**THE BRAIN IN BOOKS AND FILM , PSYCH 461, NEUR 461, FALL 2021**

**(draft)**

**DR. JANE FLINN**

OVERVIEW OF THE COURSE.

The films in this course are ones that I have enjoyed watching and frequently have not had time to show, or only to show in part, in classes. A theme running through many of the films is that both genetics and the environment can affect our brains and our behavior, and that the environment can change the brain for good or ill.

There are three required books: My Brain on Fire deals with an unusual and probably under-diagnosed brain illness that can masquerade as schizophrenia, Still Alice is about a woman suffering from Alzheimer's disease, a disease which now impacts many families. The third book is Healthy Brain; Happy Life, which emphasizes how important exercise is in our lives. A fourth book could be chosen if anyone is interested Left Neglected , also by Lisa Genove who wrote StillAlice.

Students should lead a discussion on a sub set of chapters from one of the required books, and on one of the films. I will review the relevant background for each film beforehand.

Films will be generally be shown on Thursdays, they can often, although not always, be watched at home. Each film will be introduced by me in the previous class, and discussed in the following class, along with one of the books. Three papers, each discussing the implications of one of the required texts are required. In addition students should write an overall review paper (4 papers in all). A quiz on each of the films will be available before the film is shown.

This schedule is subject to change if discussion of a topic moves faster or more slowly than anticipated. Video links may change.

AUG 24/26 TUE; Structure of the brain, forms of memory. The epigenetic revolution; the brain and behavior can be influenced by the environment. Music can have positive influences on the brain.

TH; in class The Musical Brain. (Film)

AUG 31/SEP 2 TUE; Discussion of a) The Musical Brain, b) My Brain on Fire (book).

TH; My Brain on Fire need videos

**AUG 30 IS THE FINAL DAY TO ADD**

SEP 7/9 TUE; Discussion of My Brain on Fire a) book , b) film.

Parkinson’s is a motor disease; drug abuse led to PD in young people (JMF).

TH; The Frozen Addict. (Film, possibly available on internet.)

**SEP 7 IS THE FINAL DROP DATE FOR 100% REIMBURSEMENT**

SEP 14/16 TUE; Discussion of a) The Frozen Addict. b) My Brain on Fire (book)

JMF, Motor memory is spared in Clive Wearing. Effect of exercise in PD, Deep brain stimulation,

TH, in class, Living without Memory, (Clive Wearing, Mike Forte, You tube). Sybil's story

**SEP14 IS THE FINAL DROP DATE FOR 50% REIMBURSEMENT**

SEP 21/23 TUE; Discussion of a) Clive Wearing, b) Summary of My Brain on Fire

Brain changes seen during sleep, (JMF).

TH; What are Dreams? (Film)

OCT 28/30; TUE; a) Discussion of a) What are Dreams? b) Still Alice (book)

Brain and behavioral changes seen in Alzheimer's disease (JMF).

TH; Still Alice (Film).

OCT 5/7 Tue; NO CLASS, MONDAY CLASSES INSTEAD.

TH; Can Alzheimer's be stopped (film)

OCT 12/14 NO CLASS, MONDAY CLASSES INSTEAD.

TUE; Discussion a) Still Alice as a) film, b) book, c) Can Alzheimer's be stopped?

TH; Stroke of Insight. Role of the cortex (films) In class

OCT19/21, TUE, Discussion on a) Still Alice as book, b) Stroke of insight

JMF Consequences of traumatic brain injury; head injuries incurred while playing football can have serious consequences. The NFL was long unwilling to recognize this.

League of Denial (Film) Watch at home.

OCT26/28 TUE; Discussion, a) League of Denial. b)Still Alice, book. c) (Role of the cortex)

Environmental effects on stress, how it may be made worse or relieved. Stress can have negative effects on health and performance in both animals and people. (JMF).

TH Discussion a) LOD and b) Still Alice summary

NOV2/3 Dr Flinn will be away all week at SFN.

TU Stress, the silent killer (Film)

TH; A Murder of Crows. (Film) Alex and Me (film)

NOV9/11 TUE; Discussion, a) Stress, b) Crows, Alex, c) (Healthy Brain) JMF

TH; Healthy Brain (Film)

NOV 16/18 TU; Discussion, Healthy brain, a) book and b) film

TH; THANKSGIVING. Dr Flinn MAY be away at SFN ON THE 16TH

NOV 23/25; Discussion, a) Healthy brain, book b) Decision making (JMF)

TH; ARE WE IN CONTROL OF OUR DECISIONS? (Ariely) Placebo effect, etc. **THANKSGIVING**

DEC 1/2 TU; Healthy brain, book

TH; Overall discussion.

