviews and conceptual papers across a broad area of incentives research from research on the basic principles underlying incentive interventions to applications of incentive interventions to address socially important behaviors; cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analyses of incentive interventions; comparative effectiveness trials; ethics of providing incentives for socially important behaviors; conditional cash transfer programs to reduce poverty and improve health; pay-for-performance programs for health care workers, teachers, and other professional; application of incentives in large organizations, cities, or countries; public policies related to the application of incentive interventions; and other important and timely topics in incentive research. Of course, as an issue in *Translational Issues In Psychological Science (TPS)*, we required that at least one psychologist in training (graduate student or postdoctoral fellow) serve as a co-author on each manuscript. We also ensured that psychologists in training serve as the Associate Editors of the special issue and that at least one psychologist in training serve as a reviewer of every manuscript. Thus, graduate students in psychology and postdoctoral fellows played major roles in every aspect of this special issue.

The result of these efforts is a special issue on incentives and motivation that includes outstanding papers on diverse aspects of incentive research. Three papers focus on the use of incentives to promote key health behaviors including physical activity in underactive sedentary adults (Donlin Washington, McMullen, & Devoto, in press), smoking cessation in adults with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (Amit-Dahan et al., in press), and the use of remote monitoring technology in incentive interventions for a range of health behaviors (Kurti et al., in press). One paper focuses on preferences for different kinds of incentives for academic behaviors in public school students (Fefer, DeMagistris, & Shuttleton, in press). One paper focuses on the use of incentives for responses to online panels (Göritz & Neumann, in press). Four papers focus on the use of incentives in the workplace, including

the application of behavioral economics to work performance (Henley, DiGennaro Reed, Kaplan & Reed, in press), the influence of pay policies described in job postings on job preference (Merriman, Turner, Galizzi, & HaynesBaratz, in press), and the use of a therapeutic workplace and employment-based incentives in the treatment of drug addiction in poor and unemployed adults (Holtyn et al., in press; Silverman, Holtyn and Morrison., in press). Taken together, the papers in this special issue illustrate the broad utility and effectiveness of incentive intervention in addressing a wide range of important social problems.

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