

## PSY593 Special Topics: The Science of Existential Social Psychology

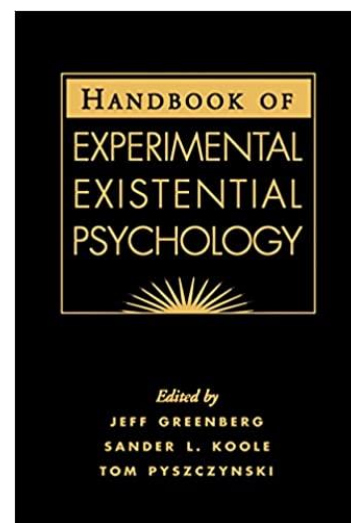
Professor:	Kenneth Vail, Ph.D.	Class time:	TBD
Email:	<a href="mailto:vail.kenneth@gmail.com">vail.kenneth@gmail.com</a>	Classroom:	TBD
Office:	Union Building, room 257	Office Hours:	By appointment

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Most readings will be provided.

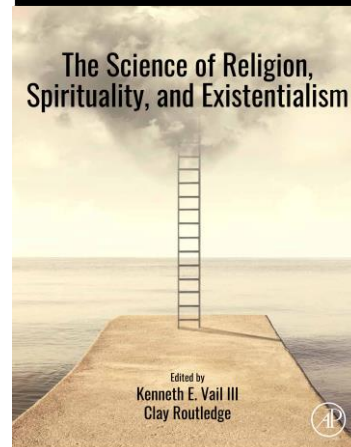
Recommended handbook:

Greenberg, J., Koole, S. L., & Pyszczynski, T. A. (Eds.). (2004). *Handbook of experimental existential psychology*. Guilford Press. ISBN: 978-1-59385-040-1



Recommended handbook:

Vail, K. E., & Routledge, C. (Eds.). (2020). *The science of religion, spirituality, and existentialism*. Academic Press. ISBN: 978-0-12817-204-9



### Course overview:

In this course we will introduce ourselves to the science of existential social psychology: the scientific study of how people think, feel, and behave as they navigate the critical issues of existence—of “being” and “becoming.” We will explore six major existential concerns: (1) life and death; (2) freedom, authenticity, and responsibility; (3) identity formation and development; (4) isolation, uncertainty, and truth/reality; (5) meaning and purpose in life; and (6) the roles of cognitive and motivational mechanisms in religion and spirituality.

The science of existential psychology, as you will see, is a very broad topic and during our class time we will not be able to cover its entirety. Instead, our class will feature a combination of the following: key readings in existential social psychology (original empirical

articles, reviews, book chapters, etc); thought papers; discussions designed to highlight, illustrate, and better understand important concepts; and foster creative new thought through proposals of original research projects. Sometimes these will be intended to complement one another, with the texts offering a broader view while in session we will explore a more focused consideration of particular theories and empirical studies.

### **Course goals:**

Our ultimate goal is not just to memorize factual knowledge about research in existential social psychology, but also to digest the ideas behind those studies – that is, to understand a given idea and its empirical support, and then use that understanding to evaluate: a) whether the evidence is convincing, b) how it stacks up with our own experience, c) how it could be applied to improve our understanding of those around us, and d) how it relates to other perspectives.

Our selection of readings, naturally, reflects my own view of the more important issues in psychological science, and is of course unavoidably restricted due to the breadth of issues and the brevity of the semester. Thus, although we'll dive deep into the issues, do not expect this course to be exhaustive.

### **Format & Expectations**

Our sessions will be in a seminar format. You will be expected to read and think about the assigned readings, prepare thoughts and questions, and then come discuss them together with myself and your fellow course mates.

Our sessions will typically be conducted in small, informal, yet guided, discussion format. Each session, the readings will be discussed and used as a springboard for our own active exploration of theory, methodological issues, and/or applied and practical considerations. The discussions will be driven by your own insights, comments, and questions, with the goal of stimulating thought and empowering you all with a firmer grasp on the ideas and methodologies that could directly or indirectly improve your mastery of the topic, your immediate research projects (e.g., thesis projects), and your general skills in the research, communication, and application of the science of existential social psychology. However, I will of course be there to participate, provide supportive insights and background information, help provide feedback on your ideas, and to help steer the discussions as appropriate.

Needless to say, the quality of these discussions will depend on thoughtful input from you. It is therefore expected that you will come to each session having substantively engaged the reading; that is, not just having simply skimmed the main points, but having taken the time to fully digest and reflect upon the issues at hand. To help ensure reading, comprehension, and provide fodder for discussion, for each session you will be required to write a brief reaction paper. Each reaction paper is intended to produce something of value (e.g., research ideas, develop a proposal, etc), so that you hopefully get something out of this training that will be of continued use to you on your career path. You will also be expected to serve as a discussion leader/facilitator in sessions on a rotating basis with your classmates. We will also have a series of low-impact quizzes and exams, to help give you opportunity to recall and apply the material.

In addition to advancing your skills and preparing you to achieve your long-term professional goals, the immediate research goal for this course is for you to develop a project to potentially serve as your master's thesis project.

**Blackboard:**

Announcements, grades, and updates for the course will be posted on Blackboard, so please check the site on a regular basis. If you must miss a class, arrange for a fellow student to provide notes for you. To access Blackboard, go to <https://bblearn.csuohio.edu/MACAuth/login.jsp> and login with your CSUID & password. If you have trouble logging in, please contact IS&T.

