

## The Psychology of Changing One's Mind

**Course:** Psych S434E

**When:** Summer 2025, Mon/Wed, 9am-10:30pm (Summer session B)  
June 30-August 1

**Where:** Remote learning (zoom link TBD)

**Instructor:** Professor Melissa Ferguson

**Instructor Office:** 100 College St., Room 1422

**Instructor Email:** [melissa.ferguson@yale.edu](mailto:melissa.ferguson@yale.edu)

**TF office hours:** By appointment

**Lab:** [www.fergusonlab.com](http://www.fergusonlab.com)

**TF:** Arin Korkmaz

**TF Office:** 100 College St., Room 1444D

**TF Email:** [arin.korkmaz@yale.edu](mailto:arin.korkmaz@yale.edu)

**Instructor office hours:** By appointment

The enrollment for this course is capped at 20. Please email the professor about enrolling.

### Course description

When and how do we change our minds? We are constantly learning information about other individuals, groups, objects, ideas, and so on, but this new information does not always influence what we think and how we feel. What determines when we update our beliefs and feelings? This course will review cutting-edge psychological science to answer this question, with special attention to social and cognitive research on how we change our minds about other individuals and groups.

### Learning goals

- Understand the latest social and cognitive psychological research on how, when, and why people change their minds
- Know cutting-edge research on how people change their minds about individuals, groups, and news topics in particular
- Appreciate (with a critical perspective) how psychological research can be applied to everyday topics related to persuasion
- Mastery of these goals will be assessed through participation in class discussion, discussion leading, reaction papers, and the term paper

### Course details

**Readings.** Students are required to read the assigned readings before each class. The materials consist primarily of empirical articles. I will post the materials on Canvas (<https://canvas.yale.edu/>) at least a week before class, but you may also access the articles electronically anytime through the library or internet.

**Reaction papers.** For each week, students will post a brief reaction paper consisting of 3 discussion points to the Canvas site by **5:00 p.m. EST** on each Sunday. The discussion points should address aspects of the readings from the upcoming week (the following Monday and Wednesday classes) that you found interesting, provocative, or confusing. At least one of the points should entail a critique of one or more of the readings. All 3 discussion points should demonstrate that you have read the corresponding readings (they should be detailed enough to show that you read it carefully) and that you have thought about the relevant lectures from the previous classes. You do not need to write about all the readings! They will be graded as either 0 (missing), .5 (needs improvement), or 1 (satisfactory). They should be 1 page in length max total for all 3 points combined, and double spaced.

**\*\*Please post these reaction papers directly into Canvas rather than attaching a word doc.\*\***

**\*\*You can choose 1 week where you don't submit discussion questions.\*\***

**Example Portfolio.** Due at the end of the fourth week of classes (the Friday of the 4<sup>th</sup> week, 5pm EST), in this assignment you will describe 4 real-world examples of content relevant to changing people's minds and relate some of the readings to these examples. For example, you can choose a movie, news article, social media post, or art installation and describe how it relates to any of the assigned readings in the class and how it relates to the topic of changing one's mind. There should be ½ page of description for each example (2 pages max for the entire assignment, double spaced).

**Research Paper.** Each student will be required to turn in a research paper at the end of the summer session. The proposal must be in APA format. We will talk more about papers objectives and criteria in class.

9-10 page research proposal (double space, one inch margins, max 10.5 pages, not including references). Topic can be selected from those discussed in class.

On the last day of class, each student will give a brief (~5 min) description of their paper.

