

# Psychology Research That Matters

## Course Details

Winter-Spring 2012  
Mondays, 7:30 – 9:00

## Discussion Leader

Larisa Heiphetz  
Department of Psychology  
Harvard University

## Course Goals

The main purpose of this course is to read and discuss psychology research relevant to everyday life.

Another course goal is to promote critical thinking about anything, but particularly matters addressable by science. This course demands that you unpack the logic behind scientific argument, critically analyze each piece of logic, and then recombine the arguments to see what remains.

Relatedly, a third goal of this course is to learn to express opinions and arguments in written form. To this end, you will submit several pieces of writing to me throughout the semester. I will provide you with feedback on your written assignments.

## Course Requirements

### Weekly Readings

Each week's readings will address a new topic, and will cover one or more key experiments. Please read the readings before coming to class. Feel free to write down any notes or thoughts that occur to you while reading and bring these notes to class with you.

### Class Participation

Attendance is vital. Please let me or any of the educational staff know if you cannot attend class on a given week so that we can plan accordingly. We understand that some things might prevent you from coming to class that are beyond your control (e.g., lockdowns), but we ask that you commit to attend every class that you can. In the event that you have to miss class, we will leave readings for you with the educational staff.

This is a small, discussion-based class, and thus the most important requirement—beyond attendance—is that you contribute positively to our weekly discussion. In order to be able to positively contribute to class discussion it is essential that you read the assigned articles before class. Oftentimes, you will have to read an article more than once in order to fully understand the issues involved.

We would like to help create a class environment in which each of us feels comfortable, respected, and engaged. In pursuit of these goals, a couple things worth considering:

- 1) Class discussion should approximate an everyday discussion as much as possible. Accordingly, there's no need to raise your hand: speak when you feel that you have something to contribute. At the same time, please don't interrupt each other or dominate the discussion.
- 2) Class discussion is confidential. While we encourage you to discuss class topics and research with those not in the class, we expect you to keep confidential any personal experiences that fellow classmates share during class discussion.
- 3) Class discussion is an opportunity for you to discover your opinions, not just state them. We don't expect any of you to be certain of your views on any given topic, nor are we certain of ours. Rather, we hope that class discussion will provide you with the chance to learn not just about psychology, but also about yourself and your viewpoints. Accordingly, open yourself up to the possibility that your opinions about topics make change as you learn about research and listen to others.

## Weekly Discussion Questions

Before every class, I will give you several discussion questions to consider as you complete the readings. The discussion questions serve two purposes: they stimulate class discussion, and they demonstrate that you have read and thought about the weekly material. Remember that personal experiences are great inspirations, but try to always discuss experimental results.

## Final Paper

Toward the end of the course, you will write a paper applying one or more of the theories/experiments we have discussed in class to a topic relevant to you (for example, something that has happened in your own life or something that you have observed in others' lives). I will ask you to write a brief description of the topics you will cover in your paper; this description will be due in class on **Monday, March 19**. During the next class, I will return your proposal with my comments, which you can then use to help you craft your paper. I will provide more information about this assignment toward the middle of the semester.

## Readings

### **Week 1 (Monday, February 6): What is psychology?**

Lilienfeld, S., Lynn, S., Ruscio, J., & Beyerstein, B. (2010). Busting big myths in popular psychology. *Scientific American Mind*, 21, 42-49.

### **Week 2 (Monday, February 13): The Power of the Situation**

Hock, R. K. (2009). Who's crazy here, anyway? In R. K. Hock, *Forty studies that changed psychology* (pp. 227-234). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Hock, R. K. (2009). The power of conformity. In R. K. Hock, *Forty studies that changed psychology* (pp. 295-299). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Milgram Experiment. From [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milgram\\_experiment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milgram_experiment)

Stanford Prison Experiment. From [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanford\\_prison\\_experiment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanford_prison_experiment)

### **Week 3 (Monday, February 20): Addiction and Recovery**

Lemonick, M. D. (2007, July 5). How we get addicted. *Time*. From <http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,1640436,00.html>

Schnabel, J. (2009). Rethinking rehab. *Nature*, 458, 25-27. From <http://www.nature.com/news/2009/090304/full/458025a.html>

Scott, P. (2006, October 12). Bodies in motion, clean and sober. *The New York Times*. From <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/12/fashion/12FITNESS.html?pagewanted=print>.

Swaminathan, N. (2008, August 12). Hacking memory to break drug addiction. *Scientific American*. From <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=hacking-memory-to-break-drug-addiction&print=true>.

### **Week 4 (Monday, February 27): Masculinity**

Bakalar, N. (2006, November 14). Childhood: Fathers influence a child's language development. *The New York Times*. From <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/14/health/14chil.html>.

Gladwell, M. (2008). Die like a man, like your brother did! In M. Gladwell, *Outliers: The story of success* (pp. 161-176). New York, NY: Little, Brown, and Company.

Hyde, J. S. (2005). The gender similarities hypothesis. *American Psychologist*, 60, 581-592.

### **Week 5 (Monday, March 5): Religion and Spirituality**

Bloom, P. (2008, November 7). Does religion make you nice? *Slate*. From [http://www2.psych.ubc.ca/~ara/media/Slate\\_article.pdf](http://www2.psych.ubc.ca/~ara/media/Slate_article.pdf).

Culotta, E. (2009, November 6). On the origin of religion. *Science*, 326, 784-787. From <http://www2.psych.ubc.ca/~ara/media/On%20the%20Origin%20of%20Religion%20-%20Science.pdf?page=full>.