**Course requirements/grading:****Read, attend, and participate:**

There are 3 necessary ingredients to optimize your experience in this course. The first is obviously that you read and familiarize yourself with the material. The second is your routine and consistent presence (course grades are highly correlated with attendance). Third, take part in your own active contemplation of the material, take part in class discussion, and be prepared to explain and discuss course material in class.

As a normally functioning person who at least occasionally steps outside your own room, your life experiences and behaviors are the very topic that the science of existential social psychology would seek to understand, explain, predict, and influence. Thus, you are in the position to think critically about the material and contribute—in other words: read, think about the material, and show up and engage the material! Though you must determine what at-home reading/study approach works best for you, I can recommend a few helpful tactics:

- a. don't try to cram all the reading right before class or even necessarily in one sitting, but instead do read in increments so that you may digest the work as you go along.
- b. budget time to read and/or review the material; that is, don't simply let your eyes scan the words with the TV on in the background and then call yourself done when you get to that last page. Some may also find it helpful to review the text anew after session.
- c. take notes about issues and questions that occur to you as you are reading, rather than trusting that they will come back to you later.
- d. research on memory and learning shows that practice is one of the best ways to learn and retain information. If you want to learn the theory and practical issues in a lasting way (and do well in discussions and project proposals while you're at it), then practice applying your knowledge of the material. As you finish reading through the various sections of the materials, it is beneficial to come up with practice questions to test yourself on how well you know the material (i.e., practice *using* the material), and/or to think about how the theory and methodology could help explain various scenarios you see developing with your family, friends, acquaintances, politicians, pop personalities, etc., etc., etc. You can do this on your own or with a friend.

**1. Quizzes:**

Five quizzes (20 points each, 100 points total) will be posted to blackboard on specified dates throughout the semester. The quizzes will consist of multiple-choice, true/false, or short answer questions and each question will be worth 1 or 2 points. Quiz items will focus on topics covered in the readings and topics being discussed during that segment, but might also occasionally cover material from prior segments. Quiz scores will be posted on Blackboard when they are graded.

## 2. Exams:

Four exams (50 points each, 200 points total) administered over the course of the semester will consist of multiple-choice, true/false, short answer, or full-length essay questions and each question will be worth 1 or 2 points. All exams will be cumulative with emphasis on recent and previously untested material.

### Make-up quizzes and exams:

Any student who misses a quiz or exam for any reason (e.g., illness, family emergency, or athletics) must take a make-up within one week of the original assessment's date and time, with a time-limit of 45 minutes for quizzes and 90 minutes for exams. Make-ups may only be taken to cover absences; they cannot be used to replace the score of an assessment already completed. In other words, you may not re-take a quiz or exam because you did not get the score you wanted.

Also note that the make-up policy is also not a convenience to allow you to skip class to avoid a quiz/exam. Without appropriate prior notice of an absence, make-ups will consist exclusively of full-length essay questions, there will be fewer of them (thus, more points will ride on each answer), and they will be more difficult.

It is possible that arrangements can be made to take the original quiz/exam with advance notice of the absence. I strongly encourage you to notify me as far in advance as possible about any anticipated absences, so that we can have time to address the issue prior to any scheduled quizzes/exams.

## 3. Preparation (reaction papers) & participation:

To prepare for the sessions, you will be required to read each article and write a brief reaction paper discussing the scheduled papers for that day. There will be a total of 23 days with scheduled readings, but I will only require a reaction paper for 20 of them (5 points each, 100 points total). That means you'll have 3 sessions of grace, in which not turning in a reaction paper will not impact your grade. Reaction papers should be at least 1 page (APA format) to discuss the research and your reactions to it. **Bring a printed hard-copy of it with you to class.**

**Reaction papers.** Your reaction papers will serve 3 related functions: (1) they encourage you to read the material carefully and critically; (2) they will prepare you to discuss the material in a reasonably informed way during class; and (3) they are a tangible way of showing that you have read the material and are prepared for the session (on that note, one way to view this requirement is that these reflection papers take the place of a formal mid-term and final exam, the alternative method of checking up on the readings). You will turn in your paper at the end of class; thus, during research review sessions, your reaction papers will serve as notes for you, and you will be better able to engage with class as appropriate.

Your reaction papers should include three components:

1. A brief(!) summary of the readings.
2. Your impressions of the readings, with careful considerations of both theoretical and/or methodological aspects of the work. This should be the most substantive component.
3. At least 2 questions for the class.

The following questions could be used to help you organize yourself in writing your paper, and could fuel ideas about what types of questions to ask or how to steer your discussion.

- What theoretical perspective(s) were explicitly considered in your reading?
- Are there methodological issues?
- Does the theory make logical sense?
  
- Which points or ideas did you find interesting or helpful? Why?
- Which ideas have important implications, and how?
- Which ideas could be used to fuel additional research, and what might that look like?
  
- Which points or ideas did you find unhelpful or problematic? Why?
- Are there any portions of the idea/method that require clarification? Why?
  
- What questions do you have about the readings, and could they help fuel class discussion?
- What critiques do you have, and could those help fuel discussion?
  
- To what extent/how is the reading relevant to other class readings/theories? Would other students see other connections?
- How might the readings inform
  - o a) the way we understand a historical or contemporary social incident or problem,
  - o b) how we interact with others in the world, and/or
  - o c) contacts between various populations (sex, race, class, religion, disability, orientation, etc)?

