
**EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY 381
PROFESSIONAL ISSUES IN
COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY
Spring 2015**

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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 their scientist/practitioner application to evolving current events. The focus of the course is on critical thinking skills and application to contemporary issues rather than rote memory or writing research papers. Students will be expected to think outside the box and apply theories and research learned in other courses to everyday contemporary issues. Psychology can be used to solve a multitude of broader cultural problems and students an ongoing theme of this course will be how we can use this knowledge in consultation applications and supervision, among other topics. will be.

Texts

Reading packet posted on Canvas

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.

The theme of this class is CRITICAL THINKING. There is no right answer and no correct perspective. I don't necessarily want to know how you 'felt' about a piece, a reading, a post, etc, I want to know what you THOUGHT about it and WHY you thought that way. I want to challenge the ways you have thought about psychology and it's potential and I expect you to challenge yourself.

Assignments

TED talk. A TED talk is a short, powerful talk (18-minutes or less) devoted to spreading ideas. From the website: TED is a global community, welcoming people from every discipline and culture who seek a deeper understanding of the world. We believe passionately in the power of ideas to change attitudes, lives and, ultimately, the world. On TED.com, we're building a clearinghouse of free knowledge from the world's most inspired thinkers — and a community of curious souls to engage with ideas and each other, both online and at TED and TEDx events around the world, all year long. You are going to do one for this class!

- What is an idea that inspires you in psychology?
- What contribution can our field make that is yet untapped?
- What creative twist can you contribute to this contribution that no one has thought of yet (or perhaps someone has, but it has not been fully explored yet)?
- Think potential, think big, think dynamic.
- Don't worry about whether or you right, whether it is doable. What is the IDEA?

We are going to be watching and listening to TED talks throughout the semester and those experiences will give you ideas about how to approach yours. The parameters are that it has to be 1) your original idea; 2) 18 minutes or less; 3) include some kind of technology, though I am very flexible about what kind; 4) be masterfully presented (no reading from the podium); 5) Something that inspires you; 6) Informed by psychological theory or research (it is fine if it is just theory). How might we be able to change the world for the better if we were able to implement your idea?

You will turn in two assignments prior to this. Both of these assignments will be blog posts on canvas. One is a brief outline of your topic and idea. Both myself and your classmates will give you feedback about your idea, ask questions, etc. You will revise it and repost it for your second assignment. This is designed to give you feedback at two points along the way about your ideas so that you can make your talk the best it can be.

Readings and Podcasts: The readings and podcasts provided represent a variety of perspectives within a given topic. The goal of the 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 or podcasts 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.

Brief blog posts. After each lesson, but prior to class, post to the canvas blog your initial thoughts or reactions about the topic. This should frame some of your discussion for the class.

Official 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. As a part of your reading, I want you to make a practice out of reading the newspaper and searching for news within our field. Not just searching online newspapers for mental health topics, but actually reading the paper about things that on its face may have nothing to do with psychology, but upon which you can apply a psychological construct to. I want you to report on two 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 both of these assignments, you will post your assignment on canvas for your fellow students (and myself) to read. You will find two examples of blog posts I have written in the past to give you examples of the kind of writing and perspective (voice) I am looking for. You may present an alternative viewpoint from the popular media, 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 hyperlink 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” and they aren’t research 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 (or difficult stats anyway) 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 your ability to do these things.

When you post your blog post, send an email to the class to notify them. This will give everyone notice that they need to read your post. Everyone should read and comment on everyone else’s post within one week of it being posted. Again, your comment posts should not be “great job” or things of that nature. It doesn’t have to be long, but should include thoughtful comments about how the piece provoked your way of thinking about a certain issue at hand.

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/Internet news sources 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. Please trust me when I say you will get far more out of the assignment if you make a habit of looking through the daily google news and finding a story that inspires you rather than forcing the assignment because you have waited until the last minute. The former will write itself, the latter will not be fun at all.

Short Group Project. In a group of 5, choose a topic of interest for the group to entertain this semester. The topic should be stimulating and/or controversial and related to psychology and overall professional issues of psychology. Choose 2 articles (they do not have to be academic in nature, but need to be well-respected) and at least one podcast to stimulate conversation. Design a blog post assignment to generate thought and reaction to your topic.

