

Grand Valley State University
Psychology 492-02: Capstone Fall 2019
Mondays and Wednesdays 1:30-2:45 PM ASH 1117

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.

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. The aim at this stage is not about finding definitive answers to the questions but to provide seeds for raising more relevant and properly framed questions you care about. We will then, through class discussion, prioritize the questions in terms of their significance and how likely they can be answered empirically (that is, by bringing in evidence from psychological science and other allied sciences). I will then ask you to search library databases, in class or as homework, to find studies that may help answer the questions. I will ask you to post a short list of articles from your library research on the Discussion Board with a short explanation for each article on why you believe it is relevant. I will then select four to five articles that bear on different aspects of the topic for further discussion and debates in the next two or three class sessions.

Components of the class for assessment

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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 15 minutes for the presentation and about 2 minutes for Q/A. A more detailed instruction will be posted later.
5. 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.
 6. Final exam: There will be a final take-home exam for assessing your understanding and thoughts on the key issues covered throughout the class.
 7. 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 summary/reflection papers: 20 points each = 120 points
- 2) Class participation including debates and class discussion = 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) In-class writings = 42 points

- 10) Attendance = 40 points
- 11) Forum postings = up to 4 points of extra credits

Total= 442 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%;	B- = 79-81%;	D+ = 65-68%;
A- = 89-93%;	C+ = 76-78%;	D = 60-64%;
B+ = 86-88%;	C = 72-75%;	F <60
B = 82-85%;	C- = 69-71%;	

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

8/26: Course overview

Topic One: Scientific psychology and rational inquiries

8/28: Introduction and debates

9/2 Labor-day, no class

9/4, 9/9, 9/11: Discussions

9/13: Reflection paper 1 due

9/16: Discussion on "Scienceblind"

9/17: Book report on "ScienceBlind" due

Topic 2: Nature, nurture and culture

9/18: Introduction and debates

9/23, 9/25: Discussions

9/27: Reflection paper 2 due on BB

9/30: Book presentations 1

Topic 3: Mind and body

10/2: Introduction and debates

10/7, 10/9: Discussions

10/11: Reflection paper 3 due on BB

10/14: Book presentation 2

Topic 4: Conscious and Unconscious minds

10/16: Introduction and debates

10/18: Draft of review paper due

10/21: Fall break, no class

10/23, 10/28: Discussions

10/30: Book presentation 3

11/1: Reflection paper 4 due

11/4: Discussion on "The Righteous Mind"

11/5: Book report on "The Righteous Mind" due on BB

Topic 5: Social perception

11/6: Introduction and debates

11/11, 11/13: Discussions

11/15: Reflection paper 5 due

11/18: Book presentation 4

Topic 6: Self, identity, values, and society

11/20: Introduction and debates

11/25: Discussion

11/27: Thanksgiving holiday recess

12/2: Discussion continues

12/3: Reflection paper 6 due

12/4: Book presentation 5, Wrap up

12/06: Review paper due

12/09: 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.

Lewandowsky, S., Ecker, U. K., Seifert, C. M., Schwartz, N., & Cook, J. (2012). Misinformation and its correction continued influence and successful debiasing. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 13, 106-131.

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>

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.
- Strohming, 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.
- Gelfand, M., Harrington, J. R., Jackson, J. C. (2017). The Strength of social norms across human groups, *Perspectives of Psychological Science*, 12(5), 800-809
- 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*.
- 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*
- Carey, N. (2013). *The epigenetics revolution: How modern biology is rewriting our understanding of genetics, disease, and inheritance*

- Dweck, C. (2006). *Mindset*.
- 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*
- Haidt, J (2013). *The righteous mind: Why good people are divided by politics and religion*
- Harris, S. (2012). *Free will*
- 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.*
- Kahneman, D. (2013). *Thinking, fast and slow*
- Mercier, Hugo. (2017). *The enigma of reason*
- Pfaff, D. (2015) *The altruistic brain*
- Sapolsky, R. M. (2017). *Behave: the biology of humans at our best and worst*
- 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*
- Stanovich, K. (2010). *What intelligence tests miss: The psychology of rationality.*

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