

Exercises and Demonstrations for Motivation and Emotion Courses

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Undergraduate courses in Motivation and Emotion cover a range of topics including various physiological, cognitive, and environmental forces that affect human and animal behavior. Motivation describes the forces acting on or within an organism to initiate and direct behavior; motivation also describes the differences in intensity of behavior. Generally authors introduce students to biological foundations, internal and external factors, the role of cognitive processes and emotional processes (psychological, biological, and cultural). All in all, students should finish such a course with a very broad understanding of the complex interaction between biology, culture, and psychological processes that induce our actions, feelings, and thoughts.

Generally a motivation and emotion course is offered as a junior-senior level elective course; it can also be a requirement along with other courses that focus on basic psychological processes (e.g., cognition or perception). I worked at an institution where the psychology department offered a motivation course as one of four courses in one subarea and students chose three of the four to fulfill their requirement. That institution also permitted the motivation course to serve as an upper-division general education course. As a result, I often had a large class comprised almost entirely (in some years) with non-majors. In that respect the course was similar to an introductory psychology course. In such cases the faculty member must recognize that students' background might be a factor in how the course is taught, including the sophistication of class discussions. On the other hand, since the topics covered in a motivation course are also discussed in other courses (e.g., biological drives for hunger are discussed in a neuroscience course), having psychology majors in the course is a positive factor since the instructor can build upon students' knowledge.

In this chapter I present demonstrations and activities that dovetail with the major concepts typically covered in a *Motivation and Emotion* course. As many students who take a motivation and

emotion course may not be psychology majors, I try to focus on topics to which they can easily relate; I use these topics as a way to teach students about various internal or external motivational factors (e.g., drive theory). Faculty who teach motivation may vary considerably in the topics they present as well as how they present the material; some textbooks present more traditional coverage of motivational systems and theory (e.g., drive theory) while others are more topic focused (e.g., hunger, within which drive theory may be one point of view addressed). When I teach motivation, I emphasize behavioral genetics, with a particular focus on the way nature-nurture interactions relate to eating, drinking, sexuality, work, leisure, additions, etc. The activities I share are general enough to be successfully implemented in an *Introduction to Psychology* course or courses that specifically cover emotion.

Topical Areas in Motivation and Emotion

Social Processes and Social Motivation

The goal of this activity is to illustrate to students some of the principles of decision-making. In this paper the author describes an activity to teach students about avoidance-avoidance conflicts. Students experience the conflict between choosing between two attractive alternatives as opposed choosing between two undesirable alternatives. For instance, students consider whether they would rather be less intelligent or less attractive. Students make up a series of approach-approach and avoidance-avoidance choices. Generally students take longer to make decisions about avoidance-avoidance choices and rate the avoidance choices less satisfactorily. The author discusses ways to integrate into class discussions about loss aversion, decision-making, and negative self-evaluation.

- Scott, T. W. (2010). A demonstration of approach and avoidance conflicts. *Teaching of Psychology*, 37(2), 132-134.

Homeostatic Processes

Body temperature and reaction time. The objective of this activity for students to learn about the circadian rhythms. Students monitor the effects of their circadian rhythms on reaction time by monitoring body temperature and playing a game of jacks over a two-day period. The student should get an appreciation of the impact that biological rhythms have on their behavior. After students have collected the data on reaction time and body temperature, they answer a series of questions. The specific directions for this activity and the questions can be found at: <http://www.cbt.virginia.edu/tutorial/CLASSACT.htm>

Addiction

The objective of this activity is to help students understand the more complex models of addiction using a simulation to illustrate addictive behaviors. In this activity students are exposed to the biological-psychological-social model of drug addiction. The simulation allows students to experience and understand the interaction of the biological, psychological, and sociological processes of drug addictions and the effects on the addicts themselves. An outline of the exercise is presented and student reactions to the exercise and recommendations for teachers are discussed

- Campbell, T. C. (2008). Addiction simulation exercise: ice cube addiction. *Favorite Activities for the Teaching of Psychology*, 4, 103-106

The objective of this exercise is to help make students aware of some of the reasoning fallacies people hold about addiction. Students generally have parochial views about addiction and do not consider the various biological and cultural factors that lead to and sustain it. This activity is easy to perform and shows students how easy it is for one to succumb to powerful psychological factors. The activity uses a deck of cards and a dollar bill to showcase the illusion of control so apparent in gambling.

