

SC079: Social Psychology

T-Th, 3:00-4:15, Cushing 212

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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.

The course integrates conceptual and theoretical work with its application to the analysis of real life case studies. In the first half of the course, we will focus more 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. As the course progresses, 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 a take-home mid-term exam, a short reaction paper, and a final paper, which together will account for 75% 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) Participation in class discussions. My assessment of your level of engagement with the class will constitute a significant part of your grade. Since not everyone feels comfortable speaking in class, that is only part of how I evaluate participation. Coming to office hours, doing extra credit assignments, and asking questions by email are also good ways to show your engagement in the class. If you have to miss class, make sure to get notes from a fellow student and keep up with all readings and assignments. If something is keeping you from attending class for more than a few times, please let me know so that we can make arrangements to keep you caught up.

- 2) Three (3) quizzes. Three quizzes with multiple choice, true/false, and/or fill in the blank questions will be given in the first six weeks of class. I will announce the material to be covered for each quiz in advance.
- 3) Midterm exam. The take-home midterm will be a short essay question based on the book, *Black Like Me*, drawing on concepts and topics covered earlier in the semester.
- 4) Short paper on social influence (6 pages). This paper will draw on the readings on conformity, compliance, and obedience.
- 5) Final paper (9-10 pages). The semester will culminate in a final paper, analyzing one of the “real world” cases we will examine 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, and the papers will be due the day of the allocated final exam period.

Grading

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

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| Participation | 10% |
| Quizzes (3) | 15% |
| Mid-Term | 20% |
| Social Influence Paper | 25% |
| Final Paper | 30% |

Course Format

I will do some lecturing, usually at the beginning of class, but I will save a good portion of our time for group exercises and/or discussion. 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. So that you all can participate and benefit from the discussions, 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, dishonesty, or collusion in another’s dishonesty is a fundamental violation of these norms. To see the College's policies in this area go to: <http://www.bc.edu/integrity>. Two other sources to consult about proper citation rules and exactly what constitutes a breach of policy are: “Plagiarism Examples and Guidelines: A Quiz” at http://www.bc.edu/schools/cas/polisci/integrity/quiz/#Example_four and the American Sociological Association’s “Quick Style Guide” at <http://www.asanet.org/page.wv?section=Sociology+Depts&name=Quick+Style+Guide>).

Policy on late assignments and missed quizzes (please read carefully!): If you miss any of the quizzes due to an *emergency*, make sure to contact me by email as soon as possible afterwards to arrange a make-up. If you know about an unavoidable conflict ahead of time, you must make other arrangements with me *in advance*. A quiz missed due to an unexcused absence will receive a grade of zero. All other papers, including the mid-term, reaction papers

and final papers will be graded down by *5 percentage points for each day they are late* unless other arrangements have been made in advance.

Readings

There are four required books for this course:

- Brown, Jonathon D. 2006. *Social Psychology*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- 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*. New York: 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. All but the Feinsod should also be available used for a better price. Copies of each book will also be placed on reserve at O'Niell Library.

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. They will also be available from the course WebCT site, also linked to the library home page.

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 is 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 Kim 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.* Doing so will not only benefit you directly by improving your understanding and performance in the course, but it will also ensure that you get a good participation grade.

Welcome to Social Psychology!

Weekly Schedule and Readings

Introduction to Social Psychology

- Tuesday, 1/15 What is Social Psychology?
- Thursday, 1/17 Conducting Research in Social Psychology [talk about deception]
- Brown, Chapter 1. "Introduction to Social Psychology" pp. 1-33.
 - Epstein, Robert. 1997. "Folk Wisdom: Was Your Grandmother Right?" *Psychology Today* (Nov/Dec).

Theories of Social Interaction

- Tuesday, 1/22 Theoretical Approaches: Logical Postivism and the Social Constructionist Critique
- Brown, Chapter 2. "Social Psychology's Theoretical Roots" pp. 34-62.
 - 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
- Thursday, 1/24 Symbolic Interactionism: the Interpretivist Compromise. [+Hewitt]
- O'Brien, Jodi. 2001. "Symbolic Interactionism: A Perspective for Understanding Self and Social Interaction." in *The Production of Reality, 4th ed.* Jodi O'Brien (ed.) Pine Forge Press. pp. 44-62.

The Self and Social Identity

- Tuesday, 1/29 The Nature of the Self
- Quiz #1: on readings from Wks 1 & 2. Methodology & Theories of Social Psych.
 - Cooley, Charles Horton "The Self as Sentiment and Reflection" pp.26-30 and Mead, George Herbert. "The Self as Social Structure" pp.31-36. in Spencer E. Cahill (ed.) 2007. *Inside Social Life*. Los Angeles: Roxbury Pub. Co.
 - Snyder's "The Many Me's of the Self-Monitor" pp.137-143 from Lesko, Wayne A. (ed.) 2006. *Readings in Social Psychology*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Thursday, 1/31 Fractured Identities and Self-Esteem
- Du Bois' "Double Consciousness and the Veil" p.178-82; Gilman's, "The Yellow Wallpaper" pp.186-189; and Cooper's "The Colored Woman's Office" pp.193-199. From Lemert, Charles (ed.) 1993. *Social Theory: The Multicultural and Classic Readings*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. From Chapter 2. "Split Lives in the Modern World"
 - Collins, Patricia Hill. 2000. *Black Feminist Thought*. Chapter 5. "The Power of Self-Definition" pp.97-121.