**REQUIRED BOOKS**

My Brain on Fire, Cahalan.

Still Alice, Genova.

Healthy Brain; Happy Life, Suzuki

**DEC 6 TAKEHOME PAPER DUE.**

Grading Policy:

10% Book chapters discussion leader

10% Film discussion leader

10% General discussion on books

10% General discussion on films

40% Papers on the three required books, and a general review paper at the end on the books and films "What did you learn from the books and films in this class?" (4 papers, 10% each)

20% film quizzes

Quizzes will be posted on Blackboard the Sunday before the scheduled film date. They will be due back Sunday following the film.

Office Hours: Tu/ TH 4:30 -5:30 DKH 2022

Call 993-4107 for an appointment at other times.

E-MAILjflinn@gmu.edu

Cell phones may not be used in class; I have the right to ask for copies of your notes if you use a computer in class.

Students with disabilities should present documentation to me and appropriate arrangements will be made.

The George Mason Honor code will be followed.

Class cancellation policy: Since the class is in the afternoon, Mason will probably have made an announcement, however, I will also e mail the class the class to give the status. Films can be made up at home. If a discussion group has to be cancelled, I will rearrange the schedule.

Official Communications via GMU E-mail: Mason uses electronic mail to provide official information to students. Examples include communications from course instructors, notices from the library, notices about academic standing, financial aid information, class materials, assignments, questions, and instructor feedback. Students are responsible for the content of university communication sent to their Mason e-mail account and are required to activate that account and check it regularly.

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# DESCRIPTION OF FILMS

THE MUSICAL BRAIN. Music can have positive influences on the brain. On reserve in Library. Not on You Tube. Will be shown in class time.

# MY BRAIN ON FIRE, Rare Disease mistaken for Mental Illness

# MY BRAIN ON FIRE -Encephalitis, on BBC's Women's Hour. 12.47 mins

(Sussanah Cahalan, Brain on Fire ~ 1 hr)This form of newly discovered encephalitis attacking the NMDA receptor produces symptoms similar to those of schizophrenia. People may have been misdiagnosed. Both of these show Sussanah herself. Netflix has the movie.

Video Link:<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yAQs2pmN3Sg&feature=youtu.be&t=3m5s>

# THE FROZEN ADDICT. Designer drugs led to Parkinson's Disease (PD) in young people. The current synthetic marijuana epidemic is causing similar unpredictable and dangerous consequences.

Video Link:<http://openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/V_474CF2C8A20B4173988486AC4C605A3C>

SYBIL'S STORY. Deep brain stimulation can control PD. (Deep brain stimulation is now being used for depression and Alzheimer’s disease.)

Video Link:<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xejclvwbwsk> (Part 1)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IOHtUzW02cg> (Part 2)

SECRETS OF THE BRAIN, Ramachandran, (Film selections).

WHAT ARE DREAMS. What benefits does sleep have? Sleep may help learning, due to replay of the day's events. Sleep disorders. Will be shown in class.

STILL ALICE. (Rent, e.g. on Netflix, or purchase.) Also available in the library on reserve. Alzheimer's disease is a growing problem, leading to memory loss, in some cases personality changes, and increased difficulties in living independently. Not on You Tube.

CAN ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE BE STOPPED? (You tube )

# LEAGUE OF DENIAL: THE NFL's CONCUSSION CRISIS (LOD). Head injuries incurred while playing football can have serious consequences. The NFL was long unwilling to recognize this. First part will be shown in class time.

Video Link: <http://www.pbs.org/video/2365093675/>

STRESS, PORTRAIT OF A KILLER , Stress can have negative effects on health and performance in both animals and people. It can be induced by social factors, but a positive environment can reduce stress. (Sapolsky)

Video Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eYG0ZuTv5rs>

A MURDER OF CROWS(National Geographic) Crows show sophisticated learning and memory abilities. Will be shown in class time.

Watch at home; Alex the Smart Parrot (11:50)

Video Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o7wdAiq0bk8>

HEALTHY BRAIN, HAPPY LIFE , Exercise can improve our mood, our memory, and our health. <http://www.apa.org/convention/2017/default.aspx>. Choose Neuroscience and the Brain.

# ARE WE IN CONTROL OF OUR DECISIONS. (Ariely ) + personal choice. What we believe can affect our decisions. The decisions we make can be influenced by how the question is posed. Placebo Effect.

Video Link:<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9X68dm92HVI>