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**EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY 381  
PROFESSIONAL ISSUES IN  
COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY  
FALL 2013**

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## **Course Description**

Professional Issues in Counseling Psychology is an APA required course intended to provide students with exposure to the primary tenets of Counseling Psychology and what it means to identify as a scientist-practitioner/counseling psychologist. Areas of study will include the history of the counseling tradition, vocational issues, supervision and mentorship, and consultation. The impact of counseling psychology and psychological issues on the greater culture will also be discussed including aspects of diversity. This is a good course to begin to understand how you want your own professional career to begin to be developed.

## **Texts**

Reading packet at IT Copy.

## **Use of Blackboard in Classes**

The following is a statement suggested by the University of Texas to include in syllabi in courses that use Blackboard: This course uses Blackboard, a Web-based course management system in which a password-protected site is created for each course. Blackboard can be used to distribute course materials, to communicate and collaborate online, to post grades, to submit assignments, and to take online quizzes and surveys.

You will be responsible for checking the Blackboard course site regularly for class work and announcements. As with all computer systems, there are occasional scheduled downtimes as well as unanticipated disruptions. Notification of these disruptions will be posted on the Blackboard login page. Scheduled downtimes are not an excuse for late work. However, if there is an unscheduled downtime for a significant period of time, I will make an adjustment if it occurs close to the due date. Blackboard is available at <http://courses.utexas.edu>. Support is provided by the ITS Help Desk at 475-9400 Monday through Friday 8 am to 6 pm, so plan accordingly.

## **Attendance**

This is a graduate course and therefore attendance is expected. However, I am not going to take attendance. Your grade will be dependent on the understanding of material that is presented both in and out of class, so your decision not to attend class will likely impact your grade negatively. I will not provide you with information missed in class without a valid, written excuse. However, you are welcome to get this information from your classmates. If you decide to attend class sporadically, understand that many of your decisions in graduate school impact the perceptions of your professors who evaluate you on an ongoing basis.

## **Students with Disabilities**

If you are a student with a disability and may need accommodations, please see me at the start of the semester. You are also advised to be registered with the Office of the Dean of Students (Students with Disabilities). Official documentation is needed for us to ensure appropriate accommodations. If you are a student with other concerns (e.g., English as a second language; child care), please see me at the start of the semester. There may be an opportunity for adjustments to be made in order to best accommodate you. You are still expected to complete all requirements.

### **Academic Dishonesty and Ethics**

Because this is a graduate level course, academic dishonesty is a particularly egregious offense. As the professor, I reserve the right to address these behaviors with one of the following possible consequences: 1) You will get a **“NC” or “F”** for the course, requiring you to retake the course again; or 2) You will get a **“NC” or “F”** for the course and I will pursue your **expulsion** from the program.

### **Assignments**

**Readings and Reactions:** The readings provided represent a variety of perspectives within a given topic. The goal of the reading assignment is for you to educate yourself about the topic and be able to discuss the topic in class with some sophistication. You are welcome to supplement your reading with other articles you may find on your own (in fact, you are encouraged to do so). You will need to have read enough to be able to form an opinion that you can support during classroom discussion. You should come to class with several discussion questions for each day that reflect this endeavor. I will randomly call on people to facilitate discussion via replacement sampling. If called on, it is not merely enough to say you “liked this part or that part” but you need to have prepared stimulating questions that will facilitate class discussion for at least a solid 20 minute period. Several students will be called upon on any given day.

**The Counseling Psychology Identity:** Write a short paper (3 pages) on what it means to be a counseling psychologist with a scientist practitioner perspective today. Why did you choose a counseling program? What distinguishes counseling from other applied disciplines? Why did you choose a scientist-practitioner program instead of a practitioner-scientist program? What do you think are the emerging themes or foci of the field when compared to 20, 30, or even 50 years ago? Use APA style and references to support some of your points. Please bring a hard copy to class in addition to emailing me an electronic version.

**Vocational Paper:** What can a degree in counseling psychology help you do? Why do you need a Ph.D. to do it instead of a master’s degree? What careers are available for counseling psychologists? Pick a career and write a two-page bullet point to summarize the career for yourself and your fellow students. Address: degree requirements; type of internship or postdoctoral study recommended; difficulty of landing that job; average pay; costs and benefits of that type of job; who is best suited for that type of job, etc. Examples include: private practice, working in a VA, medical setting, academic jobs

(from jr. college to APA accredited program), forensic/prison work, consultant, counseling center, etc. I want you to research these on the Internet or viable other resources and also interview someone who holds one of these jobs. It can be a phone interview. Bring a copy of your paper to everyone in class and be prepared to discuss it in class.