### **Requirements and Evaluations**

1. Participation in classroom discussions (20%)
2. Weekly reaction papers (4 total; 20%)
3. Example Portfolio (4 pages; 20%)
4. Research proposal, 10 pages (40%)

### **Our learning environment**

**Mental Health and world events.** Students often struggle at various points throughout their time in academia (and people in general frequently struggle at various points throughout their lives!). **If you're feeling like you're struggling at any point, I encourage you to please reach out and talk to someone.** You can reach out to me too to discuss class assignments, or to hear about further

Commented [AKI]: Should we change them to discussion points? I know the first version of this said had an assignment where they had to post 3 questions.

resources. I can connect you to people who can help. See mental health resources at Yale here: <https://yalehealth.yale.edu/directory/departments/mental-health-counseling>

Respect for Diversity. I am committed to fostering a civil, respectful, and open-minded climate so that all of us can live and work in a learning environment free of harassment, bias-motivated behaviors, unfair treatment, and fear. Yale University expects all members of our community to refrain from actions or behaviors that intimidate, humiliate, or demean persons or groups or that undermine their security or self-esteem based on traits related to race, ethnicity, country of origin, religion, gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, age, or physical or mental ability, including learning and/or developmental disabilities and past/present history of mental disorder or other category protected by state or federal law.

With regard to building and sustaining a supportive learning environment, your suggestions on any of the material we cover are encouraged and appreciated. Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students or student groups. If any of our class meetings conflict with your religious events, please let me know so that I can make arrangements for you. Please note that emails and personal conversations with me will always be kept confidential as long as they do not warrant mandated reporting (for sexual harassment or physical danger to you or others).

If you encounter sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, sexual assault, or discrimination based on race, color, religion, age, national origin, ancestry, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability please contact the Title IX Coordinator, Elizabeth Conklin, at [elizabeth.conklin@yale.edu](mailto:elizabeth.conklin@yale.edu), 203.432.6670, or any of the University Title IX Coordinators: <http://provost.yale.edu/titleix/coordinators>. Keep in mind that if you report an instance of sexual misconduct to a faculty/staff member, they must notify our college's Title IX coordinator about the basic facts of the incident (you may choose to request confidentiality from the University).

Please know that I am committed to the [Yale Department of Psychology's commitment](#) to ensuring an inclusive and diverse community that provides a safe environment for learning and working in which everyone can thrive. In and out of class, I will promote honesty and integrity and encourage healthy debate, discourse, and exchange of ideas. I ask you to please respect and support class members by:

- Being courteous in your interactions with and discourse about others
- Giving all community members a chance to voice their thoughts
- Ensuring that, when offered, criticism is polite and constructive
- Avoiding judging, discriminating, or making unwelcome jokes or disparaging remarks

If something is said in class (by anyone) that makes you feel uncomfortable, please talk to me about it. I also will set up a form by which you can submit any concerns anonymously.

Disability Accommodation. Yale is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to students with permanent and temporary disabilities. Please contact the Resource Office on Disabilities if you would like more information or to arrange accommodations. Also, if you are struggling with this course, please consider contacting me, the Resources Office on Disabilities (<https://sas.yale.edu/>), and/or the Poorvu Center (<https://poorvucenter.yale.edu/>) for help.

### **Academic Integrity**

Our community takes academic integrity very seriously. Forms of academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, cheating and improper sourcing, will not be tolerated. For definitions please refer to: <http://catalog.yale.edu/undergraduate-regulations/regulations/academic-dishonesty/>. Submission of work that is plagiarized at any stage (draft or final form) will be given a failing grade for the course. You will be reported to the Executive Committee, as required by Yale policy. All writing assignments in this course will be submitted to Turnitin via the Assignments folder in Canvas. Turnitin generates a report on the originality of your writing by comparing it with a database of periodicals, books, online content, student papers, and other published work. This report can help you discern when you are using sources fairly, citing properly, and paraphrasing effectively—skills essential to all academic work. I recommend that you submit your reaction papers and term paper early enough to review your Turnitin report before the respective due date. Then, if necessary, you will have time to ask for help from me, or from someone at the Writing Center. The Poorvu Center website (<https://poorvucenter.yale.edu/>) explains how to view your similarity report and provides a useful discussion on using sources in academic writing.

