

## SC079: Social Psychology

MWF 2-3pm, Gasson Hall 205

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### Course Description

Social psychology is the study of how individuals' values, attitudes, and behaviors are shaped by social interaction. This core course will introduce you to the methods, theories, and key findings of the field as it has been approached by both psychologists and sociologists. Since this is a survey course, students will be introduced to a wide range of subfields in social psychology, including research on perception, judgment, social construction, identity and our sense of self, persuasion, prejudice, compliance and conformity, obedience to authority, group behavior, aggression and inter-group conflict, and helping behavior.

The course is roughly divided into two parts. In the first half of the course, we will focus on the basic theoretical perspectives and fundamental cognitive, emotional, and interactional processes by which we come to understand and collectively *constitute* ourselves, each other, and society. In the second half, our focus will shift to specific kinds of behavior at the level of group and inter-group dynamics. We will analyze first-hand accounts of historical events to explore how the basic human motivations we studied in the first half of the course—such as the need for self-esteem or cognitive consistency—can be both the social glue that holds our society together and also, under certain conditions, the impetus for extraordinarily destructive behaviors. By analyzing such phenomena as racial prejudice, the holocaust, the Jonestown suicides, and the Columbine shootings, we will consider 1) the power and complexity of the social psychological forces that shape our lives, 2) how difficult it can be to recognize the point at which they are likely to generate more negative than positive behaviors, and 3) what it takes to resist being pushed in unwanted directions.

As a part of BC's "core" curriculum, this course is designed to contribute to your personal and scholarly growth in the following ways:

Perennial Questions. We will interrogate several fundamental questions in the study of human social behavior, such as:

- What is the essence of human nature?
- How do we decide/know what is "true" and "real"? or what is the "right" or "wrong" way to act in a given situation?
- What role do "nature," "nurture," and "free will" play in determining our behavior?
- How do shared values and understandings about how society works arise and become stable or change over time?
- How do these values and understandings differ from one society to another?

**Historical Perspective.** Many of the most important social psychological studies were motivated by attempts to understand major historical events such as the holocaust, or in response to issues like racism and sexism. Consequently, in evaluating the work of social psychologists, we will consider how the scientists' underlying assumptions, questions, and methodologies may have been shaped by the historical circumstances in which they did their work and by their own situatedness within that context.

**Methodology.** You will be introduced to the logic of scientific inquiry, the range of research methods commonly used in social psychological research, and to key debates over the advantages, disadvantages, and ethical questions involved in using them to address different kinds of questions. We will also work on developing your ability to critically evaluate research findings on the basis of their methodology.

**Writing.** Writing is both a tool that helps us comprehend and think critically about what we are reading and learning, and also a necessary skill for conveying those insights to others. To help you further hone this skill, class assignments will include five short "response papers" and one final paper, which together will account for half of your grade. As different styles of writing and argumentation are expected in different disciplines, I will help you understand the particular standards of writing and source referencing that are appropriate in the social sciences. We will also discuss how to *read* and *study* social science materials efficiently and effectively.

**Cultural Diversity.** Because social psychology sees reality and the "social order" as an aggregate product of our interactions with each other, it encourages us to understand how different cultures create different sets of norms and world views and that no one cultural perspective is "the right" way of understanding or approaching the world. We will explore the social psychological causes of tensions between cultural, ethnic, racial, and other groups and how these tensions can produce fractured identities, stigmatization, lack of self-esteem, and intergroup violence. Understanding the causes and consequences of cultural intolerance and prejudice is an important step in learning to overcome or prevent them.

**Personal Development.** The material we will be covering will likely challenge some of your "common sense" understandings of how the world works. It will push you to reflect on your own perceptions, motives, and attitudes and to consider those of your classmates' who may see the world differently than you do. Learning about the social influences that act upon all of us should help you understand how to make more conscious choices in response to those influences. It is also my hope that by understanding how the choices we all make as individuals ultimately come together to "construct" the larger society in which we live, you will gain a fuller sense of your own capacity to help construct the kind of world you want.

