

Health Psychology

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The discipline of health psychology examines biological, psychological, and social factors in physical health and illness. Course topics typically include discussions of health promotion and illness prevention, psychosocial factors in health behavior, utilization of the health-care system, physiological systems, stress and illness, pain, coping, and issues related to specific health conditions. Both research and application are emphasized. As such, the field of health psychology examines biopsychosocial connections through collaboration with and input from multiple specialty areas within psychology. This intra-disciplinary focus allows for many opportunities to incorporate engaging learning activities, as well as the capability to tailor activities from other content areas to health-related domains

Original Exercise/Demonstration

Biopsychosocial Interpretations of Mortality Rate Differences between Groups

This activity is useful for introducing the need for a biopsychosocial approach to understanding health and illness using what initially seems to be an obviously biological event: mortality rates. The website for the National Vital Statistics System of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss.htm>) contains many documents useful for illustrating concepts in health psychology. In the first few days of the course, I print copies of selected tables presenting data on mortality rates according to age, sex, race, and geographic region. Each student in class receives a different table, and is asked to interpret and share the information in their table with the class. Students are often quite surprised to discover variations in death rates across different groups. Students then brainstorm possible explanations for these differences, which are then discussed in terms of biological, psychological, and social influences. This activity highlights the limitations of the traditional biomedical model of disease, and the need for understanding biopsychosocial factors in health and disease.

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (December 21, 2010). National Vital Statistics System. In *Centers for Disease Control and*

Prevention. Retrieved December 21, 2010, from <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss.htm>.

Annotated Bibliography

Methods & Critical Thinking—Introducing Health Psychology

A group activity designed to promote students' critical thinking, specifically regarding "psychological myths," with an emphasis on providing students with the tools needed to evaluate such beliefs. Students are taught to use reliable and valid library and internet resources to research the empirical evidence regarding a topic area. The authors report improvement on pre-post assessments of critical thinking, and student evaluations of the activity as useful and worthwhile. Students can assess personal beliefs regarding health or claims in the media regarding health issues (e.g., herbal supplements to improve memory, the impact of particular diets on health, stress as a sign of personal weakness).

- Blessing, S. B., & Blessing, J. S. (2010). PsychBusters: A means of fostering critical thinking in the introductory course. *Teaching of Psychology*, 37, 178-182. doi:10.1080/00986283.2010.488540.

Evaluating Media Reports of Health Research

This article presents an activity designed to enhance students' understanding of and appreciation for research. In this activity, students are presented with a media report of psychological research, and the original research article on which it was based. The authors report increased understanding of the role of research and the limitations of media reports. An appendix includes worksheets to help guide students in their evaluations and comparisons of the media report and the journal article. This exercise is particularly useful when tailored for the evaluation of health-related product claims and reports of health-related research in the media, both of which are often oversimplified and sensationalized. I have found that this activity increases students' awareness of media bias in the health field, improves their critical thinking, and increases their skill in using library and database resources.

- Hall, S. S., & Seery, B. L. (2006). Behind the Facts: Helping students evaluate media reports of psychological research. *Teaching of Psychology*, 33, 101-104. doi:10.1207/s15 328023top3302_4

Experimental Methods & the Mind-Body Relationship

Describes an activity used to illustrate the experimental method, in which heart rate is measured after alternating periods of resting, reading a violent story, and running in place. Provides a good demonstration of the elements of experimental design, as well as allowing for a discussion of the relationship between the mind and body, including individual variation in responding.

- Cameron, S., Christiano, J., & Mausner, B. (2008). Experimental design: Varying heart rate. In L. T. Benjamin, Jr. (Ed.). *Favorite activities for the teaching of psychology* (pp. 25-26). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Health Behaviors: Approach & Avoidance Conflicts

This activity demonstrates the difficulty in making avoidance decisions by having students time one another's responses to a series of approach and avoidance choices. Many health behaviors are perceived in terms of loss, e.g., giving up smoking, not eating, taking time away from pleasurable activities to work out. Stimuli can be modified to reflect health-relevant behaviors. Results can be used for class discussion on "behavior traps," as well as ways to effectively promote health behaviors.

