

Making Observations of Psychological Processes in Everyday Life

Introduction to the Project

This semester you will be participating in an ongoing project that seeks to link the concepts we will be discussing in class with real-life experiences and observations. The guiding principle of this research is that since all normal human beings have minds, psychological processes affect everything and anything that we normally do. And since people have an enormous amount of experience by the time they are adults normal people have a huge repertoire of effect ways to see, think about and act on the world-at-large. What we are aware of is largely what we are not (yet) on top of, though, and whatever works reasonably well we just simply do. Paradoxically that means that we seldom know how we do things and often don't even know that we are doing them.

The knowledge about our own minds and the minds of other people which we constantly use to understand what they are doing and decide what to do in response, is embodied in what psychologists call *folk psychology*. This Project is intended to help you recognize how folk psychology works to form our ideas and structure our actions and then to move beyond the limits it imposes to achieve more complex and ultimately more effective means of intervention.

In the pages that follow you will find brief outlines of the Topics this course will consider and a set of questions to guide your research. The questions are intended to be provocative but they are not intended to be complete. There are many other worthwhile questions you can use and I hope you will develop some of your own and share them with the class as we go along.

Spread your nets wide. In general it's easier to observe what other people do and don't do, but of course we are people ourselves and so what others do, we also do. In this regard it's particularly interesting to consider situations where people do things we don't approve of or think wise and so resolve not to do—but then find themselves doing anyway.

The results of your research will be used in class to fuel discussions. The more surprising your observations the better, though it's worth remembering that sometimes the most interesting things we discover are the ones happening right in front of our noses that somehow we had not previously noticed. You will work in teams and we will spend some time in class creating functioning, productive teams. Good teamwork will not just be rewarded with pats on the back—each team can earn extra grade points by working together effectively.

Mechanics: What you will actually be doing

[1] Group Work, Part One

Groups of 4 students will work together on this Project.

[2] Get Started

The first thing to do is to acquaint yourself with the Topics of the course and make sure you have a basic understanding of the concepts. I have provided some questions as to how to go about finding examples for each Topic (such as Learning) in the PDFs listed in the Research Topics section of the website.

[3] Group Work, Part Two

Groups will be assigned to provide information about each of *four* of the following Topics over the course of the semester. The assignments of which Topics your Group will cover will be made in class

Each member of each group is required to find an example for each of the Topics assigned to your Group.

Examples must be

- Prepared
- Posted (via the *postings* function on the OpenLab website for your course; more below)
- Signed
- Categorized (more information below) both for
 - Topic that the observation pertains to
 - Group that you belong to

[4] The course will cover the following Topics:

- Learning
- Cognition
- Neuroscience
- Memory
- Intelligence
- Development
- Emotion
- Motivation
- Personality
- Social Psychology

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- Psychological Conditions
- Treatment of Psychological Disorders

There are twelve Topics and each will get about one week of our attention, though if we get enough interesting examples we can spend more time on a given Topic.

[5] Preparation of your observations

a. Make sure to provide references for your examples. Dependent on the source, this could be a url or a note you made about a conversation you overheard. If it pertains to something you observed, a TV program or a news report, be sure to cite the situation or program in which it occurred and the date and time of broadcast. If it is a written source, provide references as you would do for writing a paper for school. If your observation involves observations made of people, be sure to document where the observations were made and, when appropriate, what was going on when they were made.

b. For each observation, provide

- A brief description (2-3 sentences) that explains what happened
- Enough additional sentences to explain what your example tells about the Topic
- Documentation of source, that is
 - Proper, full references for all written or published sources and
 - Information about where, when and under what circumstances personal observations were made

c. Each observation can earn up to 50 points for the observer. [See Grading Rubric for how observations will be graded.] When all members of the Team post observations all members of the Team will receive an additional 25 points.

[6] Presentation of your observations

Observations will be reported via *Postings* on the OpenLab website for this course.

Each posting must be *labeled by category* in two ways:

- According to which *Topic* you are reporting on
- According to which *Group* you belong to

Failure to provide proper categorization will lead to failure to get credit for your own work and also will prevent your Group from getting the bonus points awarded to every Group all of whose members make submissions.

Each student is responsible for making at least one observation for each topic assigned to their Group.

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Use the resources of your teams, and be as creative as you can be. Let no one do all the work, and let no one be left out!

Learning Goals:

a. This project is designed to have students

- 1) Do some naturalistic research
- 2) Extend their understanding of pertinent areas in psychology (such as 'memory distortion' and 'altruism') to real-life situations
- 3) Deepen their understanding of such topics
- 4) Challenge their existent ways of thinking about humans and their minds

b. The project involves three steps. Students

1. Must acquaint themselves with each Topic and familiarize themselves with the basic concepts that comprise the topic
2. Use this information to find examples that correspond to Topics from real-life sources
 - Such sources include, but are not limited to, newspapers and other news reports; online sources of information; observations of others (students, people on the street, et al); movies and tv; etc
3. Provide brief descriptions of how they believe their examples demonstrate the concept(s) pertinent to their topic

c. The *primary goal* of the exercise is to bridge the gap between 'intellectual' and 'practical' or 'lived' understanding by getting students to utilize concepts learned from books, notes and in class in their everyday lives.

d. *Secondary goals* include:

- Learning how to do basic research
- Learning how to utilize everyday resources to garner information about psychological processes
- Learning how to evaluate information gathered from different sources
- Learning the rudiments of systemic thinking (by placing observations into appropriate larger (social) systems).

e. A *tertiary goal* is to foster interaction between and among students by creating conditions in (and perhaps around) the classroom that encourage sharing findings, evaluating each other's observations and debating critical points about the material.