

**General Psychology Fall 2005
Monday/Wednesday 5:00- 6:15
PSY 80272 section 03; 3 credits**

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"Be patient toward all that is unsolved [in your heart] and try to love the questions themselves." -Rilke

"Mental health results from the fulfillment of archetypal goals."- Anthony Stevens and John Price, *Evolutionary Psychiatry* (2000)

"Like the T cells of the body, the healthy psyche fights off infection, rejecting false voice and false relationships." - Carol Gilligan, *The Birth of Pleasure* (2002)

Typically, the introductory statement of a General Psychology syllabus might include the topics and areas that will be covered (see calendar/schedule further down in syllabus for that). However, although the topics we will cover this semester are important, I nevertheless would like to emphasize some things that sometimes get paid lip service, but seldom are treated with any seriousness or are truly valued.

In some ways, we are all psychologists—natural born psychologists. That is, trying to figure out and understand human behavior and the human mind is, I would argue, an innate tendency. We come from a long line of ancestors who tried to figure out human behavior and the mind. Those who weren't interested in such things, those who didn't try to figure out human behavior and 'other minds' (and eventually 'the mind'), were probably not as successful and did not survive. This is a rather speculative and crude evolutionary explanation, but clearly, knowledge-seeking, making sense of the world, having schemas, and understanding causal relationships benefited our ancestors' survival and reproduction. This is where we come from, and this is who we are. Being a knowledge-seeker (a philosopher, say) aids one in gaining status, power and resources (survival) which helps in gaining access to potential 'high quality' mates (reproduction). But also, when we engage in the pursuit of gaining *any* kind of knowledge (e.g., knowledge regarding whether one's partner is having an affair, what teacher is the best in the school, which political candidate is less likely to pollute our air, what is the best, healthiest diet), it is often about one's survival (and one's offspring's survival) and reproduction in the here and now.

But in another sense, knowledge-seeking is just simply pleasurable. It feels good to try to figure out causal relationships even if there is no immediate benefit in the here and now, because it *is* driven by an ancient program. It is because this program is related to survival and reproduction that when we engage in any epistemic pursuit, it lights up our reward centers—it simply feels good. And that’s my primary goal for the class: to activate the intrinsic knowledge-seeking tendency in you—the part of you that feels good engaged in the quest “to know”; to inspire a little epistemic passion; to further your way toward critical thinking and individuation—to get you to become evaluativists; to ignite your interest in the human mind; to instill (if not already present) a passion for writing, to facilitate opening your minds a little; to challenge you, to provide opportunities and an environment for you to feel safe to stretch your mind and to question and re-think some of your assumptions and beliefs; to help to expand, deepen, and enrich your mind —