

Topic: Introducing students to scientific journal articles in Introduction to Psychology

Discussion leaders: Dr. Natasha Tokowicz, department of psychology, and Adeetee Bhide, department of psychology

Dr. Natasha Tokowicz and Adeetee Bhide discussed their course transformation, in which introduction to psychology students will read popular press articles and a corresponding empirical research articles cited in the popular press article. Students then describe whether the popular press article correctly represented the empirical research article. Students discuss whether there are omissions, misrepresentations, and issues with causality and results in the popular press article. These projects are done in groups, and students present their findings to the class.

Some suggestions and feedback on the project:

- Students are given a pre-survey about their confidence in reading empirical research articles. It was suggested that confidence levels can be broken down further into different sections, e.g., how confident do you feel reading the methodology, the literature review, the results, the conclusions?
- It was also suggested that students should be asked in the pre-survey, “How often do you read popular press articles? Do you value reading these articles? What sources do you use when reading the popular press article to determine if it is a valid article? Do you read the comments section when reading online popular press articles?”
- There were suggestions on how to implement this project, in particular, how students comment on popular press articles. The website [hypothes.is](http://www.hypothes.is) contains popular press articles on climate change, and scientists critique each article. It was suggested that students could do something similar, e.g., post to a website about the discrepancies between the popular press article and the empirical article or add to a blog post about the popular press article. It was also suggested that classroom salon could be used to aid student commenting on popular press articles. A pdf version of the press article can be uploaded, and the students can comment on particular parts of the article. For example, a student could highlight an omission in the article and give reasons why the information was omitted.
- Ben Rottman noted that issues of causality were also important in his research methods class. As students in introduction to psychology learn more about causality, they can be more sophisticated in their critiques of the popular press article and discussion whether variables are correlated or there is a causal relationship. It would be interesting to see the extent to which psychology majors in introduction to psychology can transfer learning about causality to their research methods class.
- Reading popular press articles may increase motivation and interest in psychology. It was noted that students’ epistemology may also play a role in how they interpret popular press articles. If students’ epistemology is more inclined toward taking “facts from authority,” they may feel that all articles are valid. Students who are more skeptical may be less trusting of the

claims in the article. It is hoped that this project will help students see that popular press articles do not always clearly represent the facts, and some level of skepticism is necessary.

- Regarding omission of information in popular press articles, it was noted that students should be able to distinguish between omissions which result in misrepresentations and omissions which simplify the research and are not misleading.