### **Course policy on using Generative AI**

The use of Generative AIs (e.g., ChatGPT, Bard, etc.) is permitted in this course as long as they are used responsibly as a source of assistance and support. For example, you can use these tools to check your grammar, rephrase your sentences, and help you fine-tune your ideas.

However, as described in the previous section, **all assignments should be your original work**. If you do use Generative AIs, you will need to use the proper citations as you would do for other sources (<https://apastyle.apa.org/blog/how-to-cite-chatgpt>).

More generally, we encourage you to use Generative AIs responsibly and be aware of the consequences and implications of using them in your coursework (in general) but especially for the “The Psychology of Changing One’s Mind.”

- Generative AIs may produce inaccurate, incomplete, and biased content.
- Generative AIs may cite wrong sources or not cite their sources at all.
- Most importantly, for the purposes of this course, relying on these tools irresponsibly may hinder your progress as critical thinkers.
- Output produced by generative AIs may sound convincing, scholarly, intelligent, and impressive, however, upon careful probing, you may find yourself underwhelmed by the content.

If you don’t believe the instructors here’s what a Generative AI recommends:

Prompt written by TF Arin Korkmaz after the policy above was written:

“Should students use generative artificial intelligence to write their reaction papers for the readings that they read for a course called “The Psychology of Changing One's mind?” Limit your response to 400 characters with spaces.”

Output of ChatGPT:

“Students should engage with the readings and think critically about them on their own. Generative AI can be a tool for brainstorming or refining ideas, but relying on it to write reaction papers undermines the learning process. (OpenAI, 2025)”

OpenAI. (2025). *ChatGPT* (April 2 version) [Large language model]. <https://chat.openai.com/chat>

Resources on how Generative AI works:  
<https://poorvucenter.yale.edu/AIguidance#1%20Understanding%20AI%20Chatbots>

### **Attendance**

For summer session, attendance is expected and there should be no unexcused absences.

**Acknowledgments:** Some of the above content was adopted with permission from syllabi from Professor Yael Niv (Princeton University), Professor Molly Crockett (Princeton University), and Professor Maria Gendron (Yale University). Many thanks to them for thoughtful content.

## **COURSE SCHEDULE AND READINGS – 5-week schedule**

### **WEEK 1**

#### **Online content: Self-change**

- The illusion of the end of history; <https://www.experimental-history.com/p/the-illusion-of-moral-decline>
- [https://www.ted.com/talks/dan\\_gilbert\\_the\\_psychology\\_of\\_your\\_future\\_self?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/dan_gilbert_the_psychology_of_your_future_self?language=en)
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/04/science/study-in-science-shows-end-of-history-illusion.html>

#### **Recorded Lecture: The illusion of moral decline**

Suggested reading (not required): Mastroianni, A. M., & Gilbert, D. T. (2023). The illusion of moral decline. *Nature*, 618(7966), 782-789. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-023-06137-x>

#### **Class 1: Do people change their minds in general?**

- Why Did We Stop Believing That People Can Change?  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/22/opinion/forgiveness-redemption.html?referringSource=articleShare>

- The brain isn't supposed to change this much. <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2021/06/the-brain-isnt-supposed-to-change-this-much/619145/>
- Mastroianni, A., & Dana, J. (2022). Widespread misperceptions of long-term attitude change. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 119 (11), e2107260119
- Klein, N., & O'Brien, E. (2018). People Use Less Information Than They Think to Make Up their Minds. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. [[Link](#)]

### **Class 2: Changing minds through active and passive dialogue**

- Rathje, S., Hackel, L. M., & Zaki, J. (2021). Attending live theatre improves empathy, changes attitudes, and leads to pro-social behavior. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*. [[PDF](#)]
- Atir, S., Wald, Kristina., & Epley, N. (2022). Talking with strangers is surprisingly informative. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 119, e2206992119.
- Wald, K. A., Kardas, M., & Epley, N. (2024). Misplaced Divides? Discussing Political Disagreement With Strangers Can Be Unexpectedly Positive. *Psychological Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09567976241230005>