### **Course Requirements**

- 1) Regular attendance and active participation in class discussions. In keeping with BC policy, I will be taking attendance at the beginning of each class period. Attendance and my assessment of your level of engagement with the class will constitute a significant part of your grade. If you have to miss class, make sure to arrange to get notes from a fellow student and make sure you keep up with all readings and assignments.
- 2) Five (5) "reaction papers" (2 pages each). You may choose *any five* assignments from a list I will provide. Each assignment covers 2 or 3 readings from one the first 7 weeks of

the course. For each one, the assignment is to summarize the readings and then give your own critical reactions to them. The deadlines will be during the week the readings are assigned, and these papers will be graded with a “✓” (satisfactory), “✓+” (very good), or “✓-” (poor). Reaction papers may not be turned in late, so you will need to plan ahead to make sure you meet five of the deadlines before the end of the semester.

- 3) One midterm exam. The mid-term will be a comprehensive exam encompassing everything covered in the lectures and readings from the beginning of the term through week 7. The format will be half essay, half short-answer, fill in the blank, and/or multiple choice.
- 4) Final quiz. A short quiz over the readings for the last week of class will be given on the last day of class.
- 5) Final paper (10-12 pages). In lieu of a final exam, you will write a final paper, analyzing one or more of the “real world” cases we will examine in weeks 7-14 in light of the social psychological theories and empirical findings covered over the course of the semester. I will hand out the assignment after the mid-term exam, and the papers will be due during the period allocated to us for a final exam.

### **Grading**

Your final grade for the course will be derived according to the following weighting of individual requirements:

Participation/Attendance	15%
Reaction Papers (5)	20%
Mid-Term Exam	30%
Last-day Quiz	5%
Final Paper	30%

### **Course Format**

The format of the course will generally be lecture on Mondays and Wednesdays, with some time each day for questions and discussion, and discussion or video screenings on Fridays. Please note that lectures will go beyond what is covered in the reading, so if you have to miss a class, make sure to have someone you can rely on take notes for you. The readings and lecture will form the core of our discussions and will help you integrate, apply, and critique the various concepts and themes we cover. I will do my part to facilitate discussion, help you understand the key arguments being made in the readings, and challenge you to think intelligently and critically about the material. Since it is difficult (and quite boring) to have a class discussion about something only a few people have read, please do your best to come to class having completed the readings assigned for that day and prepared to discuss them.

### **Academic Integrity**

It is each student’s responsibility to understand and adhere to the accepted norms of intellectual honesty in their academic work. Any form of cheating, plagiarism, or dishonesty, or collusion in another’s dishonesty is a fundamental violation of these norms. More information on the College’s policies and procedures in this area can be found at:

<http://www.bc.edu/integrity>. If you are not sure proper citation rules, or exactly what constitutes cheating, plagiarism, or dishonesty, another good source is the Political Science website, “Plagiarism Examples and Guidelines: A Quiz” at

[http://www.bc.edu/schools/cas/polisci/integrity/quiz/#Example\\_four](http://www.bc.edu/schools/cas/polisci/integrity/quiz/#Example_four). The American Sociological Association's "Quick Style Guide" (<http://www.asanet.org/page.wv?section=Sociology+Depts&name=Quick+Style+Guide>), is also a very helpful resource.

**A note about late assignments and missed exams.** If you miss the midterm or final quiz due to an emergency (i.e. something that is both *unavoidable and unforeseen*), make sure to contact me by email as soon as possible afterwards to arrange a make-up. Failure to contact me may result in your being dropped from the class. If you know about an unavoidable conflict ahead of time, let me know *in advance*, and we can make other arrangements. Otherwise, missing the midterm or final quiz will result in a grade of zero for that test. Final papers will be graded down by 5 points (on a 100 point scale) for each day they are late. And as noted above, reaction papers will not be accepted late.

### **Readings**

There are five required books for this course:

- Brown, Jonathon D. 2006. *Social Psychology*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Waller, James. 2002. *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing*.
- Griffin, John Howard. 1996 [1960]. *Black Like Me*. New York: Signet.
- Brown, Brooks and Rob Merritt. 2002. *No Easy Answers: The Truth Behind Death at Columbine*. Lantern Books.
- Feinsod, Ethan. 1981. *Awake in a Nightmare: Jonestown, the Only Eyewitness Account*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.

