

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY & INSTITUTE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
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PSYCHOLOGY OF PEACE & HUMAN RIGHTS

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Meeting times: Wednesdays, 5:00 P.M. – 7:30 P.M., US Central Time

Meeting room: Heritage Hall 226 (*you will have prior notice of any changes to our meeting location*)

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

She came here with nothing but a handful of seeds and the slimmest of instructions to “use your gifts and dreams for good,” the same instructions we all carry. She accepted the gifts from the other beings with open hands and used them honorably. She shared the gifts she brought from Skyworld as she set herself about the business of flourishing, of making a home.

- Dr. Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*

What came into existence beside the dead body of the loved one was not only the doctrine of the soul, the belief in immortality and a powerful source of man’s sense of guilt, but also the earliest ethical commandments. The first and most important prohibition made by the awakening conscience was ‘Thou shalt not kill.’ It was acquired in relation to dead people who were loved, as a reaction against the satisfaction of the hatred hidden behind the grief for them; and it was eventually extended to strangers who were not loved, and finally even to enemies.

- Dr. Sigmund Freud, “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death”

It is this awareness of ‘knowing what they do not know’ that is a defining characteristic not only of a good scientist, but also a good peacemaker.

- Dr. Marc Gopin, *Bridges Across an Impossible Divide*

How does the human mind contribute both to the defense of human rights and to the perpetuation of violence? Why do some individuals and communities move toward cooperation and reconciliation while others deepen cycles of fear and domination? And can we leverage the interconnected web of our biogenetics, cognition, affect, relationships, culture, spirituality, and natural environment to increase prosocial outcomes? These and related questions have beguiled (proto)psychologists for millennia and occupy the beating intellectual heart of the **psychology of peace and human rights**: a transdisciplinary intersection of scholarly fields that utilizes psychological science to describe and prescribe processes related to strengthening peace, quelling violence, and promoting justice at individual, communal, national, and global levels.

Grounded in my own scientist-practitioner training model, this advanced seminar seeks to explore the contributions of psychological theory and method to evidence-based practice through a normative lens of peace and human rights. Drawing from both western and Global Majority traditions, we will place major ideas of the human psyche—including those of several ‘Great Psychologists’ (yes, including Freud!)—into conversation with contemporary science of the human brain/mind/behavior. We will survey and debate the role of psychological science in constructing both peace with justice and violent conflict through a human rights lens. We will also augment our psychological insights with important concepts in anthropology, political science, public health, philosophy, religious studies, neuroscience, and peace and conflict studies; however, our guiding analytic framework remains rooted in an ecologically-embedded biopsychosocial-spiritual model.

Throughout the semester, we will ask explanatory questions about how psychological processes operate, normative questions about what peace and human rights require, and practical questions about what researchers, practitioners, institutions, and communities should do. Evidence can inform ethical and practical judgment, but it cannot resolve every normative question on its own. By the end of the semester, my hope is that you will not only think more critically and rigorously about psychology’s place in peace and human rights but also envision yourself as a contributor to humanity’s “moral equivalent of war.”

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- **Define and identify** major concepts, historical developments, and ethical considerations in the psychology of peace and human rights. (*Assessment: Mastery of material*)
- **Explain and interpret** the impact of ecologically-embedded biopsychosocial-spiritual dynamics through a transdisciplinary approach, comparing how different scholars and practitioners understand the causes and conditions of violent conflict, peace, and human rights. (*Assessment: Mastery of material*)
- **Analyze** relationships among the biological, cognitive, affective, behavioral, social, cultural, political, spiritual, and ecological dimensions of conflict and peace, and interrogate how systems of power, identity, and inequality shape human experience and social transformation. (*Assessment: Facilitation*)
- **Synthesize** various psychological theories, research methodologies, and evidence-based practices with contemporary and historical cases involving conflict, human rights, peacebuilding, reconciliation, or community well-being through seminar discussion and collaborative facilitation. (*Assessment: Facilitation*)

- **Construct** a theoretically grounded and evidence-based argument that synthesizes psychological science with insights from related disciplines to address a significant challenge in peace psychology and human rights. (*Assessment: Final synthesis*)
- **Apply** course theories and evidence to unfamiliar cases and develop ethically grounded, contextually responsive recommendations for research, practice, and policy. (*Assessment: Final synthesis*)

HOW TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN THIS COURSE

Our course is structured as a participatory seminar, meaning this is not a “memorize the slides and forget everything after the exam” course; in fact, I likely will not lecture very much at all. Your success therefore depends less on passive notetaking and more on preparation, curiosity, consistency, depth, intellectual growth, and professionalism in how you think and contribute to our weekly discussions.

Undergraduate students earning an “A” consistently complete the readings thoughtfully, participate in ways that advance discussion and simulation, and connect theories and concepts across sessions rather than treating each week in isolation. Strong students move beyond summary toward analysis, interpretation, and argument; arrive prepared to facilitate; and remain willing to revise assumptions when confronted with new evidence or perspectives. You do not need to sound like a graduate student or published scholar to earn an A. You do need to demonstrate sustained preparation, engagement, and intellectual growth throughout the semester.

Graduate students earning an “A” are expected to demonstrate greater theoretical precision, intellectual independence, and ethical leadership. In addition to the expectations above, graduate students should engage broader literatures where appropriate, situate theories within methodological and disciplinary debates, and demonstrate stronger synthesis across psychological science and related fields. They should also contribute to the seminar through thoughtful facilitation, constructive questioning, and mentorship of earlier-career colleagues. Graduate students are not expected to “have all the answers.” Often, the most productive seminars involve realizing together just how complicated the questions actually are.

A few practical recommendations can help you succeed in this course and in advanced seminars more broadly:

- **Read strategically.** Your primary goal is comprehension, not memorization. For journal articles, begin with the abstract, introduction, and conclusion; scan headings to understand the argument’s architecture; then examine methods, results, or other details closely enough to evaluate the evidence. I have generally arranged readings in a suggested order so that ideas build upon one another. As you read, ask: What kind of claim is being made? What counts as evidence? What can this method illuminate or obscure? What assumptions or ethical commitments organize the inquiry?
- **Take notes on questions, not just content.** Strong seminar participants arrive with genuine questions, tensions, critiques, and connections. What persuaded you? What did not? What assumptions does the argument rely upon? What alternative explanation might fit the evidence? What would you want to ask the author—or the rest of us?
- **Do not annotate every sentence.** Earlier in my academic career, my highlighting practices turned journal articles into coloring books; don’t be like me. Focus on major arguments, concepts, evidence, and tensions. Ask yourself which ideas deserve the most “air time” in our limited time together and why.

- **Approach the seminar as a professional community.** Listen actively, disagree respectfully, build on others' ideas, and practice engaging *with* people rather than simply talking at them. Seminars work best when participants help one another think more carefully. You should be able to articulate another perspective fairly before critiquing it and remain open to changing your own.
- **Connect the course to the world beyond the classroom.** Bring course ideas into conversation with current events, other coursework, research, professional experiences, community life, and your own observations. Consider where psychological theories illuminate the world well, where they fail, and how the material might matter for the kind of scholar, practitioner, professional, or citizen you hope to become.
- **Communicate and use available support.** I take teaching seriously and want to be a resource for you. If you are encountering challenges with the course, an assignment, the readings, or your participation, please reach out early so we can develop a reasonable gameplan together.
- **Give yourself permission to be challenged.** We will examine violence, oppression, trauma, identity, morality, spirituality, reconciliation, human flourishing, and the capacity of people to harm and care for one another. These are weighty questions, and you are not expected to leave with simple answers. I hope you leave with sharper analytical tools, stronger intellectual habits, greater comfort with uncertainty, and a clearer sense of how psychological science might contribute to peace and human rights.
- For graduate students completing the Evidence-Synthesis Project, **start early and work steadily.** Research develops through repeated cycles of reading, questioning, searching, revising, and rethinking. The project is scaffolded across the semester precisely so you do not have to produce thousands of words fueled entirely by caffeine, fear, and one emotionally devastating Spotify playlist.

DIVISIVE CONCEPTS & SHARED VALUES STATEMENT

All UAB faculty, instructors, and teaching staff have the academic freedom to explore, discuss, and provide instruction on various topics in an academic setting. This class may present difficult, objectionable, or controversial topics for consideration, but will do so through an objective, scholarly lens designed to encourage critical thinking and analysis. Although students may be asked to share their personal views in the academic setting, no student will ever be required to assent to or agree with any "divisive" concept under Alabama law, nor penalized for refusing to support or endorse it. All students are strongly encouraged to think independently and analytically about all material presented in class. They may express their views in a time, place, and manner consistent with class organization and structure, per UAB's commitment to free and open thought, inquiry, and expression.

Collaboration, integrity, respect, and excellence are the core values of our institution, affirming what it means to be a member of the UAB community. A key foundation of UAB is diversity. At UAB, everybody counts every day. UAB is committed to fostering a respectful, accessible, and open campus environment. We value every member of our campus and the richly different perspectives, characteristics, and life experiences that contribute to UAB's unique environment. UAB values and cultivates access, engagement, and opportunity in all aspects of our research, learning, clinical, and work environments. I aim to create an open and welcoming environment that supports the success of all UAB community members.

COURSE READINGS

Our course has one required book.¹ Other texts (e.g., journal articles, book chapters, videos, and other media) will be distributed on Canvas throughout the semester. I am happy to provide additional recommendations for your assignments and our area of inquiry more broadly.

Required text:²

Kimmerer, R. W. (2015). *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge, and the teachings of plants*. Milkweed Editions. ISBN-10: 15713135672

COURSE ETHICS

Classroom Behavior³

This course is designed to help prepare thoughtful, ethically grounded, and intellectually serious students for professional and civic life in psychology, peacebuilding, human rights, and related fields. Accordingly, our classroom is not simply a place to receive information; it is a shared intellectual and ethical community shaped through dialogue, collaborative inquiry, and mutual respect. Because this course is organized as a discussion-based seminar, your preparation, attentiveness, and participation are essential to your own learning and the quality of the collective learning environment.

Throughout the semester, we will engage difficult and often emotionally, politically, and morally complex topics related to violence, trauma, identity, spirituality, reconciliation, oppression, and human flourishing. We will not always agree with one another, nor should we. However, disagreement must remain grounded in textual engagement, careful listening, good-faith interpretation, and respect for the dignity of others. One of the most important intellectual and moral skills you can develop is learning to understand and articulate another viewpoint fairly before critiquing it (“Yes, and...” usually helps). Our goal is not to “win” discussions, but to deepen collective understanding. You should view our course as rehearsal for your professional life.

Seminars also provide opportunities to practice the increasingly rare arts of concentration, presence, and sustained attention.⁴ Please arrive prepared and on time, minimize unnecessary electronic distractions (e.g., phones away and on silent unless previously cleared with me), and use technology only when it directly supports learning (e.g., quickly checking a fact during discussion). While I understand that many of us prefer using digital readings and notes, habitual

¹ If you don’t want to support Amazon etc., here are some independent bookstores:

<https://bookshop.org/>

<https://www.thriftbooks.com/>

<https://www.powells.com/>

² The UAB bookstore has physical and [virtual copies](#) you can purchase, and Sterne Library should also have a reserve copy to check out. Further, if you have a Spotify premium account, you can listen to the full e-book [here](#).

³ Credit and kudos to Professor Geneviève Souillac and her UAB *Peace, Justice, and Human Rights* 2017 seminar for language and ideas used throughout this syllabus on building and maintaining a healthy and challenging social contract within the classroom.

