

PSYCHOLOGY OF AGING

Fall 2001

Professor Alice Cronin-Golomb

Office hours: Mondays 1:00-2:00 and Thursdays 10:30-11:30, or by appointment.

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Course Description and Goals

There is no going back. You are aging, I am aging, we all are aging. To study the psychology of aging is to have a chance to peer into the future. What can we expect from ourselves, our families, our friends and colleagues as we age? Is the fear of cognitive decline, especially memory loss, warranted by prevalence figures, or is that fear out of proportion to what happens to most aging people? On the other side, are we underestimating the influence of the social and cultural environment on our views of the aging self and aging others?

This course will provide a survey of major topics in the psychology of aging. We will investigate the domains of memory, cognition and intelligence, the social and cultural environment, sensation and perception, language, emotion, spirituality, personality, health behavior, and the living environment. Rather than taking each topic solely on its own, we will look for common themes across domains, such as change and maintenance of identity with age. We will learn the best (and worst!) research methods for studies of aging, and so be in a position to critique new studies as they appear in the news and in the academic literature. We will come to know the geographical highlights of the aging brain and why we should almost never refer to the aging brain as if it represented a single reality. The aging brain becomes a metaphor for the aging population, where heterogeneity reigns. Acknowledging the specter of Alzheimer's disease is balanced by discovering the healthy centenarians in our midst.

Our goals are as follows:

- ?? to survey a broad range of topics in psychology with specific reference to aging
- ?? to seek common themes across topics
- ?? to understand research methodology in the field of gerontology
- ?? to interact with gerontologists and other professionals who study aging in order to obtain their unique and valuable perspectives on the field
- ?? to interact with elderly individuals from the community in order to obtain their own unmatched perspectives

We will strive to attain these goals by extensive reading from textbooks and from selected individual journal articles; by inviting guests to our class with whom we will interact (not just have them lecture to

us); by interacting with each other around the material through our questions about the readings and short presentations to each other; by visiting one model of a local living community; by viewing and critiquing media images of elderly people; by using the knowledge accumulated over the course of the class to engage in product design targeted toward the elderly user; and to prepare four different types of written documents to demonstrate a creative and energetic engagement with the material learned in the class.

Readings

- (1) Stuart-Hamilton, I. The Psychology of Ageing. This clear, compact text covers most major topics in the field. It has a handy glossary at the end for quick reference, which may be especially useful as you read from other sources. It is required that you obtain this book.
- (2) Birren, J.E. and Schaie, K.W. (eds.) Handbook of the Psychology of Aging, 5th Edition. This is an edited collection of chapters written by experts in their fields. The information is up-to-date and scholarly. Where Stuart-Hamilton provides the overview, Birren and Schaie provide the details. The readings from this book are required. You may obtain the book for yourself—it is at the bookstore, listed as a recommended text. Alternatively, you may read the chapters on reserve if you do not wish to purchase the whole book.
- (3) The syllabus lists additional readings (mostly journal articles) by the week. These are required readings. Please note that I may substitute or add to the listed readings in order to accommodate requests by our guest speakers. I will announce changes in class and will be sure that all new readings are placed on reserve in plenty of time for you to read them before class.

All reserve readings (Birren and Schaie chapters and journal articles) may be obtained at the main desk in the Science and Engineering Library (38 Cummington St.).

Course Requirements, Due Dates and Grading Criteria

- 1) Questions you have generated from the weekly readings: 30%. Due every week.

Each week you will generate two questions. The two questions should not be from the same reading if there is more than one reading that week. They are due at the beginning of each class. There are 12 weeks of opportunities to submit questions. You must submit at least 10 sets of questions. If you submit 11 (or 12), you may drop the lowest (two) grade(s). If you submit fewer than 10, you will receive a zero for each missing set. A good question synthesizes information provided from more than one reading, or goes beyond the reading in an informed, creative way. A relatively poor question simply asks for recall or recognition of information provided in a required reading.