***Current Events + blog post:*** Mental health and professional psychology is a topic that can be found on just about any news day. As professional psychologists, it is important that we keep informed about what is happening in our field, how people are being helped or hurt by the field, and what the current issues are surrounding our field. Far too often, we sit and let the television tell us what is going on, with an inevitable spin that comes from TV journalism that is often incomplete or a wholly inaccurate portrayal of psychology and mental health. For this assignment, I want you to make a practice out of reading the newspaper. Not just searching online newspapers for mental health topics, but actually reading the paper on a semi-regular basis (every Sunday for example?) for topics related to our field. It needs to be a mainstream print source (I'm partial to the NYT, but any of the big ones will do: Washington Post, USA Today (my least favorite), L.A. Times, Chicago Tribune, Houston Chronicle, Austin Chronicle or Texas Tribune (if you are interested in local news), San Francisco Chronicle, Boston Globe, Atlanta Journal-Constitution, etc.). You can get the print edition or you can read it online. If you have a question about a paper being acceptable, just ask. Issues around mental health, insurance, mental health policy, diversity, all apply...it just needs to be related to types of professional issues we deal with in counseling psychology. I want you to report on three current event stories during the semester. You will approach this from the perspective of a "public intellectual" of sorts, whereby you use a solid mix of plain English research reporting and editorializing about a proposed solution to the problem at hand.

For each of these three assignments, you will write a blog post that we will post on the class blog site. You will find two examples of blog posts I have written in the past that follow the format mentioned above. Choose a topic that has relevance to the field and has been covered by the media. Ideally, you will be presenting an alternative viewpoint from the media viewpoint, correcting a media story that misrepresents an issue important to mental health or diversity, or offering a new solution to a hard to solve problem. I would like you to link your sources in – as I have done here – as a way of supporting your positions and educating the reader as to where your sources came from. This is different than APA style in that hyperlinks will be able to take the reader directly to your sources rather than listing your references at the end. To be clear, these are not "reaction papers." What I mean by that, is I am not looking for your opinions why people should be better parents or how horrible the latest school shooting is. Each post should contain the following:

- 1) The news story that prompted your interest, with a few sentences of background about this story.
- 2) State the problem inherent in the story. Usually, this will be something specific about the story you have a problem with. For example, the research

- methodology, inherent bias, ignorance of some tenet of mental health, complete failure to account for an important aspect of the social problem (I find this often happens in stories that do not want to address the issues of poverty head on, for example), and so on.
- 3) Offer the psychological theory that can account for why this missing piece is something the media should consider in future reporting.
  - 4) Describe a few studies that support this theory (these are likely seminal studies, but do not have to be).
  - 5) Offer a solution to the problem at hand based on this research.

As you can see from my examples, these are not long assignments in terms of writing. I good blog post should be easily digestible to the reader and as such, I would suggest you write no more than 2 single spaced pages (in word format) to accomplish your goal. It should be written in plain English, with no jargon or statistics and in a way that difficult concepts are clearly and easily explained. (For example, instead of saying “prefrontal cortex” you might say “the part of the brain that controls decision making and impulse control.” Someone with a high school education should be able to read your post and understand what you are trying to convey. Finally, blog posts are efficient and concise. Choose your words carefully. You are not writing a dissertation, you are not proving you are smart....you are trying to educate as many other people as you can about a field that is very dear to your heart. You should feel some investment and passion in the opportunity that lies in this level of communication.

Your grading will in part be dependent on my review of your post and in part dependent on your colleague’s review. You will each read each other’s posts and rank order the posts from the best to the worst. You will email me your rank orders and I will use those rank orders, in part, to assign your grade. Fair warning: these posts will be graded much more harshly than the other papers. My advice is to take the assignment seriously, be reading the paper throughout the semester and working on these assignments throughout the semester. Waiting until the week before will likely not yield the grade you are looking for. You are welcome to post your blogs earlier than the deadline as well if you want to set your own deadlines for yourself based on your schedules.

The department tech consultants will be creating a blog specifically for the class that you will be able to log in to and post your blog when it is complete.