⁴ If you’re interested in learning more about this trend among the younger generations, I recommend Jonathan Haidt’s 2024 book *The Anxious Generation* which covers this issue fairly well. You can access the full text online for free through UAB’s Library.

multitasking, texting, social media use, and fragmented attention diminish both individual learning and the quality of collective dialogue.⁵ Increasingly, sustained focus, thoughtful listening, and meaningful interpersonal engagement are essential professional skills in tertiary education, clinical work, leadership, and public life. You are therefore expected to:

- Complete readings before class,
- Listen actively and respectfully,
- Engage/critique/debate ideas rather than attack persons,
- Support arguments with evidence and thoughtful reasoning,
- Remain open to complexity and ambiguity,
- Contribute to an environment where others feel intellectually safe enough to think aloud, take risks, and revise their perspectives.

Finally, approach conflict and disagreement with a restorative rather than punitive orientation. Assume complexity before malice, extend grace where possible, hold yourself accountable when necessary, and above all else: be kind.

Academic Integrity Code

Your success, both during your time at UAB and after graduation, is valued by the University. You must complete your coursework and research to gain and develop the knowledge and skills necessary for your future career. The purpose of the [Academic Integrity Code](#) is to support our academic mission and to maintain and promote academic integrity. All students attending UAB are expected to pursue all academic endeavors with integrity, honor, and professionalism, and to observe standards of conduct appropriate to a community of scholars. Please be sure you understand the different forms of "academic misconduct" the code covers. See what UAB students say about academic integrity and review the FAQs on the [Student Academic Integrity webpage](#).

Academic Policy Appeal

Students should request an Academic Policy Appeal when they are unable to continue in a course due to reasons beyond the strict qualifications outlined in this policy. Students must submit supporting documentation to demonstrate why they are unable to continue in a course. Learn more about the Academic Policy Appeal and how to submit an appeal form by visiting the [Academic Policy Appeal webpage](#).

Grading Policies and Practices

UAB offers various grading policies to students, including the Study Abroad Grading Policy, the Grade Change Policy, the Course Repeat Policy, and the University Forgiveness Policy. View more about the policies in the Grading Policies and Practices section of the [Undergraduate Catalog](#).

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use

For my courses, you may NOT use generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) on material that you submit for a grade in this course. Writing assistance AI programs (e.g., Grammarly) are acceptable only for spelling, mechanics, and grammatical copyediting; however, you must disclose on the assignment that you have used this technology and how you used it. You may use GenAI privately to clarify difficult concepts or generate study questions, but you may not use it to draft, outline, revise, summarize, or otherwise produce material submitted for a grade. If I suspect that you are using GenAI for your assignments in a manner that violates the course ethics

⁵ Empirical evidence indicates that handwritten notes significantly activate deeper neural networks than typed notes; see the uploaded article "Handwriting by not typewriting leads to widespread brain activity: A high-density EEG study with implications for the classroom" in the Resources section of Canvas for more information.

outlined in this syllabus, I will first arrange a meeting to discuss the situation and determine the best course of action. Violations may result in assignment or course penalties consistent with UAB's Academic Integrity Code and its established review procedures. Further, depending on the violation, I reserve the right to report suspected GenAI use to the College of Arts and Sciences, Graduate School, and Honors College Academic Integrity Code Coordinators, as well as to the department chair(s) and/or dean(s). Be prepared to accept changes (within reason) to my GenAI policy. Developments in GenAI are in flux, and the rules outlined in this syllabus may need to be revised on short notice. This may affect the content of assignments and their evaluation.

Academic misconduct is present in academic work wherever AI assistance has been used when unauthorized or when authorized has not been disclosed as required. Such behavior is considered deceit and a violation of UAB's shared commitment to truth and academic integrity. Deceit constitutes academic misconduct and is subject to review according to UAB's Academic Integrity Code.

Student Conduct Code

The purpose of the UAB student conduct process is to support UAB's vision, mission, shared values, and the tenets of the UAB's creed, The Blazer Way. Through a student-focused, learning-centered lens, the process strives to uphold individual and community standards, foster an environment of personal accountability for decisions, promote personal growth and the development of life skills, and care for the well-being, health, safety, and property of all members of the UAB community. The [Student Conduct Code](#) ("Code") outlines the standards of behavior for all students and student organizations, as well as the rights of students and the process for adjudicating alleged violations. It is written to provide a general notice of non-academic prohibited conduct. The Code should be read broadly and is not designed to define non-academic conduct in exhaustive terms. All students and student organizations are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with the Code. The current version of the Code, which may be revised periodically, is available from the Office of Community Standards & Student Accountability.

Intellectual Property

My lectures and course materials, including PowerPoint presentations, quizzes, exams, outlines, and similar materials, are protected by copyright. You may take notes and make copies of course materials for your own use; you may not audio- or video-record the class without my explicit permission. Without my written consent, you may not allow others to publicly reproduce or distribute lecture notes and course materials, whether a fee is charged.

Title IX Statement

Per Title IX, UAB does not discriminate based on gender in its programs or services. UAB is committed to providing an environment free from gender-based discrimination and expects individuals who live, work, teach, and study within this community to contribute positively to it and refrain from behaviors that threaten the freedom or respect that every member of our community deserves. For more information about Title IX, policy, reporting, protections, resources, and support, please visit the [UAB Title IX webpage](#).

Violence Prevention and Response Policy

UAB is committed to maintaining a safe and secure educational environment and workplace to ensure the well-being of faculty, staff, students, and visitors. UAB prohibits violence and threatened violence. Each UAB community member is responsible for understanding, preventing, and responding appropriately to campus/workplace violence. For more information, please refer to the [Violence Prevention and Response Policy](#).

GRADING SCALE:⁶

A = 90—100 (percent = points)

B = 80—89

C = 70—79

D = 60—69

F = <60

COURSE ASSESSMENT:⁷

The history of seminar education spans thousands of years, from Socratic dialogue in classical philosophy to French salons and contemporary Oxford-style tutorials.⁸ Seminars emphasize participatory discussion, close textual analysis, facilitation, and independent research because these practices cultivate the ability not merely to absorb information, but to interrogate assumptions, wrestle with complexity, communicate ideas clearly, and participate meaningfully in the collaborative production of knowledge and said knowledge's implementation in the world around us. These practices ask students to constantly wrestle with complexity and interrogate conscious and unconscious assumptions—make no mistake, absolute right or wrong is not a mainstay of this course. Accordingly, assessment in this course evaluates intellectual, ethical, and professional capacities aligned with our learning outcomes:

1. **Attendance, participation, and mastery of course materials** emphasize preparation, close reading, collaborative inquiry, and the ability to think critically with others through dialog.
2. **Facilitation** develops skills in group-level communication, program design, ethical reflection, adaptability, and collective meaning-making.
3. **Final Synthesis** asks you to integrate the course's major theoretical, methodological, and practical insights into rigorous, evidence-based analysis. Undergraduate students will complete a closed-note, essay-format final examination to apply holistic knowledge to a case study. Graduate students may choose either the examination or a semester-long evidence-synthesis paper.
4. **Extra credit** provides opportunities for further intellectual and professional engagement and, when necessary, final-grade "shrapnel cover" for the occasional semester snafu.

Assignment Submission Policies

Unless otherwise specified, written assignments must include your official UAB name and be submitted both through Canvas and to my UAB email (nrs1992@uab.edu) as Word documents. I will provide feedback on the emailed Word document; the Canvas submission supports academic-integrity review, including plagiarism and unauthorized GenAI use.

Deadlines are part of professional practice and help develop accountability, time management, and project planning. Unless prior arrangements have been made, late submissions

⁶ Generally, Incompletes (a grade of "I") are given only in the most extraordinary circumstances (e.g., severe illness). Per UAB's policy, outstanding work for an Incomplete must be submitted and graded by the grade submission deadline of the following semester. In this case, May 2027. If the Incomplete has not been replaced by this point in time, the final grade automatically becomes an "F."

⁷ Please see Canvas for grading rubrics and directions to complete all assignments.

⁸ If you're interested in learning about the intellectual origins of seminar-style instruction, I've uploaded John Henry Newman's seminal book, *The Idea of the University*, in Canvas. I highly recommend this to folks who might want to work at universities one day, as it lays a strong case for why universities should foment intellectual formation and critical thinking (rather than mere information transfer).

will generally receive a **1-point deduction per business day**. Because the course is graded on 100 points, this represents one percentage point of the final course grade per business day.

I also recognize that life becomes unpredictable. You may therefore invoke the **“Life Happens Policy” once during the semester** for a no-questions-asked **3-day extension** on one element of your facilitation assignment (proposal or reflection) or Evidence-Synthesis Project (proposal or revision). No explanation or documentation is required. Please make every reasonable effort to notify me before the original deadline so I can adjust my grading schedule. Extensions beyond this policy will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

ASSESSMENT	DUE DATE	PERCENTAGE
1. Attendance, Participation & Mastery of Course Materials (30%) - Weeks 1-5 - Weeks 6-10 - Weeks 11-15	- Wednesday, 23 September - Wednesday, 28 October - Wednesday, 9 December	10% 10% 10%
2. Facilitation (30%) - Email introduction & session preferences - Facilitation proposal - Facilitation - Reflective essay	- Friday, 28 August - Two weeks before facilitation - Variable - One week after facilitation	0% 5% 15% 10%
3. Final Synthesis (40%) - Final Exam (<i>All undergrads, grad student option</i>) - Evidence-Synthesis (<i>Grad student option</i>) - Proposal - Revision - Final submission	- 7:00-9:30 P.M. on Wednesday, 9 December - Friday, 25 September - Friday, 30 October - Wednesday, 9 December	40% 5% 5% 30%
4. Extra Credit (1% per submission)	Ongoing	10%
TOTAL		110%/100%

1. Attendance, Participation & Mastery of Course Materials (30%)

Attendance in this seminar is grounded in relational accountability: our learning depends on one another's preparation and presence. You may have **one (1) unexcused absence without penalty**. Beginning with the second unexcused absence, each additional absence reduces your final course grade by **10 percentage points** (one letter grade). This deduction includes the participation points otherwise available for that session. **More than three unexcused absences will result in an automatic F**. Excused absences require appropriate documentation and may include illness, bereavement, religious observances, jury or military duty, disability-related accommodations, approved UAB activities, conference presentations, and civil unrest. Routine transportation problems, work conflicts, and vacations are generally not excused. Please communicate anticipated challenges as early as possible; make-up opportunities will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Active participation is equally important. Come prepared to analyze, question, critique, and connect the readings rather than simply summarize them. Strong participation includes substantive contributions, careful listening, respectful disagreement, and engagement with peers' ideas. You are expected to complete the readings yourself and contribute your own interpretations

and scholarly voice; AI-generated summaries or analyses cannot substitute for the intellectual rigor asked of seminar participants.

Mastery of course material will be assessed primarily through **organic in-class participation**. Each session is worth up to **2 points**: deep, substantive engagement earns 2 points, while limited or superficial participation earns 1 point. Your first unexcused absence will be excluded from the participation average rather than scored as zero. Beginning with the second unexcused absence, the 10-point course-grade deduction applies without an additional participation penalty. If I observe substantial neglect of assigned readings, I may instead administer occasional **2-point reading quizzes**, which will replace participation points for that session.

