SYLLABUS: PSYC 414 The Psychology of Natural, Artistic, and Moral Beauty [S21 v2]

DATE: Spring 2021
COURSE NUMBER AND TITLE: PSYC 414 The Psychology of Natural, Artistic, and Moral Beauty
CREDIT HOURS:  3
TIME AND PLACE: 10:30-11:45 a.m. MW all ZOOM
PROFESSOR: Rhett Diessner, Ed.D.
OFFICE: SpH 224 ph.# 792-2338, diessner@lcsc.edu
OFFICE HOURS: 2:00 – 3:00 p.m. M-TH Through Zoom or phone call. Email to make an appointment, and if you prefer phone, I’ll give you my cell #.

Course Description/Purpose
The purpose of the course is to help students understand the influence of Natural Beauty, Artistic Beauty (painting, music, and literally anything designed by a human), and Moral Beauty on human flourishing. The course is designed as a service-learning course, in which students are assigned to accompany elders in our community to learn about their moral beauty.

“It is necessary for me to desire to be changed by beauty, otherwise beauty cannot act on my soul.”
– Julio Savi, Italian Poet (personal communication 09Jan2015)

Prerequisites: “C” or better in PSYC 101 or PSYC 205, AND "C" or better in ENGL 102 or permission of instructor.

Topical Outline
1. Why Beauty?
2. Philosophy and Beauty
3. Evolution and Beauty
4. Neuroscience of Beauty
5. Natural Beauty
6. Artistic Beauty
7. Moral Beauty
8. Pedagogy and Beauty
9. Personality Development and Beauty

A Service-Learning Course
One of the best ways of learning is to “learn by doing.” Also, as the Positive Psychology movement states, the highest form of the “good life” is the meaningful life, and such a life is defined as serving something greater than ourselves. This course has been designated as a Service Learning course, which means that students will directly serve the needs of human beings during the course, and that such service will meet the goals of the course itself. You will be assigned an elder from the community to visit weekly; you will serve the psychological needs of this elder, while at the same time collecting “data” from the elder that will help you achieve the course objective of compassionately “seeing” the inner beauty of the elder.

A note to persons with disabilities: If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible. My office location and office hours are printed above.

Required Text:
Course Goals and Outcomes of PSYC 414

A. Goal: Serve the psychological development needs of a senior citizen through identifying the forms of inner beauty manifested by the elder. Students, in pairs, will be assigned senior citizens to visit in their homes and care facilities (during our class time, so it should not be a schedule nightmare). But this year it will be through Zoom.

   Outcome: Write a paper in APA style documenting the beautiful virtues and character strengths of your elder.

B. Goal: Understand the development of the beauty of virtues and character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

   Outcomes:
   a. Profile your own top 5 beautiful strengths
   b. Profile your assigned elder’s beautiful strengths

C. Goal: Gain knowledge of the research literature on the psychology of beauty in nature.

   Outcome: Pass quizzes concerning this literature

D. Goal: Gain knowledge of the research literature on beauty in art and design.

   Outcome: Pass quizzes concerning this literature

E. Goal: Gain knowledge of the research literature on moral beauty.

   Outcome: Pass quizzes concerning this literature

F. Creatively express your appreciation of beauty by making a beauty presentation to the class.

Skills and Outcomes to be Gained and/or Strengthened in This Course:

1. Increase your ability to “see” the inner (or behavioral) moral beauty of human beings. This is an excellent life skill, because when you see the beauty of another, you cause that beauty to become stronger within the other person. But also, to be able to “see” this beauty, you must represent it in your own mind, thus making your own mind a more beautiful place. This can lead to your own long-term flourishing and joy in life. It is also a critically important skill for counselors who want to be “strength-based” psychotherapists.

2. “SAM” = Savoring, Absorption, and Mindfulness. This three-fold combination of skills can lead to more meaning in life and activate the “soothing” emotional system, helping you to become a mellower person that enjoys life, and can lead to better emotional balance.

3. Notice beauty more often in the four domains of nature, art, human behavior (virtues), and ideas; and record those observations in a Beauty Log (journaling).