- 2) Presentation #1: 10%. Oct. 3.

This presentation of 10-15 minutes is on aging as represented in literature or film. Your job is to review a book (or other written material) or film that features an older character and to draw forth themes relevant to the psychology of aging. I will provide suggestions and addresses of web sites with

further suggestions for books and films, and am also open to your suggestions. I will provide a handout detailing my expectations for your presentation.

3) Short report #1: 10%. Due Oct. 3.

You will submit a 3-5 page report on the topic of Presentation #1, to be handed in at the beginning of the class in which you are presenting.

4) Presentation #2: 10%. Nov. 28.

This presentation of 10-15 minutes incorporates product design and interviewing. You will present a product you have designed for use with an elderly population. Your presentation will include the reactions of at least two elderly individuals to your product proposal. I will provide a handout detailing my expectations for your presentation.

5) Short report #2: 15%. Due Nov. 28.

You will submit a 5-7 page report on the topic of Presentation #2, to be handed in at the beginning of the class in which you are presenting.

6) Research paper, 25%. Due Nov. 14 at latest (see details below).

The topic of your research paper is to be discussed with me ahead of time. You will choose a topic in the psychology of aging and cover it in some depth (15 pages). This may be on a topic that is new to you, or a topic already familiar to you from previous study, or it may be a further development of topics broached in one of your short reports. I would be happy to review a draft of your paper and give you feedback before you submit the final version. The paper is due a week after we cover the same general topic in class or Nov. 14, whichever date is earlier. For example, if you choose to write on language, which we cover in class on Oct. 24, your paper will be due on Oct. 31. If you choose to write on health behavior, which we cover in class on Dec. 5, your paper will be due on Nov. 14. The rolling deadline has two purposes. First, your topic is fresh in mind right after your presentation, giving you the best opportunity to write a good paper. Second, I have time to review first drafts and to provide detailed feedback as I grade individual papers. We will assign due dates for each student by mutual consent.

Policy on extensions: Extensions generally are not given for presentations, reports and papers. If you anticipate difficulty with due dates, please let me know as far in advance of the date as possible. Under no circumstances will I accept a set of questions after the class that they apply to.

Policy on attendance and class participation: Regular attendance and participation in class discussions are expected. If you know you will miss a class, please let me know in advance. Our ability to engage meaningfully with the material and with each other depends upon everyone's commitment to the success

of the class. The commitment entails being present on time for each class, doing all the readings, preparing weekly questions on the readings, and engaging in discussion with classmates and guest speakers.

Policy on academic misconduct: You will be reading from many sources and will be writing several reports, including your presentations. I expect that your work is your own. The internet is a remarkably useful tool but it is just another source of information, and the same rules apply to its use as to use of more traditional information media. If you describe another person's work or provide their words, you must provide a proper citation in the text and in your reference list. To pass off the work of another as your own, whether with malicious intent or not, is plagiarism. Your student handbook provides information on plagiarism, and academic misconduct in general, and their consequences. In a separate handout I will provide information on what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it.

Guest speakers this semester:

Elizabeth Markson, Social and cultural environment
Michael Lyons, Research Methodology
Neil Cohen (special colloquium), Memory
Hali Diecidue, Religion and End-of-Life Issues
Dan Mroczek, Personality
Tracy Dunne, Interventions
Margaret Kelly-Hayes and Margery Silver, Health Behaviors

