Instructor Information

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Nature of the Course

In this course, students learn positive strategies to overcome minor self-defeating behavior. Students (1) learn about accepting and forgiving rather than punishing the self for mistakes, (2) identify self-defeating attitudes—such as perfectionism and anxious rumination—that may be associated with self-defeating behaviors and (3) build self-care routines and “life-enhancing behaviors” (Cudney & Hardy, 1991) that may be associated with self-respect.

Findings from a recent study indicate that the tendency to be self-forgiving is “linked with greater well-being, including high self-esteem, positive emotions, a lack of shame, low neuroticism, and low levels of anxiety and depression” (Fisher & Exline, 2006). Although self-forgiveness research is still in its infancy, research suggests that the benefits of learning a “propensity toward feeling forgiven” may include a reduction in anger, anxiety, depression, “paranoid ideation, and interpersonal sensitivity” (Snyder & Lopez, 2002, p. 451).

To combat anxious rumination or perfectionism, Tangney, Boone, & Dearing (2005) suggest moving away from focusing on personal transgressions to appreciating one’s contributions to loved ones, to the community and to personal growth in the future. Templeton (1997) stated that a “person who has gained a sense of humility is no longer phenomenologically at the center of his or her world. The focus is on the larger community of which he or she is a part.” According to Maruna (2001) and others, the emphasis is “not on moral angst but on moral change and moral action.” Holmgren (2002) summarized how to avoid rumination: “To dwell on one’s past record of moral performance, either with a sense of self-hatred and self-contempt or with a sense of superiority, is an activity that is overly self-involved and devoid of any real moral value. The client will exercise his moral agency much more responsibly if he removes his focus on the fact that he did wrong and concentrate instead on the contribution he can make to others and on the growth he can experience in the moral and nonmoral realms” (p. 133). (See Ch. 10 “Forgiving the Self: Conceptual Issues and Empirical Findings” in the Handbook of Forgiveness edited by Everett L. Worthington Jr., 2005, pages 154-155.)
Course Description

Students learn about “life-enhancing behaviors” (Cudney & Hardy, 1991) that may lead to self-acceptance, self-forgiveness, and self-respect. Students practice and evaluate strategies to promote positive physiology. For the purposes of this class, the following behaviors are considered minor self-defeating habits: overworking, overspending, overeating, sleep deprivation, or a sedentary lifestyle. *See definitions of self-defeating behavior on page 3. At mid-semester, students will interview a social worker, counselor, or psychologist working with teens displaying self-defeating and self-destructive behavior. In the research project, students explore positive methods to deal with a self-defeating attitude of their choice. At the end of the semester, they will teach family members or colleagues about an attitude that may lead to poor habits. For example, perfectionism may be associated with excessive exercising, and anxious rumination may be associated with sleep deprivation. Students will also teach family members or colleagues about behaviors that may promote self-respect. According to Cudney and Hardy, “a series of life-enhancing behaviors will, over time, lead to the sort of breakthrough that comes when our minds, bodies, attitudes and actions are integrated into the wholeness that is the source of our creativity, insight, usefulness, and contentment” (1991).

Students will explore

- the research about self-forgiveness, self-respect, and self-defeatism
- situations when self-acceptance may be necessary for normal human weaknesses or when self-forgiveness may be appropriate for violations of one’s moral code
- the difference between self-esteem and self-respect
- transformative change and character growth
- “symbolic restitution” that may take place as community service

According to Dr. Selhub, a goal for overcoming self-defeating behavior is to move toward attitudes such as “I am loved” and “We have all that we need” to address the self-defeating “I am not good enough” attitude. As a clinical instructor at Harvard Medical School, and senior staff physician at Massachusetts General Hospital, Eva Selhub has found that if the brain thinks the answer to the question “Am I enough?” is “no,” blood pressure rises while cortisol and adrenaline flood the system. If the perception “I’m not enough” continues, “the immune system shuts down. Over time, a person may develop inflammatory disorders from arthritis, autoimmune disorders, and allergies to diabetes, obesity, depression, and cardiovascular disease” (Selhub, 2009). Eventually, positive self-nurturing routines are replaced by poor habits. In this class, students may choose to practice the last two steps in Selhub’s SHIELD prescription: “Listen to the self to find the answer to this question: In what way did the situation tell me ‘I’m not enough’ or ‘I don’t have enough?’ and Decide to give yourself what you need” (Selhub, 2009). Selhub recommends a “Love Response” rather than a “stress response.” Many of the chemicals released in a “Love Response, endorphins, oxytocin, dopamine, vasopressin, and nitric oxide, also… create positive physiology” (Selhub, 2009).

