

## **Additional Try It Yourself Exercises Chapter 2**

### **Try It Yourself**

Imagine this: Your employer, the head of a drug company, has given you the assignment of finding new psychoactive drugs. What kinds of psychoactive drugs would you want to search for? Drugs to relieve pain, depression or other disorders? Or would you focus on drugs to enhance intellectual performance and memory? Do you believe that drugs should be used only to treat problems, or to enhance life? Why?

Now imagine this: You have been a little tired lately. Your physician offers you a medication that will alleviate your fatigue, but it might also increase your appetite leading you to eat more and gain weight. Would you accept the drug? What if your fatigue had been severe? Would you accept the drug then? What if the side effects included irritability and loss of patience? Would you accept the drug now? How severe do the psychological effects of a medication have to be to make you refuse it? Is the price worth it, or should drug companies be prohibited from marketing drugs that have psychological side effects?

*These are philosophical questions whose answers depend on your own values. For many people, while life enhancement is desirable, the alleviation of pain and disease seems more important and immediate. Whether one can tolerate side effects depends on several factors: compared to the suffering, how debilitating are the side effects? What is your attitude toward tolerating discomfort? What is your attitude toward taking medications? How long would you have to take the medication (and how long would you have to tolerate the side effects)? A prominent question in society concerns the manufacture and sale of drugs that change one's psychological state. Some people argue that adults who understand the risks and are prepared to take them should be allowed access to any drugs that they wish (i.e., arguments for legalising substances that are now illegal in many parts of the world). Other people argue that such substances should not be available because of their potential to cause harm to the person who ingests it and often to others. What do you think?*

### **Try It Yourself**

For many of us, a single cup of coffee in the morning isn't enough to get us started. For others, a single cup of tea (which contains less caffeine) does the trick. Similarly, some people find that a cigarette (nicotine) is helpful in calming down, while for other people, several cigarettes may be needed to have the desired effect. If you use caffeine or nicotine, how much do you require to achieve the desired effect? Do you think this might mean that you have developed a tolerance for the drug? Does this change your feeling about using the drug?

*In some cases, it is difficult to determine whether a substance is addictive. Caffeine is such a substance, and there is presently controversy as to whether compulsive caffeine ingestion qualifies as an addiction in the same way as heroin use. On a psychological level, a person can become 'addicted' to almost anything that gives pleasure. For example, a person with an obsessive-compulsive disorder may be 'addicted' to washing their hands perhaps 20 times a day. Yet this clearly does not qualify as a physiological addiction. To many people, the term 'addict' used in reference to themselves is distasteful, and feeling that they may be labeled an addict may lead them to monitor their usage of many substances. But the term 'addict' is much less distasteful to other people, who may laughingly call themselves addicted to many things (e.g., the television 'junkie'). How do you feel about this? Is the term 'addiction' used too freely?*

### **Try It Yourself**

An old saying suggests that 'laughter is the best medicine.' The role of humour in dealing with stress is well known; in fact, over 40% of people use humour to deal with stress (McCrae 1984). Do you find yourself using this technique? Given your observations and the current knowledge of psychoimmunology, do you think humour is the 'best medicine'? Do you see any practical way to apply this idea to your own life? Are there times when humour might increase stress? For example, would it increase or decrease your stress if your instructor put a joke at the beginning of each examination, or if your boss started his/her proficiency evaluation of you with a joke? Ask your friends if they would respond the same way you do.

*Given what we know about psychoimmunology, humour may not be the best medicine, but it certainly can be a very good one. Humour needs to be used appropriately, however. Most of us would not find a joke told at the beginning of a stressful situation such as an examination or a proficiency evaluation to be appropriate, especially if the joke is told by someone who is not under the same stress as we are. In fact, at these times we may not even see the humour in the joke whereas at other times we might. If the joke is told by someone who is causing us the stress (the instructor or supervisor who is evaluating you, for example), the attempt at humour may almost seem cruel. But when we are in a stressful situation, making a joke about it helps us to redefine the situation in a less threatening way and makes us take the situation (and ourselves!) less seriously.*