### **WEEK 2**

#### **Online content: Ugly Side of Beauty?**

- First 35 minutes only: Vedantam, S. (Host) Zayas, V. (Guest) (2023, December 23). *Ugly Side of Beauty*. Retrieved from <https://hiddenbrain.org/podcast/the-ugly-side-of-beauty/>

#### **Recorded Lecture: How Influential Are Impressions from Photos?**

- Suggested reading (not required): Günaydin, G., Selcuk, E., & Zayas, V. (2016). Impressions based on a portrait predict, one month later, impressions following a live interaction. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*. [Download Supplementary Materials](#)

#### **Class 3: How faces change minds**

- Todorov, A., Mandisodza, A. N., Goren, A., & Hall, C. C. (2005). Inferences of Competence from Faces Predict Election Outcomes. *Science*. <https://doi.org/03081623>
- Todorov, A. (2018). Can we read a person's character from facial images? *Scientific American*. Available at <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/can-we-read-a-persons-character-from-facial-images/>
- Madan, S., Savani, K., & Johar, G. V. (2022). How you look is who you are: The appearance reveals character lay theory increases support for facial profiling. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 123(6), 1223.

#### **Class 4: Can we resist the influence of the face/appearance?**

- Axt, J. R., Yang, J., & Deshpande, H. (2022). Misplaced Intuitions in Interventions to Reduce Attractiveness-Based Discrimination. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672221074748>
- Hong, S., Suk, H. W., Choi, Y., & Na, J. (2021). Face-Based Judgments: Accuracy, Validity, and a Potential Underlying Mechanism. *Psychological Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09567976211000308>

### **WEEK 3**

#### **Online content: Can a podcast change your mind on big game hunters?**

- Adler, S. (Host) (2021, May 27). *RadioLab: The Rhino Hunter*. Retrieved from <https://radiolab.org/podcast/rhino-hunter>

#### **Recorded lecture: Can a podcast change implicit impressions?**

- Suggested reading (not required): Kurdi, B., Mann, T. C., & Ferguson, M. J. (2022). Persuading the implicit mind: Changing negative implicit evaluations with an 8-minute podcast. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*. <http://doi.org/10.1177/19485506211037140>

#### **Class 5: Changing the prejudiced implicit mind?**

- Charlesworth, T. E. S., & Banaji, M. R. (2022) Patterns of Implicit and Explicit Attitudes IV: Persistence and responsiveness in attitude change from 2017-2020. *Psychological Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09567976221084257>. [OSF] [pdf]
- Ofosu, E.K., Chambers, M.K., Chen, J.M., & Hehman, E. (2019). Same-sex marriage legalization associated with reduced implicit and explicit anti-gay bias. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 116, 8846-8851.

#### **Class 6: Changing the prejudiced explicit mind?**

- Broockman, D. E. & Kalla, J. K. (2016). Durably reducing transphobia: a field experiment on door-to-door canvassing. *Science*, 352(6282): 220-224.
- Bruneau, E., Casas, A., Hameiri, B., & Kteily, N. (2022). Exposure to a media intervention helps promote support for peace in Colombia. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 6(6), 847-857. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-022-01330-w>
- Onyeador, I., Hudson, S. T. J., & Lewis, N. A., Jr. (2021). Moving beyond implicit bias training: Policy insights for increasing organizational diversity. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 8(1), 19-26.