Herbert Benson, M.D., Associate Professor of Medicine, Harvard Medical School, has found that effective mind/body techniques stimulate the “relaxation response.” In this class, students experiment with several techniques to enhance positive physiology and discover strategies that may be useful in displacing self-defeating attitudes. Students have the option to try mind/body methods such as Yoga, Internal Qi Gong, or T’ai Chi (Carlson, 2003).
Course Objectives

At the end of the semester, students will be able to describe actions associated with building self-acceptance, self-forgiveness and self-respect after engaging in minor self-defeating habits:

1. Identify behavior associated with self-acceptance and/or self-forgiveness (Ulrich, 2009);
2. Examine self-defeating attitudes such as perfectionism, “self-destructive unselfishness,” “self-destructive self-blame” (Ulrich, 2009), and “false limitations” (Flanigan, 1997);
3. Employ Flanigan’s questions (1997) to determine level of responsibility (Ulrich, 2009);
4. Employ lifestyle changes to reduce stress (Benson, 1975 and 2000) and incorporate self-nurturing and calming mind/body strategies;
5. Apply daily self-care routines: (a) building a caring social network, (b) eating nutritious meals, (c) sleeping well, (d) exercising, and (e) immersing the self in nature (Selhub, 2009);
6. Discern specific life lessons and personal benefits from an event rather than ruminating about a negative situation (Lyubomirsky, 2008);
7. Establish daily habits fostering character growth (Holmgren, 2002) rather than self-blame;
8. Assess and make amends to the harmed person/self with changed behavior & actions (Maruna, 2001);
9. Decide how to reconcile with the self & reconnect with others using either the “love response” (Selhub, 2009) or another relaxation approach such as meditation to foster loving-kindness for self & others;
10. Create regular times to contribute to significant others and the community (Templeton, 1997) as a means of “symbolic restitution” (Flanigan, 1996) to shift focus beyond the self.

* Definitions of Self-Defeating Behavior

A self-defeating behavior is “any attitude or gesture that thwarts a person’s healthy desire for love, acceptance, fulfillment, or tranquility” and may include an action that “once worked to help an individual cope with a hurtful experience but that now works against the individual to keep him or her from responding to new moments in life in a healthy way” (Cudney & Hardy, 1991).

Anderson (2011) describes self-defeating behavior as the “self-rebellious dimension” of your personality when you are “acting out inappropriately” and your childish feelings emerge upon the stage of your adult life: “Think of the things you yearn for—to have a happier love life, to break free of debt, to achieve greater recognition in your field—and consider all of the impulsive little things you do that actually hinder your progress toward those goals” (2011, page 5). Anderson believes that these damaging habits are related to immediate gratification when a person decides to substitute “self-indulgence for self-nurturing” (2011, page 6). One of Anderson’s clients described his habits, “I ate what I wanted, even though I got fat and lost my looks…. I spent what I wanted, even though I eventually foreclosed on my mortgage” (Anderson, 2011, page 8).

Serious habits are often called self-destructive behavior and may include addictions, compulsions or obsessions. Self-destructive behavior is beyond the scope of this class.
Course Requirements

No textbooks are required: Students will read E-Reserve articles & book chapters.

Assignments

You will
1. Participate in class discussions;
2. Practice exercises & evaluate each one in a paragraph;
3. Write a summary of an interview & a reflection paper;
4. Write an application paper;
5. Create a PowerPoint show and present your research to two adults; and
6. Write 3 or 4 essays from a choice of 10 possible questions for the open-book, open-note final essay exam.

Class Discussions

After you read the lecture material, watch course videos and streamed movies and finish assignments in the lesson overview, you’ll participate in our class discussions. Please post your opinions; support them with evidence from a case study, interview, movie, journal article, online guest lecture, course video; and respond to another student’s comment the following week. You won’t earn full credit if you don’t a reply to a classmate in a discussion.

Exercises

Every few weeks throughout the semester, you will practice and evaluate exercises designed to promote positive physiology: (1) Selhub’s cognitive/behavioral “love response” method, (2) Flanigan and Ulrich self-forgiveness strategies and (3) mind/body techniques to promote Benson’s “relaxation response.”

Interview Summary and Reflection Paper

Interview summary: You’ll interview a social worker, psychologist, or school counselor and ask questions about (1) teen self-defeating habits that seem to be increasing in frequency, (2) new positive methods he/she uses to build self-respect, (3) typical outcomes of these positive methods, and (4) effective prevention strategies. You’ll submit a 2-page single-spaced summary. Reflection Paper: Recall your healthy teenage goals and identify teenage attitudes that sabotaged your goals. Write a 1-page single-spaced reflection paper explaining “how you acquired the behavior that you use[d] to defeat yourself” (Cudney & Hardy, 1991).

Application Paper

After listening to Pamela Atkinson’s audio lecture about self-respect, watch for self-defeating attitudes at work, home, and school. Decide if you know anyone with a minor self-defeating attitude. You’ll discern if the attitude is a Response to Weakness from Diagrams 1 & 2 in Lessons 1 and 2, a reaction discussed in Lesson 3, or an issue discussed in Lesson 10. You’ll consider Ulrich’s techniques or suggestions from self-respect articles and videos on the course and propose a “series of life-enhancing behaviors” (Cudney & Hardy, 1991) to bolster self-acceptance and self-respect. Do not identify the person by name in your paper. As an
advocate for the homeless in Utah, Pamela Atkinson described how she helps homeless individuals as well as the working poor and addicted populations develop self-respect. In your paper, mention the unhealthy attitude, but focus primarily on positive solutions to increase self-acceptance and self-respect. Write at least 2 (undergrads) or 3 (grads) single-spaced pages and discuss the application of positive psychology to a self-defeating attitude.