- Dollinger, S. J. (2008). The illusion of control. *Favorite Activities for the Teaching of Psychology*, 4, 201-202.

Anxiety and Fear

The purpose of this activity is to allow students to directly experience the process of systematic desensitization. Systematic desensitization is an effective way to reduce people's anxiety. The exercise described in this paper actively involves members of an introductory psychology course experiencing the benefits of systematic desensitization firsthand. Students hold a rat's transparent box and also witness peer-volunteers as they actually hold the animal. The paper empirically

validates that even mild exposure (holding the box) significantly lowers anxiety.

- Barber, N. (1994). Reducing fear of the laboratory rat: a participant modeling approach. *Teaching of Psychology*, 21, 228-230.

Aggression

The goal of this activity is to help students to learn more about operational definitions by focusing on the topic of aggression. This activity invites students to actively discuss various meanings of aggression using a questionnaire to guide discussion. Students consider whether twenty-five behaviors (e.g., a spider eats a fly) are forms of aggression. This activity. It is effective in both small and large classes. The activity, depending upon discussion, could engage students for 30 to 40 minutes. Faculty may also want to integrate into the discussion several definitions of aggression given by psychologists (e.g., behavior intended to hurt another person).

- Benjamin, L. T. (1985). Defining aggression: an exercise for classroom discussion. *Teaching of Psychology*, 12, 40-42.

The main objective of these exercises is to strengthen students' ability to recognize social instigators of aggression. Students are presented with 12 aggression instigators (e.g., insult, attack, aggressive models, etc) and asked to find scenes of violence in movies that show the effects of the instigators. It is a great activity to connect the seriousness of the discussion to something that they all already familiar with. For example, students will be able to think about instances in which they have become angered and can use this activity to help them to better understand the factors that lead to their anger.

- Davidson, W. B. (1990). The dirty dozen: classroom demonstrations of twelve instigators of aggression. *Teaching of Psychology*, 17(4), 252.

The primary learning outcome for this activity is for students to learn about different explanations of aggression by considering particular social and political factors that may contribute to war. This creative activity asks students to read the 1932 exchange "Why War" between Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud; students must respond to both authors by writing each a two-page response. Students are asked to agree or disagree and to comment on the perspectives of human aggression as stated by the Einstein or Freud. One benefit of the activity is that the letters contain a mix of history, psychology, and personal opinion, giving students a chance to consider a broad view of human aggression.

- Dunn, D. S. (1992). Perspectives on human aggression: writing to Einstein and Freud on “why war?”. *Teaching of Psychology*, 19(2), 112-113.

Sleep and Wakefulness

Students are always interested in dream interpretation. One major faculty objective is to help students to distinguish between anecdotal dream analysis from legitimate attempts to understand dreams, especially as a way to understand unconscious motives. In this exercise the author describes an activity that helps students learn how prior knowledge, expectations, and other conceptually-driven processes affect dream interpretation. The activity takes about 15 minutes and involves the whole class; it can be easily adapted for an introductory course or be used in upper-level courses.

- Bernstein, D. A. (2008). The role of prior information in dream analysis. *Favorite Activities for the Teaching of Psychology*, 93-98.

Sleep is a favorite topic of many students and students eagerly share their own sleep habits and dreams. Students normally do not think of dreaming and sleep as motivational behaviors. This activity invites students to respond to a questionnaire about sleep and dreaming to gather data about their knowledge of these topics. The answers students provide make for an effective class discussion. Easily adapted for large classes.

- Benjamin, L. T. (2008). To sleep, perchance to dream. *Favorite Activities for the Teaching of Psychology*, 4, 89-92.

Dream diaries. This activity can be used to relate motivation to biopsychology by encouraging students to use the activation-synthesis model or the clinico-anatomical hypothesis to interpret the dreams. I have done this activity in several classes and always get a wide range of interesting student feedback. Although some students prefer discussing their own dreams amongst themselves, prepare to be asked by many what the “true” meaning or interpretation of a particular dream is. Approximately 2 weeks before the chapter on sleep and dreaming is discussed, tell your class to start keeping a dream diary. Encourage students to keep a pad of paper and pencil near their bed so they can write down any memory of a dream upon waking up. After 2 weeks of keeping the diary, tell students to break up into groups and discuss one or two of their dreams with the other group members. The other students in the group should be instructed to give an interpretation of the dream.