2. Facilitation (30%)⁹

Over the course of the semester, you will facilitate a portion of one seminar session. This assignment develops practical skills in program design, collaborative inquiry, public communication, ethical leadership, adaptability, and reflective professional practice. These capacities are central to successful careers in peacebuilding, human rights practice, clinical and community work, research, policy, and other settings in which people must think and act together. The assignment unfolds across four stages: preparation, design, implementation, and reflection. Full directions and grading rubrics for each graded component are available in Canvas.

2.1: Email Introduction & Session Preferences

Due date: Friday, 28 August 2026

By the end of the first week of the semester, please email me a brief introduction including:

- Your preferred name, background, academic standing/major/minor/degree program, and other university activities,
- Any professional experiences (e.g., research labs, internships) you have completed or are completing that are relevant to the course,
- Why you chose this course and how it connects to your longer-term goals,
- Three (3) seminar sessions you would be interested in facilitating and why,
- and any additional information or accommodations I should be aware of to support your success.

Depending on class size and topic distribution, some students may co-facilitate sessions as part of a pair or team.

2.2: Facilitation Proposal

Minimum length: ~1,500 words as an individual / ~2,000 words as a team¹⁰

Due date: At least two weeks before your facilitation¹¹

Before facilitating, you will develop a professional-style facilitation proposal explaining what you hope the class will examine, how you plan to create that learning experience, and why your design makes sense. The proposal is more than a lesson plan: it asks you to practice the kind of intentional program design common in peacebuilding, human rights, and related fields. Your

⁹ In Canvas, I've uploaded David Schön's (1983) great book, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, which describes his suggestions for integrating constant reflection into professional behavior and deliverable-completion. I leaned on this work as I constructed your pre/post facilitation reflection prompts, and I encourage you to skim his text as you develop your professional identity and personal standard operating procedures in your vocational life.

¹⁰ Minimum word length for all assignments in this course is not inclusive of references and/or a works cited section.

¹¹ For individuals/teams who want to facilitate sessions 2 or 3, we need to be in contact ASAP so I can approve your plan and disseminate potential reading changes to your colleagues.

proposal will identify your central focus and learning goals; develop a theory of change explaining how and why your proposed activities may contribute to those goals; provide a realistic facilitation design and timeline; consider participation, ethics, disagreement, and adaptability; and identify any materials or resources needed for implementation. You should engage relevant course readings and other scholarship where appropriate.

Creativity is encouraged, including dialogue, simulations, case analysis, debates, role play, reflective exercises, multimedia, skills practice, and collaborative problem-solving. Your proposal provides an intentional starting point rather than a script. I will likely recommend revisions, and learning to respond thoughtfully to feedback, uncertainty, and unintended consequences is part of the assignment.

2.3: Facilitation

Due date: Variable

Minimum facilitation length: 45 minutes as an individual / 60 minutes as a team

Your facilitation will occur near the beginning of your assigned seminar session, after which I will help synthesize themes, introduce additional context, and continue our collective inquiry. Your goal is to help the seminar do meaningful intellectual work together. Strong facilitations move beyond summarizing readings toward analysis, application, questioning, synthesis, disagreement, and collaborative meaning-making. They create multiple avenues for meaningful participation while remaining attentive to dignity, power, boundaries, and the complexities of discussing difficult material. You will be evaluated on what occurs in the room rather than on perfect fidelity to your proposal. Strong facilitators listen, read group dynamics, adapt pacing or activities when needed, and preserve the purpose of a session while allowing its form to evolve. Preparation matters; so do judgment, presence, ethical responsiveness, and the ability to learn from what emerges.

During and immediately after your facilitation, you should jot down brief field notes using the template provided in Canvas. Capture important moments, decisions, group dynamics, unexpected developments, and questions you want to revisit. These notes are not separately graded; they provide evidence for your post-facilitation reflection.

2.4: Post-Facilitation Reflection

Due date: Within one week after your facilitation

Minimum length: 1,500 words

After some distance from the experience, you will return to your proposal, field notes, memories of the facilitation, course readings, and my feedback to examine your facilitation as a form of professional praxis. The reflection emphasizes radical honesty, psychological analysis, ethical reflexivity, and professional growth. You will examine consequential moments from the session; distinguish observation from interpretation; consider how your own assumptions, emotions, habits, judgments, identity, or desire for control shaped the experience; and analyze your relationship with the group.

Most importantly, you must seriously engage at least one author (or author team) from our course readings and use their work to develop a psychological interpretation of your own praxis. Your primary goal is to allow theory from your chosen reading to deepen or complicate how you understand yourself as a practitioner. Your reflection should conclude by translating these insights into more intentional future practice and considering the kind of practitioner you are becoming.

3. Final Synthesis (40%)

The Final Synthesis asks you to demonstrate what you can do with the theories, methods, evidence, and ethical questions we have examined throughout the semester. Undergraduate students will complete a cumulative final examination. Graduate students may choose either the final examination or a semester-long Evidence-Synthesis paper. Both pathways assess your ability

to move beyond recalling course content toward using psychological science to investigate consequential questions about peace, violence, human rights, and human flourishing. The examination emphasizes synthesis across assigned course materials, while the Evidence-Synthesis emphasizes independent research, methodological rigor, critical appraisal, and sustained engagement with a focused body of evidence.

3.1: Final Examination (All undergrad students, optional for grad students)

Time/Date/Location: 7:00-9:30 P.M.; Wednesday, 9 December; Our classroom

The final examination will be cumulative, holistic, and essay-based; it will assess your ability to apply course material to an unfamiliar case study and construct clear, evidence-based arguments. Strong responses will draw on specific readings and theories, connect ideas across sessions, engage complexity, and consider relevant theoretical, ethical, methodological, and practical implications. Your conclusions need not match my own; evaluation will focus on the quality of your reasoning, command of course material, and strength of your analysis. Graduate students should demonstrate greater theoretical precision, methodological awareness, engagement with graduate readings, and intellectual independence.

3.2: Evidence-Synthesis Project (Optional for grad students)¹²

The Evidence-Synthesis Project is a semester-long investigation of a focused question at the intersection of psychological science, peacebuilding, and human rights. Rather than writing a conventional research essay in which you select a position and gather sources to support it, you will conduct a **structured evidence-synthesis** designed to determine what a defined body of scholarship supports, where important uncertainties remain, and why those findings matter. Depending on your question, the project may take the form of a systematic review, scoping review, integrative review, meta-analysis, or other form of structured critical synthesis. Psychological science should remain the primary analytical anchor, although relevant scholarship from public health, anthropology, political science, neuroscience, peace and conflict studies, human rights, and related fields may also be incorporated.

The purpose is not to prove that your original expectations were correct. You will begin with a working proposition, but your conclusions should remain open to contradictory findings, null results, methodological limitations, contextual variation, and alternative explanations. A qualified or unexpected conclusion supported by strong evidence is preferable to a confident argument that exceeds what the literature can support. The first two stages are intentionally weighted lightly so that you have room to experiment, make mistakes, respond to feedback, and strengthen the project before most of the grade is determined by the completed synthesis. The project is scaffolded across three stages:

3.2.1: Evidence-Synthesis Proposal¹³

Due date: Friday, 25 September 2026

Length: ~1,500 words

The proposal is a scaled-down simulation of a competitive research grant application (in this case, National Institutes of Health). You will identify an important scientific problem and evidence gap, develop a focused research question and Specific Aims, propose an appropriate evidence-synthesis design, and explain why the project is both rigorous and feasible. The proposal should

¹² I suggest reaching out so we can discuss how this paper can best suit the specific needs you may have in completing your program's curriculum. I'm very open to the idea of you using this assignment to work on comprehensive exams/thesis/dissertation milestones, publishable manuscripts, and the like.

¹³ In Canvas, you'll find a solid review article ("[Formulation of a research question — Stepwise approach](#)") that articulates how to generate a research question (RQ) and why RQs are more useful than a general problem statement in developing and implementing a research plan.

engage at least 5 scholarly sources. The goal is to develop a credible research plan before substantial implementation begins.

3.2.2: Evidence-Synthesis Revision

Due date: Friday, 30 October 2026

Minimum Length: 2,500 words

The revision asks what happens when the proposed project encounters the actual evidence. You will respond to reviewer feedback, begin implementing the review methods, document important methodological changes, and present an emerging synthesis of the literature. At this stage, your methods, organization, or interpretation may still change; that is expected. Strong research requires adapting when the evidence reveals problems, limitations, or unexpected patterns. The revision should engage at least 10 scholarly sources and demonstrate a credible path toward completing the review.

3.2.3: Evidence-Synthesis Final Submission

Due date: Wednesday, 9 December 2026

Minimum length: 5,000 words

The final submission presents the completed evidence synthesis: what you reviewed, how you reviewed it, what the evidence collectively indicates, how confident you are in those conclusions, and why the findings matter. The paper should read as a completed scholarly synthesis rather than an extended proposal, annotated bibliography, or collection of article summaries. You will report your methods transparently, synthesize evidence across studies, critically appraise its strengths and limitations, connect findings to psychological theory, and draw conclusions proportionate to the evidence. Your final Discussion should explain what the review contributes and what implications responsibly follow for future research, measurement, practice, policy, peacebuilding, human rights, or another relevant domain. The paper should engage at least 15 scholarly sources overall, although the number of studies formally included will depend on the review question and eligibility criteria.

Ideally, this project will have value beyond the course: as a foundation for a thesis or dissertation, conference presentation, grant proposal, manuscript, professional report, or future research agenda. The larger goal is to practice how researchers identify an important uncertainty, design a credible investigation, respond to review, revise when evidence requires it, and communicate conclusions that deserve the confidence placed in them.

4. *Extra Credit (10%)*¹⁴

Below are several ways to earn extra credit. Each completed opportunity will add 1 point to your final course grade, for a maximum of 10 additional points. You may mix and match opportunities and may repeat categories, although each submission must involve a distinct experience or source and make meaningfully different connections to our course. To receive credit, you must submit a 500-word critical reflection explaining what you learned, how the experience relates to specific course readings or concepts, and how it shaped or challenged your thinking. Unless otherwise noted, activities outside UAB must be approved by me beforehand.

4.1: Attend a relevant event. Attend a psychology, peacebuilding, human rights, public health, environmental justice, religious, or related event at UAB, in Birmingham, or through another national or international organization. For non-UAB events, email me a link or provisional program and briefly explain what you expect to learn. All events sponsored by UAB's [Institute for Human Rights](#) will qualify.

¹⁴ I highly encourage students to complete these opportunities together, and I'm happy to discuss team submissions.

4.2: Critically engage a self-selected reading. Select a reputable news article, policy report, scholarly article, book, or book chapter related to psychology, peace, or human rights. Your reflection should identify the source's central argument, evidence, limitations, and relationship to at least one course reading or debate.

4.3: Watch a relevant film or documentary. Watch a film related to psychology, peacebuilding, conflict, human rights, trauma, reconciliation, spirituality, or ecological justice. The film must be approved by me beforehand, and your reflection should analyze it through specific course theories rather than simply review its plot.

4.4: Interview a researcher or practitioner. Conduct a brief interview with someone whose professional or community work relates to the course. Your reflection should connect their experience to at least two course concepts and consider how academic theory aligns—or fails to align—with professional practice.

4.5: Observe or participate in a relevant institution, site, or public process. Visit or participate in an approved museum, memorial, community organization, place of worship, public meeting, dialogue, civic process, or service activity. Reflect critically on how peace, rights, power, identity, care, or conflict were expressed through the experience.

4.6: Create a public-facing knowledge translation product. Develop an op-ed, policy brief, infographic, podcast, annotated resource guide, or similar product that communicates a course concept to a nonacademic audience. Submit the product along with a reflection explaining your intended audience, intellectual choices, and use of course material.