**PowerPoint Presentation**

Select a self-defeating attitude and find several mind/body programs for that attitude, which have been published in recent journal articles. Search on the EBSCOhost database. Find a few journal articles about programs for self-defeating attitudes in the course. For example, prisons encourage regular dance practice to calm inmates, hospitals teach Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction for stressed patients, and doctors may suggest yoga for stress-related back conditions. **Undergrads**: Find five journal articles, blend findings with course material, and create a 45-minute, 15-slide PowerPoint presentation for 2 family members. **Grads**: Find eight journal articles and create a 90-minute, 25-slide PowerPoint presentation of research findings for 2 colleagues. For full credit, your participants must complete an evaluation, sign a disclaimer, and email the instructor. (All necessary forms are provided on the course.) Please include a citation on every slide and a Works Cited slide at the end of your show.

**Extra Assignment for Graduate Students**

- Use graduate required readings to add another paragraph in your discussion postings.

**Disclaimer**

Students are not encouraged to share personal or private information and stories with other students as part of the course. We discuss case studies and streamed movies. We do not reveal self-defeating attitudes/habits of friends or relatives in our discussions.

**Grade Scale**

Grading in this course is based upon the following activities and assignments. Since all graded assignments are related directly to course objectives, failure to complete a major assignment may result in an unsatisfactory course grade.

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<th>Assignments</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Discussion Postings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exercise Evaluation Paragraphs</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interview Summary &amp; Reflection Paper</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>Application Paper</td>
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<td>GRADS: 25-slide PowerPoint Presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDERGRADS: 15-slide PowerPoint Presentation</td>
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<td>Final Essay Exam (Undergrads--3 essays/Grads--4)</td>
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Planning Time

Successful students earning an A, B, or C grade use their time wisely. The standard formula for college coursework is 1:3. Every hour of class time results in at least three hours of homework. A three-credit online course will require at least 9 hours of homework (reading, research, and studying) per lesson. As a result, successful students plan their time wisely so that they keep up with assignments by maintaining a pace that fits the course schedule. They also communicate with the instructor or teaching assistants often so that they can receive much needed feedback on their work.

Online Course Responsibilities

This course requires significant self-motivation. Some lessons take a considerable amount of time to complete. Please note that not all lessons are created equal. Some may take a bit more time than others. Some people believe this to be a much easier way to study this subject than in the on-campus framework. Others may feel very intimidated at first. Be patient as you work your way through the first few lessons. If you are serious about the material, you will learn as much, if not more, than most on-campus students about this subject and develop reading and communication skills that are vital to the workforce of the 21st century.

The following is a list of general notes as they relate to the course:

- All course communication with the instructor should be completed using the Canvas email tool.
- Assignments are to be posted into the submission area (copying a Word document and pasting it) or in a Word format (.docx) or a pptx. If you aren’t submitting a PowerPoint show, please copy and paste a Word document in the submission area. Remember to post your documentation (evaluations & disclaimers) with your show. Please keep copies of all your work.
- If you submit assignments through email, I may not find them in time to grade them.

Online Courtesy & Communication Policy

Extreme consideration for the feelings of others is expected. People cannot see you smile and may not know when you are joking. Do not tell people they are stupid or wrong. Do explain why you believe differently. If someone has the facts wrong, direct them to the source of accurate information or politely offer your alternative “facts.” Use of profanity or direct/indirect insults which defame a person’s character, race, ethnicity, religion, etc. are inappropriate and will not be tolerated.
Academic Dishonesty & Plagiarism

Cheating will not be tolerated in this course. Anyone caught cheating will fail the course and will be reported to the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, in accordance with the Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities. Successful students always make sure that their work is original. This is important because the instructor must be able to gauge what the student has learned. Therefore, copying the work of another person, whether an essay, answers on your assignments or during a test, is considered plagiarism. Plagiarism is a form of cheating. Any time a student uses someone else’s work and does not give that person credit, it is plagiarism. Anyone who plagiarizes will receive a failing grade on the assignment. If this is repeated, the student will fail the course and can be expelled from the university. If you are “suspected” of plagiarism, you will bear the burden of proof. You must be able to present rough drafts or related materials and discuss the topic intelligently. Refer to the University of Utah Plagiarism Policy for more details and/or the University of Utah - Policy and Procedures Manual.

University Policy for Incomplete Grades

University policy states that the “I” grade may be given--at the instructor’s discretion--whenever a student has satisfactorily completed at least 80% of the coursework, but is unable to complete the remainder due to extenuating circumstances beyond the student’s control. The instructor will stipulate the particular work to be completed before a new, replacement grade can be submitted. If the work is not completed within one calendar year, the “I” grade will change to an “E” (failing) grade.

General Information

The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in this class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the instructor and to the Center for Disability Services, http://disability.utah.edu/ 162 Olpin Union Building, 581–5020 (V/TDD) to make arrangements for accommodations. This information is available in alternative format with prior notification. Please provide the instructor with a letter from the Center for Disability Services as soon as possible.

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