#### Due Dates and Grading for Assignments

Assignment	Due Date	Points
Readings/Reactions	Every Week	Deduction of 10 points on overall grade for each day unprepared
CP Identity Paper	Feb 6	50
Vocational Paper	March 6	50
Blog Post #1	March 27	100
Blog Post #2	April 10	100

Blog Post #3	April 24	100
Each rank order	Due April 3, 17, May 1, respectively	Deduction of 10 points on overall grade for each ranking not turned in.

### Grading Key

Total Points: 400

380-400	A
360-379	A-
352-359	B+
332-351	B
320-331	B-
312-319	C+
292-311	C
280-291	C-
240-279	D
Below 240	F

## READING TOPICS

### **History and Systems**

\*Baker, D. B. (2003). Counseling Psychology. In D. K. Freedheim (Ed)., *Handbook of psychology: History of psychology, Vol. 1.* pp. 357-365.

\*Buckley, K. W. (1997). The selling of a psychologist: John Broadus Watson and the application of behavioral techniques to advertising. In L. T. Benjamin (Ed). *A history of psychology: Original sources and contemporary research. Second Edition.* McGraw Hill: Boston.

\*Cranston, A. (1986). Psychology in the Veterans Administration: A storied history, a vital future. *American Psychologist, 41*, 990-995.

Fitzgerald, L. F. & Osipow, S. H. (1986). An occupational analysis of counseling psychology: How special is the specialty? *American Psychologist, 41*, 535-544. (**just look at the tables**).

### **Graduate Student Development & Supervision**

\*Clark, R., A., Harden, S. L., & Johnson, W. B. (2000). Mentor relationships in clinical psychology doctoral training: Results of a national survey. *Teaching of Psychology, 27*, 262-268.

\*Ducheny, K., Alletzhauser, H. L., Crandell, D., & Schneider, T. R. (1997). Graduate student professional development. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 28, 87-91.

\*Freitas, G. J. (2002). The impact of psychotherapy supervision on client outcome: A critical examination of 2 decades of research. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 39, 354-367.

\*Norcross, J. C. & Halgin, R. P. (1997). Integrative approaches to psychotherapy supervision. In C. E. Watkins (Ed). *Handbook of Psychotherapy Supervision*. pp. 203-222.

### **Self Care**

\*Coster, J. S. & Schwebel, M. (1997). Well-functioning in professional psychology. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 28, 5-13.

Guy, J. D., Stark, M. J., & Poelstra, P. L. (1988). Personal therapy for psychotherapists before and after entering professional practice. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 19, 474-476.

\*Mahoney, M. (1997). Psychotherapists' personal problems and self-care patterns. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 28, 14-16.

Schwebel, M. & Coster, J. (1998). Well-functioning in professional psychologists: As program heads see it. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 29, 284-292.

### **Consultation (read Gallessich and one of the others)**

\*Gallessich, J. (1982). *The profession and practice of consultation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. (selected chapters).

Lucier, K. (2008). A consultative training program: Collateral effect of a needs assessment. *Communication Education*, 57, 482-489.

Cragan, J. F. (2008). Designing and maintaining a communication consulting relationship: A fire officer case study. *Communication Education*, 57 464-471.

Sanchez, D. & King-Toler, E. (2007). Addressing disparities: Consultation and outreach strategies for university settings. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 59, 286-295.

### **Scientist Practitioner (Read Seligman (1995), Lyddon (1990) and two others of your choice)**

\*Seligman, M. E. P. (1996). Science as an ally of practice. *American Psychologist*, 51, 1072-1079.

Lyddon, W. J. (1990). First- and second-order change: Implications for rationalist and constructivist psychotherapies. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 69, 122-127.

\*Persons, J. B. (1991). Psychotherapy outcome studies do not accurately represent current models of psychotherapy: A proposed remedy. *American Psychologist*, 46, 99-106.

\*Seligman, M. E. P. (1995). The effectiveness of psychotherapy: The consumer reports study. *American Psychologist*, 50, 965-974.

\*Smith, K. R., (2009). Psychotherapy as applied science or moral praxis: The limitations of empirically supported treatment. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, 29, 34-46.

\*Goldfried, M. R., & Wolfe, B. E. (1996). Psychotherapy practice and research: Repairing a strained alliance. *American Psychologist*, 51, 1007-1016.