COURSE CALENDAR

SESSION	DATE	UNIT	TOPIC	ASSIGNMENT DUE
1	26 Aug	1: Foundations	- Syllabus Review - Defining Psychology, Peace & Human Rights	- Email introduction - Facilitation: Session Preferences
2	2 Sept	1	- Ethics - Participatory Research	
3	9 Sept	2: Biological Dynamics	- Neuroscientific Approaches - Neural Plasticity, Neurogenesis	
4	16 Sept	2	- Stress, Distress, Eustress - Individual & Intergenerational Health	
5	23 Sept	3: Psychological Dynamics	- Affect & Cognition - Moral Judgment	- Participation: Part I - Evidence-Synthesis: Proposal & Outline
6	30 Sept	3	- Behavioral Pathways to Violence/Nonviolence	
7	7 Oct	3	- Defining the Human Condition - Depth Psychology	
8	14 Oct		- Introduction to Ecopsychology - Catching Our Breath	
9	21 Oct	3	- Mental Health & Psychosocial Support	
10	28 Oct	4: Social Dynamics	- Individual & Group Identity - Intergroup Relations	- Participation: Part II - Evidence-Synthesis: Rough Draft
11	4 Nov	4	- Polarization - Leadership & Influence	
12	11 Nov	5: Spiritual Dynamics	- Meaning-Making & Purpose - Faith, Belief & Transcendence	
13	18 Nov	6: Ecological Dynamics	- Ecopsychology Continued - Indigenous Peacemaking	
NO CLASS: FALL/THANKSGIVING BREAK				
14	2 Dec	7: Endgame	- Reflections, Next Steps & Call to Action	- Participation: Part III
15	9 Dec	--	- Final Examination (all UG; G option) - Evidence-Synthesis (G option)	- Final Synthesis

WEEKLY BREAKDOWN

SESSION 1: 26 AUGUST 2026 **WHAT WILL WE DO TOGETHER?**

Our first session will begin by getting to know one another: who we are, why we are in this course, and how we hope the seminar might contribute to our academic, professional, and personal development. We will then carefully review the syllabus, course expectations, major assignments, and the broader logic of the semester so that everyone understands not only what we will do, but why we are doing it. Because this course asks us to engage difficult questions involving violence, identity, power, justice, dignity, and human suffering, we will also co-create a seminar ethics agreement that we can revisit and revise throughout the semester as our classroom community develops.

From there, we will turn to the intellectual foundations of the course. Drawing from Christie and colleagues, Johan Galtung, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Donnelly and Whelan, and William James, we will introduce peace psychology and human rights as interconnected fields of inquiry. We will examine concepts such as negative and positive peace, direct and structural violence, dignity, freedom, justice, and human flourishing while asking why psychology has historically devoted greater attention to aggression and pathology than to cooperation, reconciliation, and peacebuilding. We will conclude by considering what psychological science can contribute to building peace with justice and strengthening human rights for all persons.

Questions for Discussion

- Why have you chosen to study psychology, peace, and human rights, and how do you define these terms?
- How might our gravitational center of ‘psychological science’ shift how ‘peace and human rights’ is studied and experienced when compared to more conventional (e.g., political science, anthropology) disciplines?
- What is the psychologist’s role in co-constructing a “moral equivalent of war” in the classroom, laboratory, and beyond?

Required Readings¹⁵

All students:

- James, W. (1910). The moral equivalent of war. *McClure’s Magazine*, XXXV(4), 463-468.
- Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace, and peace research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 6(3), 167-191.
- Christie, D. J., Tint, B. S., Wagner, R. V. & DuNann Winter, D. (2008). Peace psychology for a peaceful world. *American Psychologist*, 63(6), 540-552.

PY undergrad students:

- United Nations General Assembly. (1948). *Universal declaration of human rights*. United Nations.

HRT undergrad students:

- Engel, G. L. (1977). The need for a new medical model: a challenge for biomedicine. *Science*, 196(4286), 129–136.

Grad students:

- United Nations General Assembly. (1948). *Universal declaration of human rights*. United Nations.

¹⁵ Remember, I list these in order of suggested reading to help you build concepts on one another.

- Engel, G. L. (1977). The need for a new medical model: a challenge for biomedicine. *Science*, 196(4286), 129–136.
- Donnelly, J. & Whelan, D. J. (2020). Chapter 1: Human rights in global politics: Historical perspective. *International human rights* (6th edition). Routledge.

Reading Strategy

- Begin with James (1910) and read it closely for his account of war's psychological and social appeal. Read Galtung (1969) closely for his framework defining direct/structural violence and positive/negative peace; skim extended typologies once you understand the framework. Read Christie et al. (2008) closely to understand the field of peace psychology's organizing map. HRT undergraduates should read Engel (1977) for the biopsychosocial model (PY students know this); PY undergraduates should read the UDHR (1948) in full (HRT students know this).
- Graduate students should read Engel (1977; if you have not already done so for another course) and Donnelly and Whelan (2020) closely, treating the UDHR as the primary document their historical analysis explains.

SESSION 2: 2 SEPTEMBER 2026

HOW SHOULD WE CONDUCT ETHICAL AND EVIDENCE-BASED PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH TO STRENGTHEN PEACE AND HUMAN RIGHTS?

Next, we will connect the moral imperative of ethical research to the pursuit of liberation, critical consciousness, and social transformation. The session also introduces critical participatory inquiry and broader debates concerning knowledge production, positionality, objectivity, and ethics in psychological research. We will examine how research methods themselves can either reproduce injustice or contribute to democratic engagement and resistance. Framed through Ignacio Martín-Baró's vision of a 'liberation psychology,' which challenged psychologists to move beyond detached individualism and instead confront structural violence, political repression, and the lived realities of oppressed communities, we will consider the cultural foundations of ethics codes in psychology and ask whether ethical practice can ever be separated from history, power, identity, and broader social conditions. Across these readings, we will wrestle with a foundational question for the course: what ethical responsibilities do psychological researchers have in societies shaped by inequality, violence, and oppression?

Questions for Discussion

- Who gets to define what counts as "knowledge," expertise, or truth within psychology and the social sciences, and how have systems of power shaped those definitions?
- Martín-Baró argued that psychology must become accountable to the lived realities of oppressed communities. What would a genuinely "liberatory" psychology look like in practice, and how would it differ from mainstream psychological approaches?
- What can critical participatory inquiry teach us about fortifying ethical research in psychological science?

Required Readings

All students:

- Martín-Baró, I. (1994). Chapter 1: Toward a liberation psychology. *Writings for a liberation psychology*. Harvard University Press.

- Call-Cummings, M., Dazzo, G. P. & Hauber-Özer, M. (2024). Chapter 1: Whose knowledge counts? *Critical participatory inquiry: An interdisciplinary guide*. Sage.¹⁶
- Parsonson, K. L. (2021). "Understanding psychology's ethics codes from an international perspective: The importance of non-ethnocentric appreciation and comparisons" in K. L. Parsonson's (Ed.) *Handbook of international psychology ethics: Codes and commentary from around the world*. Routledge.

Grad students:

- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum.
 - Publisher's Forward, Introduction to the Anniversary Edition, Forward, Preface, Chapter 1
- Fine, M. (2006). Bearing witness: Methods for researching oppression and resistance—a textbook for critical research. *Social Justice Research*, 19(1), 83-108.

Reading Strategy

- Begin with Martín-Baró (1994) and read it closely for the foundations of liberation psychology. Read Call-Cummings et al. (2024) closely for positionality, knowledge democratization, and critical participatory inquiry. Read Parsonson (2021) for the central argument that ethics codes are culturally situated; skim the extended history and international examples once you understand that argument.
- Graduate students should read Fine (2006) closely for her critiques of objectivity, validity, generalizability, and researcher distance; this (and anything by Michelle Fine, to be honest) is a great source if you ever publish on participatory methods. In Freire (1970), moderately skim the front matter, then pay closer attention to Chapter 1, focusing on oppression, mutual liberation, and banking versus problem-posing education.

SESSION 3: 9 SEPTEMBER 2026

HOW DO HUMAN NEUROBIOLOGICAL SYSTEMS SHAPE (AND ARE SHAPED BY) OUR CAPACITIES FOR AGGRESSION, THREAT, SAFETY, AND CONNECTION?

This session examines how contemporary neuroscience is reshaping our understanding of conflict, connection, fear, and empathy. Moving beyond older assumptions that the brain is biogenetically fixed, we will debate how neuroplasticity, social experience, and political environments intersect to shape emotional regulation, perception, identity, and behavior across the lifespan. Drawing from research on fear conditioning and trauma, we will examine how chronic exposure to danger, humiliation, violence, and insecurity can reorganize neural and physiological systems in ways that reinforce hypervigilance, defensive behavior, and cycles of conflict. At the same time, these readings challenge purely deterministic or deficit-based understandings of human behavior by exploring the plasticity of the "social brain," including the possibility that compassion, co-regulation, emotional resilience, and prosocial orientation can themselves be intentionally cultivated through relationships, contemplative practices, and social environments. Across our discussions, we will ask: if fear, empathy, aggression, trauma, and connection are deeply embodied and neurobiological processes, what does this mean for how psychologists understand healing, conflict transformation, and the possibility of peace?

Questions for Discussion

- What are the ethical, political, and practical implications of understanding the human brain as fundamentally plastic (i.e., alterable) and shaped by social experience?

¹⁶ Fun fact: Dr. Call-Cummings taught me advanced participatory action research, which was my last PhD class, way back in the spring of 2021. She and the co-authors (who were Teaching Assistants in the class I took) are beloved colleagues of mine. Hopefully, you will see why in the reading.

- Several authors argue that empathy, compassion, and emotional regulation can be intentionally cultivated through contemplative, relational, or social practices. To what extent do you find this convincing, and what limitations or dangers might accompany this perspective?
- Across these readings, what vision of human nature begins to emerge? Are humans primarily threat-oriented and defensive, relational and cooperative, endlessly adaptable, or something else entirely?

Readings

All students:

- Singer, T. (2025). A neuroscience perspective on the plasticity of the social and relational brain. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1547, 52–74.
- Masterson, M. (2022). Humiliation and international conflict perspectives. *The Journal of Politics*, 84(2), 876-888.
- Klimecki, O. M., Leiberg, S., Lamm, C., & Singer, T. (2013). Functional neural plasticity and associated changes in positive affect after compassion training. *Cerebral Cortex*, 23(7), 1552–1561.

Grad students:

- Porges, S. W. (2025). Polyvagal theory: Current status, clinical applications, and future directions. *Clinical Neuropsychiatry*, 22(3), 169-184.
- Li, Y., Zhi, W., Qi, B., Wang, L. & Hu, X. (2023). Update on neurobiological mechanisms of fear: Illuminating the direction of mechanism exploration and treatment development of trauma and fear disorders. *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience*, 17, 1216524.

Supplementary reading:

- Gazerani, P. (2025). The neuroplastic brain: Current breakthroughs and emerging frontiers. *Brain Research*, 1858, 149643.

Reading Strategy

- Begin with Singer (2025) and read it closely for distinctions among empathy, compassion, mentalizing, and social-brain plasticity. Read Masterson (2022) closely for how humiliation may increase conflict preferences. Read Klimecki et al. (2013) for the main argument, research design, and findings; skim technical neuroimaging details. Gazerani (2025) is supplementary background on general neuroplasticity mechanisms (useful for non-neuro folks who want a primer).
- Graduate students should read Li et al. (2023) for fear acquisition, extinction, generalization, and relapse, skimming detailed molecular pathways after understanding the framework. Read Porges (2025) for neuroception, co-regulation, defensive states, and social engagement, while treating Polyvagal Theory as a debated framework rather than settled consensus; he's an important name to know and bandied about quite often.