You do not need to address each of the above questions (though you could), and you should feel free to address other issues not included above. Each paper should be unique to the reading.

Reaction papers should be standard 12pt font, 1" margins, and at least 1 pages. Please spare the ever-so-subtle tricks to create length (e.g., taking half the page to write your name, the date, my name, the course title, course number, the citation for the paper, etc, etc, etc, or using wide paragraph spacing, etc)... don't mess around, just dive in and write about the research. Keep in mind that these reaction papers do not need to be extremely detailed or exhaustive; you can reference issues in your reaction paper and then elaborate the details during in-class discussion.

**Participation.** A major reason for this course's focus on participation in discussion sessions is that learning takes place more effectively when information is handled in an *active* fashion, and when you can ask about things you didn't know you needed to think about and get guidance on the many important things that you might have never written down. Feel free to ask questions or ask to spend some time going over the basics of a particular theory, method, or application of any topic that we might encounter. We can then endeavor to use our time to cover the material, or I can give a condensed interpretation in-session and then refer you to the appropriate materials for more in-depth coverage.

Please do not feel shy about speaking up. You're only a student for a limited time, so try to make it a point to ask about things as often as you wonder about them. I can assure you that the environment for each session will be welcoming to questions and the open exchange of ideas, whatever they may be.

Also, although I am technically running the show, I do not view myself as the “leader” of these sessions in the way that an instructor “leads” a lecture. Instead, the course is intended as a “seminar” experience, which involves everyone and values stimulating questions and curiosities as much (or more) than having immediate answers. So, though I will be participating in the discussions, this course is ultimately about empowering you with an advanced command of the key issues in researching, communicating, and applying the science of existential psychology. So please actively engage the material and encourage each other to ask and answer questions, to disagree with each other in productive ways, and to think in new and interesting ways.

## 4. Discussion leadership

You'll be expected to serve as discussion leader for about 4 sessions (25 points each, 100 points total), in pairs or teams of three (depending on the size of the class), on a rotating basis. The discussion leaders are each expected to do three things:

1. Think critically—in advance—about what kinds of issues would be interesting and stimulating to discuss, and prepare discussion points and questions in advance.
2. Demonstrate an advanced level of understanding of the material and guide our group through the topic.
3. Fuel discussion; keep the group actively contemplating the issues.

A sign-up sheet and schedule of readings will be circulated on the first day of class; please choose a set of dates that you know you can attend, to ensure that you can complete the discussion leader assignments.

For sessions in which you are a discussion leader, you do not need to prepare a “reaction paper”, per se. Instead, ***you should prepare “discussion leadership notes”***, that prepare yourself (on paper) for the three abovementioned tasks. ***You'll need to prepare these ahead of time, send them to me by noon the day before the session so I can see what you've prepared, and then bring them to class as a guide.*** You are also more than welcome to meet with me prior to the class if you would like to talk about issues/questions for the class to discuss.

## Research proposal

You will be required to propose an original study idea as a possible thesis project. That means you'll need to devise an interesting research question and develop a specific experimental design to answer your question. You will need to submit a preliminary draft proposal to me, go through a few rounds of revision, and then submit a final written research proposal.

Proposals in this course should apply existential social psychology to your particular domain of interest, with some direction and guidance from me. We'll also need to make sure that your proposal goes beyond what is already known within your particular domain; that is, try to come up with something either theoretically or methodologically innovative, that adds to an

extant area of the literature. Some examples include proposing a theoretical integration, a new application of some sort, a test of a new method, a new way to think about an old problem, or test a brand new theoretical idea (assuming it has reasonable logical support).

There should be an explicit rationale for why your topic is important, a focus on explaining what your experiment is designed to tell us, and a detailed description of exactly how it will do so. Note the paper will be that much more productive if it is a project you might actually conduct (e.g., a possible thesis proposal).

## **5. Initial/draft proposal ideas**

Throughout the semester, you will be expected to think about and devise a research question and a specific research design to address it. After we've covered all the major areas of existential concern (after Exam 3), in week 13, you will submit an initial draft of your favorite and most interesting research idea (1 page max) that you would want to pursue for your final project proposal. I'll evaluate it and give you feedback. This preliminary exercise will be your opportunity to plan out your proposed experiment, with the caveat that your study topic/design needs my approval before proceeding. One reason for this is to encourage you to put "pen to paper" at a point early enough in the semester that you can effectively determine whether there is enough information on a topic and whether you can integrate it into some coherent form. Another reason is that I can give you some feedback, if necessary, and perhaps suggest other ideas or sources at a point in the semester that is not too late. It goes without saying that you do not have to wait until end of semester to start on your research ideas, and it's also helpful to generate myriad research ideas so that we can selectively choose the best from the "menu" of those various ideas.

## **6. Final project proposal**

After you've received feedback from me about your initial/draft proposal idea, you will be expected to grow that initial draft into a full final proposal. Your final research proposal should be an APA style proposal for your empirical study on your topic, adjusted from your original idea based on feedback and ongoing discussion. Please consult the APA Publication Manual for format guidelines. Your proposal should be somewhere in the neighborhood of 10-15 pages (not counting title, abstract, references, tables, figures), but length will depend on the demands of the theoretical questions and method descriptions, and should contain:

- A. An introduction that forecasts your study, reviews the relevant research, articulates the hypotheses you seek to assess, and explicates the nature of the contribution that your study would make
- B. A method section describing the design, procedures, and materials, and how they will enable you to assess the merits of your hypotheses.
- C. A planned analysis and anticipated results section describing how you plan to analyze the data and specific expected findings based on your theoretically derived hypotheses.

