

The Psychology of Health
PSYCHOLOGY 303
Fall Semester 1998

Dr. Bette Ackerman

Office: 117 Clough, Ext. 3985

Office Hours: MWF 2:30 - 3:30, Tu 1:00 - 2:30, or by appointment.

Informational Goals:

1. To provide students with a preliminary understanding of the important ways in which psychological states and behaviors are involved in health and illness
2. To provide students with a basic knowledge of chronic illnesses and their incidence rates, as well as the effectiveness of psychologically based treatment modalities
3. To provide students a closer look at some illness of interest or relevance to them, and to consider the psychological risk and treatment factors

Skill and Experience Goals:

4. To provide students with experience in reading the academic literature in psychology and an appreciation for the difficulties inherent in research, particularly in health fields
5. To sensitize students to the impact of stress on health and well-being, and to introduce them to several techniques for controlling and managing their own stress
6. To provide students with experience evaluating claims of product or procedure effectiveness.
7. To encourage the student to question his or her own health behaviors, and to give the student first-hand experience with the difficulty in modifying these behaviors
8. To encourage the student to think more broadly about health, prevention, and life-style

Text & Readings:

Brannon, L., & Feist, J. (1997). Health psychology: An introduction to behavior and health. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. (referred to as **BF** in class schedule)

The text will be the source of much of the technical information presented in the course. This information is often complicated and nuanced, and so a text provides the best format. Students will be expected to be familiar with the major research findings and the problems with the existing research, as well as some of the basic incidence rates. For example, just how common is coronary heart disease? Is it more common than "cancer"? What are the most likely causes of death for people in their early 20s? Further, you should appreciate the relative effectiveness of various psychological treatment strategies: Are anti-smoking TV spots effective? Can alcoholics ever learn to drink alcohol "safely"? Can psychological interventions affect CHD? Cancer? We will generally use class time to consider and discuss issues that don't lend themselves to a more factual presentation or attempt to resolve conflicting evidence.

Ten research articles (**RA**) will also be assigned. These readings will be used to introduce and familiarize students with the research literature. Reprints of these have been placed on reserve in the Burrow library and copies may be available at the bookstore. Students are strongly encouraged to use a personal Xerox copy. A guide to use in preparing for discussion appears on page 3 of the syllabus.

Discussions:

Students will be responsible for leading the class discussion of each article [discussion leaders must meet with Dr. Ackerman in a timely fashion], but all class members are expected to be familiar with them (the articles) and prepared to discuss the methodological problems. 10% of the students' grade will be determined by their performance as discussion leader as well as class participation. [I take notes regarding participation in class discussion, level of thought behind comment/question, insight, stimulation of response by classmates, etc.]

Exams:

There will be four exams. These will be a combination of multiple choice and short essays. The exams will cover the text, outside readings, lectures, and other class activities. The multiple choice questions will be used to evaluate your acquisition of the knowledge base, and the essays will primarily be used to assess your ability to integrate, draw inferences, and to reflect on a broader level the implications of what you have learned. Exam grades will determine 60% of your course grade. In preparing for the exams you will want to pay particular attention to those research findings which fail to support common health assumptions.

Panel Presentations:

Students will form 4 groups to investigate claim of over the counter herbal substance currently popular with the general population. Should you not want to work in a group, I will entertain your request to work alone, or in a smaller group, but you will be held responsible for the same production. The panel should report back to the class regarding a) the popular claims made about a substance, b) evidence supporting or disconfirming these claims, and c) recommendations regarding the use of the substances. Students are encouraged to use internet sites for much of their research for this project, and specific web sites (and their URLs) will be provided. Presentations to the class will determine 15% of your course grade. Possible herbal remedies include: ginko biloba, echinacea, St. Johns wort, melatonin, weight-loss compounds, or "smart" compounds.

Wellness Activities & Personal Health Assessment:

In an attempt to encourage each student to become involved with the material encompassed by health psychology, the students will be assigned health behaviors recognized as important to wellness in the areas of exercise, relaxation, and eating/drinking. The purpose of these activities are to provide the students with first-hand experience with the procedures used to modify health behaviors, and to experience how difficult the procedure can be. These activities are to be individually charted through the semester. At the conclusion of the semester, a summary of the student's personal health assessment should be summarized in a 3-5 page paper worth 5% of the course grade. Any student who smokes is strongly encouraged to attempt to lessen or stop smoking. If you have any other health behavior that you want to modify (problems falling asleep, etc), Dr Ackerman would be happy to work with you.