Methods of Instruction

1. Direct instruction by the professor.
2. Cooperative learning and “community of learning” approach in dyads and small groups and whole class.
3. “Hands-on,” applied learning through interaction with a senior citizen and with natural settings of beautiful nature and beautiful art/design.
4. Personal analysis and reflection.
Evaluation: Percentages and Points of Products Toward Overall Grade

30%  I. Major Paper
300 pts. This is the basic college term paper, as applied to reporting on the inner beauty of an elderly adult. Positive psychologists call this “strength spotting” – you will identify 2 top beautiful inner strengths of the elder. The paper should be similar to what you were taught in ENGL 102, and written in APA style. Advice for completing the paper is below. An example paper will be emailed to you later in the semester. Feel free to remind Diessner to do so.

30%  II. Quizzes
420 pts. There will be 9 chapter quizzes, but I will drop your 2 lowest ones, thus 7 x 60 = 420. Remind Diessner to give you objectives for the quizzes ahead of time.

8% III. Questionnaires and Assignments
80 pts.  
A. Completing the VIA questionnaire on yourself 10pts 
   Even if you did it last semester, do it again
   Access the VIA at viacharacter.org
B. Completing the CSRF of VIA with Elder 10pts
C. WWW (What Went Well) – A short note of 1 thing that went well for YOU when visiting with elder) note after each visit to elder 6 x 5 = 30pts
   Include the date and beginning and ending times of visit (explicitly write “date of visit was….”)! Include the full name of the elder.
   Note about WWW notes: These are apparently difficult to write. Think about something that went well for YOU during your meeting with the elder – something that pleased you, or made you happy, or brought you contentment, or amusement, or…… but make it something GOOD; something that caused a good feeling in YOU. Your WWW note should start with, “One thing that went well for me was…”
D. Peer Beauty Reports.
   During breakout group sharing of beauty logs, take a pause after the first person is done describing their beauty log, and make a note of what your fave item was from them. Do this for each person in your breakout group, and note their name. Then post it in Canvas.
   Example:
   Gloria = poem she described
   Frank = eagle he saw fishing the Clearwater
   Chizuko = got into the new Taylor Swift song 6 x 5 = 30 pts

10% IV. Beauty Presentations
100 pts  
Develop a brief presentation on one of four types of beauty: natural, artistic/design, moral/virtue, or a beautiful idea. Any form of presentation is acceptable, such as pptx. Feel free to make yourself vulnerable and do something creative. If you pretty much do anything, you get full credit. Note that students in the past have done such things as: a) shown their collection of beautiful crystals; b) created a pptx of photographs of beadwork by family members; c) created a pptx with photos they had taken of beautiful nature, and then included a beautiful idea quote on each photo; and d) sang a song and/or played an instrument during class. Many students simply play a Youtube video that they found beautiful; this isn’t the best choice, but it fully acceptable. Pass/fail 100 pts.
10%  V. Journaling about Beauty; Beauty Logs
100 pts  Journals (also called logs) will be collected twice; once at midterm (+50 pts) and once before finals week (+50 pts). Once-a-week write (keyboard) descriptions of experiences with one each of the four kinds of beauty studied in this course: nature, art/design, moral, and beautiful ideas. Thus you will have 4 entries in your journal every week. For reporting these four experiences, try to use a 27 second SAM for each one. That is, stare, listen, and meditate on the “object” for at least 27 seconds. BEFORE YOU email YOUR JOURNAL to me FOR GRADING, highlight your FOUR MOST MOVING EXPERIENCES. Do this by putting it in red font and bold it.

> Bonus 10 points: Complete a demography form

---

Distinguished, A, or Excellent  950 points and earn an A on elder paper = A in the course; A- = 920-949
Superior, B, or Very Good     850-899 points; B+ = 900-919; B- 800-849
Adequate, C, or OK            720-780 points; C+ = 781-799; C- = 700-719
 Unsatisfactory D             600-699

Advice for the Major Paper

1. The paper is a celebration of the Elder’s life, so include only the positive in it. (That doesn’t mean that the negative is not important, but we will not be addressing it in this paper.)

2. Write it in research format APA style (Intro; Methods; Results; Discussion; References). Note: WORD has a pre-made template for writing APA style papers that is very convenient.

Select two of the Elder’s beautiful character strength to address in your paper.

Begin your paper with an abstract on a page by itself. The abstract should not be over 150 words, and should summarize your entire paper (a summary of the Intro, Methods, Results, and Discussion, but mostly Results).