**Managed Care and the business of psychotherapy (read Buchholz, Reed, Cushman, and two of the remaining)**

\*Buchholz, S. (1998). The dilemma of managed care. *American Psychologist*, 53, 485.

\*Reed, G. M., & Eisman, E. J. (2006). Uses and misuses of evidence: Managed care, treatment guidelines, and outcomes measurement in professional practice. In C. D. Goodheart, A. E. Kazdin, & R. J. Sternberg (Eds.), *Evidence-based psychotherapy: Where practice and research meet*, pp. 13-35. Washington DC: American Psychological Association.

\*Cushman, P., & Gilford, P. (2000). Will managed care change our way of being? *American Psychologist*, 55, 985-996.

Sanchez, L. M. & Turner, S. M. (2003). Practicing psychology in the era of managed care. *American Psychologist*, 58, 116-129.

Bobbitt, B. L. (2006). The importance of professional psychology: A view from managed care. *American Psychologist*, 37, 590-597.

Rupert, P. A., & Baird, K. A. (2004). Managed care and the independent practice of psychology. *American Psychologist*, 35, 185-193.

Kremer, T. G. & Gesten, E. L. (2003). Managed mental health care: The client's perspective. *American Psychologist*, 34, 187-196.

### **Prescription Privileges**

\*Antonuccio, D. O., Danton, W. G., & McClanahan, T. M. (2003). Psychology in prescription era. *American Psychology*, 58, 1028-1043.

\*DeLeon, P. H., & Wiggins, J. G. (1996). Prescription privileges for psychologists. *American Psychologist*, 51, 225-229.

\*DeNelsky, G. Y. (1996). The case against prescription privileges for psychologists. *American Psychologist*, 51, 207-212.

### **Power, Privilege, Diversity, and Social Justice (read Lott, Black, Fowers and one of the remaining two)**

Blitstein, R. (2009). Weathering the storm. *Miller-McCune*, July-Aug, 48-57.

\*Lott, B. (2002). Cognitive and behavioral distancing from the poor. *American Psychologist*, 57, 100-110.

Gergen, K. J., Gulerce, A., Lock, A., & Misra, G. (1996). Psychological science in cultural context. *American Psychologist*, 51, 496-503.

\*Black, L. L. & Stone, D. (2005). Expanding the definition of privilege: The concept of social privilege. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 33, 243-255.

Fowers, B. J., & Richardson, F. C. (1996). Is multiculturalism good? *American Psychologist*, 51, 609-621.

### **Critical vs. Political Thinking**

\*Loftus, E. F. (1993). The reality of repressed memories. *American Psychologist*, 48, 518-535.

\*Lilienfeld, S. O. (2002). When world collide: Social science, politics, and the Rind et al., (1998) child sex abuse meta-analysis. *American Psychologist*, 57, 176-188.

\*McCarty, R. (2002). Science, politics, and peer review: An editor's dilemma. *American Psychologist*, 57, 198-201.

### **Mental Health Politics**

\*Redding, R. E. (2001). Sociopolitical diversity in psychology: A case for pluralism. *American Psychologist*, 56, 205-215.

\*Campbell, R. S., Gibbs, B. N., Guinn, J. S., Josephs, R. A., Newman, M. L., Rentfrow, P. J., & Stone, L. D., (2002). A biased view of liberal bias. *American Psychologist*, 297-298.

\*Marecek, J. (1995). Gender, politics, and psychology's ways of knowing. *American Psychologist*, 50, 162-163.

\*Humphreys, K. & Rappaport, J. (1993). From the community mental health movement to the war on drugs: A study in the definition of social programs. *American Psychologist*, 48, 892-901.

\*Barry, C. L., (2006). The political evolution of mental health parity. *Harvard Review of Psychology*, July/August, 185-194.

Peck, M. C., & Sheffler, R. M. (2002). An analysis of the definitions of mental illness used in state parity laws. *Psychiatric Services*, 53, 1089-1095.

### **Media & Political Psychology (read Seyle, Bushman, and two of the remaining 4)**

\*Seyle, D. C. & Newman, M. L. (2006). A house divided? The psychology of red and blue America. *American Psychologist*, 61, 571-580.

\*Caprara, G. V. & Zimbardo, P. G. (2004). Personalizing politics: A congruency model of political preference. *American Psychologist*, 59, 581-594.

\*Hanson, G. et al., (2010). The 2008 Presidential Campaign: Political cynicism in the age of Facebook, MySpace, and YouTube. *Mass Communication and Society*, 13, 584-607.

