

**Grand Valley State University**  
**Psychology 492-01: Capstone Winter 2020**  
**9:00-9:50am MWF ASH 2310**

**SYLLABUS**

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**Course Description**

By the time you take this required course for psychology majors, you must have been told many times that psychology is science. Yet it is one thing to receive and accept a message at its face value, and quite another to assimilate it into your beliefs and value system. The main objective of this course is to reach a deeper understanding about the forms and the functions of psychological inquiries in life and society. The questions that I invite you to explore include: What does it mean to take psychology and allied inquiries seriously as science? Does scientific psychology represent a neatly separate body of knowledge from common sense and personal experience? How is psychology related to other areas of inquiry including physical sciences, biological sciences, social sciences, philosophy, and literature? How could discoveries from scientific psychology be applied to ethical and productive living of individuals and policy-makings that affect the society as a whole? What other bodies of human knowledge have to be called on to bear on resolving the issues that you care about?

To ensure that class discussions are as informed as possible, you are required to first read and review what psychologists and philosophers of science have written on some of the related topics, which will serve as anchors and catalysts for raising your own questions. We will start with a review of textbook 'recipes' for doing science, and then examine the socio-historical contexts and philosophical presumptions for different schools/approaches in psychology, including evolutionary psychology, cultural psychology, and neuropsychology.

We will then delve into several special areas of inquiry within the traditional territories of academic psychology, including the relationship between nature and nurture, mind and body connections, conscious and unconscious minds, social perceptions, self and society. We will examine, in each case, how and to what extent scientific psychology can illuminate our understanding on important issues and how such studies have impacted people's lives and contemporary culture. Throughout the class discussions, I will invite you to reflect on each topic, raise your own questions, and find ways for answering the questions scientifically.

Two themes that runs across the all the core readings I supplied are 1) the importance of raising empirical questions that can be answered scientifically; 2) understanding both the biological/evolutionary approach and the social-cultural approach to understanding human mind and behavior, and why both of them are indispensable.

Keep in mind that this class is not primarily about specific areas of studies in psychology. Although you may find some of the topics familiar, please keep an open mind, be critical (but not blindly critical), and be prepared to gain new insights on the same “old” issues. The class is intended to be a disciplined and open-ended exploration of the issues you care about, and you are expected to talk and write about your own understanding on those issues, informed by what you read and class discussions. An essential skill you will learn or consolidate is raising meaningful as well as logically and empirically answerable questions. To help reach these objectives, I will frequently ask you, in classroom and writing assignments, to elaborate and articulate your questions, or transform them into testable hypotheses. I will frequently ask you to search for research findings that either support or contradict your ideas or hypotheses.

### **Course objectives (as stated in GVSU official Catalog)**

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- 1) Identify concepts associated with major theoretical perspectives and empirical findings in the discipline.
- 2) Engage in the application of major theoretical perspectives and empirical findings in the discipline.
- 3) Describe alternative theoretical perspectives within the discipline and, where possible, integrate/synthesize across these perspectives.
- 4) Recognize various sources of bias in psychological research, and how these can affect the interpretation or usefulness of research findings.
- 5) Analyze and explain interdisciplinary approaches to psychological questions.
- 6) Recognize and produce an appropriate level of professional-style writing.

### **Reading material**

No textbooks are required. Most of the reading material will be accessible in pdf files that can be downloaded either from the Blackboard or directly from the web. In exchange for the cost of the textbook, you have to defray the cost of printing the reading material yourself. **Please bring printed copies of the articles to class for discussion whether or not you are the assigned presenter of the articles.** You are not allowed to use laptop computers in classroom, except on a few occasions for research purposes, in which cases I will let you know by announcements on the blackboard beforehand. You may also have to purchase three books from amazon.com or other online used bookstores such as alibris.com at your own expenses, if they are not available from libraries. The two required books are listed on page 8 in the syllabus. Most of the books cost under \$15.

## **Structure of the class**

There will be six topics for class discussion, debates and exploratory writing assignments. Each of these topics will consume about two weeks, or four class sessions except for the first topic (scientific psychology and rational inquiry), which will take six class sessions. While there is room for change due to unforeseeable circumstances, each of the four-session block for a topic will be structured similarly.

For each topic, I will start in the first class by raising a few 'big' questions and inviting you to focus on some of the foundational issues/concepts. We will spend the next three or so classes discuss the core readings (see the list of core readings below). The aim of the discussion is to provide seeds and proper frames for raising questions you care about. Meanwhile, I will ask you to raise more questions and search library databases, in and out of class, to find studies that may help answer the questions raised in class discussion. I will ask you to post your questions and attach the articles you found on the Discussion Board with a short annotation on why they are relevant. I will then select four to five articles that bear on different aspects of the topic for further discussion and debates in the following class session.