SESSION 4: 16 SEPTEMBER 2026

HOW DOES STRESS GET 'UNDER THE SKIN' AND ACCUMULATE ACROSS TIME, SPREAD THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS/GENERATIONS/SOCIAL CONTEXT AND SHAPE HUMAN HEALTH?

In this session, we will closely investigate how stress, trauma, violence, and social inequality become biologically and psychologically embedded within/down/across individual lives, families, communities, and generations. Building on last week's discussion of neuroplasticity and fear, we now turn toward the relationship between toxic stress, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), trauma physiology, epigenetics, and broader social structures. Rather than treating trauma solely as an individual psychological event, these readings explore how poverty, war, persecution,

instability, and chronic insecurity shape bodies, nervous systems, emotional regulation, health outcomes, and life trajectories over time. We will examine the distinction between adaptive (i.e., eu-) and maladaptive (i.e., dis-) stress, including debates surrounding limits of resilience narratives, while also considering how trauma can persist long after violence formally ends. Readings on intergenerational trauma and epigenetics raise profound questions concerning memory, inheritance, embodiment, and whether/how violence can leave biological traces across generations. Finally, drawing from Holocaust survivor research and contemporary studies of refugees and childhood adversity, we will wrestle with the following: how can stress be both a marker and consequence of human rights violations while also a motivational force to combat these violations?

Questions for Discussion

- Last week's readings emphasized neuroplasticity, fear conditioning, and the social brain. How do this week's readings deepen or complicate those ideas by showing how chronic stress and violence become biologically embedded through allostatic load, physiology, and epigenetic processes?
- McEwen argues that toxic stress cannot be separated from social structures such as poverty, instability, inequality, and weak social support systems. How does this challenge more individualistic psychological explanations of stress and mental health?
- Studies on ACEs, survivor syndrome, and intergenerational epigenetics both suggest that violence may persist long after the original event itself has ended. What do these readings suggest about memory, embodiment, and the long-term social consequences of war, persecution, and displacement?

Required Readings

All students:

- McEwen, C. A. (2022). Connecting the biology of stress, allostatic load and epigenetics to social structures and processes. *Neurobiology of Stress*, 17, 100426.
- Swedo, E. A., Pampati, S., Anderson, K. N., Thorne, E., McKinnon, I. I., Brenner, N. D., Stinson, J., Mpofu, J. J. & Niolon, P. H. (2024). Adverse Childhood Experiences and Health Conditions and Risk Behaviors Among High School Students — Youth Risk Behavior Survey, United States, 2023. *US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 73(4), 39–49.
- Niederland W. G. (1981). The survivor syndrome: further observations and dimensions. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 29(2), 413–425.

Grad students:

- van der Kolk, B. A. & d'Andrea, W. (2010). "Towards a developmental trauma disorder diagnosis for childhood interpersonal trauma" in R. A. Lanius, E. Vermetten and C. Pain (Eds.), *The impact of early life trauma on health and disease: The hidden epidemic*. Cambridge University Press.
- Mulligan, C. J., Quinn, E. B., Hamadmad, D., Dutton, C. L., Nevell, L., Binder, A. M., Panter-Brick, C. & Dajani, R. (2025). Epigenetic signatures of intergenerational exposure to violence in three generations of Syrian refugees. *Scientific Reports*, 15, 5945.

Supplementary reading:

- Le Fevre, M., Mathen, J. & Kolt, G. S. (2003). Eustress, distress, and interpretation in occupational stress. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 18(7), 726-744.

Reading Strategy

- Begin with McEwen (2022) and read it closely for how social structures shape toxic stress, allostatic load, and development; allostatic theory is critical for our course. Read Swedo et

al. (2024) for the main findings and limitations; skim detailed tables and methods. Read Niederland (1981) closely for the long-term psychological and physical consequences of persecution; this landmark study deserves our full attention. Le Fevre et al. (2003) is supplementary background on eustress and distress.

- Graduate students should read van der Kolk and d'Andrea (2010) closely for the limits of PTSD and the developmental-trauma framework. Read Mulligan et al. (2025) for its multigenerational design and central findings; skim detailed epigenomic methods.

SESSION 5: 23 SEPTEMBER 2026

HOW DO COGNITION AND AFFECT INTERACT TO SHAPE MORAL JUDGMENT, INCLUDING WHO WE SEE AS DESERVING OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND JUSTICE?

This session examines how cognition, emotion, and moral intuition shape the ways humans interpret justice, rights, conflict, and “the other.” Building on earlier discussions of neuroplasticity and stress, we now add the complexities of cognitive-affective processes that influence perception, judgment, and ethical reasoning. Drawing from foundational work on cognitive dissonance and the mere exposure effect, we will explore how beliefs and attitudes are often shaped less by detached rationality than by familiarity, emotional states, social pressures, and the need for internal psychological coherence. We will also note how fear, sadness, and other affective states alter moral judgment during moments of crisis and instability, raising questions about the reliability of ethical decision-making under conditions of uncertainty and threat. Finally, through moral foundations theory and scholarship on cognitive bias, we will interrogate why individuals and groups often arrive at radically different understandings of fairness, authority, loyalty, purity, rights, and justice despite believing themselves to be morally rational actors. Across these readings, we will wrestle with a difficult but foundational question for psychology and human rights alike: if human judgment is shaped by cognitive shortcuts, affective processes, social exposure, and ideological frameworks, what does this mean for how we understand prejudice, polarization, moral disagreement, and the possibility of democratic coexistence?

Questions for Discussion

- The readings on emotion and moral judgment suggest that fear and sadness alter ethical decision-making in distinct ways. How can we harness this knowledge to better guide moral reasoning during periods of crisis, instability, or collective threat?
- Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance suggests that people often change beliefs to maintain internal psychological consistency. How might this help explain why individuals justify injustice, rationalize violence, or remain committed to harmful ideologies even when confronted with contradictory evidence?
- Moral foundations theory argues that liberals and conservatives rely upon different moral intuitions and priorities. Does this framework help explain contemporary political and human rights conflicts, or does it risk oversimplifying ideological differences and power relations?

Required Readings

All students:

- Festinger, L., & Carlsmith, J. M. (1959). Cognitive consequences of forced compliance. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 58(2), 203–210.
- Graham, J., Haidt, J., & Nosek, B. A. (2009). Liberals and conservatives rely on different sets of moral foundations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 96(5), 1029–1046.
- Zheng, M., Qin, S., & Zhao, J. (2024). Effects of sadness and fear on moral judgments in public emergency events. *Behavioral Sciences*, 14(6), 468.

Grad students:

- Hofmann, B. (2023). Biases in bioethics: A narrative review. *BMC Medical Ethics*, 24, 17.
- Friedman, H. H. (2023). *Cognitive biases and their influence on critical thinking and scientific reasoning: A practical guide for students and teachers*. Retrieved from: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2958800>

Supplementary reading:

- Zajonc, R. B. (1968). Attitudinal effects of mere exposure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 9(2), 1-27.

Reading Strategy

- Begin with Festinger and Carlsmith (1959) and read closely for cognitive dissonance and induced compliance. Read Graham et al. (2009) closely for moral foundations and ideological differences. Read Zheng et al. (2024) for the CNI model and central findings; skim technical details after understanding how sadness and fear altered moral judgment. Zajonc (1968) is supplementary (for this class, at least) but foundational because it demonstrated that repeated exposure alone could improve attitudes without argument, reinforcement, or meaningful interaction, establishing familiarity as a basic affective mechanism with major implications for prejudice, propaganda, intergroup contact, and peacebuilding.
- Graduate students should read Hofmann (2023) closely for his taxonomy of biases in bioethics. Read Friedman (2023) selectively, focusing on biases relevant to conflict, outgroups, and scientific reasoning rather than every example.

SESSION 6: 30 SEPTEMBER 2026

HOW DOES SOCIAL COGNITION SHAPE WHETHER INDIVIDUALS AND COLLECTIVES COOPERATE, HELP, OR HARM?

This session examines the psychological and behavioral processes that can move individuals and societies toward either cooperation or violence. Continuing our cognitive-affective-behavioral framework, we now turn to the social learning, relational structures, cultural norms, institutional pressures, and developmental motivations that shape prosocial and aggressive behavior. Drawing from Bandura's foundational work on observational learning, we will examine how violence is modeled, normalized, and reproduced through families, institutions, media, and broader cultural systems. Deutsch's theory of cooperation and competition invites us to consider how the structure of goals and relationships can make either mutual assistance or obstruction more likely. Kelman's analysis of torture as a "crime of obedience" extends these questions into the realm of human rights by demonstrating how authorization, routinization, and dehumanization can weaken moral restraints and enable participation in institutionalized violence. Graduate readings deepen both sides of this inquiry: Davidov and colleagues examine the distinct motivations underlying prosocial behavior, while Arendt interrogates how legality, duty, obedience, and the displacement of independent judgment can transform systematic violence into the performance of an apparently ordinary institutional role. Ultimately, this week asks a deceptively simple but deeply consequential question: under what psychological, relational, and institutional conditions do humans learn or become authorized to harm one another, and under what conditions can cooperative, protective, and caring behavior become more likely?

Questions for Discussion

- Bandura's Bobo Doll experiment suggests that aggression can be socially learned through observation and imitation. What implications does this have for attempts to prevent or

mitigate violence within families, schools, political movements, media systems, and societies more broadly?

- Kelman conceptualizes torture as a “crime of obedience” enabled through authorization, routinization, and dehumanization. How do institutions weaken individual moral restraint, and how should responsibility be distributed between direct perpetrators and those who formulate, authorize, normalize, or tolerate violent policies?
- Across Bandura, Deutsch, and Kelman, to what extent do violence and cooperation appear to be products of individual choice versus learned behavior, relational structures, institutional authority, cultural norms, and broader social conditions?

Required Readings

All students:

- Bandura, A., Ross, D. & Ross, S. A. (1961). Transmission of aggression through imitation of aggressive models. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 63(3), 575–582.
- Deutsch, M. (1949). A theory of co-operation and competition. *Human Relations*, 2(2), 129–152.
- Kelman, H. C. (2005). The policy context of torture: A social-psychological analysis. *International Review of the Red Cross*, 87(857), 123–134.

Grad students:

- Davidov, M., Vaish, A., Knafo-Noam, A. & Hastings, P. D. (2016). The motivational foundations of prosocial behavior from a developmental perspective—evolutionary roots and key psychological mechanisms: Introduction to the special section. *Child Development*, 87(6), 1655–1667.
- Arendt, H. (1964). Chapter VIII: Duties of a law-abiding citizen. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A report on the banality of evil*. Viking Press.

Supplementary reading

- Fry, D. P. (2012). Life without war. *Science*, 336(6083), 879–884.
- Olmos-Gómez, M., Ruiz-Garzón, F., Azancot-Chocron, D. & López-Cordero, R. (2023). Prosocial behaviour axioms and values: Influence of gender and volunteering. *Psicología: Reflexão e Crítica*, 36, 16.