Do NOT print the paper 2-sided (back to back) – I appreciate saving trees, but it makes it hard to grade.

A. Introductory section: This introduces relevant background to the two character strengths you selected. Find data-based APA style articles that address those two character strengths, and are related to the data you collected (but you do not mention your data in the Introductory section). The Introductory section usually begins with a “problem statement” (or the issues you will be examining in your paper; e.g.: “The challenge is to examine the existence of the character strengths of perspective/wisdom and kindness in one particular person.” After the problem statement is a literature review of studies, and sometimes theory, which is relevant to the two character strengths. When citing data based research articles on your two selected character strengths, summarize the articles by describing the main findings and the subjects/participants. The Introductory section will end with your hypotheses about the presence of two character strengths in your elder. Sometimes, instead of hypotheses, the “goals” of the paper will be stated, like a “thesis sentence” in an English paper or an essay: “This paper will characterize and examine the presence of two of the top five character strengths of one elder.”

B. Method section: It begins with a subsection about your subject. Then it has a subsection about the measure you used (describes the Strength Spotting Interview). It also has a procedure subsection, which will describe how you took notes, how you interviewed, how you generated your data.

C. Results section: Usually this is a short section in an APA paper, but in this paper it will be a long section. It will describe, summarize, and also quote some of, the data you collected (from your tons of field notes) that are
relevant to the *two character strengths* you selected. Although this section of an APA research paper is usually very statistical, your paper will be more “qualitative,” and include observations of the elder’s behavior, and stories of their experiences relevant to the two character strengths.

D. Discussion section: At the beginning of this section you summarize your main conclusions – it integrates your hypotheses with your data. Then you explain the results section. You explain using reasons that you creatively develop and it also connects the data from the results section to your literature review from the introductory section (and thus you cite relevant chapters and articles here too).

E. Reference section: In general, the bigger the better. Data-based research articles carry the most weight; without at least 4 relevant research articles cited, you will unlikely achieve an A grade. Find APA style research papers to integrate into your paper, and to illustrate and illuminate and interpret your findings from the interviews with the elder. Citations to internet sites are usually not appropriate, unless they are scholarly (i.e., the paper at the site uses peer review data-based articles).

F. **YOUR FIELD NOTES FROM ALL YOUR VISITS SHOULD BE ATTACHED TO THE FINAL PAPER THAT YOU GIVE TO THE PROFESSOR.** They do not have to be perfectly legible, but there should be many pages of them. The field notes will not be given to the elder. You can either keyboard the notes, or you can scan your handwritten notes and send them to me with the paper.

*Being caring and empathic to the elder overrides all data collection considerations.*

Data Collection Procedure:

Take notepads (or laptops) with you to the interviews. Try to write down everything your elder says and does. It can be difficult to write constantly, and still pay attention to the elder. You have to find a balance. But you should try to generate rich field notes. You do not need to interpret or explain the elder in the field notes – they are “observational” – they simply record what you see and hear.

Your number one goal, during all interviews, is to practice being empathic and caring (applied social/interpersonal intelligence; attunement/engrossment). Your first 2 interviews will be to create a friendly relationship with the elder, and to have them complete the VIA or CSRF. Your next 4 interviews will be to explore the elder’s positive experiences with their top 5 character strengths.

As your paper will be a celebration of the life of the elder, and the wisdom that you gain from interacting with them, you will be focusing on the positive and what has gone well in the life of the elder.

**The paper will be a celebration of two character strengths that have gone well in the elder’s life.** This does not mean that the failures and negative parts of our lives are not important. We will not, however, in this class, focus upon them. One of the precepts of the positive psychology movement is that we gain more psychological health from employing our strengths, than we do from remediating our weaknesses. However, that may or may not be true. What does seem to be true is that a focus on the positive does lead to “flourishing.” And for some strengths, like “perseverance,” it may include over-coming problems in their lives.

Be sure to think about “closure” with the elder you are assigned. You will spend 40 minutes with them at least for 6 visits. Professionals need experience with “ending” professional relationships, yet still remaining caring and connected. Do not make any promises to the elder that you cannot keep (but also feel free to visit or communicate with them after the class is over). Feel free to bring this topic up for class discussion.

