FOLLOWING THE REASONED AND THE REACTIVE PATH OF (FOOD) DECISION MAKING: HOW INNOVATIONS IN THEORY CAN LEAD TO INNOVATIONS IN PRACTICE

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Every day we are faced with a daunting array of food choices. What should I eat? Where should I eat? When should I eat and with whom? How much should I eat? Our experience of these choices is varied as well. Some choices appear to involve thoughtful and careful deliberation, whereas other choices appear to involve no deliberation at all. Consistent with this distinction, there are aspects of the food environments in which we live that offer detailed information about nutrition and calories and thus appear to be designed for a consumer who prioritizes reflection and consideration, whereas there are other aspects of the environment such as labels or packaging that are designed to trigger a response from a consumer whose actions are considered impulsive and reactive. How are we to understand this array of decision processes and the strategies that are designed to affect them? Are there models of decision making that can provide a framework for predicting the choices that people make and that can guide the development of intervention strategies designed to promote healthy choices? In my talk, I will review recent innovations in models of behavioral decision-making, with a particular focus on evidence for two parallel processes: a reasoned and a reactive path (e.g., Strack & Deutsch, 2004). The delineation of these two paths provides an exciting framework for understanding how people regulate their eating behavior in a complex stimulus rich environment (Metcalfe & Mischel, 1999). With recent advances in our understanding of how and when people translate intentions into actions (Webb & Sheeran, 2006) and actions into habits (Wood & Neal, 2007), a set of principles have emerged that can guide new approaches to thinking about the interplay between environmental, biological, and intrapsychic processes on food choice. Taken together, these innovations in theory have the potential to expand and enrich the design of intervention strategies that can effectively promote the initiation and maintenance of healthy behavioral practices (Rothman, 2000; Rothman et al., 2004; Rothman & Salovey, 2007). Intervention strategies which if, in turn, are tested, will serve to enrich our models of behavioral decision-making (Rothman, 2004).

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