Field Trip: Visit to the Boston Alzheimer Center

S = Stuart-Hamilton; BS = Birren and Schaie. All other readings are on reserve in the Science and Engineering Library, 38 Cummington St., as are the Birren and Schaie readings.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Readings</u>
Sept. 5	Orientation: What is aging?	S: pp. 15-23; BS ch. 1
Sept. 12	Hard to forget: Memory	S: pp. 87-115; BS ch. 14; Scheibe 1989
Sept. 19	Easy to forget: Social and cultural environment	BS ch. 17 & 18; Markson & Taylor
Sept. 26	Research methods -- powerful and weak The windows of sensation & perception	S: pp. 197-208; BS ch. 3 S: pp. 28-36; BS ch. 10; Baltes & Lindenberger, 1997; Cronin-Golomb, 1995
Oct. 3	Presentation #1. Aging in literature and film. Intelligence and cognition I *Short report #1 due*	S: pp. 47-86; BS ch. 12
Oct. 10	The living environment: Visit to Boston Alzheimer Center	BS: ch. 9; Brawley 1997
Oct. 17	The changed nervous system: pruning the superfluous? Intelligence and cognition II	S: pp. 23-28, 37-45; BS ch. 6, 7 S: pp. 165-195
Oct. 24	The bulwark of language	S: pp. 117-138; BS: ch. 15 Wingfield reading
Oct. 31	Do not go gentle into that good night: Emotion, religion, and end-of-life issues	BS ch. 16
Nov. 7	The rampart of personality	S: pp. 139-164; BS: ch. 19; Mroczek (2 readings)
Nov. 14	The sound and fury of your #1 film choice *Research paper due*	
Nov. 21	Thanksgiving break	
Nov. 28	Knowledge in action: Interventions for daily living Presentation #2: Product design *Short report #2 due*	Koss & Gilmore, 1998; Rheaume et al. 1988; Satlin et al. 1992; BS ch. 4
Dec. 5	Health behavior. The continuing question of identity.	BS ch. 8

Guidelines for writing your paper: Aging as represented in literature or film

I) Title page: should tell me exactly what your paper is about (e.g., Dementia vs. Delirium in King Lear)

II) First paragraph of paper should tell me what the psychological issue is you're about to describe. Is it controversial? Is there a consensus in the field? Remember your reader. Why should I find this an interesting topic?

III) Describe the relevant novel, film or other medium. Describe character(s), their overt actions, and their thoughts, explicitly referencing descriptions in the book (page #s), film (“in the scene on the blasted heath...”), etc.

IV) Summarize, telling me **your** interpretation of the representation of aging and its validity, based on your knowledge of the psychology of aging (using references where relevant). For example, "Though other people in the play view Lear's behavior as indicative of mental degeneration, his actions actually reflect a rational response to a shift in locus of control in his environment. Situations similar in kind if not in scope are encountered by elderly individuals across the socioeconomic range, as shown by studies by X (citing that author's chapter in Birren and Schaie)".

V) Bibliography. Include: Author(s) (for printed material), title of book, movie, etc. (underlined), page numbers, year of publication or film release.

General tips

Remember that this is a Psychology of Aging paper. It's not a sociology or economics paper, and it's not a philosophy paper.

Maximum length is 5 pages, exclusive of title and bibliography pages (minimum is 3 pages). Use the space wisely. Don't spend 2 pages setting up the issue and only one providing your evidence.

Type it double-spaced. Proofread before turning it in. Grammatical errors prime me to find content errors. If you have difficulty writing, show it to a friend who's a good writer before turning it in.

Grading criteria

Good understanding of topic in the psychology of aging, solid support for assertions through use of relevant references, enlightening critique of the book, film etc. under discussion, well organized, clearly written. 10% of the class grade.

*Due date: Wednesday, October 3, at the beginning of class (10:30 AM). Do not be late for class. No extensions.

THE PRESENTATION:

Also due Oct 3. Please let me know if you have a preference for going earlier or later in the class time. Please let me know a week ahead of the presentation what you will be presenting! It will help me determine presentation order.

The presentation is 10-15 minutes. I will stop you at the end of 15 minutes. If there is time at the end we can open it for a general discussion.

Please let me know a week ahead of the presentation about any audiovisual needs you may have. We will have an overhead projector and I will get a VCR but if you need anything else let me know.

Remember your audience. Be crisp and organized—you have little time. If you're showing a film it's very important that you know exactly where to wind it to show the clips you plan—don't waste time fiddling around with your tape.