**Schedule of graded materials:**

## Participation (reaction papers)

- Expected every session, required for 20 of the 23 sessions.

## Discussion session leadership

- Expected approximately 10 times throughout the semester (depending on class size), during 10 of our 23 discussion sessions.

## Quizzes &amp; Exams

- We'll engage each general topic for 3 sessions, and we'll alternate with quizzes and more substantive exams. That is, we'll engage a topic for 3 sessions, then take a small quiz on that specific topic (that topic ONLY); then, we'll engage the next topic for 3 sessions, and then we'll have a more substantive exam (cumulative, plus the two general topics we've covered since the previous exam, with emphasis on the most recent topic).

## Project proposal

- A draft of an initial idea is due on a specified day, about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way through the semester. Final full drafts are due at the beginning of the last day of class. Late papers will not be accepted.

**Points Distribution by course task:**

Below is a breakdown of the points from the various exams, quizzes, etc. There will be no curve. Everyone has an opportunity to earn an "A".

		Points	% of grade
1	Quizzes	100	13%
2	Exams	200	27%
3	Preparation (reaction papers), and participation	100	13%
4	Discussion leadership	100	13%
5	Initial proposal idea/draft	50	7%
6	Final project proposal	200	27%
	Total	750	100%

**Grading scale and exact points breakdown:**

Instead of focusing on your grade in this class I would rather that you find the material interesting and useful in its own right as I hope that years down the road, the things you learn in this class will be of greater value to you than what grade you happened to receive. Recognizing, however, that your grades are of some importance, final letter grades will be calculated based on the total number of points earned with letter grades assigned as per the following:

Letters by percent			
A	100-93%	C+	79.99-77%
A-	92.99-90%	C	76.99-70%
B+	89.99-87%	D	69.99-60%
B	86.99-83%	F	59.99-0%
B-	82.99-80%		

Letters by points			
A	750-698	C+	599-578
A-	697-675	C	577-525
B+	674-652	D	524-450
B	652-623	F	449-0
B-	622-600		



**Respect Policy:**

Respect is an essential part of an effective classroom. By enrolling in this class, you are agreeing to show respect for the instructor, other students, and yourself. Please demonstrate respect by:

- Engaging in polite discussion and dignified discussion. The topic will require us to deal with some hot-button social issues, such as race, sex, religion, and politics, and we will certainly discuss some of these together in class. It is imperative that we approach these discussions in a polite manner, cooperatively focusing on and evaluating the merits of various relevant psychological ideas, research questions, and methodology.
- Arriving to class on time and staying until the end; doing otherwise disrupts class.
- Not using tablets, phones, or other devices; these devices are captivating and fun, which is exactly why (even with the best of intentions) they often end up being distractions in the classroom. Leave them at home or turn them off during class.

**Academic honesty:**

Academic integrity is fundamental to the activities and principles of a university. All members of the academic community must be confident that each person's work has been responsibly and honorably acquired, developed, and presented. Any effort to gain an advantage not given to all students is dishonest whether or not the effort is successful. The academic community regards breaches of the academic integrity rules as extremely serious matters. Sanctions for such a breach may include academic sanctions from the instructor, including failing the course for any violation, to disciplinary sanctions ranging from probation to expulsion. When in doubt about plagiarism, paraphrasing, quoting, collaboration, etc., consult the course instructor.

**Students with Disabilities:**

If you anticipate barriers related to the format or requirements of this course, if you have emergency medical information to share, or need to make arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please let me know as soon as possible. If disability related accommodations are necessary (for example, a note taker, extended time on exams, captioning), please register with the Office of Disability Services (<https://www.csuohio.edu/offices/disability/>), and notify me of your eligibility for reasonable accommodations. For other CSU resources for students with disabilities, click on "Disability Resources" at the bottom of the CSU homepage.

**Intellectual pluralism:**

The University community welcomes intellectual diversity and respects student rights. Students who have questions or concerns regarding the atmosphere in this class (including respect for diverse opinions) may contact the Department Chairperson or Undergraduate Director. All students will submit an anonymous evaluation of the instructor/course at the end of the course.

**Recording class material:**

Because your peers will be giving oral presentations, audio or video recordings of course activity is not allowed unless specifically permitted by the faculty member and/or students who are recorded. Further, the redistribution of audio or video recordings of statements or comments from the course to individuals who are not students in the course is prohibited without the express permission of the faculty member and of any students who are recorded.

