

Psychology 674- Special Topics in Psychology: Existential Social Psychology

Fall Semester

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Instructor.

Office and Office Hours 342 Armitage, Tuesday and Thursdays 11:00 am to 1:00 pm

Class times and days. Class will meet Mondays from 6:00 pm to 8:50 pm in Armitage 108

Course Description and Course Goals

Who am I? What is my purpose? Am I in control of my destiny? How can I live my best life? Why do I believe in things I cannot see? The growing subfield of existential social psychology uses rigorous scientific methods to address these questions and more. This course will survey current theory and research in existential social psychology. By the end of the course...

- Students should understand and be able to apply theory and research in existential psychology.
- Students should be able to articulate the practical importance of existential social psychological research.
- Students should be proficient in generating testable hypotheses that are grounded in theory.
- Students should be able to identify, critique, and apply research methods used in existential psychology.

Writing Goals

Students will complete an APA style research proposal inspired by a topic/theory covered in class. This project is designed to give student practice and guidance in academic writing. My goal for this assignment is to help students to be more thoughtful about and critical of their writing.

Course Policies

Communication

I will utilize Sakai and your Rutgers email for communication. Students are expected to check them regularly. I will respond to emails as promptly as I can. Feel free to send me a gentle reminder if I do not respond within 24 hours.

Office Hours

Please visit me during my office hours if there is something you do not understand. If you are unable to attend my office hours please e-mail me to schedule an appointment.

Attendance and Participation

Students must be an active participant in every class and a portion of students' final course grade will be based on participation. There are no excused absences, but students are able to miss up to 2 classes without it negatively affecting their grade. Contact me if you experience circumstances that interfere with your ability to come to class.

Students are expected to complete readings before class, complete weekly thought papers in advance of class, and participate in activities and discussions. I define acceptable participation as completing all in-class activities and contributing to class discussions (at least 2 contributions). Students should seek help well in advance of deadlines.

Electronic Devices

Be respectful. I reserve the right to tell you to knock it off.

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to submit only their own work throughout this course. Cheating, plagiarizing, and other academic misconduct will result in a failing grade and the student may face other disciplinary actions as specified by the university. Appropriate documentation of sources using APA Style is necessary to avoid plagiarism. For further information regarding Rutgers' policies: <https://deanofstudents.camden.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity>

Code of Conduct

Rutgers University-Camden seeks a community that is free from violence, threats, and intimidation. You are expected adhere to Student Code of Conduct: <https://deanofstudents.camden.rutgers.edu/student-conduct>

RaptorCares

The Raptor Cares Report (<https://deanofstudents.camden.rutgers.edu/reporting>) connects you to our Dean of Students Office and they can assist you with a variety of concerns that impact your academic performance.

Office of Military and Veterans Affairs

The Office of Military and Veterans Affairs can assist our military and veteran students with benefits, deployment issues and much more. Contact: Fred Davis 856-225-2791 frdavis@camden.rutgers.edu

Special Needs

If you need disability accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS).

<https://learn.camden.rutgers.edu/disability-services> speak with me ASAP if you have accommodations through OSD.

Support for Undocumented and Immigrant Students

The Rutgers Immigrant Community Assistance Project (RICAP) provides free and confidential immigration legal consultations. For more information or an appointment, contact Jason Hernandez, Esq., at Jason.c.hernandez@rutgers.edu. The Rutgers Office of Undocumented Student Services provides one-on-one case management. For more information, please contact Yuriana García Tellez at y.garcia@rutgers.edu.

Assessments

Grading will be based on 1) attendance/class participation (see above; 25%), 2) weekly thought papers (10%), 3) leading a discussion (25%), and 4) a final research proposal (40%).

Weekly thought papers

Students must write a 1-page max paper on their reflections of the weekly reading. The papers are informal and can discuss any aspect of the reading. However, the papers MUST contain 1) 2 or more discussion questions or comments to share with class, 2) a research idea, and 3) a discussion about how you can apply something you learned from the reading to your life, the world, your research, or your future career. Late thought papers will not be accepted. Thought papers can be turned in as hardcopies at the time of class or uploaded to Sakai before class.

Leading a Discussion

Groups of 2 students will 1) choose a topic from the schedule (below), 2) find a reading, and 3) lead a class discussion over the article. The reading must be related to the chosen topic and report original research. It cannot be a review, meta-analysis, or theory paper. I must approve the article a week in advance.

Research proposal

The final project is an APA style research proposal. This paper will propose a study testing hypothesis inspired by a theory or topic from the course. The paper should have an introduction and a method section. Each student will be required to meet with me to 1) finalize topic and 2) to receive feedback on a draft of the proposal.