Use of prepared overhead transparencies is advised, because writing on the board or on a transparency during your talk takes valuable time. Having such visuals gives you valuable cues to move your talk along smoothly.

Grading criteria

Good understanding of topic in the psychology of aging, solid support for assertions through use of relevant references, enlightening critique of the book, film etc. under discussion, well organized, clear and exciting presentation. 10% of the class grade.

If you have any questions, please contact me, alicecg@bu.edu, or stop by office hours, Mon 1:00-2:00 or by appointment.

Guidelines for writing your paper: Product design

You will submit a 5-7 page report describing a project you have designed for use with an elderly population.

- I) Title page: should tell me exactly what your paper is about.
- II) First paragraph of paper should tell me what the psychological or behavioral issue is you're about to address by presenting this great new product. Why should the reader find this an interesting topic?
- III) Describe the relevant scientific literature, documenting the issue you mention in the first paragraph. Keep it focused. For example, if your product helps overcome sensory deficits, be sure you document the specific deficit (that is, you can't just say "vision is impaired". You need to target the specific visual deficit you're interested in). Areas that you might consider span the range of real-world problems that affect older people, from any of several domains such as housing (independent or assisted living), nutrition and exercise, transportation, work and retirement, recreation, social interactions, and other activities of daily living.
- IV) Describe your product. How does it address the issue you raised? Does your solution (your product) present itself as a clear and logical solution to the issue raised in the literature review? How feasible would it be to introduce this product in the real world? What kind of audience (market) do you think it would find? Use figures, diagrams, photographs, or other illustrations as you like (they don't count toward the page limit).
- V) Your report will include the input of at least two elderly individuals to your product proposal. You may do any of the following (including more than one of the following, if you like): (1) Interview before designing the product: Ask questions about what they would like to see in the design of a particular product. Questions can be about ease of use, special features, esthetics, cost, etc. (2) Develop a prototype, interview people, and incorporate their suggestions in your final design. (3) Completely develop the design and then get comments on it. Don't be satisfied with comments such as, "yes that's very nice". Probe deeper. Some possible probes: How would the person use it? If that person wouldn't use it, can they think of someone else who would? How much do they think it would be worth?
- VI) Summarize. State how your product addresses the issue you raised at the beginning of the paper.
- VII) Bibliography. Include: Author(s) (for printed material), title of journals, etc. (underlined), page numbers, year of publication.

General tips

Maximum length is 7 pages, exclusive of title page, bibliography pages, and figures (minimum is 5 pages). Use the space wisely. Don't spend 4 pages setting up the issue and only one or two describing your design.

Type it double-spaced. Proofread before turning it in. Grammatical errors prime me to find content errors. If you have difficulty writing, show it to a friend who's a good writer before turning it in.

Be creative! Don't worry if you think it'd be too expensive to manufacture your item—money is no

object here. To reach a wide audience, you will want your product to be affordable—but you might also imagine an expensive product for a special (niche) market.

Grading criteria

Good understanding of topic in the psychology of aging, solid support for assertions through use of relevant references, well organized, clearly written. 15% of the class grade.

*Due date: Wednesday, November 28, at the beginning of class (10:30 AM). Do not be late for class. No extensions.

THE PRESENTATION:

Also due Nov. 28. Please let me know if you have a preference for going earlier or later in the class time. Please let me know ahead of time what you will be presenting! It will help me determine presentation order.

The presentation is 10-15 minutes. I will stop you at the end of 10 minutes to allow for questions. If there is time at the end we can open it for a general discussion.

Please let me know about any audiovisual needs you may have. We will have an overhead projector.

Remember your audience. Be crisp and organized—you have little time.

Grading criteria

Good understanding of topic in the psychology of aging, solid support for assertions through use of relevant references, creative and logical product design, well organized, clear and exciting presentation. 10% of the class grade.

If you have any questions, please contact me, alicecg@bu.edu, or stop by office hours, Mon 1:00-2:00 or by appointment.