Topic Paper and Presentation:

Students will work individually to learn more about some topic related to health psychology to be summarized in a paper. The paper will require students to delve into the published literature for some disorder or health problem and consider it from a psychological perspective. Thus, the topic must have some relevance to psychology, either due to predisposing personality, risk behaviors, psychological complications in the course of the disorder, or treatment implications. Specific instructions will be provided in class.

The topic paper will be worth 10% and will include a presentation to the class. Several assignments pertaining to the topic have been assigned and are listed in the class schedule and are meant to "encourage" students to work on the project throughout the semester. Students may ask the instructor for feedback on a draft of the paper if it is completed by Nov. 23r (before the Thanksgiving holiday).

Topics must be approved by Dr. Ackerman, but possible topics include:

AIDS/HIV, possibly AIDS-related dementia or treatment	Arthritis
Alzheimer's	Chronic Fatigue Syndrome
Asthma	Cystic Fibrosis
Crack Babies	Fetal Alcohol Syndrome
Epilepsy	Narcolepsy
Leukemia, or Other Specific Cancers	Stroke
Specific Sleep Disturbances	

Penalties will be assessed for any late work, including the preliminary assignments, at the rate of 1/2 letter grade per day.

Guide to Critiquing Psychological Literature

In preparing to lead and participate in class discussion, you need to make sure that you thoroughly understand the work. The following guidelines are questions and issues that you should think about whenever you read published work. In class we will talk about strategies for leading class discussions.

I Research Articles/Chapters

A. Purpose

Why did the researchers conduct the research? What is the experimental hypothesis? In other words, what did the researchers expect to find?

B. Design

1. Who is included in the sample?
2. Is the study correlational, descriptive/observational, or experimental??
3. What are the independent and dependent variables and how were they operationally defined? Pay attention to strengths/weakness in the design, and note any assumptions, flaws, or limitations in the design, then finish reading the article to see if your concerns were merited.

C. Findings

Discuss the major findings of the research. Discussion leaders should be able to explain the general intent behind the statistical procedures, as well as the findings & implications. Everyone should be familiar with the major findings discussed in the narratives of the results and discussion sections of the papers. Did the authors confirm or fail to confirm their research hypothesis? Were there unexpected/unpredicted findings or qualifications placed on the results?

You often are not in the best position to critique a study until after you have finished reading it. So after reading the article, turn your attention to critiquing the work.

D. Critique

This section will reflect your understanding and evaluation of the article.

1. Sample: Is the sample representative? If not, how might the results be skewed/affected?
How far can you generalize the findings given the sample?
2. Research Strategy: Is the research strategy reasonable?
What alternatives would be preferable? Why did the authors choose to conduct the study the way they did?
Are the operational definitions reasonable? problematic?
Are the variables really measuring what the authors claim? What might they really be measuring?
3. Findings: What impact do the findings have?
Can you think of alternate explanations for the findings?
What use can you make of these findings?
What would be a reasonable next step for research?

E. Are there question you have regarding the article? Things you are confused about?

II Summaries of Review Articles, Theoretical Papers, Chapters, or Other Readings:

A form for these is difficult, as each piece is often unique. In general, pay attention to the following:

- A. What is the purpose of the piece? What does it attempt to deal with?
- B. How is the piece organized?
- C. If a review article, which variables/dimensions appear to have been tried, and which appear to be the most promising? Where does the field appear to be going?
- D. What are the main conclusions, according to the authors? Do you agree with these?

- E. What do you take away from the reading? That is, how is it relevant to you or things you are interested in? What have you learned that is interesting?
- F. Are there question you have regarding the article? Things you are confused about?