Tentative Schedule			
Week	Date	Topic Covered	Deadline
1	9/10	Introduction	
2	9/17	Terror Management Theory	
3	9/24	The Meanings of Life	
4	10/1	The Self	
5	10/8	Belonging, Attachment, Ostracism	
6	10/15	Freedom and Freewill	
7	10/22	Motivation and Human Flourishing	
8	10/29	Mental Time Travel	
9	11/5	Religion and Religious-Like Beliefs	
10	11/12	Evil, Enemyship, and Victimhood	
11	11/19	Sex and Relationships	Proposal Topic Last Call
12	11/26	Psychological Health	
13	12/3	Physical Health and Aging	
14	12/10	Physical Health and Aging	Feedback Meeting Last Call
15	12/17	Finals Week	Proposal Due by 11:59 pm

READINGS WILL BE POSTED ON THE SAKAI SITE. I reserve the right to change the schedule

Readings

Week 1: Introduction

Pyszczynski, T., Greenberg, J., Koole, S., & Solomon, S. (2010). Experimental existential social psychology: Coping with the facts of everyday life. In D. T. Gilbert, & S. T. Fiske (Eds.), *Handbook of Social Psychology* (5th ed.). McGraw-Hill.

Sartre, J.-P. (1956). *Existentialism is a humanism* (C. Macomber, Trans.). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. (Reprinted from *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*, 1956, Paris: Éditions Gallimard.)

Week 2: Terror Management Theory

Abeyta, A. A., Juhl, J., & Routledge, C. (2014). Exploring the effects of self-esteem and mortality salience on proximal and distally measured death anxiety: A further test of the dual process model of terror management. *Motivation and Emotion, 38*, 523-528.

Pyszczynski, T., Wicklund, R. A., Florescu, S., Koch, H., Gauch, G., Solomon, S., & Greenberg, J. (1996). Whistling in the dark: Exaggerate consensus estimates in response to incidental reminders of mortality. *Psychological Science, 7*, 332-336.

Schimmel, J., Hayes, J., & Sharp, M. (2019). A consideration of three critical hypotheses. In C. Routledge & M. Vess (Eds.), *Handbook of Terror Management Theory* (1st ed.). Cambridge Academic Press.

Week 3: The Meanings of life

Juhl, J., Routledge, C., Hicks, J. A., & Sedikides, C. (2017). Can affectively negative experiences contribute to well-being? The affectively negative need-fulfillment model. In M. D. Robinson & M. Eid (Eds.), *The happy mind: Cognitive contributions to well-being*. New York, NY: Springer.

King, L., Heintzelman, S. J., & Ward, S. (2016). Beyond the search for meaning: A contemporary science of the experience of meaning in life. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 25*, 211-216.

Proux, T., & Heine, S. J. (2008). The case of the transmogrifying experimenter. *Psychological Science, 19*, 1294-1300.

Week 4: The Self

Abeyta, A. A., Routledge, C., & Sedikides, C. (2017). Material meaning: Narcissists gain existential benefits from extrinsic goals. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 8*, 219-228.

Mahadevan, N., Gregg, A. P., Sedikides, C., & de Waal-Andrews, W. G. (2016). Winners, losers, insiders, and outsiders: Comparing hierometer and sociometer theories of self-regard. *Frontiers in Psychology, 7*, Article 334.

Schlegel, R. J., Smith, C. M., & Hirsch, K. A. (2013). Examining the true self as a wellspring of meaning. In J. A. Hicks & C. Routledge (Eds.) *The experience of meaning in life: Classical perspectives, emerging themes, and controversies*. Springer.

Week 5: Belonging, Attachment, and Ostracism

Bartz, J. A., Tchalova, K., & Fenerci, C. (2016). Reminders of social connection can attenuate anthropomorphism: A replication and extension of Epley, Akalis, Waytz, and Cacioppo (2008). *Psychological Science, 27*, 1644-1650.

Mikulincer, M. (2019). An attachment perspective on managing death concerns. In C. Routledge & M. Vess (Eds.), *Handbook of Terror Management Theory* (1st ed.). Academic Press.

Paolo, R., Williams, K. D., Torstrick, A. M., & Montali, L. (2014). Orders to shoot (a camera): Effects of ostracism on obedience. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 154*, 208-216.

Week 6: Freedom and Freewill

Fromm, E. (1941). Chapter II: The emergence of the individual and the ambiguity of freedom. In *Escape from Freedom*. Farrar and Rinehart.

Moynihan, A. B., Igou, E. R., van Tilburg, W. A. P. (2018). Lost in the crowd: Conformity as escape following disbelief in freewill. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 49*, 503-520.