Cognitive Processes: Perception, Judgment, & (Re)producing the Social Order

Tuesday, 2/5 Perceiving Others and Causal Attribution

- Brown, Chapter 3. “Social Perception,” sections III and IV, pp. 85-100.
- Brown, Chapter 4. “Social Judgment,” section II, pp. 111-125.

Thursday, 2/7 “Defining the Situation,” and How We Collectively (Re)produce the Social Order

- 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.
- Blumer’s “Society in Action” pp.312-316 and Thorne’s “Borderwork Among Girls and Boys” pp.317-325 in Spencer E. Cahill (ed.) 2007. *Inside Social Life*. Los Angeles: Roxbury Pub. Co.

Attitudes and Behavior

Tuesday, 2/12 Attitudes: What They Are and Where They Come From

- Quiz #2: on readings from Week 4. Perception and Judgment
- Brown, Chapter 6. “Attitudes and Behavior” pp. 194-237.

Thursday, 2/14 Cognitive Dissonance: When Attitudes and Behavior Don’t Match

- Festinger, Leon and James M. Carlsmith. “Cognitive Consequences of Forced Compliance” in Lesko, Wayne A. (ed.) 2006. *Readings in Social Psychology*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon. pp.115-123.

Prejudice

Tuesday, 2/19 Prejudice as Interactional Oppression

- Quiz #3: on Attitudes and Behavior
- Brown, Chapter 10. “Prejudice” pp. 351-391.

Case Study: *The Experiences of a White Man “Being Black”*

Thursday, 2/21

- Griffin, John Howard. *Black Like Me*, pp. 1-44.

Tuesday, 2/26

- Griffin, John Howard. *Black Like Me*, pp. 45-145.

Thursday, 2/28

- Griffin, *Black Like Me*, pp. 145-164 and “Epilogue.” pp. 165-194.

Friday, 2/29 – Mid-terms due in my faculty box, McGuinn 426, by 5pm.

May 3-7

NO CLASSES – SPRING BREAK!

Persuasion: Changing Attitudes

Tuesday, 3/11 Persuasion: Changing Attitudes

- Brown, Chapter 7. “Persuasion,” Parts I-III, pp. 238-268.

Social Influence: Conformity and Compliance

Thursday, 3/13 Kinds of Social Influence

- Brown, from Chapter 8. “Social Influence” pp. 275-288.
- Cialdini, Robert B. *Influence: Science and Practice*. Chapter 4. “Social Proof” pp. 98-142.

Tuesday, 3/18 Compliance: Commitment, Reciprocity, and Other Triggers

- Brown, from Chapter 8. “Social Influence,” pp. 296-306.
- Cialdini, Robert B. *Influence: Science and Practice*. Chapter 3. “Commitment and Consistency” pp. 53-97.

Thursday, 3/20 **NO CLASSES – EASTER WEEKEND**

Social Influence: Obedience to Authority

Tuesday, 3/25 Obedience: The Power of Authority

- Miller, Arthur G. *The Obedience Experiments*. Chapter 3 “The Obedience Experiments: Theme and Variations,” pp.37-66.

Thursday, 3/27 Explaining Obedience: Milgram’s Theory of the “Agentic State”

- Miller, Arthur G. *The Obedience Experiments*. Chapter 8, “Milgram’s Theory of Obedience: An Appraisal,” pp.221-255.

Tuesday, 4/1 Obedience in Real Life: Reserve Police Battalion 101

- Social influence papers due today.
- Browning, Christopher. *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. pp. 1-8; 55-77.

Groups and Group Dynamics

Thursday, 4/3 The Nature, Function, and Dynamics of Groups

- Brown, Chapter 9. “Groups” Parts I-IV, pp. 316-337.
- Brown, Section E of Chapter 8, “Conformity and Group Decision Making” pp.288-295.

Tuesday, 4/8 Deindividuation: the Stanford Prison Experiment

- Haney, C., Banks, W., & Zimbardo, P. 1973. "Interpersonal dynamics in a simulated prison. *International Journal of Criminology and Penology*, 1:69-97.

Thursday, 4/10 POW Camps: Obedience, Compliance, or Brainwashing?

- Schein, E.H. 1956. "The Chinese indoctrination program for prisoners of war; a study of attempted brainwashing" *Psychiatry* 19(2):149-172.

Aggression

Tuesday, 4/15 The Nature and Causes of Aggression

- Brown, Chapter 13. "Aggression" pp. 474-512.

Case Study: Aggression and the Shootings at Columbine

Thursday, 4/17 The Long Build-up

- Brown & Merritt. *No Easy Answers*, Chapters 1-7. pp. 1-82.

Tuesday, 4/22 Personality, Frustration, the Media: Which Explanation to Believe?

- Brown & Merritt. Chapters 8-12 and 14. pp. 83-145 and 157-167.

Jonestown: Influence, Aggression, or Group Dynamics?

Thursday, 4/24 Who Was Jones?

- Feinsod, Ethan. *Awake in a Nightmare. Jonestown: the Only Eyewitness Account*. Chapters 1-4 pp.11-53.

Tuesday, 4/29 The Allure of Unity: Discipline, a Shared Dream, and Charismatic Leadership

- Feinsod, Ethan. *Awake in a Nightmare. Jonestown: the Only Eyewitness Account*. Chapters 7-9, pp. 88-121 and chapters 11-12, pp. 134-156.

Thursday, 5/1 When Unity Turns Deadly: Fear, Blind Loyalty, and Groupthink

- Feinsod, *Awake in a Nightmare*, Chapters 13-16, pp.157-206.

Friday, 5/9 – Final Paper Due by 5:00 pm in my Faculty Box, McGuinn 426.