Reading Strategy

- Begin with Bandura et al. (1961), focusing on the hypotheses, experimental design, and central findings; skim the finer procedural details once you understand how observational learning was tested. Read Deutsch (1949) closely for the distinction between cooperative and competitive goal structures and their psychological consequences. Read Kelman (2005) closely for torture as a “crime of obedience,” especially authorization, routinization, dehumanization, and the distribution of institutional responsibility. Fry (2012) and Olmos-Gómez et al. (2023) are supplementary extensions on peace systems and prosocial values.
- Graduate students should understand Davidov et al. (2016) for the major developmental and motivational foundations of prosocial behavior, moving more quickly through summaries of individual studies. Read Arendt (1964) closely for legality, duty, conscience, obedience, and personal responsibility, placing her argument directly into conversation with Kelman; she is a luminary that warrants deep thought and introspective reflection.

SESSION 7: 7 OCTOBER 2026

WHAT IS THE ‘HUMAN CONDITION,’ AND HOW CAN OUR DEFINITION MOTIVATE OUR QUEST FOR PEACE, JUSTICE & HUMAN RIGHTS?

This week marks a turning point in the course. Thus far, we have examined peace and human rights primarily through the lens of empirical science: neuroplasticity, stress, cognition, affect, and social conditioning. We have explored how humans become capable of both extraordinary care and extraordinary cruelty, and how systems of violence and inequality become biologically and psychologically embedded within individuals and across societies. This session turns deeply inward, asking not simply ‘what psychology explains,’ but ‘what it means to be human’ in a world introjected by suffering, mortality, hope, love, violence, uncertainty, and meaning.

The depth psychologists in this week’s readings grapple with some of humanity’s oldest and most beguiling questions. Writing amidst World War I, Freud reflects on disillusionment, civilization, death, and the darker dimensions of human nature. Then, Maslow asks what human beings fundamentally need to flourish, become whole, and self-actualize. Frankl, reflecting on his experiences surviving Nazi concentration camps during WWII, argues that even under profound suffering, humans retain the freedom to choose meaning and moral orientation. Terror Management Theory suggests that much of human culture, identity, prejudice, and violence may emerge from our terrifying awareness of mortality itself. Meanwhile, Smithson and colleagues and Clarissa Pinkola Estés invite us to consider the psychological necessity of hope, imagination, instinct, and soulful reclamation in uncertain, confusing, and dark times.

I built this week to invite us to reflect deeply on our own definitions of the human condition, since our definitions are shaped by our individual differences, personality traits, and operational ‘theory of the person.’ Peacebuilding and human rights work are profoundly psychological, existential, moral, and spiritual projects. The possibilities and worlds we co-construct externally are existentially intertwined with the inner worlds we cultivate, consciously and unconsciously. I invite you to reflect honestly and openly on questions like: What do you believe human beings fundamentally seek? What fears most profoundly shape us? What gives life meaning in the face of suffering, injustice, and mortality? What sustains hope when our world feels on the brink of collapse? And what kind of person do you seek to become, responding to these stark realities?

Questions for Discussion

- What do you believe human beings are fundamentally motivated by: survival, belonging, meaning, love, power, fear, recognition, transcendence, something else, or some combination of these? Why?
- What gives our lives meaning when bombarded by suffering, loss, injustice, or violence, and yet, how can hope still endure?
- If peace and human rights work ultimately requires confronting both the beauty and darkness of human nature, what kind of person do you hope to become through that confrontation?

Required Readings

All students:

- Freud, S. (1915). “Thoughts for the times on war and death” in S. Freud and A. Freud (Eds.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the history of the psycho-analytic movement, papers on metapsychology, and other works*. The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis.
- Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370–396.
- Frankl, V. E. (1959). The case for tragic optimism. *Man’s search for meaning*. Beacon Press.
- Pinkola Estés, C. (1992). *Women who run with the wolves*. Ballantine Books.
 - Introduction: Singing over the bones
 - Chapter 1: The howl: Resurrection of the wild woman

Grad students:

- Greenberg, J., Solomon, S. & Pyszczynski, T. (1997). Terror management theory of self-esteem and cultural worldviews: Empirical assessments and conceptual refinements. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 29, 61-139.
- Smithson, M., Shou, Y., Dawel, A., Calex, A. L., Farrer, L. & Cherbuin, N. (2022). The psychological benefits of an uncertain world: Hope and optimism in the face of existential threat. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 749093.

Reading Strategy

- Begin with Freud (1915) and read it closely for his arguments about civilization, aggression, ambivalence, disillusionment, and death. Read Maslow (1943) for the hierarchy of needs and his broader account of human motivation, moving more quickly once you understand the hierarchy (pay close attention to self-actualization). Read Frankl (1959) closely for meaning, suffering, responsibility, and hope. Read Pinkola Estés (1992) for the La Loba story and her central account of instinct, psychic fragmentation, and reclamation; skim some of the extended symbolic elaboration after you understand the core argument.
- Graduate students should read Greenberg et al. (1997) closely for Terror Management Theory's central claims concerning mortality awareness, self-esteem, and cultural worldviews, while skimming the extended study-by-study review. Read Smithson et al. (2022) for its argument, longitudinal design, and central findings concerning the varied psychological effects of hope; skim detailed statistical modeling.

SESSION 8: 14 OCTOBER 2026

CATCHING OUR BREATH

This session serves as both a midpoint reflection and a change of pace within the course. After seven weeks examining the foundations of peace psychology, ethics, neuroscience, affect, cognition, behavior, and the depths of the human psyche through empirical science and psychological theory, we now pause—and perhaps get a little wrapped up—in Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass*. Grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing and being, Kimmerer offers a fundamentally different way of approaching knowledge, relationship, and flourishing. Rather than separating science, story, spirituality, ecology, ethics, and memory, she braids them together through narrative, reflection, Indigenous knowledge systems, and ecological observation. Across the first half of the book, Kimmerer asks us to reconsider what it means to belong to a place, and how humans might relate to the earth—and to one another—through reciprocity rather than domination. Her stories challenge assumptions embedded within western frameworks of individuality, ownership, and progress while returning us to gratitude, kinship, memory, responsibility, and mutual flourishing. This week is about cultivating attentiveness and imagining different ways of being human.

Questions for Discussion:

- After the emotionally heavy and introspective material from last week, what parts of *Braiding Sweetgrass* felt restorative, hopeful, grounding, or challenging to you personally?
- Kimmerer argues that humans have much to learn from the more-than-human world. How does this idea compare with the more traditional psychological perspectives we have read so far?
- If psychologists took Kimmerer's relational, place-based, and reciprocal worldview seriously, how might it change the way we design interventions for peace, human rights, and human flourishing?

Required Readings

All students:

- Kimmerer, R. W. (2022). *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge, and the teachings of plants*. Milkweed Editions.
 - Preface
 - Part 1: Planting Sweetgrass
 - Part 2: Tending Sweetgrass
 - Part 3: Picking Sweetgrass

Reading Strategy

- Read the Preface, “Skywoman Falling,” “Learning the Grammar of Animacy,” “Allegiance to Gratitude,” “Mishkos Kenomagwen: The Teachings of Grass,” and “The Honorable Harvest” closely for Kimmerer’s central ideas concerning reciprocity, animacy, gratitude, knowledge production, responsibility, and mutual flourishing. Read “The Council of Pecans,” “The Gift of Strawberries,” and “The Three Sisters” for their main arguments about collective survival, gift economies, and interdependence. Move more quickly through the remaining essays, but do not skim too aggressively: Kimmerer’s stories, memories, metaphors, and ecological observations are themselves part of her epistemology, not merely decoration surrounding an argument.

SESSION 9: 21 OCTOBER 2026

HOW CAN WE ACCELERATE THE STRUGGLE FOR PEACE AND HUMAN RIGHTS BY GRAPPLING WITH MENTAL HEALTH/PYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT AS A PRACTICE AND AN ETHIC OF CARE?

Returning to empirical psychological science, we now examine Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) in contexts of war, displacement, humanitarian emergency, and human rights violations. These readings ask us to confront the immense emotional, relational, and social burdens produced by collective violence while also questioning how “mental health” itself is defined across cultural and political contexts. Tol and colleagues situate MHPSS within a public-health framework that links psychological well-being to protection, education, livelihoods, dignity, and community support. Charlson and colleagues underscore the scale of mental health needs in conflict-affected populations, while Summerfield challenges the globalization of Western psychiatric categories and warns against medicalizing or depoliticizing understandable human suffering. Herman, Ungar, and Sherwood further complicate simplistic notions of resilience and recovery by emphasizing reconnection, agency, relationships, culture, meaning, and supportive social ecologies rather than individual coping alone. Across these readings, we will wrestle with a terrifying question with a beautiful answer: how does collective violence disrupt human psychological functioning, and where are psychologists best positioned to help people and communities recover, reconnect, and flourish?

Questions for Discussion

- How do biological, psychological, interpersonal, and ecological dynamics shape mental health and psychosocial well-being in contexts of conflict, displacement, and human rights violations—and what does this imply for MHPSS practice?
- What is lost when peacebuilding and human rights research and practice fail to center mental health and psychosocial well-being in vulnerable communities?
- How should clinical and psychosocial practice change when it is guided not only by symptom reduction, but also by human rights, dignity, agency, reconnection, and the broader goals of peacebuilding?

Required Readings

All students:

- Tol, W. A., Purgato, M., Bass, J. K., Galappatti, A., & Eaton, W. (2015). Mental health and psychosocial support in humanitarian settings: A public mental health perspective. *Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences*, 24(6), 484–494.
- Herman, J. L. (2022). *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence - from domestic abuse to political terror*. Basic Books.
 - Chapter 10: Reconnection
- Ungar M. (2011). The social ecology of resilience: Addressing contextual and cultural ambiguity of a nascent construct. *The American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 81(1), 1–17.

Grad students:

- Sherwood, N. R. (2023). Chapter five: The resilience of insider-peacebuilders. *Building peace for the peacebuilders: The psychology of resilience among practitioners transforming conflict in their own communities* [Book manuscript].
- Summerfield, D. (2012). Afterword: Against “global mental health.” *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 49(3-4), 519-530.

Supplementary reading:

- Charlson, F., van Ommeren, M., Flaxman, A., Cornett, J., Whiteford, H., & Saxena, S. (2019). New WHO prevalence estimates of mental disorders in conflict settings: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *The Lancet (British Edition)*, 394(10194), 240–248.

Reading Strategy

- Begin with Tol et al. (2015) and understand the definition of MHPSS and its public-health, multisectoral framework; skim extended intervention examples. Read Herman (2022) closely for empowerment, reconnection, agency, relationships, and the survivor mission, moving more quickly through lengthy clinical illustrations; she is a giant in the field of trauma transformation (and a personal hero of mine). Read Ungar (2011) closely for decentrality, complexity, atypicality, cultural relativity, and resilience as socially and culturally situated. Charlson et al. (2019) is supplementary; focus on the abstract, prevalence estimates, and limitations rather than statistical procedures.
- Graduate students should read Summerfield (2012) closely as a critique of medicalization, diagnostic universalism, and the depoliticization of suffering. In my book chapter, read the framing and interpersonal, community, and structural resilience sections closely; skim the extended catalog of individual traits and practices, then return to the conclusion and peacebuilder typologies.

SESSION 10: 28 OCTOBER 2026

HOW DO SOCIAL IDENTITIES & COLLECTIVE EMOTIONS MOBILIZE GROUPS TOWARD CONFLICT, RIGHTS-CLAIMING, OR SOLIDARITY?

