

PSY 392C: Contemporary Issues in Psychology (Fall 2012)

Mental Simulation

Syllabus

Instructor: John V. Petrocelli

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Office hours: Mon: 9:30-10:30, Tues: 3:30-4:30
and by appointment

Days: Tuesday/Thursday

Time: 2:00 – 3:15

Location: Greene Hall 310

Course website: <https://sakai.wfu.edu>

Course Description

Seminar treatment of current theory and research in several areas of psychology. Prerequisites: Senior, major standing.

Course Design and Objectives

This course is designed to give you the opportunity to engage more fully in the field of experimental psychology by reading, discussing, and evaluating primary research articles related to a particular topic (i.e., counterfactual thinking and other forms of mental simulation). Although I will introduce you to some of the critical issues, the real emphasis will be on “playing” with ideas by thinking and talking about concepts and research. Beyond increasing your awareness of the importance mental simulation (in thinking, feeling, and behaving) and your ability to review original sources, present those ideas to your classmates, and think about the relevance of this material to your own life, learning outcomes include:

- An understanding of empirical findings in social psychology and how major research designs address different questions and hypotheses
- An ability to formulate social psychological problems/questions, to determine the degree to which an explanation is supported by reasoning/empirical evidence, to perceive alternative explanations and to determine what evidence is needed to choose between them, to synthesize empirical evidence and psychological concepts, and to critically evaluate existing explanations and generate new ideas
- An ability to locate social psychological research information, to design and conduct research, to use statistical techniques to analyze information, to evaluate statistical information and quality of research
- An ability to use professional (APA) writing conventions and effective written/oral communication skills
- An ability to recognize the relevance of social psychology to everyday life and appreciate the importance of social psychological science to answering fundamental questions
- An ability to critically evaluate claims made in social psychological research
- An understanding of how social psychologists form questions and design experiments in ways that can test their hypotheses statistically

Required Readings

Readings are made available in the Course Reader. These readings will serve as a framework for the course. Please bring to class either a hard copy of the readings (no computers) so that you can reference the material. The quality of your work (i.e., Final Quiz and Final Paper) is likely to reflect your record of attendance and the effort that you put into reviewing the course readings.

Student Responsibilities

- Attend class and be prepared to participate
- Check Sakai regularly for course updates
- Complete all course requirements
- Complete a student course evaluation

Grading

Your letter grade for this course is determined by the percentage of total points (500 possible) earned throughout the semester. A letter grade will be assigned on the basis of the following scale:

A+ 98 - 100% A 93 - 97% A- 90 - 92% B+ 88 - 89% B 83 - 87% B- 80 - 82%
C+ 78 - 79% C 73 - 77% C- 70 - 72% D+ 68 - 69% D 63 - 67% D- 60 - 62% F <60%

Points are earned in five ways:

❖ **Reaction Essays (10 points each x 7 = 70 points; 14%):** You will be assigned to write a Reaction Essay to the two readings scheduled for each week. Submit a one-page paper in reaction to the readings for the week. Essays may be single-spaced (approx. 500 words) or double-spaced (approx. 250 words), but are not to exceed one page (if you have more to say, reduce the font and/or margins). Understand that a Reaction Essay is not a simple re-wording of the Abstract of an article, or a summarization. It is intended to serve as an intellectual exercise that may take the form of an agreement, disagreement, elaboration, contrast, parallel, or critical analysis of the work selected. Examples of sentences to get you started:

- “I see a contradiction between Smith’s (2002) article and the section we read about...”
- “A possible experiment that could be conducted to test the hypothesis described in Smith’s (2002) article involves...”
- “The theory describe in Smith’s (2002) article could be used to improve productivity in work groups by...”
- “The theory in Smith’s (2002) article helped me to analyze an experience that I once had in a group conflict situation that was hard for me to understand at the time...”
- “I disagree with the interpretation of the findings described in Smith’s (2002) article...”

Note: Only seven Reaction Essays are required. To make our lives a bit easier, you are being spotted 30 points. Beginning with week 2, Reaction Essays are due on the first class session of each week.

❖ **Class Discussion and Participation (100 points; 20%):** The learning experience in this course will involve sharing of thoughts during class discussions (focused on the required readings). Come to class willing and prepared to voice your thoughts and opinions; please ask questions during class. The Reaction Essays serve the goal of making you think about the readings before you come to class and prepare you for class discussion. As you are reviewing an assigned reading, writing your Reaction Essays, and thinking about upcoming class discussions, the following questions should help to guide you: What is the main research question of the article? What is the answer or conclusion that the article provides for this question? What evidence is used in support of this conclusion? Is this evidence sound? What questions do I still have about this paper? What aspects of the paper remain unclear? Are there weaknesses in the methodology, statistics or conclusions? Are there any other aspects of the article that draw criticism or cause concern?

