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Psychbusters Project

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PSYCHBUSTERS Project

Objective

In addition to the content that you learn in the Principles of Psychology course, the other main skill you should learn is how to think critically about scientific claims, particularly those concerning human behavior. The PsychBusters Project is designed to give you practice at learning that kind of ability.

Assignment

The field of Psychology is full of various common sense myths, such as “absence makes the heart grow fonder” and “out of sight, out of mind.” How is one to evaluate such claims and determine which is correct? Psychologists have been scientifically studying such claims for years; this project will guide you in accessing the scientific literature and evaluating such claims.

Listed below are the various chapters, starting with Chapter 4, that we will cover in this course. With each chapter are a handful of statements. Some of these statements are true, some are false, and some are in between. We will divide up into teams containing 2-3 people. Each team will be responsible for one chapter. The team will pick one of the statements and decide, based upon an evaluation of the scientific literature, if the myth is “confirmed,” “plausible,” or “busted.” A “confirmed” myth would be one that, as stated, is generally considered to be true, while a “plausible” myth is one that, given the right definitions and conditions could be true. A “busted” myth is in no way true. If you know or think of a myth that is not on the list but you would like to do, that should be fine as well—just run it by me first.

When we start your chapter in class, your team will do a brief presentation to the class concerning what you found. This presentation will be 5 minutes and follow this format:

- 1) The first slide should introduce us to the myth (*i.e.*, where did it originate?),
- 2) The second slide or two should define the terms,
- 3) The next slide should state the sources you used in developing your thinking (APA style),
- 4) Next should be a slide or two of findings/results, integrating and summarizing the information,
- 5) The last slide should state if the myth is “confirmed,” “plausible,” or “busted.”

When we begin chapter 3, I will provide an example for you.

Blogging

A key component of this assignment is the Group Blog. Each group member must contribute to the blog a minimum of 4 times, and tag their entries. Each group should address the following in the Blog:

1. Each student in a group will investigate one claim, to gather information to present to the group. Each student will blog about the myth chosen, operationally define terms, search strategy, and summary evaluative conclusions (*i.e.*, was the scientific literature easy to locate, understandable)? [This must be completed by each group member 1 week before the presentation date.]
2. Discussion of the process by which the myth to be investigated was chosen.
3. Why did you choose the articles you did to investigate the myth? What search strategies did each group member use?
4. Each group member will be responsible for reading one source, and providing an original summary of that source.
5. Group should integrate and summarize the various sources, and make a conclusion as to the truth of the myth.
6. What questions do you still have? How would you find answers to these questions?

The Blog must be completed by 5pm the day before your group is to present. Blogs will then be made available to the entire class. All students are required to read the blog before class so that they are prepared for questions and discussion. I strongly encourage group members to share duties for the group posts (described in steps 2,3,5 and 6 above). Group members can edit a single post as a means of collaboration, or of course you can collaboratively compose the entry before posting it. Blogs should show very clearly who posted what (via tagging) and when; uneven distribution of labor within the group may be redressed via the class participation grade.

Original writing is extremely important, for both the presentation and the blog. I will be looking to see *original* summaries of articles, rather than excerpts from the article abstract or manuscript, and *original* presentation of ideas.

Evaluation

Every member of the team will get the same score.

Grading for the presentation (5% of total) will be based on the quality of the argument you build to base your conclusion:

- 1) how well you define your terms,
- 2) the quality of your sources (APA style),
- 3) the manner in which you used your results, and
- 4) the presentation itself (I'm not expecting perfection, but it should be practiced, and everyone should have a part).

Grading for the blog (5% of total) will be based on:

- 1) Successfully **meeting the deadlines for the initial posts** by each group member,
- 2) Evidence in the blog entries of **successful preparation** by reading and reflection,
- 3) Style: writing **avoids errors in standard English** which interfere with understanding; entries are composed as for an educated, outside audience,
- 4) Quality of content: **entries convey substantial information** to the reader and address prompts complete, and
- 5) Entries must authentically and progressively document the process of completing the assignment and should form the foundation of the presentation (avoid writing blog entries at the end of the process of composing the presentation).

The Myths

Chapter 3: Neuroscience/Behavior

- 1) We only use 10% of our brains
- 2) A person's cognitive ability would be decimated if they lost half their brain
- 3) It is possible to beat a lie detector machine
- 4) Feeling no pain would be an advantage in living life

Chapters 4 and 5: Sensation and Perception

- 1) Blind people have unusually sensitive organs of touch
- 2) The Mosquito ringtone cannot be heard by adults
- 3) Eating carrots improves eyesight
- 4) Colors appear different at dusk

Chapter 6: States of Consciousness

- 1) You cannot die from lack of sleep
- 2) If you die in your dream, you die in real life
- 3) Some people can not become addicted to drugs
- 4) Hypnosis acts like a "truth serum"

Chapter 7: Learning

- 1) Animals can learn to communicate using a language
- 2) Learning language is much easier prior to age thirteen
- 3) You can quit smoking by listening to tapes while you sleep
- 4) Reward is more effective than punishment in learning

Chapter 8: Memory

- 1) When old people's forget something frequently, it means they have Alzheimer's
- 2) Babies have no memory until they are 5 years old
- 3) Inside our brains are memories for everything that we have experienced
- 4) Having more and shorter study sessions is better than having longer and fewer ones

Chapters 9 and 11: Thinking and Intelligence

- 1) Experts are born, not made
- 2) Listening to Mozart makes you smarter
- 3) Intelligence scores have no correlation to academic performance

- 4) Creativity usually occurs in a burst of insight

Chapter 12: Motivation and Emotion

- 1) Botox injections can make people happy
- 2) To change people's behavior toward members of ethnic minority groups, we must first change their attitudes.
- 3) The more highly motivated, the better you will do at solving a complex problem
- 4) Painting your room certain colors can change your mood

Chapter 13: Social Psychology

- 1) Opposites attract
- 2) Familiarity breeds contempt
- 3) There is safety in numbers
- 4) Absence makes the heart grow fonder

Chapter 14: Human Development across the Lifespan

- 1) Children memorize much more easily than adults
- 2) Boys and girls have no inherent differences in toy preferences
- 3) By giving a young baby lots of extra stimulation (like musical toys and mobiles) we can markedly increase its intelligence
- 4) Babies can only see in black and white

Chapters 16 and 17: Psychological Disorders / Treatment

- 1) A full moon affects people's behaviors
- 2) Mentally ill people are no more likely to be violent than normal people
- 3) Talking to a shrink is no better than talking to a good friend
- 4) Freud is the father of psychology