These books (the Feinsod in coursepack form) are all available at the Bookstore. Two copies of each book will also be placed on reserve at O'Niell Library. I know that the textbook by Brown is quite expensive, and because it is a first edition, you will probably not be able to find a used copy. However, since I will most likely be using the same books again next term, *you should be able to sell the books back to the bookstore at the end of the term for 50% of what you paid for them.*

All other assigned readings are available through electronic reserves and can be downloaded and printed from any computer with an internet connection. From the library home page (<http://www.bc.edu/libraries/>), go to "resources," then to "course reserves catalog," log in, and look up the course.

### **Final Note:**

You all have different academic backgrounds and strengths. Sociology may not be your strongest class or it may come very easily to you. In either case, it's important to realize that no one understands everything perfectly the first time they hear/see/read it. Please feel free to ask questions in class or to come visit Chris or myself during our office hours if you need extra help with the material or want to talk about how you are doing in the course.

*Welcome to Social Psychology!*

## Weekly Schedule and Readings

### Week 1. Introduction to Social Psychology

**Wednesday, 9/6**     What is Social Psychology?

**Friday, 9/8**             Conducting Research in Social Psychology

Readings:

- Brown, Chapter 1. "Introduction to Social Psychology" pp. 1-33.
- Epstein, Robert. 1997. "Folk Wisdom: Was Your Grandmother Right?" *Psychology Today* (Nov/Dec).  
<http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/index.php?term=pto-19971101-000027.xml&print=1>
- Kelman, Herbert C. 1967. "Human Use of Human Subjects: the Problem of Deception in Social Psychological Research" *Psychological Bulletin* 67:1-11.
- Earl Babbie. 1986. "Truth, Objectivity, and Agreement" in *Observing Ourselves*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc. pp.19-28
- Christian H. Jordan and Mark P. Zanna. 1999. "How to Read a Journal Article in Social Psychology." in R. F. Baumeister (Ed.), *The Self in Social Psychology*. Philadelphia: Psychology Press. pp. 461-470. Also at:  
<http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/~sspencer/psych253/readart.html>

### Week 2. Psychological and Sociological Theories of Social Interaction

**Monday, 9/11**            Overview and Introduction to Symbolic Interactionism

Readings:

- Brown, Chapter 2. "Social Psychology's Theoretical Roots" pp. 34-62.
- Hewitt, John P. 2002. Chapter 1: "Social Psychology and Symbolic Interactionism" in *Self and Society: A Symbolic Interactionist Social Psychology*, 9th Ed. Allyn & Bacon. pp. 1-27
- Schwandt, Thomas A. 1994. "Constructivist, Interpretivist Approaches to Human Inquiry" in Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Sage Publications. pp. 118-125.

**Wednesday, 9/13**     Symbols, Language, and Meaning.

Readings:

- Jost, John T. and Kruglanski, Arie W. 2002. "The Estrangement of Social Constructionism and Experimental Social Psychology: History of the Rift and Prospects for Reconciliation" *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 6(3), 2002, pp. 168-187
- George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. 2005. "Metaphors We Live By" in Jodi O'Brien (ed.) *The Production of Reality*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Pine Forge Press. pp. 102-114

**Friday, 9/15**             Discussion

### **Week 3. Cognition: Perception and Judgment**

**Monday, 9/18** Perception: How We See Others

Readings:

- Brown, Chapter 3. "Social Perception" pp. 63-100.
- Anderson, Veane N. 1992. "For Whom is This World Just?" *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 22:248-259.

**Wednesday, 9/20** Judgment: How We Define the Situation Tells Us How to Act

Readings:

- Brown, Chapter 4. "Social Judgment" pp. 101-142.
- Hewitt, Chapter 4. "Social Interaction and the Formation of Conduct" pp. 124-165.

**Friday, 9/22** Discussion

### **Week 4. The Self, Self-presentation, and the Construction of Identity**

**Monday, 9/25** The Nature of the Self, Identity, and Self-Esteem

Readings:

- Brown, Chapter 5. "The Self" pp. 143-192.
- Cooley's "The Looking Glass Self" (2 pgs.)
- George Herbert Mead. "The Self, the I, and the Me" (4 pgs.)