\*Bushman, B. J., & Anderson, C. A. (2001). Media violence and the American public. *American Psychologist*, 56, 477-489.

\*Ginges, J. et al., (2011). Psychology out of the laboratory: The challenge of violent extremism. *American Psychologist*, 1-13.

\*Jost, J. T., (2006). The end of the end of ideology. *American Psychologist*, 61, 651-670.

### **READING/DISCUSSION SCHEDULE**

1/23 History and Systems

1/30 Graduate Student Development & Supervision

2/6 Self-Care  
 2/13 Consultation  
 2/20 Prescription Privileges  
 2/27 Managed Care, Health Insurance & Socialized Medicine  
 3/6 Power, Privilege, Diversity, & Social Justice  
 3/13 Spring Break  
 3/20 Conference  
 3/27 Discuss Book on Ignorance  
 4/3 Critical v. Political Thinking  
 4/10 Mental Health Politics  
 4/17 Media & Political Psychology  
 4/24 Scientist Practitioner  
 5/1

### **BLOG POST EXAMPLES**

#### **No Link Between Childhood Obesity and Working Mothers**

March 9, 2011

My daily Google News search on Friday February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2011 revealed an interesting finding. The headline read “Kids’ weight rises the longer mom works, study finds.” Soon, a number of news outlets and blogs had picked up the story, or at least the headline. “Working mothers’ kids more likely to be obese.” “The more mom works, the heavier her kids get: Study.” And the ever-popular condemnation posed as a question: “Working moms to blame for kids’ obesity problems?” [note to reader: make sure your voice rises up at the end of the sentence to make it sound more like a question than a statement]. Given the First Lady’s emphasis on reducing childhood obesity (and Sarah Palin’s emphasis on making sure mother’s have the right to make their children obese), there has been a lot of media attention to the topic. It is also noteworthy that in the midst of this media attention, we have found the person to blame: Mom. Now, don’t get me wrong. As a psychologist, I have learned many ways to scapegoat dear old Mom for our psychological problems. However, as a feminist, I have also learned that most of evidence justifying that blame was the result of faulty research and misguided misogynistic theory.

The initial news feed that was posted on Google was one from [CTV.com](http://CTV.com), a network television station out of Calgary Canada. They noted that the study was generating a lot of controversy, but seemed to miss the most important one. When I first read the story, I thought this was another case of the media misconstruing scientific results – a practice that occurs fairly frequently. So I downloaded the [Child Development](#) (Morrissey, Dunifon, & Kalil, 2011) article and read it for myself. To be clear, *Child Development* is a very influential professional journal in the social sciences. The researchers obtained a competitive grant from the National Institutes of Health and work at some of the most prestigious universities in the country. But they completely missed the boat.

In an interesting article in the December 2010 issue of the New Yorker, [Jonah Lehrer](#) outlined a number of interesting trends in scientific research. One of the most compelling, and most relevant to the *Child Development* article was that of “shoehorning”, a concept Lehrer credits Stephen Jay Gould for coining. Shoehorning is essentially a researcher’s unconscious or unintentional confirmation of his or her bias. They know what they think the data should be telling them and thus hone in on confirming information while ignoring disconfirming information. Such bias can occur at any time in the research process including the theories we choose to guide our research, the questions we choose to measure those theories, how we choose to analyze the data, and how we decide to report the results.

There are logistical issues in research that reinforce researchers’ tendency to make decisions based on bias. There is an expectation that projects funded by large grants will yield multiple published papers from the same data set. This means cherry picking variables of interest in an effort to produce these papers. This picking process often violates statistical rules (often resulting in making things look significant when they are not) and writing about relationships that might have a sensational appeal, but do not really contribute to our scientific knowledge base in a meaningful way.

