

Critical Psychology and Law

Spring, 2026

Course Instructor: Dr. Chetan Sinh, Professor, JGLS

Number of Credits: 4

Cross-Listed: Yes

Credit Types: Law and non-law

Course Description

Adopting a critical approach, this course bridges the gap between psychology and law. The movement to inform law with cutting-edge psychology research becomes limited due to a lack of dialogue and commonsensical interpretations. The differences in the perspectives and methodology created further gaps. Critical psychology gives a fresh perspective of the engagement between psychology and law. It crosses the boundaries of individualism inherent in mainstream psychology and informs the law that our psychology is a matter of sociohistorical contexts and cultural adaptations. It is important to note that law is a sociotechnical system that mediates our adaptation to the social system and conventional morality. Critical psychology is also about being critically conscious of how we see the world and get swayed by our prejudices. It is necessary to make the law understood from the eyes of the subaltern. The idea is to empower the self of all the legal beings and agents and go beyond the neoliberal shaping of law and society to a more communitarian form. The carrying of the false consciousness of justice based on narrowly defined forensic methods, legal categories, and populist ideologies gives the incomplete impression of justice towards the oppressed gender minorities, the invisible working class, Dalits, and intellectually unique. Law is not limited but transformative and matters for liberation and rehabilitation. The standards of the legal domain are appreciated, and the avenues of

engagement with the legal agents and people are explored through dialogues, critical thinking on the established psychological models and social activism. We will explore how, under ordinary circumstances and special circumstances, i) people become conscious of law, morality, and social conventions, ii) emphasize therapeutic psychology when it comes behavioural and cognitive regulation, iii) understand the meaning of insanity, iv) resolve or accept the hegemonical orders shaping intentions and thoughts, and v) becomes active agents of social change.

Course Aims

- a. To make a case for the importance of critical psychology of law and in what way critical psychology can make law meaningful and emancipating
- b. To look critically and understand the social construction of madness in our society and how law generally do justice.
- c. To understand how law can be better connected to psychological research

Course Content

S. No.	Topic	Month
1.	Introducing critical psychology Central concerns and vision Methods of inquiry Ethics and practicing critical psychology	February, 2026
2.	Psychology and law: Critical overview Forensic Psychology,	February, 2026

	<p>Legal Psychology</p> <p>Psychological Jurisprudence and public policy</p>	
3.	<p>Challenging System Legitimacy¹</p> <p>Procedural justice, substantive justice, and false consciousness</p> <p>Law, capitalism, and distributive justice</p> <p>Neoliberalism, psychology, and law</p> <p>The reasonable person fiction</p> <p>The side effect problem</p>	<p>February,</p> <p>2026</p>
4.	<p>The critical perspective in psychological jurisprudence²</p> <p>Anarchism</p> <p>Critical Legal Studies</p> <p>Feminist Jurisprudence</p> <p>Postmodernism</p> <p>Chaology</p> <p>Social Identity</p>	<p>March,</p> <p>2026</p>

¹ D. Fox and I. Prilleltensky (eds.) (1997). Critical Psychology: An introduction. Sage

² In Bruce A Arrigo (ed)(2004). Psychological Jurisprudence: Critical explorations in law, crime, and society. State University of New York Press.

See David Canter and Rita Zukauskienė (2008). Psychology and Law: Bridging the gap. England: ASHGATE

See Bruce Arrigo and Dennis Fox. (2009). Psychology and the law: The crime of policy and the search for justice. In D. Fox and I. Prilleltensky (eds.), Critical Psychology: An introduction. Sage

5.	<p>Psychology as politics</p> <p>Decolonizing psychology: Global South and Indian Perspective of the Critical Psychology</p> <p>Indian systems of psychology, Source of knowledge, evidence, verification</p>	March, 2026
6.	<p>Psychopathology and law</p> <p>Madness: Biological or constructed³</p> <p>Insanity defense</p> <p>Myths of mental illness and the future of therapeutic psychology⁴in law</p> <p>Decolonizing insanity in law: Cultural perspective</p>	April, 2026
7.	<p>Reflection for Critical Psychology and social justice⁵</p> <p>Epistemic Violence and Epistemic Justice</p> <p>Inequality and oppression: The Role of Ideology</p> <p>Intention and Consequence: The Trap of Neutrality</p> <p>Inequality and oppression: The Role of Ideology</p> <p>The Scope of Social Change and Law through social-political Action</p>	April, 2026

³ In Ian Hacking (1999). The social construction of what? Harvard University Press

⁴ Nikolas Rose. (2018). Are mental disorders “Brain Disorder? In Our Psychiatric Future. Polity Press

⁵ Dennis Fox, Isaac Prilleltensky, and Stephanie Austin. (2009). Critical Psychology for Social Justice: Concerns and Dilemmas. In D. Fox and I. Prilleltensky (eds.), Critical Psychology: An introduction. Sage

8.	Revision Week	May
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Reading:

1. D. Fox & I. Prilleltensky (Eds). Critical Psychology: An Introduction. Sage
2. I. Parker (2007). Critical Psychology: What it is and what it is not. Social and personality psychology compass, 1 (1), 1-15.
3. A. Kapardis (2003). Psychology and law: A critical introduction. Cambridge University Press.
4. I. Martin-Baro (1994). Writings for a liberation psychology. Harvard University Press.
5. Tom Tyler (2006). Psychological perspectives on legitimacy and legitimation. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 57, 375-400.
6. Social Media and Morality (JJ Van Bavel)
7. R. D. Laing: The divided self. Pelican
8. R. D. Laing: The politics of experience.
9. Derek Hook: A Critical Psychology of the Postcolonial: the mind of Apartheid: Routledge
10. Erving Goffman: Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity: Penguin