PSYC S306: Nature, Nurture, & Human Development
Summer 2014, Session B (7 July – 8 August)
TTh 1:00-2:15

Instructor: Julia Kim-Cohen, PhD
Email: julia.kim-cohen@yale.edu
Office hours: Immediately after class & by appointment

Prerequisite: PYSC 110 (Introduction to Psychology or equivalent)

Course Description
To what degree are human abilities, traits, and mental disorders determined by nature and/or nurture? Is the question of nature vs. nurture a meaningless inquiry or a debate that is still alive and well? What promise does the genomics revolution hold for solving problems of human misery? This course will provide an overview of the study of genetic and non-genetic contributions to individual differences in human behavior and development. Topics will cover research methods for identifying genetic and environmental influences, with a focus on cognitive abilities, personality, psychopathology, and sexual orientation. Students will explore ways in which the fields of psychology and behavioral genetics can be synergistically combined to answer questions regarding the interplay of nature and nurture in human behavioral development. Throughout the course, an emphasis will be placed on identifying ethical dilemmas raised by emerging findings in behavioral genetics, how such findings are portrayed by the media, and what implications they have for advancing theories, research methods, clinical practice, and policy.

Readings
There is no textbook for this course. Original empirical articles, review papers, and book chapters have been carefully selected to complement the material that will be presented in lecture. Readings will be a mix of “classic” and “cutting-edge” papers. Typically, 6-9 readings will be assigned per week. Students will receive guidance on how to improve their reading of primary source material.

Class Format
No more than half of each class meeting will be devoted to lecture. The rest of the time will consist of class discussion, class debate, small group work, film excerpts, and student presentations. Sessions will be interactive, and hopefully, fun!
Course Requirements & Grading

1. Participation (20%). Participation in class discussions, activities, and debates will be an important component of this course. It will be to your advantage to come to class having read the material assigned and ready to think critically about the topic. Attendance will not be taken, but periodically, I will be assigning 1-minute papers in class that reflect upon my teaching and the day’s lecture. These papers will not be graded, but your attendance will be recorded and will contribute toward your grade.

2. Response Papers (10%). Students will submit 5 response papers (1-2-page, double-spaced maximum) throughout the session. You may choose to focus in-depth on a single reading or integrate ideas across readings. In either case, your paper should end with a question for class discussion. Your response paper must be emailed to the instructor no later than 10am on the day of a class meeting. Each response paper will be worth 2% of your grade.

3. Writing Assignment: Media Critique (15%). Students will find a news article of 500 words or more that reports on a genetic finding relevant for psychology. Based on the news article (published since 1995) and the original journal article on which it is based, students are to prepare a 3-5 page (double-spaced) critique of the news article’s claims and assess the degree to which it correctly represents the research finding and whether it might mislead the public’s understanding of genetics and behavior. Papers are due by 5PM on Friday, July 25th.

4. Presentation (5%). Students will share their media critique with the class in a brief 10-minute presentation and facilitate a short discussion. Further details regarding this assignment will be provided in class.

5. Exam 1 (20%). This exam will cover Methods & Approaches for studying nature-nurture interplay. It will consist of multiple-choice, short answer questions, and 2-3 short essays.

6. Exam 2 (30%). This exam will cover Individual Differences & Psychopathology. It will also consist of multiple-choice, short answer questions, and 3-4 short essays.

Grades in this course will not be curved. Grades for any assignment and final grades will be earned according to the following:

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<th>Grade</th>
<th>B+</th>
<th>86-89%</th>
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A necessary note on plagiarism: Please don’t do it. Don’t cheat someone out of the credit they deserve for an idea, whether published or unpublished, and don’t cheat yourself out of an opportunity to practice and learn writing and thinking skills. The urge to plagiarize can arise due to the stress of facing a looming deadline. Prevent this by planning ahead and working ahead of deadline. Don’t wait until the last minute and seek help from the instructor—I am here to make this a good learning experience for you.
Tentative Dates & Topics

Tuesday, July 8 (Week 1 – 1)

- Welcome, Introduction & Overview
- Review of Syllabus
- Testing causation in non-experimental research
- Reading exercise: close reading of an empirical journal article
- Film excerpt: “Oskar & Jack”

Thursday, July 10 (Week 1 – 2)

- Heritability: how much is “nature” and how much is “nurture”? 
- Varieties of gene-environment interplay
  1. Gene-environment correlation (rGE)
  2. Gene-environment interaction (GxE)

Tuesday, July 15 (Week 2 – 3)

- Varieties of gene-environment interplay (cont.)
  3. Epigenetics
- Behavior genetics & the media

Thursday, July 17 (Week 2 – 4)

- Exam 1 (1:00 - 2:15)
- Overview of Individual Differences & Psychopathology
- Personality

Tuesday, July 22 (Week 3 – 5)

- Cognitive Ability
- Behavior Genetics and Equality
- Film excerpt: “Gattaca”

Thursday, July 24 (Week 3 – 6)

- Class debate 1: “Should scientists study the genetics of race and IQ?”
- Sexual Orientation
- Film excerpt: “Twilight of the Golds”
- Media Critiques DUE by 5PM Friday, July 25th.
Tuesday, July 29 (Week 4 – 7)

- Student presentations of media critiques
- Primer on psychiatric diagnoses
- PTSD

Thursday, July 31 (Week 5 – 8)

- Schizophrenia
- Antisocial behavior, violence, & crime

Tuesday, August 5 (Week 6 – 9)

- Class debate: “Should DNA be used in criminal defense?”
- Addiction

Thursday, August 7 (Week 6 – 10)

- Exam 2 (1:00 – 2:30)
- The Future – what’s next?
- Wrap-up

Selected Reading List


Kendler, K. S. (2013). What psychiatric genetics has taught us about the nature of psychiatric illness and what is left to learn. Molecular Psychiatry, 18, 1058-1066.