### **WEEK 4**

#### **Online content: Cults!**

- Leon Festinger and the Alien Apocalypse [Futility Closet]. (2019, February 4). 235-*Leon Festinger and the Alien Apocalypse* [Video]. Youtube.com. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fy06VDrnh7A>

### **Recorded lecture: Who Tends to Believe Conspiracies?**

- Suggested readings (not required): Imhoff, R., Zimmer, F., Klein, O., Antonio, J. H., Babinska, M., Bangertner, A., Bilewicz, M., Blanuša, N., Bovan, K., Bužarovska, R., Cichočka, A., Delouvé, S., Douglas, K. M., Dyrendal, A., Etienne, T., Gjoneska, B., Graf, S., Gualda, E., Hirschberger, G., Kende, A., Kutiyki, Y., Krekó, P., Krouwel, A., Mari, S., Milošević Đorđević, J., Panasiti, M. S., Pantazi, M., Petkovski, L., Porciello, G., Rabelo, A., Radu, R., Sava, F., Schepisi, M., Sutton, R. M., Swami, V., Thórisdóttir, H., Turjačanin, V., Wagner-Egger, P., Žeželj, I., & van Prooijen, J.-W. (2022). Conspiracy mentality and political orientation across 26 countries. *Nature Human Behaviour*. doi:10.1038/s41562-021-01258-7
- Cohen, G. L. (2003). Party over policy: The dominating impact of group influence on political beliefs. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85(5), 808-822.

### **Class 7: Cults and conspiracies**

- [THE-PSYCHOLOGY-OF-THE-CULT-EXPERIENCE-The-New-York-Times.pdf](#)
- [https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/07/12/what-makes-a-cult-a-cult?utm\\_source=on-site-share&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=on-site-share&utm\\_brand=the-new-yorker](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/07/12/what-makes-a-cult-a-cult?utm_source=on-site-share&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=on-site-share&utm_brand=the-new-yorker)
- Op-ed by Robson: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/nov/29/how-to-deal-with-a-conspiracy-theorist-5g-covid-plandemic>
- Costello, T. H., Pennycook, G., & Rand, D. G. (2024). Durably reducing conspiracy beliefs through dialogues with AI. *Science*, 385(6714), DOI:10.1126/science.adq1814.

### **Class 8: Fake News and Misinformation**

- The Right Way to Fight Fake News <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/24/opinion/fake-news-social-media.html>
- Arechar, A. A., Allen, J., Berinsky, A. J., Cole, R., Epstein, Z., Garimella, K., Gully, A., Lu, J. G., Ross, R. M., Stagnaro, M. N., Zhang, Y., Pennycook, G., & Rand, D. G. (2023). Understanding and combatting misinformation across 16 countries on six continents. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 7(9), 1502-1513. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-023-01641-6>
- Martel, C., Rathje, S., Clark, C. J., Pennycook, G., Van Bavel, J. J., & Rand, D. G. (2024). On the Efficacy of Accuracy Prompts Across Partisan Lines: An Adversarial Collaboration. *Psychological Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09567976241232905>

## **Week 5**

### **Online content: Is social media pushing us apart?**

- Shapiro, A. (Host) (2022, September, 09). *How the polarizing effect of social media is speeding up*. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/2022/09/09/1121295499/facebook-twitter-youtube-instagram-tiktok-social-media>



- How to have better political conversations | Robb Willer [TED]. (2017, February 9). 235-  
*How to have better political conversations | Robb Willer* [Video]. Youtube.com  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6V6p1tgHfm0>

**Recorded lecture: How Do We Reduce Polarization?**

- Suggested reading (not required): Hartman, R., Blakey, W., Womick, J. *et al.* Interventions to reduce partisan animosity. *Nature Human Behaviour* 6, 1194–1205 (2022).  
<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-022-01442-3>

**Class 9: Bridging divides through narratives or evidence?**

- Kubin, E., Puryear, C., Schein, C., & Gray, K. (2021). Personal experiences bridge moral and political divides better than facts. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 118(6).
- Callahan, B., Harouni, L., Dupree, C.H., Kraus, M.W., & Richeson, J.A. (2021). Testing the efficacy of three informational interventions for reducing misperceptions of the Black-White wealth gap. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 118 (38), e2108875118. [PDF](#)
- Bilali, R. (2022). Fighting violent extremism with narrative intervention. Evidence from a field experiment in West Africa. *Psychological Science*.

**Class 10: Final paper descriptions/presentations (no assigned readings)**