It was clear from reading the *Child Development* piece that the shoehorning in this study was deeply couched in gender bias. Gender bias is everywhere in our culture. Women make better child caregivers, men make better CEOs, women should be responsible for the housework, men shouldn’t be stay at home fathers – the list is endless. The shoehorning of gender bias in the *Child Development* paper operates in a number of ways. First, the authors of the study failed to measure men’s contribution, or lack of contribution, to any of the variables of interest. In other words, we have no idea how fathers’ work habits contributed to their children’s weight because this information was not collected with the same precision as women’s work. On average, over 80% of the mothers in this study were married or cohabitating and 92% of those fathers worked full time as well. Yet, women’s work was repeatedly cited for being responsible for childhood obesity rates. Second, what little data that was gathered on fathers was gathered in a way that minimized its statistical contribution to the research question. For example, suppose two people made a statement to you. One person told you this statement in their regular tone of voice, the other whispered it very softly from across the room. Which one do you think you would hear better? In statistical analysis, how variables are measured can have the same type of impact on the results of the study. Variables that are measured well will effects the findings more than variables that are not measured well. For the *Child Development* study, the variables measuring father impact on children’s obesity were just a whisper. Finally, the actual results are overstated. The media coverage of this study, and admittedly much of the study’s own spin on the issue overstated the issue of “obesity.” The children in the working mother group were only one pound heavier than the children in the non-working mother group. This is hardly obese. In addition, the strength of this “one pound” finding was so small, it can safely be said that there was no actual clinical significance at all. In other words, the chances of the findings of this study really helping us to solve the problem of childhood obesity is non-existent.\*

Relax Mom, its not your fault after all.

\* there were many other methodological flaws to the *Child Development* study that exceed the limits of this particular post, yet further illustrate its uselessness in solving the childhood obesity problem.

### Why Regulation Works

May 1, 2011

Texas is a prideful state. No one here likes to be told what to do, least of all by the government. A tea party strong hold, Texans are more likely to drive the long way to work in their gas guzzling SUVs than they are to buy a hybrid or heaven forbid, vote for a bond that would fund a public transportation railway. From gun control to carbon emissions, the overall sentiment is: If the government wants to restrict it, it must be a bad idea!

Enter Midland, Texas and some say the worst drought the state has ever seen. The plight of the area has been superbly reported by [Kate Galbraith](#) in both the [Texas Tribune](#) and the [New York Times](#). As Galbraith reports, without additional rain, the area has the potential to run out of water by January, 2013. As a result, both Midland and Odessa have been forced to impose watering restrictions that limit how often people can water their lawns. But the teeth in these restrictions mirror Texans' motto, "You can't tell *me* what to do." In fact, despite the seriousness of the water shortage, residents are still able to water their lawns three times a week. And for Midland, these restrictions are more like "guidelines" since there are no penalties imposed on those who choose not to follow the rules.

I understand the current climate of wanting to limit government. Government tends to be inefficient and Congress' inability to affect any kind of legislative change in the last 10 years has left us a nation perpetually disgusted and frustrated. However, the answer does not lie in the obliteration of government regulation and the reason is that individuals don't do a good job of regulating themselves.

The reason lies in a theory of psychology called attribution theory. Attribution theory states that when someone else makes a mistake, observers are more likely to attribute that mistake to a personal flaw in that person but when that same observer makes the same mistake, they are more likely to attribute it to the situation (i.e., Its not my fault). The example more people can relate to is driving. How many times has someone run a red light or cut you off in traffic and you yell "That stupid son of a \$%&#!" as if you yourself have never made such an error. But you have...and when you do, you have all kinds of situational reasons why it was not really your fault and the other person should not be so hostile. Or at least not as hostile as you would have been to them. You can apply this same process to a number of things in life – littering, why we continue to buy gas guzzling cars, even why we eat foods that make us fat and sick. The notion is, "I" have a good reason and because of this good reason, it is ok – for me.

And we continue to rationalize these reasons by thinking “my little footprint is not going to make that big of a difference.” The problem is, your footprint is not the only one. What’s more, research has shown that individualistic cultures (like the United States) are more likely to engage in this kind of attribution error more than collectivistic cultures. As a culture we are more self-centered and more likely to believe that “I am the only one I really need to be responsible to.” This tends to play out in an attribution bias that is even more self-serving and not community serving.

So back to our Midland water shortage. Without serious regulations with serious penalties, many people are likely to justify breaking the rules. Maybe it is that they didn’t really water their lawns that long, or their yard is smaller than other people’s lawn, or they are having a barbeque this weekend and they don’t want their friends to have to stand on hard, brittle grass. These same mind games we play with ourselves have played themselves out in just about every national crisis where regulation has been lax with the most recent example being the mortgage/financial crisis. Every time, the personal rationales vary but the outcome remains the same. Still we do the same thing. We attribute the problems to someone else’s flaws (usually the government) and fail to see the ways that we collectively contribute to the problem. In the end, we are worse off and deeper in crisis.