This session examines how social identities and collective emotions can mobilize groups toward conflict, solidarity, resistance, or rights-claiming. We will focus on how people come to understand themselves as part of a larger “we,” how group boundaries shape perceptions of “us” and “them,” and how shared emotions can intensify division or motivate collective action. Korostelina and Tajfel show how social identities are constructed and how even minimal distinctions can generate in-group favoritism and out-group differentiation. Halperin and colleagues extend this analysis by examining how group-based emotions and emotional climates shape conflict escalation, de-escalation, and reconciliation. Drazenovich and Stroink frame human rights as processes of “rights claiming,” in which marginalized groups mobilize around dignity, identity, and norms to secure recognition and belonging. Reicher and Haslam challenge the assumption that groups inevitably produce conformity or tyranny, showing how collective identity

can also support resistance and empowerment. This week and next form a pair: here we examine mobilization from the “bottom up”; next week we turn to leadership, institutions, polarization, and reconciliation from the “top down.”

Questions for Discussion

- Earlier in the semester, we discussed fear, humiliation, morality, and stress primarily at the individual level. How do this week’s readings deepen those conversations by showing how emotions become socially shared and politically mobilized?
- How do social identities transform individual emotions into collective behaviors that can produce either solidarity, exclusion, conflict, or rights-claiming?
- What psychological conditions seem to make groups more likely to move toward inclusion, cooperation, and solidarity rather than polarization, hierarchy, or tyranny?

Required Readings

All students:

- Korostelina, K. V. (2007). Chapter 1: Social identity as social phenomenon and scientific concept. *Social identity and conflict: Structures, dynamics, and implications*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Halperin, E., Sharvit, K. & Gross, J. J. (2010). “Emotion and emotion regulation in intergroup conflict: An appraisal-based framework” in D. Bar-Tal (Ed.), *Intergroup conflicts and their resolution: A social psychological perspective*. Taylor & Francis Group.
- Drazenovich, G. & Stroink, M. (2024). Interpreting human rights as the social psychological phenomenon of rights claiming. *International Journal of Psychology*, 59(2), 225-234.

Grad students:

- Tajfel, H., Billig, M. G., Bundy, R. P. & Flament, C. (1971). Social categorization and intergroup behaviour. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 1(2), 149-178.
- Reicher, S. & Haslam, S. A. (2006). Rethinking the psychology of tyranny: The BBC prison study. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 45, 1-40.

Supplementary reading:

- Xu, X., Scarborough, A. N., Anthony, L. M. & Smillie, L. D. (2025). Personality, ideology, and attitudes toward social justice. *Journal of Personality*, 2025, 1-16.

Reading Strategy

- Begin with Korostelina (2007) and read closely for how social identity is constructed, maintained, and connected to group boundaries, security, and conflict. Read Halperin et al. (2010) closely for group-based emotions, appraisal, action tendencies, and emotion regulation across conflict escalation, de-escalation, and reconciliation; move more quickly through the extended review of individual studies. Read Drazenovich and Stroink (2024) closely for rights-claiming, social identity, dignity, and the alignment of injunctive and descriptive norms. Xu et al. (2025) is supplementary; focus on the theoretical model and central findings rather than detailed methods and statistical analyses.
- Graduate students should read Tajfel et al. (1971) closely for the logic, design, and findings of the minimal-group experiments, while skimming some of the reward-matrix detail once the central pattern of in-group favoritism and maximum differentiation is clear. Read Reicher and Haslam (2006) closely for their critique of role-based explanations of tyranny and their social-identity account of power, resistance, and group failure; skim the detailed chronological reconstruction of the BBC study after understanding its major phases and conclusions.

SESSION 11: 4 NOVEMBER 2026

HOW CAN GROUPS, LEADERS & INSTITUTIONS TRANSFORM POLARIZATION INTO (RE)CONCILIATION?

Last week, we examined how identities and collective emotions mobilize groups from the “bottom up,” shaping solidarity, rights-claiming, exclusion, and conflict. This week shifts “top down” to ask how leaders, institutions, and group processes can either deepen polarization or help transform fractured relationships toward reconciliation. Together, these sessions reveal a central tension in peace psychology: the same social forces that bind people together can also intensify hierarchy, division, and violence. Lewin’s action research reconnects us to participatory methods by arguing that sustainable social change requires evidence-based engagement with real-world group problems. Hogg and Kershaw examine leadership as a deeply social process shaped by group identity, legitimacy, and uncertainty. Nadler and Shnabel complicate reconciliation by emphasizing both structural and socio-emotional needs, including dignity, justice, trust, and healthy identity. Finally, Tutu’s reflections on South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission offer a deeply human account of survivors, perpetrators, communities, and institutions confronting atrocity publicly and collectively. Across these readings, we will ask how polarized groups can move toward more just, inclusive, and sustainable forms of coexistence.

Questions for Discussion

- Last week focused on identity and collective emotion from the “bottom up.” How do this week’s readings show that leaders and institutions can either intensify those dynamics or redirect them toward cooperation and reconciliation?
- Tutu’s account of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission raises difficult questions about justice, forgiveness, memory, and coexistence after violence. Across this week’s readings, what tensions emerge between accountability, healing, reconciliation, and social stability in post-conflict societies?
- What social and psychological conditions make groups more/less vulnerable to polarization, exclusion, and destructive conflict, and what is the psychologist’s role in cultivating conditions that support cooperation and reconciliation?

Required Readings

All students:

- Hogg, M. A. (2001). A social identity theory of leadership. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 5(3), 184-200.
- Kershaw, C., Rast, D. E., Hogg, M. A. & van Knippenberg, D. (2021). Battling intergroup bias with effective intergroup leadership. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 60, 765-785.
- Tutu, D. (1999). Chapter 6: A victim hearing. *No future without forgiveness*. Doubleday.

Grad students:

- Lewin, K. (1946). Action research and minority problems. *Journal of Social Issues*, 2(4), 34–46.
- Nadler, A. & Shnabel, N. (2015). Intergroup reconciliation: Instrumental and socio-emotional processes and the needs-based model. *European Review of Social Psychology*, 26(1), 93-125.

Supplementary reading:

- DeLamater, J. D. & Collett, J. L. (2018). Chapter 14: Group processes. *Social psychology* (9th edition). Routledge.

Reading Strategy

- Begin with Hogg (2001) and read closely for leader prototypicality, group identification, legitimacy, uncertainty reduction, and the risks of prototype-based leadership; move more quickly through the broader review of leadership theories. Read Kershaw et al. (2021) to

understand intergroup relational identity and how leaders can reduce bias without erasing subgroup distinctiveness; skim detailed statistical analyses after understanding the design and findings. Read Tutu (1999) closely, attending to how testimony, recognition, dignity, memory, and institutional witnessing shape reconciliation. DeLamater and Collett (2018) is supplementary background on group polarization, power, trust, procedural justice, and responses to inequity.

- Graduate students should read Lewin (1946) closely for action research, democratic participation, evaluation, and the relationship between scholarship and practical social change. Read Nadler and Shnabel (2015) closely for structural, relational, and identity-related reconciliation, the instrumental and socio-emotional routes, and the needs-based model; skim the extended study-by-study review once the framework is clear.

SESSION 12: 11 NOVEMBER 2026

HOW DO SPIRITUAL AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES INFLUENCE INDIVIDUALS TO ADVANCE OR OBSTRUCT PEACE AND HUMAN RIGHTS?

Across much of modern psychology, the spiritual dimension of human experience is often minimized or treated as secondary to biological, psychological, and socio-structural dynamics. This week intentionally expands our framework into an explicitly biopsychosocial-spiritual model by asking how spiritual worldviews, practices, and experiences shape both peace and violence. Building on earlier discussions of trauma, identity, reconciliation, and existential meaning-making, we will examine how religion and spirituality influence meaning, dignity, belonging, and transcendence in contexts of conflict. For many people, these dimensions are not peripheral; they are central sources of identity, moral orientation, and resilience, and ignoring them can undermine efforts to build peace with rights. The readings suggest that spirituality and religion can cultivate empathy, courage, humility, solidarity, awe, self-transcendence, and bridge-building across seemingly impossible divides. Yet these same forces can also be manipulated through dogmatism, coercion, exclusion, abuse, and authoritarian power. We will therefore wrestle with a central tension: what distinguishes spiritual and religious forces that cultivate human flourishing and reconciliation from those that calcify fear, hierarchy, and hatred?

Questions for Discussion

- Earlier in the semester, we discussed authority, conformity, humiliation, and group influence through readings on aggression, social identity, and leadership. How do Oakley's discussion of spiritual abuse and Ruiz Andrés' examination of religion and human rights help us distinguish between spiritually transformative leadership and coercive or authoritarian forms of religious power?
- How does the spiritual search for hope in the face of mortality complicate Frankl's and Freud's ideas by suggesting that awe, transcendence, ritual, or spirituality can reshape how individuals understand themselves, others, and the possibility of reconciliation?
- How do this week's readings suggest that spiritual practices, religious communities, or transcendent experiences might help people metabolize suffering in ways that conventional psychological frameworks sometimes struggle to explain?

Required Readings

All students:

- Ruiz Andrés, R. (2023). Human rights and religions: An overview of a controversial relationship. *Religions*, 14(11), Article 1343.
- Oakley, L., Kinmond, K. & Humphreys, J. (2018). Spiritual abuse in Christian faith settings: Definition, policy and practice guidance. *The Journal of Adult Protection*, 20(3/4), 144-154.

- Gopin, M. (2012). Chapter 9: A summary of the peacemakers' transformative qualities. *Bridges across an impossible divide: The inner lives of Arab and Jewish peacemakers*. Oxford University Press.

Grad students:

- Köbrich, J., & Hoffmann, L. (2023). What do we know about religion and interreligious peace? A review of the quantitative literature. *Politics & Religion*, 16(4), 708–732.
- Wang, C., Lucarini, A., Cocco, V. M., Dierckx, K. & Vezzali, L. (2025). Building bridges with awe: Exploring underlying mechanisms and moderators of the relationship between awe and prejudice towards sexual minority group members. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 64(2), Article 12884.

Supplementary reading:

- Wehr, P. & Lederach, J. P. (1991). Mediating conflict in Central America. *Journal of Peace Research*, 28(2), 85-98.

Reading Strategy

- Begin with Ruiz Andrés (2023) and read for the central argument that religions and human rights have a historically complex, ambivalent, and potentially cooperative relationship; move more quickly through the extended historiography once you understand the post-secular framework. Read Oakley et al. (2018) closely for their definition of spiritual abuse, especially coercion, control, manipulation, misuse of scripture, enforced obedience, and safeguarding implications. Read Gopin (2012) closely for humility, identity enlargement, relationship-building, emotional openness, and the transformative qualities shared by spiritual peacemakers; he offers a brilliant psychological blueprint of what makes a 'peacemaker.' Wehr and Lederach (1991) is supplementary for insider-partial mediation, cultural legitimacy, trust, and the Esquipulas peace process.
- Graduate students should read Köbrich and Hoffmann (2023) closely for their multidimensional definitions of religion and interreligious peace and their major conclusions concerning religious ideas, identities, practices, actors, and institutions; skim the extended study-by-study review once the patterns and methodological limitations are clear. Read Wang et al. (2025) for the hypotheses, three-study design, and central findings linking awe to reduced prejudice through self-transcendence and belief in oneness; skim detailed statistical analyses after understanding the mediators, moderators, and limitations.

SESSION 13: 18 NOVEMBER 2026

IF WE LEARNED TO LIVE IN GREATER RECIPROCITY WITH THE ECOLOGICAL WORLD, HOW WOULD THE SCIENCE AND PRACTICE OF PEACE AND HUMAN RIGHTS TRANSFORM?

