



*Society for the Teaching of Psychology*  
Division 2 of the American Psychological Association

**PSY 208: Close Relationships and Physical Health Across the Lifespan**  
**12:30pm-1:45pm on Tuesdays/Thursdays**  
**Academic Center North 103**  
**3 Credits**

**Instructor:**

Will Johnson, PhD

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Kapelski Learning Center 115

Office Hours: Mon & Wed: 9:30-11:00am; Tue & Thu: 8:30am-9:30am

**Required Text:** Readings as assigned. All readings will be available as .pdf files via Canvas.

**Course Website:** All materials for this course are available on Canvas. To access Canvas, navigate to [canvas.widener.edu](https://canvas.widener.edu) and select “Close Relationships and Health Across the Lifespan” under “Courses” or navigate to <https://widener.instructure.com/courses/9889>.

**Course Description:**

This course examines how our relationships with close others impact our physical health (and vice versa), for better or worse. Drawing heavily from literature published in the last 10 years, the course will explore the social contagion of health-related behaviors such as balanced eating and regular exercise in addition to the role of close relationships in buffering or amplifying the effects psychosocial risk on stress reactivity and immune function. The course will cover relationships between parents, friends and romantic partners through varied theoretical lenses such as attachment theory, the theory of planned behavior and the biological embedding model. We will also focus on how the context (age, race, culture, sexual orientation, etc.) of these relationships affects the way they impact physical health. The course will culminate with students leading class discussion and writing an essay regarding how they can improve the health of close others in their lives.

**Objectives for you in this course are:**

1. Students will demonstrate an ability to write and speak clearly about course material
  - a. Active participation in class discussion
  - b. Class facilitation on a course reading
  - c. Completion of a APA-formatted research paper
2. Students will demonstrate critical thinking skills
  - a. Ask thoughtful discussion questions
  - b. Apply psychological theory and data to everyday life
3. Students will demonstrate an understanding of psychological concepts and theories
  - a. Understand how social, developmental and health psychology concepts interact
4. Students will demonstrate an understanding of the scientific method
  - a. Interpret statistical data
  - b. Weigh cumulative evidence from a variety of sources and methods

**Grading**

Exam 1: 50 Points  
Exam 2: 50 Points  
Final Paper: 100 Points  
Discussion Questions: 50 points  
Discussion Leading: 50 points  
Total: 300 Points

**Grades are assigned as outlined below:**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Points</b>
A	93-100	279-300
A-	90-92	270-278
B+	87-89	261-269
B	83-86	249-260
B-	80-82	240-248
C+	77-79	231-239
C	73-76	219-230
C-	70-72	210-218
D	60-69	180-209
F	0-59	0-179

**Exam Format**

There will be two exams. Exams will in-class (open book). Students will answer five short-form essay questions from eight possible prompts. The second exam will be non-cumulative and only cover material from the second half of the course.

**Discussion Questions**

Before each class, students will upload two questions about readings from that day's course material to Canvas. The aim of these questions is to ensure lively discussion and incentivize you for completing readings before classtime. Discussion questions should be submitted by 8am the day of class. These questions will be worth two points per class period and graded for completion. Students should also bring these questions to class for use during class discussion. Often, these questions consider why the authors made a particular choice or how this set of findings could be meaningfully applied. Examples of thought-provoking discussion questions for the first two weeks of readings are provided on Canvas.

**Leading Class Discussion**

During the second half of the semester, students will lead class discussion in pairs. The goal of this facilitation is to foster greater engagement with the readings and to practice presentation and discussion skills. During their class period, the student team will lead discussion for one of the assigned papers with Will leading discussion of the other assigned readings. Student pairs will be graded on their level of preparation and effort in guiding class discussion. A rubric for the assessment of this discussion can be found on Canvas and students will receive detailed feedback following their facilitation.