Research Articles

- | Date | Article |
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| 1. 9/4 | Sobel, D. S. (1990). The placebo effect: Using the body's own healing mechanisms. In R. Ornstein & C. Swencionis (Eds.), <u>The healing brain</u> (pp. 63-74). New York: The Guilford Press. |
| 2. 9/4 | Green, J., & Shellenberger, R. The stress response. In <u>The dynamics of health and wellness</u> (pp. 96-136). Fort Worth: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. {Skimming this article is ok, but know which parts of the body can be affected by stress, and read carefully those parts of the body which seem to apply to your personal manifestations of stress} |
| 3. 9/14 | Jemmott, J. B., III, & Magloire, K. (1988). Academic stress, social support, and secretory immunoglobulin A. <u>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</u> , <u>55</u> , 803-810. |
| 4. 9/30 | Kobasa, S.C.O. (1990). Stress-resistant personality. In R. Ornstein & C. Swencionis (Eds.), <u>The healing brain</u> (pp. 219-230). New York: The Guilford Press. |
| 5. 9/30 | Funk, S.C. (1992). Hardiness: A review of theory and research. <u>Health Psychology</u> , <u>11</u> , 335-345. |
| 6. 10/12 | Rodin, J., & Langer, E.J. (1977). Long-term effects of a control-relevant intervention with the institutionalized aged. <u>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</u> , <u>35</u> , 897-902. |
| 7. 10/26 | Taylor, S.E., Lichtman, R.R., & Wood, J.V. (1984). Attributions, beliefs about control, and adjustment to breast cancer. <u>Personality and Social Psychology</u> , <u>46</u> , 489-502. |
| 8. 11/4 | Pennebaker, J. W., Kiecolt-Glaser, J. K., & Glaser, R. (1988). Disclosure of traumas and immune function: Health implications for psychotherapy. <u>Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology</u> , <u>56</u> , 239-245. |
| 9. 11/20 | Brownell, K.D., & Rodin, J. (1994). The dieting maelstrom. <u>American Psychologist</u> , <u>49</u> , 781-791. |
| 10. 11/20 | Rejeski, W. J., Thompson, A., Brubaker, P. H., & Miller, H. S. (1992). Acute exercise: Buffering psychosocial stress responses in women. <u>Health Psychology</u> , <u>11</u> , 355-362. |

	Day	Date	Topic	Reading Assignment/Class Activity
1	W	8/26	Introducing Health Psych	
2	F	8/28		BF 1
3	M	8/31	Conducting Health Research	BF 2
4	W	9/2		
5	F	9/4		Discussion of RA 1&2
<i>Labor Day</i>				
6	W	9/9	Defining and Measuring Stress	BF 3
7	F	9/11	<i>Relaxation Training</i>	
8	M	9/14	Understanding Stress and Illness	BF 4, Short paragraph explaining the subject of your topic paper.
9	W	9/16		
10	F	9/18		Discussion of RA 3, panel on _____
11	M	9/21	Exam 1	
12	W	9/23	Understanding Pain	BF 5
13	F	9/25		
14	M	9/28	Coping with Stress and Pain	BF 6, Outline of topic paper due
15	W	9/30		Discussion of RA 4&5
16	F	10/3		
17	M	10/5	Seeking Health Care	BF 7
18	W	10/7		
19	F	10/9	Adhering to Medical Advice	BF 8
20	M	10/12		Discussion of RA 6, panel on _____
21	W	10/14	Exam 2	
22	F	10/16	Behavioral Factors in CVD	BF 9
<i>Fall Break</i>				
23	W	10/21		
24	F	10/23	Behavioral Factors in Cancer	BF 10, annotated bib. due
25	M	10/26		Discussion of RA 7, panel on _____
26	W	10/28	Living with Chronic Illness	BF 11
27	F	10/30		
28	M	11/2	Staying Healthy	BF 12
29	W	11/4		Discussion of RA 8, panel on _____
30	F	11/6	Exam 3	
31	M	11/9	Smoking Tobacco	BF 13
32	W	11/11		
33	F	11/13	Using Alcohol and Other Drugs	BF 14
34	M	11/16		
35	W	11/18	Eating to Control Weight	BF 15
36	F	11/20		Discussion of RA 9 & 10
37	M	11/23	Exercising	BF 16 Drafts of Papers (optional)
<i>Thanksgiving</i>				
38	M	11/30	Alternative Medical Paradigms	
39	W	12/2	Future / Overview	BF 17
40	F	12/4	Student Presentations	
41	M	12/7		
42	W	12/9		Topic Papers Due
	T	12/15	Final Exam 8:30 - 11:00	