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Following the Thread of Social Cognitive Theory through the Development, Implementation, and Outcomes of the HackHealth After-School Program for Disadvantaged Youth

When theories are used to inform research and practice, evidence of their influence may be detectable down the line through the ultimate outcomes. In designing and implementing the *HackHealth* program, an after-school program for disadvantaged middle school students that aims to increase their interest in health, their health and digital literacy skills, and their health-related self-efficacy, Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) informed many of our decisions about the aims, content, and implementation of the program. SCT posits that there are two primary psychological determinants of a person's behaviors – his/her self-efficacy beliefs and his/her outcome expectations. While the former refers to a person's beliefs in his/her ability to engage in a particular behavior, the latter refers to his/her expectations that engaging in that behavior will lead to a particular outcome. In other words, a person is most likely to engage in a particular health behavior if she believes she is able to and if she believes that doing so will result in a desired outcome, such as improved health.

Through the *HackHealth* program, we aim to reduce current and future health disparities among American youth from differing racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds by increasing participants' health-related self-efficacy and by helping to shape and inform their outcome expectations through an increased understanding of the crucial link between their daily health-related behaviors and their ability to maintain their health and prevent and/or manage disease. To achieve these aims, we work toward increasing participants' awareness and knowledge of health-related topics. Each participant selects a health condition of personal relevance to him/her, such as one that he/she or a loved one has/had. Throughout the program, we work with each student to improve their health and digital literacy skills within the context of their selected health condition. By ensuring the personal relevance of both content and skills, we are able to engender and sustain participants' interest and engagement in the program. We encourage participants to research not only the definition of their selected health condition, but also the specific ways in which one can work toward preventing and/or managing it.

In this proposed lightning talk, we will outline the thread of SCT throughout *HackHealth*, beginning with the ways in which it influenced our decisions related to designing and running the program, and ending with the ways in which its influence can be detected among the many different types of outcomes reported by our 63 participants and their parents through follow-up

interviews and focus groups. We identified a wide array of positive outcomes that were attributed to *HackHealth*, including increased interest in health, improved ability to find credible health-related information online, better awareness of health issues and health behaviors that can help to prevent or manage a health condition, and an ability and desire to use what they learned to help their family members and friends.

Final question for the group:
How can we ensure that theory informs our work in such a way that our research (or practice) results in the outcomes we aim to engender?

Further reading about Social Cognitive Theory

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HackHealth Website: http://hackhealth.umd.edu/