**Final Paper**

Each student will pick a physical health problem we have discussed in class. Students will then identify *social risk factors* and *social protective factors* for this problem. Keeping these risk factors and protective factors in mind, students will detail how they can improve the health of those around them in their everyday lives. The goal of this paper is to consider the practical application of psychological evidence and to practice writing a literature review. Papers should

cite at least 5 peer-reviewed journal articles, be between 7-10 pages and use APA-style references. References may be from assigned readings but often require articles from outside the course. Students will receive extra credit and instructor feedback for submitting an outline and first draft of their final paper. A rubric and examples of excellent papers are available on Canvas.

## **Calendar**

### Introduction and Methods

*Tuesday 1/15*

Holt-Lunstad, J., Robles, T. F., & Sbarra, D. A. (2017). Advancing social connection as a public health priority in the United States. *American Psychologist, 72*, 517.

Klein, W. M., Shepperd, J. A., Suls, J., Rothman, A. J., & Croyle, R. T. (2015). Realizing the promise of social psychology in improving public health. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 19*, 77-92.

*Thursday 1/17*

Pietromonaco, P. R., Uchino, B., & Dunkel Schetter, C. (2013). Close relationship processes and health: implications of attachment theory for health and disease. *Health Psychology, 32*, 499.

Repetti, R. L., Robles, T. F., & Reynolds, B. (2011). Allostatic processes in the family. *Development and Psychopathology, 23*, 921-938.

### Attachment and Health

*Tuesday, 1/22*

Bernard, K., & Dozier, M. (2010). Examining infants' cortisol responses to laboratory tasks among children varying in attachment disorganization: Stress reactivity or return to baseline?. *Developmental Psychology, 46*, 1771

Kelsay, K., Leung, D. Y., Mrazek, D. A., & Klinnert, M. D. (2013). Prospectively assessed early life experiences in relation to cortisol reactivity in adolescents at risk for asthma. *Developmental Psychobiology, 55*, 133-144.

*Thursday, 1/24*

Puig, J., Englund, M. M., Simpson, J. A., & Collins, W. A. (2013). Predicting adult physical illness from infant attachment: a prospective longitudinal study. *Health Psychology, 32*, 409.

### Paternal Buffering of Early Adversity

*Tuesday, 1/29*

Chen, E., Miller, G. E., Kobor, M. S., & Cole, S. W. (2011). Maternal warmth buffers the effects of low early-life socioeconomic status on pro-inflammatory signaling in adulthood. *Molecular Psychiatry, 16*, 729-737.

Farrell, A. K., Simpson, J. A., Carlson, E. A., Englund, M. M., & Sung, S. (2017). The impact of stress at different life stages on physical health and the buffering effects of maternal sensitivity. *Health Psychology, 36*, 35.

*Thursday, 1/31*

Manning, L. G., Davies, P. T., & Cicchetti, D. (2014). Interparental violence and childhood adjustment: How and why maternal sensitivity is a protective factor. *Child Development, 85*, 2263-2278.

### Health Impacts of Abuse and Neglect

*Tuesday, 2/5*

Danese, A., Moffitt, T. E., Harrington, H., Milne, B. J., Polanczyk, G., Pariante, C. M., ... & Caspi, A. (2009). Adverse childhood experiences and adult risk factors for age-related disease: depression, inflammation, and clustering of metabolic risk markers. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, *163*, 1135-1143.

Widom, C. S., Czaja, S. J., Bentley, T., & Johnson, M. S. (2012). A prospective investigation of physical health outcomes in abused and neglected children: New findings from a 30-year follow-up. *American Journal of Public Health*, *102*, 1135-1144.

*Thursday 2/7*

Johnson, W. F., Huelsnitz, C. O., Carlson, E. A., Roisman, G. I., Englund, M. M., Miller, G. E., & Simpson, J. A. (2017). Childhood abuse and neglect and physical health at midlife: Prospective, longitudinal evidence. *Development and Psychopathology*, *29*, 1935-1946.

### Peer Relationships and Health Behaviors

*Tuesday, 2/12*

Pace, U., D'Urso, G., & Zappulla, C. (2018). Negative eating attitudes and behaviors among adolescents: The role of parental control and perceived peer support. *Appetite*, *121*, 77-82.