**Wednesday, 9/27** Whose Me is it Anyway?: Fractured Identities

Readings:

- Lemert, Charles (ed.) 1999. *Social Theory: The Multicultural and Classic Readings*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. From Chapter 2. "Split Lives in the Modern World": Du Bois' "Double Consciousness and the Veil" p.162-67; Gilman's, "The Yellow Wallpaper" and "Women and Economics" pp. 172-77; and Cooper's "The Colored Woman's Office" pp. 178-83.
- E. Jones & S. Berglas. 1978. "Control of the Attributions about the Self Through Self-Handicapping Strategies: the Appeal of Alcohol and the Role of Underachievement." *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin* 4(2):200-206.
- Inge Bell and Bernard McGrane. 2005. "Adventures in Desocialization" Ch. 9 in Bell, Inge, Bernard McGrane, and John Gunderson. *This Book Is Not Required: An Emotional Survival Manual for Students*. 3rd. ed. pp. 129-144.
- Greenberg, J., Solomon, S., Pyszczynski, T., Rosenblatt, A., Burling, J., Lyon, D., Simon, L., and Pinel, E. (1992). "Why do people need self-esteem? Converging evidence that self-esteem serves an anxiety-buffering function" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 63:913-922.

**Friday, 9/29** Discussion

## **Week 5. Attitudes, Behavior, and (Re)producing the Social Order**

**Monday, 10/2** Cognitive Dissonance: When Attitudes and Behavior Don't Match

Readings:

- Brown, Chapter 6. "Attitudes and Behavior" pp. 194-237.
- Sherif, M. 1947. "Group influences upon the formation of norms and attitudes" In T. M. Newcomb & E. L. Hartley (Eds.), *Readings in Social Psychology*. New York: Holt. pp. 219-232.
- McKimmie, Blake M. Deborah J. Terry, Michael A. Hogg, Antony S.R. Manstead, Russell Spears, and Bertjan Doosje. 2003. "I'm a Hypocrite but So is Everyone Else: Group Support and the Reduction of Cognitive Dissonance." *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice* 7(3):214-224.

**Wednesday, 10/4** Social Construction and Social Change

Readings:

- O'Brien, Jodi. 2001. "Building and Breaching Reality" in Jodi O'Brien (ed.) *The Production of Reality*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Pine Forge Press. pp. 334-352.
- Cecilia Ridgeway. 1997. "The Persistence of Gender Inequality in Employment" *American Sociological Review* 62(2):218-235.

**Friday, 10/6** Discussion

## **Week 6. Prejudice**

**Monday, 10/9** Columbus Day. No class.

**Wednesday, 10/11** Prejudice, Stereotypes, and their Impact on the Social Order

Readings:

- Brown, Chapter 10. "Prejudice" pp. 351-391.
- Griffin, John Howard. *Black Like Me*.
- Plous, S. 1996. "Ten myths about affirmative action. *Journal of Social Issues*, 52:25-31. Also at:  
<http://www.understandingprejudice.org/readroom/articles/affirm.htm>)

**Friday, 10/13** Discussion

## **Week 7. Persuasion**

**Monday, 10/16** Research on Persuasion

Readings:

- Brown, Chapter 7. "Persuasion" pp. 238-273.

**Wednesday, 10/18** Advertising and its Discontents

Readings:

- Naomi Klein. *No Logo*. Chapter 1. "New Branded World" pp. 3-26 and Chapter 12. "Culture Jamming: Ads Under Attack" pp. 279-311

**Friday, 10/20**      **Midterm Exam**

**Week 8. Social Influence**

**Monday, 10/23**      Conformity and Compliance

Readings:

- Brown, Chapter 8. "Social Influence" pp. 274-315.
- Asch, Solomon. 1951. "Effect of Group Pressure upon the Modification and Distortion of Judgments" in H. Guetzkow (ed.), *Group Leadership and Men*. Carnegie Press. pp. 177-190.
- Schein, E.H. 1956. "The Chinese indoctrination program for prisoners of war; a study of attempted brainwashing" *Psychiatry* 19(2):149-172.

**Wednesday, 10/25** Obedience to Authority

Readings:

- Milgram, S. 1963. "Behavioral study of obedience." *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 67:371-378.
- Haney, C., Banks, W., & Zimbardo, P. 1973. "Interpersonal dynamics in a simulated prison. *International Journal of Criminology and Penology*, 1:69-97.
- (optional) Cialdini, Chapter 3. "Social Proof" pp. 98-142.