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
First outline of TED talk	Feb 11	25
Second outline of TED talk	Feb 25	25
Official Blog Post #1	Feb 18	100
Official Blog Post #2	March 25	100
Feedback to fellow students for official blog posts (x2) and TED talk outline (x2)	Within one week of posting	25 points each (4 total)
Brief Blog Posts	Weekly when readings are assigned (10 total)	5 points each
TED talk	Last 3 days of class	100

Week	Topic
January 21	Introduction
January 28	<p>Science, Politics, and Money</p> <p>*Lilienfeld, S. O. (2002). When world collide: Social science, politics, and the Rind et al., (1998) child sex abuse meta-analysis. <i>American Psychologist</i>, 57, 176-188.</p> <p>*McCarty, R. (2002). Science, politics, and peer review: An editor's dilemma. <i>American Psychologist</i>, 57, 198-201.</p> <p>On the Media – Private Funding, Medical Journals, and Bias Portraying Medicine: The Perils of Painting by Numbers</p>
February 4	<p>Power, Privilege, Diversity, and Social Justice</p> <p>Lott, B. (2002). Cognitive and behavioral distancing from the poor. <i>American Psychologist</i>, 57, 100-110.</p> <p>Black, L. L. & Stone, D. (2005). Expanding the definition of privilege: The concept of social privilege. <i>Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development</i>, 33, 243-255.</p>
February	The Politics of Diagnosis

11	<p>Humphreys, K. & Rappaport, J. (1993). From the community mental health movement to the war on drugs: A study in the definition of social programs. <i>American Psychologist</i>, 48, 892-901.</p> <p>This American Life – 81 words episode #204</p> <p>http://www.ted.com/talks/thomas_insel_toward_a_new_understanding_of_mental_illness?language=en</p>
February 18	<p>Scientist Practitioner</p> <p>Lyddon, W. J. (1990). First- and second-order change: Implications for rationalist and constructivist psychotherapies. <i>Journal of Counseling and Development</i>, 69, 122-127.</p> <p>*Seligman, M. E. P. (1995). The effectiveness of psychotherapy: The consumer reports study. <i>American Psychologist</i>, 50, 965-974.</p> <p>http://www.cbsnews.com/news/treating-depression-is-there-a-placebo-effect/</p>
February 25	<p>Media and Political Psychology</p> <p>*Seyle, D. C. & Newman, M. L. (2006). A house divided? The psychology of red and blue America. <i>American Psychologist</i>, 61, 571-580.</p> <p>*Bushman, B. J., & Anderson, C. A. (2001). Media violence and the American public. <i>American Psychologist</i>, 56, 477-489.</p> <p>On the Media – Newtown Massacre</p>
March 4	<p>Prescriptions and Psychology</p> <p>*Antonuccio, D. O., Danton, W. G., & McClanahan, T. M. (2003). Psychology in prescription era. <i>American Psychology</i>, 58, 1028-1043.</p> <p>*DeLeon, P. H., & Wiggins, J. G. (1996). Prescription privileges for psychologists. <i>American Psychologist</i>, 51, 225-229.</p> <p>*DeNelsky, G. Y. (1996). The case against prescription privileges for psychologists. <i>American Psychologist</i>, 51, 207-212.</p>
March 11	<p>Managed Care</p> <p>*Buchholz, S. (1998). The dilemma of managed care. <i>American</i></p>

	<p><i>Psychologist</i>, 53, 485.</p> <p>*Cushman, P., & Gilford, P. (2000). Will managed care change our way of being? <i>American Psychologist</i>, 55, 985-996.</p>
March 18	Spring Break
March 25	Out of town
April 1	<p>Self-Care</p> <p>*Coster, J. S. & Schwebel, M. (1997). Well-functioning in professional psychology. <i>Professional Psychology: Research and Practice</i>, 28, 5-13.</p> <p>Guy, J. D., Stark, M. J., & Poelstra, P. L. (1988). Personal therapy for psychotherapists before and after entering professional practice. <i>Professional Psychology: Research and Practice</i>, 19, 474-476.</p> <p>*Mahoney, M. (1997). Psychotherapists' personal problems and self-care patterns. <i>Professional Psychology: Research and Practice</i>, 28, 14-16.</p> <p>http://www.radiolab.org/story/91580-stress/</p> <p>Simply Happy TED talk radio hour</p>
April 8	Short Group Project
April 15	Short Group Project
April 22	TED talks
April 29	TED talks
May 6	TED talks

BLOG POST EXAMPLES

[No Link Between Childhood Obesity and Working Mothers](#)

March 9, 2011

My daily Google News search on Friday February 4th, 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, 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.