Mercken, L., Steglich, C., Sinclair, P., Holliday, J., & Moore, L. (2012). A longitudinal social network analysis of peer influence, peer selection, and smoking behavior among adolescents in British schools. *Health Psychology*, *31*, 450-459.

*Thursday, 2/14*

Swearer, S. M., & Hymel, S. (2015). Understanding the psychology of bullying: Moving toward a social-ecological diathesis–stress model. *American Psychologist*, *70*, 344.

### Family Relationships and Health Behaviors

*Tuesday, 2/19*

Dwyer, L. A., Bolger, N., Laurenceau, J. P., Patrick, H., Oh, A. Y., Nebeling, L. C., & Hennessy, E. (2017). Autonomous motivation and fruit/vegetable intake in parent–adolescent dyads. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, *52*, 863-871.

Simons, L. G., Sutton, T. E., Simons, R. L., Gibbons, F. X., & Murry, V. M. (2016). Mechanisms that link parenting practices to adolescents' risky sexual behavior: A test of six competing theories. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *45*, 255-270.

*Thursday, 2/21*

Sleddens, E. F., Gerards, S. M., Thijs, C., Vries, N. K., & Kremers, S. P. (2011). General parenting, childhood overweight and obesity-inducing behaviors: A review. *Pediatric Obesity*, *6*, 12-27.

Turpyn, C. C., & Chaplin, T. M. (2016). Mindful parenting and parents' emotion expression: effects on adolescent risk behaviors. *Mindfulness*, *7*, 246-254.

### The Science of Effective Interventions

*Tuesday, 2/26*

Cornelius, T., Gettens, K., & Gorin, A. A. (2016). Dyadic dynamics in a randomized weight loss intervention. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, *50*, 506-515.

Graham, A. M., Pears, K. C., Kim, H. K., Bruce, J., & Fisher, P. A. (2017). Effects of a school readiness intervention on hypothalamus–pituitary–adrenal axis functioning and school adjustment for children in foster care. *Development and Psychopathology*, 1-14.

*Thursday, 2/28*

Knoll, N., Hohl, D. H., Keller, J., Schuez, N., Luszczynska, A., & Burkert, S. (2017). Effects of dyadic planning on physical activity in couples: A randomized controlled trial. *Health Psychology, 36*, 8-20.

Walton, G. M. (2014). The new science of wise psychological interventions. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 23*, 73-82.

### Spring Break

Tuesday 3/5

NO CLASS

Thursday, 3/7

NO CLASS

### Close Relationships and Sexual Minority Stress

Tuesday, 3/12

#### **Exam 1**

Thursday, 3/14

Goldsen, J., Bryan, A. E., Kim, H. J., Muraco, A., Jen, S., & Fredriksen-Goldsen, K. I. (2017). Who says I do: The changing context of marriage and health and quality of life for LGBT older adults. *The Gerontologist, 57*, 50-62.

Mereish, E. H., & Poteat, V. P. (2015). A relational model of sexual minority mental and physical health: The negative effects of shame on relationships, loneliness, and health. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 62*, 425-437.

### Romantic Relationships and Health Behaviors

Tuesday, 3/19

Chopik, W. J., & O'Brien, E. (2017). Happy you, healthy me? Having a happy partner is independently associated with better health in oneself. *Health Psychology, 36*, 21-30.

Cornelius, T., Desrosiers, A., & Kershaw, T. (2016). Spread of health behaviors in young couples: How relationship power shapes relational influence. *Social Science & Medicine, 165*, 46-55.

Thursday, 3/21

Jackson, S. E., Steptoe, A., & Wardle, J. (2015). The influence of partner's behavior on health behavior change: the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing. *JAMA Internal Medicine, 175*, 385-392.

Lüscher, J., & Scholz, U. (2017). Does social support predict smoking abstinence in dual-smoker couples? Evidence from a dyadic approach. *Anxiety, Stress, & Coping, 30*, 273-281.