❖ **Paradigm Demonstration and Discussion (PDD; 100 points; 20%):** This exercise will provide you with some presentation experience as well as an experiential way of learning more about experimental procedures used in social psychology research today. During one session of class, you will be required to pair with one or more students to conduct a demonstration of an experimental paradigm described in a research article. This paradigm must be published within a peer-reviewed social psychology (or related) journal (e.g., *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, or *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, or *Psychological Science*). It is your responsibility to find the article. Please run the idea and the paper by me at least one week prior to your PDD. Many of the articles include multiple experiments, but you only need to demonstrate one study paradigm, a modified study, or a modified “hybrid” of multiple studies. During your demonstration, you can use the entire class or a single volunteer (whichever is more feasible, given the time constraint). Focus on demonstrating the method (procedures). Afterwards, describe the hypothesis used by the researchers and the background information (you do not have to use PowerPoint, but it may help). Then you should briefly discuss what is typically found from the paradigm (the results). If at all possible, tally and present the class results. In the interest of time, the procedures used during class may be modified from what is described in the article. In such cases, inform the class of how the demonstration was modified from what the researchers employed. With the remaining class time, lead a discussion about the topic. Make sure to prepare discussion questions based on the reading; these questions should be provocative and integrative questions that will engage the class. The overall goal is to make the paradigm memorable.

❖ **Final Quiz (80 points; 16%):** There are several conceptual, factual, and applied concepts that will be discussed in the assigned readings and during class time. I'll need to know that you understand these concepts and can apply them. The format of the quiz will be short-answer essay.

❖ **Final Paper (150 points; 30%):** Due at the final class meeting, is a 7-8 page final paper. Select a theoretical topic of particular interest to you and form a clear research question that is not entirely answered by the existing literature. Your paper should be structured as a brief experimental proposal, including a theoretically-drawn set of hypotheses and a detailed description of methods and procedures. Your proposed study must include at least two independent variables and one independent variable must be directly manipulated. The 2 x 2 design and mediation designs are common and highly appropriate designs for this paper. The paper should be double-spaced, formatted using APA-style, include a Title-Page and References; include an Abstract. The paper must include at least seven references of published articles, books, or chapters (no internet articles). By the end of the second week of class, you are required to submit to me three possible titles of your paper (e.g., "Implicit Social Behavior in Athletic Competitions"). I will then decide which paper I want to read. Make sure that all three titles reflect three different topics. Think specific for this paper.

Attendance

Class attendance will not be monitored. However, due to the participatory and interactive nature of this course, consider your attendance mandatory. Studies show that class time is the most efficient use of a student's time when it comes to learning material. Unless by reason of extenuating circumstances or participation in religious or civic observances, your attendance is expected at all times.

Lecture Notes

Lecture notes are not provided. Much of the lectures will be interactive, involving class-discussion related to the topic, thought experiments, and experimental procedure demonstrations. If you must miss a lecture, please get notes from a classmate (if they are willing).

Sakai

You are expected to become familiar with the Sakai Academic Suite <https://sakai.wfu.edu>. Sakai is an online course environment that allows Wake Forest University faculty and students to create, integrate, and maintain web-based teaching and learning resources. Grades will be posted on Sakai. Announcements or changes will be announced on Sakai as well.

Cheating and Plagiarism

Although I don't expect there to be any problems, cheating and/or plagiarism will not be tolerated. When you signed your application for admission to Wake Forest University, you agreed to live by the honor system. As part of the honor system, you agreed to abstain from cheating, which includes plagiarism. You are accountable to the following from the Student Handbook: "Plagiarism is a type of cheating. It includes: (a) the use, by paraphrase or direct quotation, of the published or unpublished work of another person without complete acknowledgment of the source; (b) the unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another agency or person providing term papers or other academic materials; (c) the non-attributed use of any portion of a computer algorithm or data file; or (d) the use, by paraphrase or direct quotation, of on-line material without complete acknowledgment of the source."

Pagers, Beepers, and Phones

Please make sure that your pagers, beepers, cell phones, noise horns, cow-bells, and other equipment that are likely to be disruptive and counterproductive to learning experience, are turned off during class.

Students with Special Needs

Please let me know if you are a student with special needs such as visual impairment, hearing impairment, or a learning disability.