Rossano, M. J. (2010, November 3). Who is my neighbor? The best and worst of religious morality. *Huffington Post*. From [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/matt-j-rossano/who-is-my-neighbor-the-be\\_b\\_776899.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/matt-j-rossano/who-is-my-neighbor-the-be_b_776899.html).

Tierney, J. (2008, December 29). For good self-control, try getting religious about it. *The New York Times*. From <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/30/science/30tier.html?ref=research>.

### **Week 6 (Monday, March 12): No class**

### **Week 7 (Monday, March 19): Morality**

*Please bring your proposal for the final paper with you to this class. I will collect your proposals and give you written feedback next week.*

Associated Press. (2006). Roots of altruism show in babies' helping hands. From [http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/11641621/ns/health-kids\\_and\\_parenting/t/roots-altruism-show-babies-helping-hands/](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/11641621/ns/health-kids_and_parenting/t/roots-altruism-show-babies-helping-hands/).

Hock, R. K. (2009). How moral are you? In R. K. Hock, *Forty studies that changed psychology* (pp. 143-150). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Miller, G. (2008). The roots of morality. *Science*, 320, 734-737. From <http://faculty.virginia.edu/haidtlab/articles/miller.2008.roots-of-morality.science.pdf>.

### **Week 8 (Monday, March 26): The Origins of Prejudice**

Are babies prejudiced? From <http://scienceblog.com/14610/are-babies-prejudiced/>.

Bergman, B. (2005, Mar 30). Unlovely, unloved? *Macleans.ca*. From [http://www.macleans.ca/article.jsp?content=20050404\\_103146\\_103146](http://www.macleans.ca/article.jsp?content=20050404_103146_103146).

Bloom, S. (2005, September). Lesson of a lifetime. *Smithsonian*. From [http://www.printthis.clickability.com/pt/cpt?action=cpt&title=Smithsonian+Magazine+%7C+History+%26+Archaeology+%7C+Lesson+of+a+Lifetime&expire=&urlID=24236188&fb=Y&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.smithsonianmag.com%2Fhistory-archaeology%2Flesson\\_lifetime.html&partnerID=253157](http://www.printthis.clickability.com/pt/cpt?action=cpt&title=Smithsonian+Magazine+%7C+History+%26+Archaeology+%7C+Lesson+of+a+Lifetime&expire=&urlID=24236188&fb=Y&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.smithsonianmag.com%2Fhistory-archaeology%2Flesson_lifetime.html&partnerID=253157)

### **Week 9 (Monday, April 2): Prejudice in Adults**

*Note: Please bring a draft of your paper with you to this class. I will collect your papers and give you written feedback next week.*

Burkley, M. (2010, December 8). Are Black women invisible? *Psychology Today*. From <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-social-thinker/201012/are-black-women-invisible>.

Gladwell, M. (2005). The Warren Harding error: Why we fall for tall, dark, and handsome men. In M. Gladwell, *Blink: The power of thinking without thinking* (pp. 72-98). New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company.

Stereotype Threat. From [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stereotype\\_threat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stereotype_threat).

### **Week 10 (Monday, April 9): Anger, Depression, and Other Fun Emotions**

Hock, R. K. (2009). Little emotional Albert. In R. K. Hock, *Forty studies that changed psychology* (pp. 72-77). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Hock, R. K. (2009). See aggression. . .do aggression! In R. K. Hock, *Forty studies that changed psychology* (pp. 85-92). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Hock, R. K. (2009). Learning to be depressed. In R. K. Hock, *Forty studies that changed psychology* (pp. 242-248). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.

**Week 11 (Monday, April 16): Emotions That Are Genuinely Fun**

**Note: Please bring the revised version of your final paper with you to this class. I will collect your papers and give you written feedback next week.**

Bakalar, N. (2010, May 31). Happiness may come with age, study says. *The New York Times*. From <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/01/health/research/01happy.html?ref=research>.

Blum, D. (1998). Finding strength: How to overcome anything. *Psychology Today*. From <http://psychologytoday.com/articles/pto-19980501-000024.xml>.

Tierney, J. (2010, November 15). When the mind wanders, happiness also strays. *The New York Times*. From <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/16/science/16tier.html?pagewanted=print>.

Wallis, C. (2005, January). The new science of happiness. *Time*. From <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1015832,00.html>

**Week 12 (Monday, April 23): Re-entry**

Butterfield, F. (2000, November 29). Getting out: A special report. *The New York Times*. From <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/11/29/us/getting-out-a-special-report-often-parole-is-one-stop-on-the-way-back-to-prison.html?src=pm>

Cohen, A. (2004, January 2). A community of ex-cons shows how to bring prisoners back into society. *The New York Times*. From <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/01/02/opinion/editorial-observer-community-ex-cons-shows-bring-prisoners-back-into-society.html?pagewanted=print>

Jacobs, A. (2008, April 27). Seeking the key to employment for ex-cons. *The New York Times*. From [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/27/nyregion/27excons.html?\\_r=1&pagewanted=print](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/27/nyregion/27excons.html?_r=1&pagewanted=print)

Kohl, R., Hoover, H. M., McDonald, S. M., & Solomon, A. L. (2008). Massachusetts recidivism study: A closer look at releases and returns to prison. "Executive summary" (pp. 1-2) and "Summary of findings and discussion" (pp. 31-35). *Urban Institute*. From [http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411657\\_massachusetts\\_recidivism.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411657_massachusetts_recidivism.pdf)