

EUROPEAN HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY SOCIETY CONFERENCE
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Symposium: Critical Perspectives on Health Behaviours

Aims. This symposium addresses mainstream health psychology topics – health behaviours; alcohol use; obesity; medication adherence; and healthy ageing – arguing that it is essential to understand individual health actions in the context of their meanings in people’s lives if interventions are to be effective.

Rationale. Widely-used models and approaches to health behaviours can be criticised, not only for focusing on individual cognitions and ignoring environmental constraints on choice, but also for neglecting the social and discursive dimensions of health actions.

Summary. The five speakers address social meanings of health actions, and the limitations of individualized and medicalised models that position health-related behaviour as isolated from social contexts and personal meanings. All presentations identify contextual factors which influence the relationships between, and relative values of, a range of health actions. This includes cultural and discursive understandings of the specific health actions as well as people’s identity by gender, age, and social position

Mixing alcohol and social media: Young adults and drinking cultures

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Background: Many young adults regularly engage in heavy drinking episodes, and frequently use social networking technologies. This study explored the ways in which new technologies are implicated in young people’s drinking cultures.

Methods: Nineteen friendship group discussions were conducted (7 all-female, 5 all-male, 7 mixed), involving 78 participants (45 female) aged between 18-25 years (M=20.67). Content and thematic analyses were undertaken on transcribed videorecordings.

Findings: Social networking was routinely embedded within young adults’ drinking practices. Social media applications were used to organise events, purchase drinks, avoid drunk texting, take/share photos, receive alcohol promotions, and share drunken stories, among other things. Alcohol marketing was seamlessly integrated into these online worlds.

Discussion: Social networking technologies both facilitate and recreate a normative culture of intoxication. To enable social change towards healthier and safer drinking cultures, we need to take a cultural lens to understand how young adults make sense of their social worlds.