**Friday, 10/27**      video on Milgram/Discussion

**Week 9. Group Behavior**

**Monday, 10/30**      The Nature, Function, and Dynamics of Groups

Readings:

- Brown, Chapter 9. "Groups" pp. 316-350.

**Wednesday, 11/1**      Disfunctional Group Dynamics

Readings:

- Waller, *Becoming Evil*. Part I. Introduction and Chapters 1-3. pp. 3-93.

**Friday, 11/3**      Discussion

## **Week 10. Aggression**

**Monday, 11/6** Nature and Causes of Aggression

Readings:

- Brown, Chapter 13. “Aggression” pp. 474-512.

**Wednesday, 11/8** Video Games, Marilyn Manson, or Bullying—What Happened at Columbine?

Readings:

- Brown, Brooks and Rob Merritt. Chapters 1-12 and 14. *No Easy Answers: The Truth Behind Death at Columbine*. pp. 1-136; 157-167.

**Friday, 11/10** Discussion

## **Week 11. Aggression, Influence, or Group Dynamics? The Case of Jonestown**

**Monday, 11/13** The Allure of Unity: Discipline, a Shared Dream, and Charismatic Leadership

Readings:

- Feinsod, Ethan. *Awake in a Nightmare. Jonestown: the Only Eyewitness Account*. Chapters 1-4 (pp.11-53) and 7-9 (pp.88-121).

**Wednesday, 11/15** When Unity Turns Deadly: Suppression of Dissent, Blind Loyalty, and Learned Helplessness

Readings:

- Feinsod, *Awake in a Nightmare*, Chapters 11-16 (pp.134-206).

**Friday, 11/17** Discussion

## **Week 12. Intergroup Violence and Conflict: the Demographics of Evil**

**Monday, 11/20** How Can “Ordinary People” Participate in Genocide?

Readings:

- Browning, Christopher. *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. pp. 1-8; 55-77.
- Waller, *Becoming Evil*. “A Model of Extraordinary Human Evil” and Chapters 4-6. pp. 94-201.

**Wednesday, 11/22** No class...

**Friday, 11/24** ...Happy Thanksgiving!

### **Week 13. Intergroup Violence and Conflict: Cultural, Social, Political Factors**

**Monday, 11/27** Structural Determinants of Genocide and Mass Killing

Readings:

- *Becoming Evil*. Chapters 7-9. pp. 202-280.

**Wednesday, 11/29** Some Myths and Realities of Suicide Terrorism

Readings:

- Pape, Robert A. 2005. *Dying to Win*. New York: Random House. "Introduction" pp. 3-26, and Chapter 9. "Altruism and Terrorism" pp. 171-198
- Plous, S. & Zimbardo, P.G. 2004. "How Social Science Can Reduce Terrorism" *Chronicle of Higher Education*, (Sept.10:B9-B10)

**Friday, 12/1** Discussion

### **Week 14. Altruism and Helping Behavior**

**Monday, 12/4** Doing Good: Does Altruism Exist?

Readings:

- Brown, Chapter 12. pp. 443-473.
- Brehony, Kathleen A. 1999. Chapter 2. "The Nature of Goodness" in *Ordinary Grace: An Examination of the Roots of Compassion, Altruism, and Empathy, and the Ordinary Individuals Who Help Others in Extraordinary Ways*. pp. 23-44

**Wednesday, 12/6** Who Does Good and Why?

Readings:

- Mattis, J. S., Beckham, W.P., Saunders, B.A., Williams, J.E., McAllister, D., Myers, V., Knight, D., Rencher, D., and Dixon, C. 2004. "Who Will Volunteer? Religiosity, Everyday Racism, and Social Participation Among African American Men" *Journal of Adult Development* 11(4):261-272.
- Mikulincer, M., Shaver, P.R., Gillath, O., and Nitzberg, R.A. 2005. "Attachment, Caregiving, and Altruism: Boosting Attachment Security Increases Compassion and Helping." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 89(5):817-839.

**Friday, 12/8** **Final Quiz.** Wrap-up Discussion.

**Monday, 12/11** Study Day

**Wednesday, 12/13** **Final Paper Due : 12:30.**