## Course schedule\*

Week	Date	Topic	Readings
1	Tue Jan 13	Course intro, syllabus review	Syllabus
	Thur Jan 15	What is existential social psych? <b>Quiz 1</b>	See reading list...
2	Tue Jan 20	<b>MLK DAY – NO CLASS</b>	
	Thur Jan 22	Life & Death: Defense against mortality	See reading list...
3	Tue Jan 27	Life & Death: Defense against mortality <b>Quiz 2</b>	See reading list...
	Thur Jan 29	Life & Death: Embracing life and growth	See reading list...
4	Tue Feb 3	Life & Death: Embracing life and growth	See reading list...
	Thur Feb 5	<b>EXAM 1: cumulative + death, life/growth</b>	
5	Tue Feb 10	Freedom: Not enough.	See reading list...
	Thur Feb 12	Freedom: Too much.	See reading list...
6	Tue Feb 17	<b>PRESIDENT’S DAY – NO CLASS</b>	
	Thur Feb 19	Freedom: A happy medium? <b>Quiz 3</b>	See reading list...
7	Tue Feb 24	Identity: Formation/development & boundaries	See reading list...
	Thur Feb 26	Identity: The social and cultural self	See reading list...
8	Tue Mar 2	Identity: Authenticity & “true self”	See reading list...
	Thur Mar 4	<b>EXAM 2: cumulative + freedom, identity</b>	
9	Mar 8-12	<b>SPRING RECESS (NO CLASS)</b>	
10	Tue Mar 16	Isolation: The “me” and the “I”	See reading list...
	Thur Mar 18	Isolation: Uncertainty	See reading list...
11	Tue Mar 23	Isolation: Shared reality <b>Quiz 4</b>	See reading list...
	Thur Mar 25	Meaning: Micro and macro systems	See reading list...
12	Tue Mar 30	Meaning: Navigation, goals, purpose	See reading list...
	Thur Apr 1	Meaning: Individual differences & awe	See reading list...
13	Tue Apr 6	<b>EXAM 3: cumulative + isolation, meaning</b>	See reading list...
	Thur Apr 8	Religious/spiritual cognition: Is it “natural”? <b>Initial proposal idea/draft due</b>	See reading list...

14	Tue Apr 13	Religious/spiritual cognition: System 1 & 2.	See reading list...
	Thur Apr 15	Religious/spiritual cognition: Atheists <b>Quiz 5</b>	See reading list...
15	Tue Apr 20	Religious/spiritual motivation: Death, Freedom	See reading list...
	Thur Apr 22	Religious/spiritual motivation: Identity, Isolation	See reading list...
16	Tue Apr 27	Religious/spiritual motivation: Meaning, Purpose	See reading list...
	Thur Apr 29	<b>EXAM 4: cumulative + religion/spirituality</b>	
17	Tue May 4	Finals week – NO FINAL EXAM <b>Final Project Proposal Due</b>	

\*Revisions to the schedule will be announced in class and/or posted on Blackboard if necessary.

**DISCUSSION LEADER SCHEDULE (p. 1 of 4)**

Please sign up to be a discussion leader for ONE of the following sessions:

Thu, Jan 15            **What is existential social psychology?**

Discussion leaders:

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Thur, Jan 22            **Life & Death: Defense against mortality**

Discussion leaders:

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Tue, Jan 27            **Life & Death: Defense against mortality**

Discussion leaders:

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Thur, Jan 29            **Life & Death: Embracing life and growth**

Discussion leaders:

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Tue, Feb 3            **Life & Death: Embracing life and growth**

Discussion leaders:

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**DISCUSSION LEADER SCHEDULE (p. 2 of 4)**

Please sign up to be a discussion leader for ONE of the following sessions:

Thu, Jan 15            **Freedom: Too much**

Discussion leaders:

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Thur, Jan 22           **Freedom: Not enough**

Discussion leaders:

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Tue, Jan 27            **Freedom: A happy medium?**

Discussion leaders:

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Thur, Jan 29           **Identity: Formation/development & boundaries**

Discussion leaders:

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Tue, Feb 3            **Identity: The social and cultural self**

Discussion leaders:

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Tue, Feb 3            **Identity: Authenticity & the “true self”**

Discussion leaders:

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**DISCUSSION LEADER SCHEDULE (p. 3 of 4)**

Please sign up to be a discussion leader for ONE of the following sessions

Thu, Jan 15            **Isolation: The “me” and the “I”**

Discussion leaders:

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Thur, Jan 22            **Isolation: Uncertainty**

Discussion leaders:

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Tue, Jan 27            **Isolation: Shared reality**

Discussion leaders:

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Thur, Jan 29            **Meaning: Micro and Macro systems**

Discussion leaders:

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Tue, Feb 3            **Meaning: Navigation, goals, purpose**

Discussion leaders:

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Tue, Feb 3            **Meaning: Individual differences & awe**

Discussion leaders:

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**DISCUSSION LEADER SCHEDULE (p. 4 of 4)**

Please sign up to be a discussion leader for ONE of the following sessions.

Thu, Jan 15            **Religious/spiritual cognitions: Is it “natural”?**

Discussion leaders:

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Thur, Jan 22            **Religious/spiritual cognitions: System 1 & 2**

Discussion leaders:

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Tue, Jan 27            **Religious/spiritual cognitions: Atheists**

Discussion leaders:

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Thur, Jan 29            **Religious/spiritual motivation: Death, Freedom**

Discussion leaders:

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Tue, Feb 3            **Religious/spiritual motivation: Identity, Isolation**

Discussion leaders:

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Tue, Feb 3            **Religious/spiritual motivation: Meaning, Purpose**

Discussion leaders:

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**READING LIST (SUGGESTIONS)**  
**PSY593: The Science of Existential Social Psychology**