## **Components of the class for assessment**

1. Summary and reflection papers: After the last class session for a topic, you are required to write a paper with three main sections: 1) summaries of the main issues and questions raised in class, 2) summaries and conceptual links across the articles discussed in class 3) Your reflections on the topic and the issues raised in class. An instruction for each paper will be posted on the Black Board. The due day is typically two days following the last class on the topic. Late work will incur deductions of points of at least 10% per delayed day. I will give full credit (20 points) to a paper that fulfills the basic requirements articulated in my instruction.
2. Class discussions on assigned readings: More than half of the class time will be spent on discussions and debates informed by empirical studies. A team of three or four students will be assigned as discussion leaders for each of the six topics. Although every student is expected to contribute to class discussions on every topic, the discussion leaders are expected in addition to be responsible for presenting and explaining the major points of selected articles when requested. Every student receives participation points for each topic depending on their level of engagement in class and postings on the discussion board, and discussion leaders receive additional points for how well they play their role in facilitating class discussion on their assigned topic. I will post a more detailed instruction on how to read and present articles in this class.
3. Questions and library research researches (see above on the structure of the class).
4. In-class writings: To ensure optimal engagement from all students of the class in debates and class discussions. I will routinely ask you to write summaries of class discussions and debates and raise any questions you are concerned or confused about, typically in the last few minutes of a class.

5. Required postings on the discussion board: During the first three or four class sessions for each topic I will post a list of questions on the discussion board. You will be asked to answer at least some of the questions and comment on other your peers' answers.
6. Book reports and book presentation: You will be assigned three books to read: Andrew Shtulman's "ScienceBlind" and Jonathan Haidt's "The Righteous Mind" and a third one chosen from the book list you'll see at the end of the syllabus. We will hold two "book-club" style class discussions on the first two books and you are required to submit a book report on each of these two books. Instructions for how to write the book reports will be posted on the BB. For the third book, you will be asked to give an oral presentation in class. A schedule for the book presented will be posted on the BB. On each book presentation day, four or five of you will present a summary and some highlights of the book and be prepared to answer questions from your peers. Each of you will have about 12 minutes for the presentation and about 2 minutes for Q/A. A more detailed instruction will be posted later.
7. Review paper: You are required a review paper of about 3000 words on an issue related to one of the six topics. I will give you a list of somewhat controversial and potentially interesting issues to consider, but you are encouraged to find your own by the criteria I set in my instruction. Ideally it is an issue that there has been researched with different theoretical approaches and perspectives, both biological-evolutionary oriented and social-cultural oriented, and even those that may seem to be on the "borderlands" of science. Your task is to describe the issue as clearly as possible, describe the different research approaches to the issue and how well each of them is supported by evidence gathered so far. You are expected to provide a critical assessment of the research findings and conclusions, and propose new researches needed to resolve the issue. I will ask you to submit a draft before submitting the final version. The purpose of doing so is to leave sufficient time for reflection and gathering research findings and thoughts that most scholars and experts find difficult to do in one shot. A more detailed instruction will be posted later on the BB. Your review paper will be graded with rubrics that require, among other things, a demonstration of progress in writing and thinking from the draft to the completed paper.
8. Final exam: There will be a final take-home exam for assessing your understanding and thoughts on the key issues covered throughout the class.
9. Capstone Forum: A forum will be implemented on the Blackboard discussion board. This is where you can communicate with your peers on any class-related issues and seek help from each other. You are strongly encouraged to post your messages on it. As an incentive, you will earn extra credit of up to 4 points by posting on the forum, depending on the frequency and the quality of your posts.

## Grading distribution

Your final grade will reflect your performance on following components:

- 1) 6 reflection papers: 20 points each = 120 points
- 2) Questions and library researches = 60 points
- 3) Book report on "ScienceBlind" = 20 points
- 4) Book report "The Righteous Mind" = 20 points
- 5) Oral Book presentation = 20 points
- 6) Review paper = 55 points
- 7) Final exam = 45 points
- 8) Discussion leading = 20 points
- 9) Attendance = 40 points
- 10) Required postings on discussion board: 6 points for each of 6 topics= 36 points
- 11) Class participation including debate, and In-class writings = 30 points
- 12) General Forum postings = up to 4 points of extra credits

**Total= 466 points + 4 extra credit points**

Your total points will be converted into percentage points, and your final letter grade will then be determined according to the following scale:

A >94%; A- = 89-93%; B+ = 86-88%; B = 82-85%; B- = 79-81%;

C+ = 76-78%; C = 72-75%; C- = 69-71%; D+ = 65-68%; D = 60-64%; F <60

**Class Schedule and important due days** (Subject to change, please check BB frequently):

**1/6: Class Overview**

**Topic one (1/8-1/24)**

**1/8: Introduction and debate**

**1/10, 1/13, 1/15, 1/17: Discussion on core readings**

**1/20: Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Day recess**

**1/22: Discussion on student questions and findings; Reflection Paper 1 due**

**1/24: Book discussion: "ScienceBlind"; 1/25: Book report on "ScienceBlind" due**

**Topic two (1/27-2/7)**

**1/27: Introduction and debate**

**1/29, 1/31, 2/3: Discussion on core readings**

**2/5: Discussion on student questions and findings**

**2/7: Book presentation 1; Reflection Paper 2 due**

**Topic 3 (2/10-2/21)**

**2/10: Introduction and debate**

**2/12, 2/14, 2/17: Discussion on core readings**

**2/19: Discussion on student questions and findings**

**2/21: Book presentation 2; Reflection Paper 3 due**

**Topic 4 (2/24-3/13)**

**2/24: Introduction and debate**

**2/26, 2/28: Discussion on core readings 2/29: Outline of Review Paper due**

**3/1-3/8: Spring Break Recess, no class**

**3/9: Discussion on student questions and findings; Reflection Paper 4 due**

**3/11 Book discussion: "The Righteous Mind"**

**3/13 Book presentation 3; 3/14: Book report "The Righteous Mind" due**

**Topic 5 (3/16-3/27)**

**3/16: Introduction and debate**

**3/18, 3/20, 3/23: Discussion on core readings**

**3/25: Discussion on student questions and findings**

**3/27: Book presentation 4; Reflection Paper 5 due**

**Topic 6 (3/30-4/10)**

**3/30: Introduction and debate**

**4/1, 4/3, 4/6: Discussion on core readings**

**4/8: Discussion on student questions and findings**

**4/10: Book presentation 5; Reflection Paper 6 due**

**4/13 General discussion; Review paper due**

**4/15: General discussion continues**

**4/17: Book presentation 6**

**4/20 Final Take-home Exam due**

## Core Readings

(This list of articles may be revised and supplemented to include what you find on PsycInfo and other data bases)

### Topic one: Scientific psychology and rational Inquiries

- Harari, Y. N. (2014). "The discovery of Ignorance", in Chapter 14 of "Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind", Harvill Secker, London
- Gilbert, D. (1991). How mental systems believe, *American Psychologists*, 46(2), 107-119.
- Meinrad, P. (1991). The difference between everyday knowledge, ideology, and scientific knowledge, *New Ideas in Psychology*, 9(2), 227-231.
- Lillienfeld, S. O. (2010). Can psychology become a science? *Personality and Individual Differences* 49 (2010), 281–288.
- Shermer, M. (2008). Folk numeracy and middle land, *Scientific American*, September, 40
- Greenfield, P. M. (2017). Cultural change over time: Why replicability should not be the gold standard in psychological science? *Perspectives of Psychological Science*, 12(5), 762-771.

### Topic two: Nature, nurture and culture

- Champagne, F. A. & Mashoodh, R. (2009). Gene in Context: Gene-Environment interplay and the origins of individual differences in behavior. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 18(3), 127-131.
- Kitayama, S. & Salvador, C. E. (2017). Culture embrained: Going beyond the Nature-Nurture dichotomy, *Perspectives of Psychological Science*, 12(5), 841-854.
- Baron-Cohen, S. (2005). The male condition. <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/08/opinion/the-male-condition.html>
- Bonsang, E. et al. (2017). As you sow, so shall you reap: Gender-role attitudes and late-life cognition. *Psychological Science*, 28:9, 2017
- Fuss, J., Auer, M. K., & Briken, P. (2015). Gender dysphoria in children and adolescents: a review of recent research, *Current Opinions in Psychiatry*, 28, 430-434.

### Topic three: Mind and body

- Van Oudenhove, L. & Cuypers, S. E. (2010). The philosophical "mind- body problem" and its relevance for the relationship between psychiatry and the neurosciences. *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, 53(4), 545-57.
- Piedimonte, A. Benedetti, F. (2016). Words and Drugs: Same Mechanisms of Action? *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, 46, 159-166.
- Mobbs, D., Lau, H., Jones, O.D., & Frith, C.D. (2007). Law, Responsibility, and the brain, *PLoS*

*Biology*, 5(4), 693-700.

