Family Therapy Institute of Santa Barbara

Ethical Therapy in a Polarized World

Advanced Topics in Law & Ethics

Taught by Debra Manchester, LCSW

Saturday November 15, 2025

SYLLABUS

| EDUCATIONAL GOALS & LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Educational Goals:

Research indicates that many clients want to discuss political and moral issues in therapy, often in deep distress about contentious differences with family members or friends. In the current climate, voicing one's truth can bring social ridicule, rejection or even threats of violence. This workshop will explore how therapists can facilitate constructive dialogue and cultivate empathy in politically divided couples or families. Together we will look at how to do the right thing for our client, ourselves and our community with allegiance to our professional codes of conduct.

Learning Objectives:

Upon completion of this course, the participants will be able to:

1. Discuss three forces driving ethics in the wrong direction.
2. Discuss how moral foundation theory explains why moral/political decisions are can be difficult to change with logical arguments.
3. Discuss the four steps in how to cultivate a receptive mindset.
4. Name three benefits of bridging differences between those with opposing views.
5. Discuss key teachings from Stoicism can help us and our clients sell-regulate emotionally and take positive action.

| COURSE OUTLINE

I. Exploring the problem of polarization
   a. Interview w/ Jonathan Rauch
   b. Interview w/ Andrew Hartz
   c. Repercussions for mental health
   d. Interview w/ Laura Bates

II. Forces Driving Ethics in The Wrong Direction
   a. Description of 6 Forces
   b. Laura Bates Interview

III. Moral Foundations Theory
   a. The elephant and the rider: emotion over reason
   b. 6 Core Moral Foundations: morality binds + blinds
   c. Ethics of our profession

IV. Bridging Differences
   a. What signals openness and receptivity
   b. How to cultivate openness to opposing views

V. What Stoicism Offers
   a. History of stoic leaders in American politics
   b. Stoic principles for dealing with adversity

| COURSE TIMELINE

8:30am-9:00am: Registration & Coffee

9:00am-9:30am: The Problem of Polarization

9:30am-10:00am: Forces Driving Ethics in the Wrong Direction

10:00am-10:30am: Moral Foundations Theory & Implications

10:30am-10:45am: Break

10:45am-11:15am: Bridging Differences

11:15am-12:00pm: Stoicism & Ethical Behavior

12:00pm-12:15pm: Q & A

| COURSE REFERENCES

1. Holiday, Ryan. *Right thing, right now good values, good character, good deeds*. Random House Large Print, 2024.
2. Liautaud, S., & Sweetingham, L. (2021). *The power of ethics: how to make good choices in a complicated world*. Simon et Schuster.
3. Rauch, J. (2025, October). *On the constitution of knowledge, split realities in america today, and the importance of being "truth friendly"*. The Ethics Incubator. https://ethicsincubator.net/ethics-and-truth-interviews/jonathan-rauch?clip=cancel-culture-is-social-manipulation-whether-left-right-or-center
4. Heterodox Academy. (2025, October). *People Underestimate the Cost of Silence - Andrew Hartz*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oMZll-dw-ks
5. Brietzke, E. (2023). Understanding and navigating the repercussions of the politically polarized climate in Mental Health. *Trends in Psychiatry and Psychotherapy*. https://doi.org/10.47626/2237-6089-2021-0350
6. PBS NewsHour. (2025, September). *"The New Age of Sexism" explores how misogyny is replicated in AI and emerging tech*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Iqjc5NXAvI
7. Haidt, J. (2012). *The righteous mind: Why good people are divided by politics and religion*. Vintage Books.
8. Gray, K. J. (2025). *Outraged: Why we fight about morality and politics and how to find common ground*. Pantheon Books.
9. Greene, J. D., Sommerville, R. B., Nystrom, L. E., Darley, J. M., & Cohen, J. D. (2001). An fMRI investigation of emotional engagement in moral judgment. *Science*, *293*(5537), 2105–2108. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1062872
10. edX. (2022, March 17). *Office Hours: Bridging Differences*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2SwanhEBwSg
11. Minson, J. A., & Chen, F. S. (2021). Receptiveness to opposing views: Conceptualization and Integrative Review. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *26*(2), 93–111. https://doi.org/10.1177/10888683211061037
12. Greater Good Science Center. (n.d.). *Bridging differences playbook*. Greater Good Magazine. https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/images/uploads/Bridging_Differences_Playbook-Final.pdf

| COURSE RESOURCES AND HANDOUTS

Topics from Open Therapy:

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/63d54a151e6cdf47b77cbd96/t/67109b7bbfbd891b64136425/1729141628233/Overlooked+Issues+in+Mental+Health+Care_Open+Therapy+Institute+Website.pdf

A short summary of Minson and Chen article, geared towards journalists, can be found here: https://journalistsresource.org/politics-and-government/receptive-opposing-views-research/

Receptiveness.net website where you can take a quiz to measure your receptiveness to opposing viewpoints

Joseph J Amon Trump's Banned Words and Disastrous Health Policies in Health Hum Rights. 2025 Jun;27(1):83–86. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12282871/

https://pen.org/banned-words-list/

https://ftm.aamft.org/bridging-our-political-differences/

https://ftm.aamft.org/bridging-the-divide-creating-respectful-dialogue/

Navigating thorny topics in therapy by Zara Adams in APA Vol 53 No2:https://www.apa.org/monitor/2022/03/career-navigating-therapy

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/images/uploads/Bridging_Differences_Playbook-Final.pdf

https://guides.lib.berkeley.edu/fake-news

https://www.allsides.com/media-bias/media-bias-chart

https://stanfordmag.org/contents/disagree-with-me

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_to_create_more_belonging_for_yourself_and_others

Brower, Tracy, "For Greater Empathy, Improve Your Listening Skills: Here's How", December 2021.

A Guide to Non-Violent Communication - CultureAlly