#### **Final Paper Outline Due**

### Social Support and Chronic Illness

Tuesday, 3/26

August, K. J., & Sorkin, D. H. (2010). Marital status and gender differences in managing a chronic illness: The function of health-related social control. *Social Science & Medicine, 71*, 1831-1838.

Gamarel, K. E., & Revenson, T. A. (2015). Dyadic adaptation to chronic illness: The importance of considering context in understanding couples' resilience. In *Couple Resilience* (pp. 83-105). Springer Netherlands.

Thursday, 3/28

Martire, L. M., & Helgeson, V. S. (2017). Close relationships and the management of chronic illness: Associations and interventions. *American Psychologist, 72*, 601.

## Cultural Variation in Close Relationships and Health

*Tuesday, 4/2*

Campos, B., & Kim, H. S. (2017). Incorporating the cultural diversity of family and close relationships into the study of health. *American Psychologist, 72*, 543.

John-Henderson, N. A., Stellar, J. E., Mendoza-Denton, R., & Francis, D. D. (2015). Socioeconomic status and social support: social support reduces inflammatory reactivity for individuals whose early-life socioeconomic status was low. *Psychological Science, 26*, 1620-1629.

*Tuesday, 4/4*

Wang, S. W., & Lau, A. S. (2015). Mutual and non-mutual social support: cultural differences in the psychological, behavioral, and biological effects of support seeking. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 46*, 916-929.

Chiang, J. J., Saphire-Bernstein, S., Kim, H. S., Sherman, D. K., & Taylor, S. E. (2013). Cultural differences in the link between supportive relationships and proinflammatory cytokines. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 4*, 511-520.

## Cardiovascular Health and Close Relationships

*Tuesday, 4/9*

Fagundes, C. P., Bennett, J. M., Derry, H. M., & Kiecolt-Glaser, J. K. (2011). Relationships and inflammation across the lifespan: Social developmental pathways to disease. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 5*, 891-903.

Robles, T. F., Slatcher, R. B., Trombello, J. M., & McGinn, M. M. (2014). Marital quality and health: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin, 140*, 140-187

*Tuesday, 4/11*

Uchino, B. N., Bosch, J. A., Smith, T. W., Carlisle, M., Birmingham, W., Bowen, K. S., ... & O'Hartaigh, B. (2013). Relationships and cardiovascular risk: Perceived spousal ambivalence in specific relationship contexts and its links to inflammation. *Health Psychology, 32*, 1067.

**Final Paper Draft Due**

## Stress, Immune Activity and Close Relationships

*Tuesday, 4/16*

Jaremka, L. M., Glaser, R., Malarkey, W. B., & Kiecolt-Glaser, J. K. (2013). Marital distress prospectively predicts poorer cellular immune function. *Psychoneuroendocrinology, 38*, 2713-2719.

Pietromonaco, P. R., DeBuse, C. J., & Powers, S. I. (2013). Does attachment get under the skin? Adult romantic attachment and cortisol responses to stress. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 22*, 63-68.

*Thursday, 4/18*

Neff, L. A., & Broady, E. F. (2011). Stress resilience in early marriage: Can practice make perfect?. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 101*, 1050.

Weisman, O., Schneiderman, I., Zagoory-Sharon, O., & Feldman, R. (2015). Early stage romantic love is associated with reduced daily cortisol production. *Adaptive Human Behavior and Physiology, 1*, 41-53.

## Close Relations and Health in Old Age

*Tuesday, 4/23*

Choi, H., Yorgason, J. B., & Johnson, D. R. (2015). Marital quality and health in middle and later adulthood: Dyadic associations. *Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 71, 154-164.

Galinsky, A. M., & Waite, L. J. (2014). Sexual activity and psychological health as mediators of the relationship between physical health and marital quality. *Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 69, 482-492.

Thursday, 4/25

Chen, J. H., Waite, L. J., & Lauderdale, D. S. (2015). Marriage, relationship quality, and sleep among US older adults. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 56, 356-377.