Motivated Cognition

When teaching about emotion theory, a principal objective is to convey the significance that cognitive processes play in the representation of emotional experience. This activity allows students to actively experience how their current state of mind can alter their emotional experiences. Students visualize having just ended a significant romantic relationship. The activity allows students to see how experimentally induced feelings of anger or sadness can affect their self-reported feelings after the exercise. All in all, the exercise uses only 10 minutes of class time; the author provides evidence of its effectiveness in lower and upper-division courses.

- Deffenbacher, J. L. (1990). Demonstrating the influence of cognition on emotion and behavior. *Teaching of Psychology*, 17(3), 182-184.

This activity illustrates to students the basic tenets of the James-Lange Theory of Emotion. This activity demonstrates the facial-feedback hypothesis. This hypothesis predicts that the perception of emotion should change as a function of our own facial expressions. Students hold a pencil (or pen) in their mouths in such a way as to force either a smile or frown and then are asked to rate how funny a set of cartoons is.

- Schallhorn, C. (1999). The facial feedback hypothesis: are emotions really related to the faces we make? *Activities Handbook for the Teaching of Psychology*, 4, 228-231.

Stress and Health

This paper describes some of the validation and establishment of norms for College Undergraduate Stress Scale. It can also be easily administered in class and used to discuss with students events that most often cause stress among college students.

- Renner, M. J. (1998). A life stress instrument for classroom use. *Teaching of Psychology*, 25(1), 46-48.

Sexuality

I use this exercise when I introduce sexual attitudes. This exercise requires students to label specific examples of sexual behavior either normal or abnormal. I have used it on numerous occasions and it allow students to balance what may be “abnormal” from a psychological point of view with what may be judged by society as “abnormal.” Students can work in groups or individually; upon completion of the exercise, you can tabulate the results on the chalkboard. Ask students if they experienced any difficulty labeling certain behaviors as normal or abnormal. What ultimately influenced their decisions?

- Kite, M. E. (1990). Defining normal sexual behavior: A classroom exercise. *Teaching of Psychology, 17*, 118-119.

This activity explores the complexity of sexual orientation. In the exercise, students categorize the sexual orientation of 10 fictional people, some of whom present discrepancies between different aspects of sexuality. The exercise should illustrate the difficulty in using rigid categories of sexual orientation and stimulate discussion.

- Madson, L. (2001). A classroom activity exploring the complexity of sexual orientation. *Teaching of Psychology, 28*, 32-35.

Work Motivation

This activity demonstrates that the level of aspiration and achievement motivation depends on several variables such as intrinsic motivation and rewards as well as extrinsic motivation and rewards. All the instructor needs is two coffee cans and sixty marbles. While only four students can actively participate, it nevertheless is a fun activity for the entire class. The author offers advice on incorporating the results into a discussion about achievement theory.

- Fernald, P. S., & Fernald, L. D., Jr. (1981). Level of aspiration. In L. Benjamin & K. Lowman (Eds.), *Activities handbook for the teaching of psychology* (Vol. 1, pp. 183-184). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Emotion

The polygraph test. This activity illustrates autonomic properties of emotion to students. Recruit a student volunteer for a brief polygraph demonstration (many large universities have a polygraph available; systems such as BioPack also would work). Be sure to begin the demonstration by

asking baseline questions (regarding name, age, occupation, etc.). Afterwards, begin asking questions of interest (some topics to consider would be past or present illicit drug use, past criminal activity, study habits, etc.). The demonstration works best if student volunteers take the subject matter seriously and try to answer sincerely.

To tell the truth. Nonverbal cues are important to emotional behavior. This activity allows students to see firsthand how nonverbal cues may be indicative of deceptive behavior. Using a set of questions given by the author, student volunteers lie on some questions and students must decide who is being deceptive. Some students are given specific hints at identifying deceptive behaviors and other students are given no such help.

- Greene, J. O., O'Hair, H. D., Cody, M. J., & Yen, C. (1985). Planning and control of behavior during deception. *Human Communication Research, 11*, 335-364.

Cultural differences in emotional descriptions. This activity shows that despite similarities between cultures in expressing some emotions, dramatic differences do exist. Klineberg (1937) found several unique emotional expressions in Chinese literature published in the 1930s. Some expressions are very similar to the way Americans express the emotion, and others are unique. Using a list of emotional expression provided by the Klineberg, ask students to guess what emotion is being portrayed.

- Klineberg, O. (1937). Emotional expression in Chinese literature. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 13*, 517-520.