<b>Session 1</b>	<b>What is existential social psychology?</b>	<b>Content</b>
Pyszczynski, T., Greenberg, J., & Koole, S. (2004). <i>Experimental existential psychology: Exploring the human confrontation with reality. (pp. 3-9)</i>		6pg
	In J. Greenberg, S. L., Koole, & T. Pyszczynski (Eds.), <i>Handbook of experimental existential psychology</i> . New York: Guilford.	
Koole, S., Greenberg, J., & Pyszczynski, T. (2004). <i>The best of two worlds: Experimental existential psychology now and in the future. (pp. 497-504)</i>		8pg
	In J. Greenberg, S. L., Koole, & T. Pyszczynski (Eds.), <i>Handbook of experimental existential psychology</i> . New York: Guilford.	
Koole, S., Greenberg, J., & Pyszczynski, T. (2006). Introducing science to the psychology of the soul: Experimental existential psychology.		4pg
	<i>Perspectives in Psychological Science</i> , 15, 212-216.	
<b>3 readings; 18 pgs content</b>		
<b>Session 2</b>	<b>Life &amp; Death: Defense against mortality</b>	<b>Content</b>
Greenberg, J., Vail, K. E., & Pyszczynski, T. (2015). Terror management theory and research: How the desire for death transcendence drives our strivings for meaning and significance. (pp. 85-134)		39pg
	In A. Elliot (Ed.) <i>Advances in Motivation Science</i> . Academic Press.	
<b>1 readings; 39 pgs content</b>		
<b>Session 3</b>	<b>Life &amp; Death: Defense against mortality</b>	<b>Content</b>
Gailliot, M. T., Stillman, T. F., Schmeichel, B. J., Maner, J. K., & Plant, E. A. (2008). Mortality Salience Increases Adherence to Salient Norms and Values. <i>Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin</i> , 34, 993–1003		9pg
Peters, H. J., Greenberg, J., Williams, J. M., & Schneider, N. R. (2005). Applying Terror Management Theory to Performance: Can Reminding Individuals of Their Mortality Increase Strength Output? <i>Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology</i> , 27, 111–116.		5pg
Florian, V., Mikulincer, M., & Hirschberger, G. (2002). The anxiety-buffering function of close relationships: Evidence that relationship commitment acts as a terror management mechanism. <i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i> , 82, 527–542.		14pg
Routledge, C., & Arndt, J. (2008). Self-sacrifice as self-defence: Mortality salience increases efforts to affirm a symbolic immortal self at the expense of the physical self. <i>European Journal of Social Psychology</i> , 38, 531–541		9pg
<b>4 readings; 38 pgs content</b>		



<b>Session 4</b>	<b>Life &amp; Death: Embracing life and growth</b>	<b>Content</b>
	Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2019). Brick by brick: The origins, development, and future of self-determination theory. (pp. 111-156) In A. Elliot (Ed.) <i>Advances in Motivation Science</i> . Academic Press.	30pg
	Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2004). Avoiding Death or Engaging Life as Accounts of Meaning and Culture: Comment on Pyszczynski et al. (2004). <i>Psychological Bulletin</i> , 130, 473–477	4pg
		<b>2 readings; 34 pgs content</b>

<b>Session 5</b>	<b>Life &amp; Death: Embracing life and growth</b>	<b>Content</b>
	Niemiec, C. P., Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2010). The path taken: Consequences of attaining intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations in post-college life. <i>Journal of Research in Personality</i> , 43, 291-306	12pg
	Park, S. W., Bauer, J. J., & Arbuckle, N. B. (2009). Growth motivation attenuates the self-serving attribution. <i>Journal of Research in Personality</i> , 43, 914-917	3pg
	Bauer, J. J., Park, S. W., Montoya, R. M., & Wayment, H. A. (2015). Growth Motivation Toward Two Paths of Eudaimonic Self-Development. <i>Journal of Happiness Studies</i> , 16, 185–210	20pg
		<b>3 readings; 35 pgs content</b>

<b>Session 6</b>	<b>Freedom: Too much</b>	<b>Content</b>
	Schwartz, B. (2000). Self-determination: The tyranny of freedom. <i>American Psychologist</i> , 55, 79-88	9pg
	Iyengar, S. S., & Lepper, M. R. (2000). When choice is demotivating: Can one desire too much of a good thing? <i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i> , 79, 995-1006	10pg
	Chernev, A., Böckenholt, U., & Goodman, J. (2015). Choice overload: A conceptual review and meta-analysis. <i>Journal of Consumer Psychology</i> , 25, 333–358	~15pg
		<b>3 readings; 34 pgs content</b>

<b>Session 7</b>	<b>Freedom: Not enough</b>	<b>Content</b>
	Rosenberg, B. D., & Siegel, J. T. (2018). A 50-year review of psychological reactance theory: Do not read this article. <i>Motivation Science</i> , 4, 281–300	13pg
	Radel, R., Pelletier, L. G., Sarrazin, P., & Milyavskaya, M. (2011). Restoration process of the need for autonomy: The early alarm stage. <i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i> , 101, 919–934	12pg
	Sittenthaler, S., Jonas, E., & Traut-Mattausch, E. (2016). Explaining Self and Vicarious Reactance: A Process Model Approach. <i>Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin</i> , 42, 458–470	11pg
		<b>3 readings; 36 pgs content</b>