Vohs, K. D., & Schooner, J. W. (2008). The value of believing in free will. *Psychological Science, 19*, 49-54.

Week 7: Motivation and Human Flourishing

- Feldman, D. B. (2103). The meaning of hope and vice versa: Goal-directed thinking and the construction of a meaningful life. In J. Hicks, R. Routledge (Eds.) *The Experience of Meaning in Life*. Springer.
- Sheldon, K. M., & Corcoran, M. (2018). Comparing the current and long term career motivations of artists and business-people: Is everyone intrinsic in the end? *Motivation and Emotion, 43*, 218-231.
- Ryan, R.M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist, 55*, 68-78.

Week 8: Mental Time Travel

- Abeyta, A. A., Nelson, T. A., & Routledge, C. (2019). Precious time: The role of time and temporal thought in managing death-awareness. In C. Routledge & M. Vess (Eds.), *The handbook of terror management theory*. Cambridge Academic Press.
- Chen, Z., & Williams, K. D. (2012). Imagined future social pain hurts more now than imagined future physical pain. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 42*, 314-317.
- Sedikides, C., Wildschut, T., & Stephan, E. (2018). Nostalgia shapes and potentiates the future. In J. P. Forgas, & R. F. Baumeister (Eds.), *The social psychology of living well*. Routledge.

Week 9: Religion and Religious-Like Beliefs

- Park, C. L. (2011). Implicit religion and the meaning making model. *Implicit Religion, 14*, 405-419.
- Rothschild, Z. K., Abdollahi, A., & Pyszczynski, T. (2009). Does peace have a prayer? The effect of mortality salience, compassionate values, and religious fundamentalism on hostility toward out-groups. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 45*, 816-827.
- Routledge, C. (2018). Religion: The most powerful form of supernatural belief. In *Supernatural: Death, meaning, and the power of the invisible world*. Oxford University Press.

Week 10: Evil, Enemyship, and Victimhood

- Routledge, C., Abeyta, A. A., & Roylance, C. (2016). An existential function of evil: The effects of religiosity and compromised meaning on belief in magical evil forces. *Motivation and Emotion, 40*, 681-688.
- Sullivan, D., Landau, M. J., & Rothschild, Z. K. (2010). AN existential function of enemyship: Evidence that people attribute influence to personal and political enemies to compensate for threats to control. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 98*, 434-449.
- Zitek, E. M., Jordan, A. H., Monin, B., & Leach, F. R. (2010). Victim entitlement to behave selfishly. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 98*, 245-255.

Week 11: Sex and Relationships

- Goldenberg, J. L., Morris, K. L., & Boyd, P. (2019). Terror management is for the birds and the bees: An existential perspective on the threat associated with human corporeality. In C. Routledge & M. Vess (Eds.), *The handbook of terror management theory*. Cambridge Academic Press.
- Kosakowska-Berezecka, N., Besta, T., Adamska, K., Jaśkiewicz, M., Jurek, P., & Vandello, J. A. (2016). If my masculinity is threatened I won't support gender equality? The role of agentic self-stereotyping in restoration of manhood and perception of gender relations. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity, 17*, 274-284.
- Murray-Swank, N. A., Pargament, K. I., & Mahoney, A. (2005). At the crossroads of sexuality and spirituality: The sanctification of sex by college students. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion, 15*, 199-219.

Week 12: Psychological Health

- Pyszczynski, T., & Taylor, J. (2016). When the buffer breaks: Disrupted terror management in posttraumatic stress disorder. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 25*, 286-290.
- Routledge, C., Roylance, C., & Abeyta, A. A. (2016). Nostalgia as an existential intervention: Using the past to secure meaning in the present and the future. In P. Russo-Netzer., S. Schulenberg, & A. Battyany (Eds.) *Clinical Perspective on Meaning*. Springer.
- Routledge, C., Ostafin, B., Juhl, J., Sedikides, C., & Liao, J. (2010). Adjusting to death: The effects of mortality salience and self-esteem on psychological well-being, growth motivation, and maladaptive behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 99*, 897-916.

Week 13-14: Physical health

Arndt, J., & Goldenberg, J. L. (2017). Where health and death intersect: Insights from a terror management health model. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 26*, 126-131.

Hooker, S. A., Masters, K. S., & Park, C. L. (2018). A meaningful life is a healthy life: A conceptual model linking meaning and meaning salience to health. *Review of General Psychology, 22*, 11-24.

Major, R. J., Whelton, W. J., Schimel, J., & Sharp D. (2016). Older adults and the fear of death: The protective function of generativity. *Canadian Journal on Aging, 35*, 261-272.