Handbook of Diversity Issues in Health Psychology

Handbook of Diversity Issues in Health Psychology is an edited handbook marrying research generated within various disciplines on diversity issues such as age, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity. The editors underscore the value of continued research on diversity issues in health psychology, as these issues collectively influence health promotion, disease prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation efforts. Toward this end, the authors address the interplay between the biological, psychological, and social influences on health-related factors such as beliefs and behaviors, life stresses, and utilization of medical services.

The book consists of 21 chapters, a Foreword, a Preface, a Table of Contents, and an Index. The book consists of four sections: Introduction and Methodology, Life Span Issues in Health Psychology, Gender and Sexual Orientation Issues in Health Psychology, and Ethnicity Issues in Health Psychology. The first section, Introduction and Methodology, consists of the first two chapters. Chapter One explains the relevance of diversity issues to health psychology and emphasizes the importance of purposefully addressing such issues within research efforts. The authors describe common research practices marginalizing diverse populations and responsibly addresses both the benefits and the risks to acknowledging diversity issues in research. In Chapter Two, the author urges researchers to accept the inherent heterogeneity existing within the population and consequently to ask limited research questions geared toward a specific subgroup. Additionally, she describes methodological pitfalls, including Simpson's paradox and pseudocorrelation, possibly resulting from tendencies to ignore heterogeneity or misperception of statistical control of heterogeneity.

Section Two, Life Span Issues on Health Psychology, contains Chapters Three through Nine. The third chapter is a relatively brief, broad-based chapter promoting awareness of life-span differences in health treatment and outcome (e.g., group variances in illness conceptions, coping styles, treatment compliance). Chapter Four chronicles the benefits of touch therapy, generally through lowered anxiety levels and depression, across age groups and medical disorders. At this juncture, touch therapy may be of particular interest to researchers but may carry limited value to practitioners due to the paucity of research supporting its effectiveness within any given population. Chapter Five details the pathways through which prenatal and postnatal exposure to cocaine impacts children's development. The author addresses biological, neuropsychological, and environmental influences on child development, in addition to the effects of substance abuse on parenting style. Suggested interventions target substance abusing mothers and their children. In Chapter Seven, the authors examine the subphases of healthy adolescent development, ranging from age 10 to age 20, in terms of health promoting and health risking factors. Concomitant to outlining healthy developmental trajectories (e.g., biological, psychological, cognitive, and
psychosocial) and the domains of adolescent health (e.g., violence and safety, sexuality, substance abuse, and chronic illness), the authors expose common societal myths about the adolescent experience. Cross-national comparisons of adolescent behaviors as well as targeted interventions capitalizing on adolescent competencies are topics presented for discussion. Chapter Eight attempts to dispel the assumption that the development of disabilities in the aging population represents inevitable and irreversible biological deterioration by addressing the contribution of cultural and psychological factors to the expression of disability. This chapter contains a useful review of research methodology promoting results that exaggerate, and in some cases create, the perception of decline in the aging population. In Chapter Nine, the authors examine relationships among physical disease, functional impairment, and depression in the aging population. Readers will come to appreciate the robust relationship between functional impairment and depression and to understand various methodological problems limiting the assessment of, and consequently research on, these three factors.

Chapter Ten serves as an introduction to Section Three, Gender and Sexual Orientation Issues in Health Psychology. The author defines terms used in discussion of these populations and describes how differences in biology, health practices, and health outcomes necessitate efforts to understand issues unique to these populations. This chapter provides the rationale for including gender and sexual orientation in our conceptualization of diversity issues and lays the foundation for the next four chapters in this section. In Chapter Eleven, the authors address a major cause of morbidity and mortality among women, cigarette smoking. Motivations for smoking initiation and maintenance are the topic of review, as are barriers to cessation. The contribution of male socialization to the development of stress- and anger-related diseases is the focus of Chapter Twelve. The author explores beliefs common to the male schema in relation to maladaptive health practices and provides specific interventions correcting for maladaptive social practices. This chapter is particularly useful to psychotherapists employing a cognitive behavioral approach to treatment. Chapter Thirteen addresses the psychological impact of HIV disease on individuals and highlights issues unique to homosexual males. The author provides insight into commonly encountered psychotherapeutic issues along with the appropriate interventions. Illustrative case vignettes make this chapter particularly useful to psychotherapists. In Chapter Fourteen, the author reviews the psychological effects of homophobia from family, educational, and governmental institutions on lesbian health and provides strategies for implementing systemic changes in prejudicial practices. Although the chapter introduces readers to various social and psychological factors influencing lesbian well-being, suggested interventions focus primarily on tertiary changes to the exclusion of individual or familial interventions.

Chapter Fifteen introduces the section entitled Issues of Ethnicity in Health Psychology. The authors address various definitions of commonly employed terms, such as ethnicity and race, then proceed to describe the contribution of sociocultural “rules” of behavior to ethnic differences in health. Using the example of breast cancer and ethnicity, the authors elucidate various factors underlying differences in morbidity and mortality in White and African American women. Chapter Sixteen presents a framework for conceptualizing African American health, which examines health outcomes across the life span. The author examines, within each developmental stage, risk factors contributing to the morbidity and mortality rates in conjunction with buffering cultural practices. This chapter is particularly