- Terry, W. (2010). A demonstration of approach and avoidance conflicts. *Teaching of Psychology*, 37, 132-134. doi:10.1080/00986281003626888

Stress & Coping: Student Worries

This in-class activity allows students to examine worry as an aspect of stress, and to create a "personal worry profile." The Worries Survey contains items pertaining to typical college students' concerns. Normative data is provided. This activity allows for both self-analysis, and class discussion of stress and coping in ways that directly relate to students. Additional measures of health and adjustment may be used in conjunction with this scale.

- McDaniel, P., & Eison, J. (2008). Assessing student worries. In L. T. Benjamin, Jr. (Ed.). *Favorite activities for the teaching of psychology* (pp. 160-164). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Emotional Stress and ANS Activation

A specific illustration of the measurement of autonomic nervous system arousal (heart rate), and its relationship to emotional stress. Students are asked to write (confidentially) essays concerning a personally stressful event, and pairs of students assume the experimenter and participant roles. Baseline, arousal, and recovery periods are assessed. The author reports that this activity has been reliable, and HR provides a sensitive measure showing clear changes over the course of the activity. Discussion can include data analysis procedures, as well as further discussion of the activity of the autonomic nervous system.

- LaVoie, A. (2008). The autonomic nervous system. In L. T. Benjamin, Jr. (Ed.). *Favorite activities for the teaching of psychology* (pp. 39-41). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Meditation Exercise & Assessment

This article presents an activity that allows demonstration and discussion of meditation, specifically integrating a scientific perspective with this "mystical" alteration of consciousness. A brief meditation exercise is presented, along with references for alternative exercises. This activity allows for an examination of the relationship between meditation and its effects on physiology, as well as subjective experience.

- Puente, A. (2008). An introduction to meditation. In L. T. Benjamin, Jr. (Ed.). *Favorite activities for the teaching of psychology* (pp. 99-102). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Addiction

A unique, first-hand demonstration of the biological, psychological, and social factors involved in addiction. Students role-play being an "ice-cube addict" for 2 days. Includes a handout detailing instructions to students. Student reports indicate this is a powerful activity with positive learning outcomes.

- Campbell, T. (2008). Addiction simulation exercise: Ice cube addiction. In L. T. Benjamin, Jr. (Ed.). *Favorite activities for the teaching of psychology* (pp. 103-106). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

The Impact of Chronic Illness

Students often experience unrealistic optimism when evaluating their susceptibility to health problems, when in reality most will have to eventually cope with a chronic illness. This exercise helps to make students more mindful of the issues that people with chronic illness have to face. Includes questions to help focus students on issues experienced by those with a particular condition (e.g., changes in daily activities, physical environment, relationships and social support).

- Taylor, S. E., & Rickabaugh, C. A. (1999). *Instructor's manual and test bank to accompany Health Psychology* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.

Behavior Change & the Single-Case Design

Focuses on research methodology in the context of a personalized behavior change project. The author found that most students chose health-relevant behaviors (e.g., exercise, eating habits) for their project. Students learn issues in data collection, analysis, charting, and interpretation, and showed significant improvement in their knowledge of this type of design.

Morgan, D. (2009). Using single-case design and personalized behavior change projects to teach research methods. *Teaching of Psychology*, 36, 267-269. doi:10.1080/00986280903175715.

Personal Health Profile

In this Instructor's Manual, each chapter's suggested activities include an activity relevant to the development of a student health profile. This profile, developed over a semester's course, includes an examination of personal health-related behaviors, a literature review, and ideas for personal change. Each activity relates clearly to issues in personal health, and to the topics included in each chapter of the textbook.

- Brannon, L. & Feist, J. (2010). *Instructor's manual with test bank: Health psychology* (7th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Stress & Pain Management

A workbook developed to help chronic pain patients reduce pain and improve coping strategies. Much of this book can be used in conjunction with a health psychology text to illustrate specific issues in pain and stress, as well as provide compelling examples of the mind-body relationship. Most self-assessments and activities in this book can be used in conjunction with class discussion, particularly on stress and coping (e.g., relaxation response, time management, automatic thoughts and cognitive

restructuring, health attitudes, setting goals and problem solving).

- Caudill, M. A., (2008). *Managing pain before it manages you* (3rd ed.). New York: Guilford.