!! Do not wait until mid-March to write your paper. As soon as you identify 1 of the *character strengths* you will address in your paper, begin using PsycINFO to find relevant papers about that topic. Begin writing your Introductory section, with its literature review, and perhaps begin the Methods section as well.
Be sure to have the elder sign a permission form in regard to collecting data from them, and writing a paper about them. Take the signed copy and attach to your paper; leave them a copy with your names and phone numbers. Collect this on your 2nd visit with the elder. This won’t work during a Zoom semester. So ask verbal permission to record field notes, and write in your field notes, “Ms. Smith gave me verbal permission on February 3, 2021 to record her words.” “Mr. Jones gave me verbal permission to write a paper about his life on March 3, 2021.”

*You will email a copy of your final paper to the elder, the same week you give the professor your paper, and invite the elder to request changes (additions and deletions) – any changes the elder wants will not be in the paper that the professor grades, but if they want changes, make the changes. The following week pick up the copy that the elder has edited and make those changes. You can then give me a hard copy of that, or email me an e-copy. If the elder did want changes, you will need to visit the elder one more time to bring them the revised paper. If they ask for changes, revise your paper, and email them the revision.

*Regardless of your point total in the overall course, an A on the term paper is required for an A in the course.

*It is important to be needed. You NEED the elder: a) to pass this class and b) to learn from the elder about life. We are addressing the most important aspects of what it means to be human: virtues and character strengths, love, gratitude, perseverance, honesty, beauty, hope, wisdom, etc. You are learning from the elder what it means to live and develop those strengths over a lifetime.

Prime Imperative

Remember: The prime imperative is to be of service to the elders – to care for their experiences, to be gentle with them, to be empathic about their thoughts and feelings, to be “in the moment” with them, and to respect and learn from their knowledge, wisdom, and lives. This imperative trumps all assignments for the class. (If doing this causes you to not gain some information you needed for your paper, you can write me a little note about it, and attach it separately to your final paper, and I will take that into account when grading.)
Grading Rubric for Major Paper on your Elder (rev. 2020)

Student’s name: ____________________________________________________

5/ / Cover page (title of paper, your name and school; running head)

15/ / Abstract (summarizes your whole paper in 150 or fewer words)

15/ / Introductory section

   15/ / Problem statement present? (What is the general &/or specific problem that your paper addresses?)

30/ / Literature review. Review a minimum of at least two data-based peer review journal articles concerning each of the 2 character strengths addressed in your paper (citing these 4 papers is a minimum to pass, not the minimum for an A). When reviewing, describe the N, the subjects and the findings of the studies you review, and, if relevant, the methods of the study. The “right” kind of article will be organized APA style: Intro, Methods, Results, Discussion.

15/ / Formal hypothesis statement

// Method section

   5/ / Participant (Subject): describes demographics of your elder

15/ / Measure: describes the CSRF given to the elder, and cites the study that validated it; state what reliability or validity has been established for it; if you use the VIA instead, cite the rel. and val. info from the VIA Institute website.

15/ / Procedure: describe how you studied your elder. What did you do?

50/ / Results: What did you find out about their strengths? Quote and paraphrase your field notes. Make this section large. This is part where you get to put in all the cool things you learned about the elder. It’s the part of the paper that the elder will enjoy reading.)

// Discussion section

15/ / Summarize and explain results (if possible, explain some results by comparing your results back to the papers you cited in the lit review);

10 / / Limitations and disclaimers (critiquing your own study) (include at least two)

10 / / Future directions for research on this same topic (include at least two)

40 / / References (at least 4 data based, 2 on each strength, that’s the minimum).

30 / / Field notes attached as an appendix to the paper

5 / / Permission form signed by elder attached (required for a passing grade) Note in the Participants or Procedure section that you received verbal permission from them, with the date that you did.

25/ / Miscellaneous factors in the quality of the paper (APA style, etc.)

Total # of points_____________           Paper grade_____________
Accessing Research Articles though the LCSC Library and the Web

1. Find [http://www.lcsc.edu/library/](http://www.lcsc.edu/library/)
   A. Click middle-top on “databases.”
   B. Scroll down a couple pages til you find PsycINFO and click on it.
   C. Then follow the instructions to log in.
   D. Then click on the middle top, “Choose Databases »” and then add “Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection.”