Weir, K. (2011). The exercise effect. *APA Monitor*, 42(11), 48-52.

#### **Topic four: Attention and Unconscious minds**

Johansson, P. et al. (2014). Choice blindness and preference change: You will like this paper better if you (believe you) chose to read It! choice blindness and preference change. *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*, 27(3), 281-289.

Peterson, M. B. et. al. (2013). Motivated reasoning and political parties: Evidence for increased processing in the face of party cues, *Political Behavior*, 35, 831–854

Dijksterhuis, A. et al. (2005). The Unconscious Consumer: Effects of Environment on Consumer Behavior, *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 15(3), 193–202.

Solms, M. (2000). Freud returns. *Scientific American*, 290(5), 82-88.

#### **Topic five: Stereotypes and Social perception**

Todd, A. R., Thiem, K. C., Neel, R. (2016). Does seeing faces of young black boys facilitate the identification of threatening stimuli? *Psychological Science*, 27(3), 384–393.

Jussim, L., Crawford, J. T., Rubinstein, R. S. (2015). Stereotype accuracy in perceptions of groups and individuals. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 24(6), 490.

Kunda, Z. & Sinclair, L. (1999). Motivated Reasoning with stereotypes: Activation, application, and inhibition, *Psychological Inquiry*, 10(1), 12-22.

Cohen, G. L., Sherman, D. K. (2005). Stereotype threat and the social and scientific contexts of the race achievement gap. *American Psychologist*, 60(3), 270-271.

#### **Topic six: Self, Identity, values, and society**

Dweck, C. S. & Molden, D. (2008). Self-theories: The construction of free will. In J. Baer, Kaufman, J. N., & L. Lawrence (Eds.) *Are We Free? Psychology and Free Will* (pp.44-64) Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.

Strohinger, N. Knobe, J., and Newman, G. (2017). The true self: A Psychological Concept Distinct from the Self. *Perspectives of Psychological Science*, 12(4), 2017

Dutcher, J. et al. (2016). Self-Affirmation Activates the Ventral Striatum: A Possible Reward-Related Mechanism for Self-Affirmation, *Psychological Science*, 27(4), 455–466.

Schwartz, S. H. (2012). An overview of the Schwartz theory of basic values. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 2(1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1116>

Przybylinski, E. & Anderson, E. (2015). Systems of meaning and transference: Implicit significant-other activation evokes shared reality, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 109(4), 636–661

### **Required Books:**

Andrew Shtulman (2017). *Scienceblind: Why our intuitive theories about the world are so often wrong*

Jonathan Haidt (2013): *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*

### **Books assigned individually (You will be assigned a unique one from the list):**

Banaji, M. R. & Greenwald, A. G. (2013). *Blindspot*.

Bartholomew, D. J. (2004). *Measuring intelligence: Facts and fallacies*

Bloom, P. (2010). *How pleasure works: the new science of why we like what we like*.

Bloom, P. (2016). *Against empathy: the case for rational compassion*

Cain, S. (2013). *Quiet: The power of Introverts in a world that can't stop talking*

Chabris, C., Simons, D. (2011). *The Invisible gorilla: How our intuitions deceive us*

De Waal, Frans (1997). *Good Natured: The Origins of Right and Wrong in Humans and other animals*

Dweck, C. (2006). *Mindset*.

Francis, F. C. *Epigenetics: How environment shapes our genes*

Gazzaniga, M. (2012). *Who's in charge?: Free will and the science of the brain*

Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice*

Gopnik, A. (2009). *The philosophical baby: What children's minds tell us about truth, love and the meaning of life*

Gorman, S. & Gorman, J. M. (2016). *Denying to the Grave: Why We Ignore the Facts That Will Save Us*

Hood, B. (2013). *The Self Illusion: How the social brain creates identity*

Iacoboni, M (2009). *Mirroring People: the science of empathy and how we connect with others*.

Kagan, J. (2010). *The temperamental thread: How genes, culture, time and luck make us who we are*.

Norensayan, A. (2015). *Big Gods: How religion transformed cooperation and conflict*

Shermer, M. (2012). *The Believing brain: From ghosts and Gods to politics and conspiracies---How we construct beliefs and reinforce them as truths*.

Shermer, M. (2016). *The moral arc: How science makes us better people*.

Shermer, M. (2001). *The borderlands of science*

This course is subject to the GVSU policies listed at <http://www.gvsu.edu/coursepolicies/>