Community Fieldwork

Describes a study in which students were required to develop, implement, and assess an intervention/prevention program in a pediatric population. Programs included adherence to medical regimens and pain management. Results, including data from students and the community, were positive. Suggestions for activity implementation are included.

- Hardy, M., & Schaen, E. (2000). Integrating the classroom and community service: Everyone benefits. *Teaching of Psychology*, 27, 47-49. doi:10.1207/S15328023TOP2701_11.

General Resource

This article describes and provides resources for a variety of activities and materials for teaching a combined lecture-lab course in health psychology. Includes ideas for and descriptions of activities such as scrapbooking, library research, a "Health Pursuit" game, site visits, and personal health plans and stress appraisals. Students reported many of these activities to be interesting and important.

- Tritt, D. G. (1993). Teaching an undergraduate lecture/research course in health psychology. *Teaching of Psychology*, 20, 21-28. doi:10.1207/s15328023top2001_4

General Resource

This workbook contains descriptions of many activities, and includes worksheets to guide students through each topic. Each activity begins and ends with students recording their beliefs and knowledge regarding the topic. Activities include self-assessments (e.g., parental influences on health beliefs and behaviors, stress evaluations and coping strategies, personal risk) and interviews and surveys (e.g., self-health checks, immigrants and acculturation). Specific topics addressed by activities include religion and health, alcohol and tobacco use, patient-practitioner interaction and racial identity, and issues in chronic illness.

- Eshun, S. (2006). *Applications in health psychology workbook*. Belmont, CA: Thompson Wadsworth.

Validated Scales on the Internet

Many assessment scales relevant to topics in health psychology are available on the internet. Students often enjoy taking, scoring, and critiquing these psychological tests. Data may be aggregated by class, and the results discussed in the context of

methodology, test construction, and predictive validity.

Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS)

This Wikipedia reference contains both adult and non-adult scales, and empirical references.

- Holmes and Rahe Stress Scale. In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved December 21, 2010, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holmes_and_Rahe_stress_scale.

Multidimensional Health Locus of Control (MHLC) Scales. Ken Wallston's MHLC scales are provided, along with FAQs and a bibliography. Also included is a link to the God Locus of Health Control (GLHC) Scale.

- Wallston, K. A. (June 15, 2007). Multidimensional Health locus of control (MHLC) scales. In *Vanderbilt University School of Nursing*. Retrieved December 21, 2010, from <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/nursing/kwallston/mhlcscales.htm>.

Scales of Subjective Well-Being. Ed Diener's collection of scales includes the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE), and the Flourishing Scale (FS). Reprints of research articles are available from this site on request.

- Diener, E. (2009). Overview of subjective well-being scales. In *Subjective Well-Being*. Retrieved December 21, 2010, from <http://internal.psychology.illinois.edu/~ediener/scales.html>.

Positive Psychology Center Questionnaires.

Several scales listed have been found to predict physical health. Research references are listed.

- Positive psychology questionnaires. In *Positive Psychology Center*. Retrieved December 21, 2010, from <http://www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu/ppquestionnaires.htm>.

Toolkit of Instruments to Measure End-of-Life Care (TIME). This website developed by the Center for Gerontology and Health Care Research, Brown Medical School, provides an extensive listing of measures designed to address issues such as pain, functional status, and grief and bereavement. Many scales can be accessed directly from the website.

- Center for Gerontology and Health Care Research. (February 17, 2004). About the TOOLKIT. In *TIME: Toolkit of Instruments to Measure End-of-Life Care*. Retrieved December 21, 2010, from <http://www.chcr.brown.edu/pcoc/toolkit.htm>.

Websites for Illness Related Organizations.

This list, compiled as a student resource by Wiley Higher Education, can be used as a resource for multiple class activities. Assignments can include having students go to these sites to learn more about a particular condition, prevention and treatment, and professional and community resources.

- Sarafino, E. P. & Smith, T. W. (December, 2010). Websites of illness related organizations. In *Instructor Companion Site Health Psychology* Retrieved December 21, 2010, from <http://bcs.wiley.com/he-bcs/Books?action=resource&bcsId=5886&itemId=0470646985&resourceId=21779>.