Final Exam

Tuesday, 4/30

Review/Wrap-up/Make-up day

Thursday, 5/2

**Exam 2**

Thursday, 5/9

**Final Paper Due**

Class Policies:

**Late Work:** No credit will be given for discussion questions turned in late. For final projects or missed exams, I aim to provide as much flexibility as possible. In order to ensure flexibility, please give me as much advance notice as possible for rescheduling exams and late final papers.

**Attendance Policy:**

In accordance with Widener's class attendance policy (see <http://www.widener.edu/academics/catalogs/default.aspx>), students with six or more unexcused absences will automatically receive a failing grade. To avoid unexcused absences, please contact me should you need to miss class.

**Technology Policy:**

You may prefer to read and annotate assigned articles electronically and therefore use your laptop or tablet to refer to readings or notes during class. If you do use technology during class, please be courteous to those around you by accessing class material only. Laptop multitasking during class has demonstrated negative effects for both users and fellow students sitting nearby.

**Communication During Class:**

Class time in this course will primarily consist of discussion. When discussing course content, especially personal experiences, it is essential that we afford every class member respect. Although the lessons from this class are intended to be shared and applied in your lives, personal information and experiences we discuss should be kept confidential.

**Communication Outside of Class:**

The best way to communicate about course material or assignments is during my office hours. However, sometimes communicating via email is faster and easier than talking to me in person. I will try to respond to emails as soon as possible, and will respond to emails within at least 24 hours during the workweek, or within 48 hours on the weekends. Exams, outlines and drafts will be returned with feedback within a week of their due date. If you have questions that are best answered by other students, please post in the "Discussion Forum" section the Canvas page.

### **Academic Integrity**

It is assumed that students have read and understand the Academic Integrity Policy as of the first day of class. This policy can be found in the “Academic Regulations” section of the student handbook and undergraduate catalog. That policy can be found at:  
<http://www.widener.edu/academics/catalogs/default.aspx>

### **Disabilities and Special Needs**

It is my priority to provide an equitable classroom via reasonable accommodations, on a flexible and individualized basis, to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. It is every student’s right to be granted reasonable accommodation of disability and research shows that requesting and using accommodations is associated with greater student success and satisfaction. If there are any parts of the course (e.g. in-class exams, class facilitations) that concern you, we will work together to find a solution. Use <http://www.widener.edu/academics/support/disabilities/request.aspx> or Disabilities Services (520 E. 14th St., 610-499-1266). Disabilities Services is the office that authorizes all accommodations on campus. Please note that you will need to present documentation of your disability to Disabilities Services. It is important to make this request as soon as possible so that we will have time to make any necessary arrangements. My goal is to create an inclusive and fair learning environment, so do not hesitate to talk to me about how I can best serve the needs of all students.

### **Academic Coaching**

Disabilities Services also offers academic coaching support to undergraduates enrolled in one of Widener's standard academic programs. We know that the college transition is not always easy and students may face new challenges and experiences. Therefore, we offer academic coaching to help students with disabilities make the transition to college academics and university life. Interested students can meet once or twice a week with a learning specialist and can use their coaching sessions to focus on time management, study skills, social and emotional adjustment, and/or academic planning. Go to <http://www.widener.edu/academics/support/> for information on seeking academic support.

### **Supporting Survivors**

It is also my priority to support and assist survivors of sexual assault and harassment. If you are a survivor and feel you need to skip a lecture, leave class or complete an alternate assignment due to potentially harmful material, I completely understand. I cannot, however, act as a confidential resource for students who have been the victim of sexual misconduct at Widener and am by law required report any incident. If you have experienced sexual assault or harassment, you can access confidential resources and report an incident at [http://www.widener.edu/campus\\_life/resources/sexual\\_misconduct/default.aspx](http://www.widener.edu/campus_life/resources/sexual_misconduct/default.aspx).

### **Supporting Student Service Members and Veterans**

Veterans and active duty military personnel with special circumstances (e.g., upcoming deployments, drill requirements, etc.) are welcome and encouraged to communicate these, in advance if possible, to the instructor.