2. Now you are in the databases that are most relevant to Psychology. Type in your search term. Linguistic intelligence helps here, as you many need to think of various synonyms for your search term, and try each one of them.
   Using “and.” If you put in the search box “bravery courage” – it will tell you there is only 1 article, because it searches for those two terms next to each other. But bravery by itself gives 102 hits; and courage by itself pops up 1737 hits. If you type “bravery and courage” then it will look for articles that have both words anywhere in the abstract, and, in this case, you’ll get 29 hits (in 2009 anyway).

3. If you are planning ahead, and search for articles, and find that they are not in our library, you can order them on inter-library loan from the front desk at the library. I do this all the time. But for convenience, you can check the box of “linked full text” that is on the upper right hand of the search page. Then it will only give you articles that you can click on, and get the whole text of the article in html or pdf.

4. Feel free to remind me sometime, about mid-term, to show you how to do this in our classroom (the computer is connected to the internet, so I can do it on the screen).

5. You can always go to the Reference desk at the library for help searching; they will guide you through it.

6. Also, if you want a relatively new article that you have found an abstract for, but can’t find it as “whole text,” google the 1st and/or 2nd author’s full names and see if you can find their personal webpage at their university. Most professors post full text of their own papers at their own websites. I often get papers this way. Or email them and ask – 99% of researchers will eagerly send you a paper within 24 hours of emailing them for it.

***

When you are citing a research article, to explain or relate to your own data or ideas, you should include a brief descriptions of the subjects, and the main conclusion from the study that is relevant to your paper. E.g.: “A study with 143 college participants, average age 20, and 58% women, showed that one can only have courage when one is fearful. If one is fearless, one is either a fool, or very detached, but without fear we cannot call an act courageous (Brown & Willowa, 2018).”

Sometimes it may be worthwhile to also briefly summarize the research procedure and measures (e.g., “Those 143 subjects were randomly assigned to two groups, the experimental group that faced the charging tiger, and the control group that watched a PBS show about a zoo.”)

When looking for the summary of the results of an APA style paper, rather than try to figure out the complex Results section, you can read the first few paragraphs of the Discussion section, as the results are usually summarized there.

Also, if you read the literature review in the Introductory section of an article that relates to the themes in your planned paper, you might find references to other studies that you could look up and then use.
SAM*
Savoring, Absorption, Mindfulness

Savoring
“…the capacity to attend to, appreciate, and enhance the positive experiences in one’s life” (Bryant & Veroff, 2007, p. xi).

Absorption
Absorption is when we are completely engaged by something (Diessner, Parsons, Solom, Frost, & Davidson, 2008); when we are completely engrossed (Noddings, 1984). We are thinking of nothing else except that thing in which we are absorbed. It is related to the concept of flow; when in flow, or absorbed, we are totally “into” what we are doing, and lose track of time and lose track of self (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Mindfulness
A short definition is: “…mindfulness is awareness of what’s happening in the present moment” (Germer, 2009, 132). You are not thinking about the past and not thinking about the future. You are non-judgmental. In terms of experiencing beauty, you are not deciding if something is beautiful or ugly, you simply are experiencing the beauty as it occurs in your mind. The beauty experience is has both a beauty stimulus (the beautiful object) and perceiver of that beauty (you, your mind, your heart, your brain, your soul). In mindfulness you become very aware of what is happening in your mind/heart during the beauty experience. In a sense you become an observer of our own brain cells, as those brain cells image the beauty stimulus and savor it being there in your brain [or in your heart, mind, or soul].

“Savoring is a variation of mindfulness. When we savor, there’s the intention to enter fully into the experience, rather than cling to it or drag it out… to let things be just as they are, fully and completely” (Germer, 2009, p. 115).

Daniel Siegel writes, “Being mindful…us is often defined as a way intentionally paying attention to present moment with being swept up by judgments” (2010, p. 83). And, mindfulness “teaches self-observation; practitioners are able to describe with words the internal seascape of the mind. At the heart of the process…is a form of internal ‘tuning in’ to oneself that enables people to become ‘their own best friend’” (p. 86).

*The idea for SAM is extracted from the work of Martínez-Martí et al. (2014).

References