Throughout the second half of the semester, we have explored how identities, institutions, spirituality, leadership, and reconciliation shape collective life. Now, this session invites us to imagine how psychology, peacebuilding, and human rights might change if human beings understood themselves not as separate from the natural world, but as active and intentional co-creators within living systems of reciprocity, interdependence, and care. Returning to the second half of *Braiding Sweetgrass*, we move beyond many of the assumptions that quietly structure modern western psychology and reconsider what it means to flourish within relationships, and also with land, water, plants, animals, those that came before us, and those that will come after us. Kimmerer broadens these conversations by suggesting that many forms of loneliness, exploitation, violence, and ecological destruction emerge from relationships grounded in extraction rather than reciprocity. In contrast, she offers stories and practices rooted in gratitude, restraint, mutual

responsibility, listening, and belonging. Rather than framing peace solely as the absence of conflict between human groups, these readings invite us to consider whether peace also depends upon restoring right relationships with the ecological world itself.

Questions for Discussion:

- In Weeks 9–12, we explored how healing and reconciliation depend upon relationships, dignity, spirituality, and collective belonging. How does *Braiding Sweetgrass* expand those conversations by suggesting that reconciliation must also include repairing relationships with the ecological world itself?
- What kinds of values, practices, or forms of leadership would become more important if societies genuinely understood humans as part of interconnected living systems rather than separate from them?
- After reading *Braiding Sweetgrass*, what are your specific recommendations to integrate eco-psychology into the broader peace and human rights project?

Required Readings

All students:

- Kimmerer, R. W. (2022). *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge, and the teachings of plants*. Milkweed Editions.
 - Part 4: Braiding Sweetgrass
 - Part 5: Burning Sweetgrass
 - Epilogue: Returning the Gift

Reading Strategy

- Read “In the Footsteps of Nanabozho,” “Burning Cascade Head,” and “Old-Growth Children” closely for Kimmerer’s accounts of becoming responsible to place, Indigenous ecological practice, restoration, and reciprocal stewardship. Read “Windigo Footprints,” “The Sacred and the Superfund,” “Shkitagen,” “Defeating Windigo,” and “Returning the Gift” closely for her critique of extraction and colonialism and her visions of environmental justice, collective responsibility, and reciprocal economies. Move more quickly through the remaining essays, but do not skim so aggressively that you lose how story, place, memory, and ecological observation function as forms of knowledge and ethical practice.

SESSION 14: 2 DECEMBER 2026

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

We are at the endgame now, friends. By this point, we have spent months sitting with some of the heaviest parts of human experience: fear, violence, trauma, humiliation, identity, polarization, loss, and suffering. We have also spent time searching for the things that allow people to endure and sometimes transform those realities: meaning, relationship, spirituality, moral courage, imagination, and care. It is my hope that our final session offers us a space to breathe, reflect, and think about what it means to carry these conversations forward into our own lives.

In *The Poetic Unfolding of the Human Spirit*, John Paul Lederach writes like a ‘fellow traveler,’ someone trying to remain awake to busy goings-on in our wide and weird world. Moving through stories, reflections, poetry, and fragments of consciousness gathered over decades of heartrending peacebuilding work, he returns again and again to a simple thesis: peace is relational, imaginative, and a wholly unique experience within the vast web of life.

In the final analysis, perhaps Lederach’s way-of-being is enough: We must remain awake and attentive to the various webs of life around us, strengthening each strand as we go, and making this life-net more resilient for the generations to come.

Questions for Discussion

- At the beginning of the semester, I asked why you wanted to study psychology, peace, and human rights. How would you answer that question now?
- Which author(s) and idea from this course will stay with you most deeply?
- What gives you the most hope about people? What still concerns you?
- William James called for a “moral equivalent of war.” What does he mean, and what is the psychologist’s role in fighting for this moral equivalent?
- What is one concrete practice, commitment, relationship, or form of attention that you intend to carry forward from this course into your life or work?

Required Reading

All students:

- Lederach, J. P. (2010). *The poetic unfolding of the human spirit*. Fetzer Institute.

Reading Strategy

- Skim Mark Nepo’s foreword to understand *haibun* as an inner and outer travelogue. Read Lederach’s prologue closely for moral imagination, organic interdependence, dynamic curiosity, artistic creativity, risk, and peace as poetic craft. Move more quickly through dated conflict statistics and some travel details, but read Colombia, Nepal, Australia, and Sierra Leone stories closely; they carry the essay’s human and ethical argument. Finish by reading “The Unfolding,” “Noticing Hidden Mysteries,” and “The Global Dream” closely for attention, courage, listening, and relationality—each of which will better equip you to reify the potential world you can help build.

STUDENT RESOURCES: NATIONAL, STATE, BIRMINGHAM, & UAB

NATIONAL & STATE	
Assistive smart phone apps	Self-Help for Anxiety Management (SAM) – monitors anxious thoughts and behaviors Recovery Road – aids individuals with eating disorders Rescuetime – aids individuals with attention deficits Moodpanda – aids individuals living with anxiety, depression, and other mood-related issues Panic Relief – aids individuals living with the consequences of panic attacks and anxiety Aspire News – discreetly alerts authorities in the event of intimate partner violence
Suicide and Crisis LifeLine (English and Spanish)	Call 988
Crisis Text Line	Text “HOME” or “HOLA” to 741741
Military 24/7 Hotline	Call: 998, Press 1 Text: 838255
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Online Resources	https://www.nami.org/Find-Support/NAMI-HelpLine/Top-25-HelpLine-Resources
National Teen Dating Abuse 24/7 Hotline	Call: 866-331-9474 Chat
National Domestic Violence 24/7 Hotline	Call: 1-800-799-7233
National Sexual Assault 24/7 Hotline	Call: 1-800-656-4673 Chat
Office on Women’s Health Helpline	Call: 1-800-994-9662 (9a – 6p Eastern Time)
RAINN – Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network 24/7 Helpline	Call: 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)

SAMHSA Treatment Referral Helpline	Call: 1-800-662-HELP (4357) Chat
Trans 24/7 Lifeline	Call: 877-565-8860
Trevor Project Lifeline (LGBTQIA+ under the age of 25)	24/7 Hotline: 1-866-488-7386 Text the word "Trevor" to 678-678
Alabama LGBTQ+ Helpline	Call: 205-323-HOPE (7273) Chat

OTHER UAB RESOURCES:

DSS Accessibility Statement

Accessible Learning: UAB is committed to providing an accessible learning experience for all students. If you are a student with a disability that qualifies under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and/or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and require accommodations, please get in touch with Disability Support Services for information on accommodations, registration, and procedures. Requests for reasonable accommodations involve an interactive process and consist of a collaborative effort among the student, DSS, faculty, and staff. If you are registered with Disability Support Services, please contact me to discuss accommodations that may be necessary for your success in this course. If you have a disability but have not contacted Disability Support Services, please call **(205) 934-4205** or visit [the DSS website](#).

Add/Drop and Course Withdrawal

- Drop/Add: Deadlines for adding, dropping, or withdrawing from a course and paying tuition are published in the [Academic Calendar](#). Review the [Institutional Refund Policy](#) for information on refunds for dropped courses. It is the student's responsibility to initiate add/drop procedures. Students may drop and add courses online after registering through BlazerNET until the drop/add deadline.
- Withdrawal: To avoid academic penalty, a student must withdraw from a course by the withdrawal deadline on the academic calendar and receive a grade of "W" (withdrawn). Failure to attend class does not constitute a formal drop or withdrawal from the course. The official course withdrawal must be completed online in [BlazerNET](#).

Technology

Access technical support and view privacy policies and accessibility statements for Canvas and other technologies on the [Student Learning Technologies website](#). Additionally, view information about the [Minimum System Requirements and Technical Skills](#).

Canvas Alerts

I may send alerts to students based on Canvas course information, such as current grades in the course, online attendance (login records), assignment due dates, and assignment scores. The alert is sent to the student's UAB email address.

Health and Safety

UAB is very concerned for your continued health and safety. Please consult the [Student Health Services webpage](#) for up-to-date guidance because the following information is subject to change as circumstances require.

We strongly recommend that you be fully vaccinated. Mask-wearing has proven to be one of the most effective mitigation strategies for combating the spread of various COVID-19 virus variants. [View information on the Immunization Requirements and Policies of the University on the Student Health Services Immunizations webpage.](#)

Student Academic and Support Services

- [One Stop Student Services](#) offers students a single point of professional, integrated service. The One Stop serves students who need assistance with academic records, financial aid, registration, student accounting, ONE card, and other related topics.
- [Student Assistance and Support](#) provides individualized assistance to promote student safety and well-being, collaboration and resilience, personal accountability, and self-advocacy. The Care Team consults and collaborates with campus partners to balance the needs of individual students with those of the campus community. [The UAB Care Team](#) helps students find solutions for academic, social, and mental health crises.
- [Disability Support Services](#) provides students with accommodations to enhance their educational experiences at UAB, ensuring equal access to programs, services, and activities.
- The [Vulcan Materials Academic Success Center](#) offers tutoring, supplemental instruction, and other support services to help students achieve their goals and complete their degrees.
- The [University Writing Center](#) offers free writing assistance for all UAB students. Get help at any stage of the writing process and with any writing. Students may meet with a tutor in person or via Zoom. Students may also upload a paper for feedback (called eTutoring in the online system). During in-person and Zoom sessions, tutors can help you understand your assignment, develop and organize your ideas, use and cite sources, revise and edit your draft, and more. When you upload a draft for eTutoring, tutors can provide feedback on both big-picture issues and detail-oriented concerns. Please note that you must upload both a draft and an assignment sheet to use eTutoring. For an appointment or more information, please see the [UWC website](#), email writingcenter@uab.edu, or call 205-996-7178. Follow the UWC on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [LinkedIn](#) for daily news and quick writing tips.
- [UAB Student Health Services](#) delivers students comprehensive, high-quality, confidential primary healthcare. Student Health provides testing services and vaccination clinics.
- [Student Counseling Services](#) offers students a safe place to discuss and resolve issues that interfere with personal and academic goals. UAB has created a new app (available in the App Store and Google Play) called [B Well](#), designed to easily access resources on mobile devices and build a self-care plan. [Kognito](#) is a free, interactive, simulation-based platform designed to help you talk with someone when you are worried about your mental health.
- The [UAB Blazer Kitchen at the Hill Student Center](#) offers food and basic supplies to any UAB student in need through in-person or online shopping. Students who can also donate food and supplies to assist their peers. Call 205-975-9509, email studentoutreach@uab.edu, or visit the [Student Assistance & Support website to get more information](#).
- The [Office of Learning Technologies](#) offers students a range of academic technologies and learning resources.
- [UAB Emergency Management](#) will be the official source of UAB information during any actual emergency or severe weather situation.

The following are the various websites describing additional student academic and technology resources:

- [UAB Policies for Students](#)
- [Student Academic and Support Services](#)

- [Technology Resources](#)

See also the [Student Assistance & Support](#) website of Student Affairs for a description of COVID-19-related resources, including the laptop loaner program.

Peers' Contact Information

I encourage students to reach out and obtain contact information of classmates. This will be helpful in the event of an absence, in forming study groups, and communicating schedule changes, among other uses.

Contact 1	Contact 2	Contact 3
Name:	Name:	Name:
Email:	Email:	Email:
Phone Number:	Phone Number:	Phone Number:

If you made it this far, send me an email with a photo of something fun about yourself—hobbies, pets, etc. Well done!