<b>Session 8 Freedom: A happy medium?</b>	<b>Content</b>
Schwartz, B., Ward, A., Monterosso, J., Lyubomirsky, S., White, K., & Lehman, D. R. (2002). Maximizing versus satisficing: Happiness is a matter of choice. <i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i> , 83(5), 1178–1197	~14pg
Haerens, L., Vansteenkiste, M., De Meester, A., Delrue, J., Tallir, I., Vande Broek, G., Goris, W., & Aelterman, N. (2018). Different combinations of perceived autonomy support and control: Identifying the most optimal motivating style. <i>Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy</i> , 23, 16–36	13pg
Wegner, D. M. (2004). Précis of The illusion of conscious will. <i>Behavioral and Brain Sciences</i> , 27(5), 649–659	10pg
<b>3 readings; 37 pgs content</b>	
<b>Session 9 Identity: Formation/development &amp; boundaries</b>	<b>Content</b>
McAdams, D. P. (2013). The Psychological Self as Actor, Agent, and Author. <i>Perspectives on Psychological Science</i> , 8, 272–295	19pg
Jiang, T., Chen, Z., & Sedikides, C. (2019). Self-concept clarity lays the foundation for self-continuity: The restorative function of autobiographical memory. <i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i>	11pg
McAdams, D. P., & Guo, J. (2015). Narrating the Generative Life. <i>Psychological Science</i> , 26(4), 475–483	6pg
<b>3 readings; 36 pgs content</b>	
<b>Session 10 Identity: The social and cultural self</b>	<b>Content</b>
Castano, E., Yzerbyt, V. Y., Paladino, M. P., & Carnaghi, A. (2006). Extending the self in space and time: Social identification and existential concerns. In R. Brown & D. Capozza (Eds.), <i>Social Identities: Motivational, Emotional and Cultural Influences</i> . (pp. 73–89). Psychology Press/Taylor & Francis (UK)	12pg
Jost, J. T. (2019). A quarter century of system justification theory: Questions, answers, criticisms, and societal applications. <i>British Journal of Social Psychology</i> , 58(2), 263–314	~20pg
Sullivan, D., Landau, M. J., Kay, A. C., & Rothschild, Z. K. (2012). Collectivism and the meaning of suffering. <i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i> , 103(6), 1023–1039	15pg
<b>3 readings; 47 pgs content</b>	
<b>Session 11 Identity: Authenticity &amp; the “true self”</b>	<b>Content</b>
Christy, A. G., Schlegel, R. J., & Cimpian, A. (2019). Why do people believe	18pg

in a “true self”? The role of essentialist reasoning about personal identity and the self. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 117, 386–416

Seto, E., & Schlegel, R. J. (2018). Becoming your true self: Perceptions of authenticity across the lifespan. *Self and Identity*, 17, 310–326 12pg

Heppner, W. L., Kernis, M. H., Nezlek, J. B., Foster, J., Lakey, C. E., & Goldman, B. M. (2008). Within-person relationships among daily self-esteem, need satisfaction, and authenticity. *Psychological Science*, 19, 1140–1145 4pg

**3 readings; 34 pgs content**

**Session 12 Isolation: The “me” and the “I”** **Content**

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 117, 497-529 20pg

Pinel, E. C., Long, A. E., Murdoch, E. Q., & Helm, P. (2017). A prisoner of one’s own mind: Identifying and understanding existential isolation. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 105, 54–63 8pg

Pinel, E. C., Long, E. L., Landau, M. J., Alexander, K., & Pyszczynski, T. (2006). Seeing I to I: A pathway to interpersonal connectedness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90, 243-257 10pg

**3 readings; 38 pgs content**

**Session 13 Isolation: Uncertainty** **Content**

van den Bos, K. (2009). Making sense of life: The existential self trying to deal with personal uncertainty. *Psychological Inquiry*, 20, 197-217 16pg

Hogg, M. A. (2014). From Uncertainty to Extremism: Social Categorization and Identity Processes. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 23(5), 338–342 4pg

Hohman, Z. P., Gaffney, A. M., & Hogg, M. A. (2017). Who am I if I am not like my group? Self-uncertainty and feeling peripheral in a group. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 72, 125–132 7pg

**3 readings; 27 pgs content**

**Session 14 Isolation: Shared reality** **Content**

Echterhoff, G., Higgins, E. T., & Levine, J. M. (2009). Shared reality: Experiencing commonality with others’ inner states about the world. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 4, 496-521 20pg

Boothby, E. J., Clark, M. S., Bargh, J. A. (2009). Shared experiences are amplified. *Psychological Science*, 25, 2209-2216 6pg

Iannone, N. E., Kelly, J. R., & Williams, K. D. (2018). “Who’s that?”: The negative consequences of being out of the loop on pop culture. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, 7, 113–129 14pg

Wesselmann, E. D., & Williams, K. D. (2017). Social life and social death: Inclusion, ostracism, and rejection in groups. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 20, 693–706 ~6pg

**4 readings; 46 pgs content**

**Session 15 Meaning: Micro and macro systems** **Content**

Baumeister, R. F., & Landau, M. J. (2018). Finding the Meaning of Meaning: Emerging Insights on Four Grand Questions. *Review of General Psychology*, 22(1), 1–10 9pg

Heine, S. J., Proulx, T., & Vohs, K. D. (2006). The meaning maintenance model: On the coherence of social motivations. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 10, 88-110 19pg

Heintzelman, S. J., Trent, J., & King, L. A. (2013). Encounters with objective coherence and the experience of meaning in life. *Psychology Science*, 24, 991-998 6pg

Randles, D., Proulx, T., & Heine, S. J. (2011). Turn-frogs and careful-sweaters: Non-conscious perception of incongruous word pairings provokes fluid compensation. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 47(1), 246–249 3pgs

**4 readings; 37 pgs content**

**Session 16 Meaning: Navigation, goals, purpose** **Content**

Fujita, K. (2008). Seeing the Forest Beyond the Trees: A Construal-Level Approach to Self-Control. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 2(3), 1475–1496 17pg