Contingency Plan

In the event that the university closes due to pandemic or other disaster, please review and study the required readings. Reading quizzes (distributed over Sakai, if the internet is available; or by postal mail if

the internet is not available) must be completed to test your comprehension of the readings. Complete all required work (to be distributed either through Sakai, e-mail, or postal mail) listed on the schedule and send the solutions to: John Petrocelli (petrocjv@wfu.edu), if the internet is available; or if the internet is not available to: John Petrocelli, P.O. Box 7778, Winston-Salem, 27109. You will be mailed or e-mailed a midterm and final examination that should be taken closed book, without access to papers, persons, or other resources. The return date for the examination will be specified in the mailing. If the internet is available, Professor Petrocelli will be available for normal office hours by e-mail.

Disclaimer

Consider this syllabus a binding contract of your responsibilities. As with most other courses, I do reserve the right to modify the schedule as deemed necessary. Any changes made to the schedule or policies within this syllabus will be announced in class and on Sakai.

Readings and Schedule

Week/Day(s): Topic(s) and Required Reading(s): PDD = Paradigm Demonstration and Discussion

1 Oct 23/25: Introduction

Kahneman, D., & Tversky, A. (1982). The simulation heuristic. In D. Kahneman, P. Slovic, & A. Tversky (Eds.), *Judgment under uncertainty: Heuristics and biases* (pp. 201-208). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Gilovich, T. (1983). Biased evaluation and persistence in gambling. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 44*, 1110-1126.

PDD Example – Petrocelli

2 Oct 30 / Nov 1: Distinctions of Counterfactual Thinking

Roese, N. J., & Olson, J. M. (1993). The structure of counterfactual thought. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 19*, 312-319.

Markman, K. D., Gavanski, I., Sherman, S. J., & McMullen, M. N. (1993). The mental simulation of better and worse possible worlds. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 29*, 87-109.

PDD

3 Nov 6/8: Functionality of Counterfactual Thinking

Roese, N. J. (1994). The functional basis of counterfactual thinking. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 66*, 805-818.

Sherman, S. J., & McConnell, A. R. (1995). Dysfunctional implications of counterfactual thinking: When alternatives to reality fail us. In N. J. Roese & J. M. Olson (Eds.), *What might have been: The social psychology of counterfactual thinking* (pp. 199-231). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

PDD

4 Nov 13/15: Emotion

McMullen, M. N. (1997). Affective contrast and assimilation in counterfactual thinking. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 33*, 77-100.

Crawford, M. T., McConnell, A. R., Lewis, A. C., & Sherman, S. J. (2002). Reactance, compliance, and anticipated regret. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 38*, 56-63.

Seta, J. J., McElroy, T., & Seta, C. E. (2001). To do or not to do: Desirability and consistency mediate judgments of regret. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 80*, 861-870.

PDD

5 Nov 20: Temporal Factors of Mental Simulation

Gilbert, D. T., Pinel, E. C., Wilson, T. D., Blumberg, S. J., & Wheatley, T. P. (1998). Immune neglect: A source of durability bias in affective forecasting. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75, 617-638.

Gilovich, T., & Medvec, V. H. (1994). The temporal pattern to the experience of regret. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 67, 357-365.

PDD _____

6 Nov 27/29: Judgments of Causality

Wells, G. L., & Gavanski, I. (1989). Mental simulation of causality. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 56, 161-169.

Mandel, D. R., & Lehman, D. R. (1996). Counterfactual thinking and ascriptions of cause and preventability. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71, 450-463.

PDD _____

7 Dec 4/6: Imagination Inflation

Garry, M., Manning, C.G., Loftus, E.F., & Sherman, S.J. (1996). Imagination inflation: Imagining a childhood event inflates confidence that it occurred. *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review*, 3, 208-214.

Goff, L. M., & Roediger, H. L., III. (1998). Imagination inflation for action events: Repeated imaginings lead to illusory recollections. *Memory and Cognition*, 26, 20-33.

Petrocelli, J. V., & Crysel, L. C. (2009). Counterfactual thinking and confidence in blackjack: A test of the counterfactual inflation hypothesis. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 45, 1312-1315.

PDD _____

8 Dec 11: Goals, Performance, Risk Taking and Confidence, and Other Topics

Greitemeyer, T., & Würz, D. (2005). Mental simulation and the achievement of health goals: The role of goal difficulty. *Imagination, Cognition and Personality*, 25, 239-251.

Crisp, R. J., & Turner, R. N. (2009). Can imagine interactions produce positive perceptions? Reducing prejudice through simulated social contact. *American Psychologist*, 64, 231-240.

PDD _____

Final Meeting: Tuesday, Dec 11 (9:00am)

- **Final Paper Due**
- **Final Quiz**