Kelemen, D., & Rosset, E. (2009). The human function compunction: Teleological explanation in adults. *Cognition*, 111, 138-143 6pg

Park, C. L. (2010). Making sense of the meaning literature: An integrative review of meaning making and its effects on adjustment to stressful life events. *Psychological Bulletin*, 136, 257-301 ~20pg

**3 readings; 43 pgs content**

**Session 17 Meaning: Individual differences & awe** **Content**

Van Tongeren, D. R., Davis, D. E., Hook, J. N., & Johnson, K. A. (2016). Security versus growth: Existential tradeoffs of various religious perspectives. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 8(1), 77–88 9pg

Steger, M. F., Shin, J. Y., Shim, Y., & Fitch-Martin, A. (2013). Is meaning in life a flagship indicator of well-being? In A. S. Waterman (Ed.), *The best within us: Positive psychology perspectives on eudaimonia*. (pp. 159–182). American Psychological Association ~19pg

Rivera, G. N., Vess, M., Hicks, J. A., & Routledge, C. (2020). Awe and meaning: Elucidating complex effects of awe experiences on meaning in life. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 50(2), 392–405 12pg

**3 readings; 40 pgs content****Session 18 Religious/spiritual cognitions: Is it “natural”?** **Content**

Bloom, P. (2007). Religion is natural. *Developmental Science*, 10, 147-151 5pg

Bering, J. M., & Bjorklund, D. F. (2004). The natural emergence of reasoning about the afterlife as a developmental regularity. *Developmental Psychology*, 40, 217-233 16pg

Atran, S., & Norenzayan, A. (2004). Religion’s evolutionary landscape: Counterintuition, commitment, compassion, communion. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 27(6), 713–730 15pg

**3 readings; 36 pgs content****Session 19 Religious/spiritual cognitions: System 1 & 2** **Content**

Baumard, N., & Boyer, P. (2013). Religious beliefs as reflective elaborations on intuitions: A modified dual-process model. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 22, 295-300 5pg

Zuckerman, M., Silberman, J. & Hall, J. A. (2013). The relation between intelligence and religiosity: A meta-analysis and some proposed explanations. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 17, 325-354 ~20pg

Järnefelt, E., Canfield, C. F., & Kelemen, D. (2015). The divided mind of a disbeliever: Intuitive beliefs about nature as purposefully created among different groups of non-religious adults. *Cognition*, 140, 72–88 12pg

**3 readings; 37 pgs content****Session 20 Religious/spiritual cognitions: Atheists** **Content**

Norenzayan, A., & Gervais, W. M. (2012). The origins of religious disbelief. *Trends in cognitive sciences*, 17, 20-25 5pg

Schiavone, S. R., & Gervais, W. M. (2017). Atheists. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 11, 1–13 9pg

Galen, L. W. (2018). Focusing on the nonreligious reveals secular mechanisms underlying well-being and prosociality. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 10, 296–306 8pg

Galen, Luke William, & Kloet, J. D. (2011). Mental well-being in the religious and the non-religious: Evidence for a curvilinear relationship. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 14, 673–689 15pg

**4 readings; 37 pgs content****Session 21 Religious/spiritual motivation: Death, Freedom** **Content**

Vail, K. E., Soenke, M., & Waggoner, B. (2019). Terror management theory and religious belief. In C. Routledge & M. Vess (Eds.), *Handbook of terror management theory* (pp. 259–285). Elsevier Academic Press 20pg

Christy, A. G., Rivera, G. N., & Schlegel, R. J. (2020). Authenticity and the 14pg

true self in religion and spirituality. In K. E. Vail & C. Routledge (Eds.), *The science of religion, spirituality, and existentialism* (pp. 119-139). Elsevier Academic Press

**2 readings; 34 pgs content**

**Session 22 Religious/spiritual motivation: Identity, Isolation** **Content**

Palitsky, R., Sullivan, D., Young, I. F., & Schmitt, H. J. (2020). Religion and the construction of identity. In K. E. Vail & C. Routledge (Eds.), *The science of religion, spirituality, and existentialism* (pp. 207-222). Elsevier Academic Press 12pg

Granqvist, P., Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2020). An attachment theory perspective on religion and spirituality. In K. E. Vail & C. Routledge (Eds.), *The science of religion, spirituality, and existentialism* (pp. 175-186). Elsevier Academic Press 9pg

Aydin, N., Fischer, P., Frey, D. (2010). Turning to god in the face of ostracism: Effects of social exclusion on religiousness. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 36, 742-753 10pg

**3 readings; 31 pgs content**

**Session 23 Religious/spiritual motivation: Meaning, Purpose** **Content**

Stauner, N., Exline, J. J., & Wilt, J. A. (2020). Meaning, religious/spiritual struggles, and well-being. In K. E. Vail & C. Routledge (Eds.), *The science of religion, spirituality, and existentialism* (pp. 287-304). Elsevier Academic Press 13pg

Kay, A. C., Gaucher, D., Napier, J. L., Callan, M. J., Laurin, K. (2008). God and the government: Testing a compensatory control mechanism for the support of external systems. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 95, 18-35 15pg

Routledge, C., Roylance, C., & Abeyta, A. A. (2017). Miraculous Meaning: Threatened Meaning Increases Belief in Miracles. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 56(3), 776-783 6pg

**3 readings; 34 pgs content**