

## SC079: Social Psychology

**MWF, 2:00-2:50, Carney 103**

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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 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 two short "response papers" and one final paper, which together will account for 40% 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. I will take 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 keep up with all readings and assignments. If you have a valid excuse, email me to let me know and provide the appropriate documentation (e.g. doctor's note).
- 2) Two (2) "reaction papers" (3 pages each). You will be asked to write two short papers in reaction to specific readings from weeks 7-9. For each one, in the first half of the paper

you are to summarize the readings and then, in the second half, give your own *critical, analytical* reactions to them.

- 3) Three (3) quizzes. Three quizzes with multiple choice, true/false, and/or fill in the blank questions will be given in weeks 3, 4 and 5. I will announce the material to be covered for each quiz in advance.
- 4) 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.
- 5) In-class essay. On the last day of class, you will have a brief, one-question essay exam on material covered in the last 2 weeks of the course.
- 6) Final paper (10-12 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:

Participation/Attendance	10%
Reaction Papers (2)	10%
Quizzes (3)	15%
Mid-Term Exam	25%
In-Class Essay	10%
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](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 exams (Read carefully!):** Quizzes, Midterm, and In-Class Essay: If you miss any of these due to an *emergency*, 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, you must make other arrangements with me *in advance*. A quiz, midterm, or in-class essay missed due to an unexcused absence will receive a grade of zero. Final papers will be graded down by *5 percentage points for each day they are late* unless other arrangements have been made. Reaction papers will be due *in class* on the date indicated in the weekly schedule and may not be turned in late except in an emergency. If you know in advance that you will be absent the day a reaction paper is due, please turn it in *before* class meets.

### **Readings**

There are six required books for this course:

- Brown, Jonathon D. 2006. *Social Psychology*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Cialdini, Robert B. 2001. *Influence: Science and Practice*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- 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.
- Waller, James. 2002. *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing*.

These books (the Feinsod in coursepack form) are all available at the Bookstore. All but the Feinsod and the Cialdini should also be available used for a better price. Copies of each book will also be placed on reserve at O’Niell Library. Note that because I will be using these books next semester as well, you can sell them back to the bookstore at the end of the course, if you so choose.

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’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 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

### Week 1. Introduction to Social Psychology

**Wednesday, 9/5**    What is Social Psychology?

**Friday, 9/7**            Conducting Research in Social Psychology

- Brown, Chapter 1. "Introduction to Social Psychology" pp. 1-33.
- Epstein, Robert. 1997. "Folk Wisdom: Was Your Grandmother Right?" *Psychology Today* (Nov/Dec).
- Earl Babbie. 1986. "Truth, Objectivity, and Agreement" in *Observing Ourselves*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc. pp.19-28

### Week 2. Theories of Social Interaction

**Monday, 9/10**        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.

**Wednesday, 9/12**    Symbolic Interactionism: the Interpretivist Compromise.

- O'Brien, Jodi. 2001. "Symbolic Interactionism: A Perspective for Understanding Self and Social Interaction." in *The Production of Reality, 4<sup>th</sup> ed.* Jodi O'Brien (ed.) Pine Forge Press. pp. 44-62.
- George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. 2005. "Metaphors We Live By" in *The Production of Reality*. pp. 102-114.

**Friday, 9/14**        Discussion

### Week 3. The Self and Social Identity

**Monday, 9/17**        The Nature of the Self

- Quiz #1: on readings from Weeks 1 & 2.
- 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.
- Lesko, Wayne A. (ed.) 2006. *Readings in Social Psychology*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon. From Chapter 5. "Social Identity": Snyder's "The Many Me's of the Self-Monitor" pp.137-143, and Flezzani & Benschhoff's "Understanding Sexual Aggression in Male College Students" pp.153-162

**Wednesday, 9/19**    Fractured Identities, Self-Handicapping, and Self-Esteem

- Lemert, Charles (ed.) 1993. *Social Theory: The Multicultural and Classic Readings*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. From Chapter 2: 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.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. 2000. *Black Feminist Thought*. Chapter 5. "The Power of Self-Definition" pp.97-121.

**Friday, 9/21**            Discussion

**Week 4. Cognitive Processes: Perception, Judgment, & (Re)producing the Social Order**

**Monday, 9/24**        Perceiving Others and "Defining the Situation"

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

**Wednesday, 9/26**    How We All Participate in (Re)producing 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.

**Friday, 9/28**            Discussion

- Quiz #2: on readings from Week 4. Perception and Judgment

**Week 5. Attitudes, Behavior, and Prejudice**

**Monday, 10/1**        Attitudes: What They Are and Where They Come From

- Brown, Chapter 6. "Attitudes and Behavior" pp. 194-237.

**Wednesday, 10/3**    Cognitive Dissonance: When Attitudes and Behavior Don't Match

- Brown, Chapter 6. "Attitudes and Behavior," Parts IV-V, pp. 215-237.

**Friday, 10/5**        Prejudice and Oppression: Attitudinal & Structural Racism

- Quiz #3: on Attitudes and Behavior (not prejudice)
- Brown, Chapter 10. "Prejudice" pp. 351-391.

**Week 6. Case Study: The Experiences of a White Man "Being Black"**

**Monday, 10/8**        **No Class. Columbus Day.**

**Wednesday, 10/10**

- Griffin, John Howard. *Black Like Me*, pp. 1-101

**Friday, 10/12**        Discussion

- Griffin, *Black Like Me*, pp. 102-164 and (Optional) “Epilogue.” pp. 165-194

### **Week 7. Persuasion: Changing Attitudes**

**Monday, 10/15** Persuasion

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

**Wednesday, 10/17** In for an Inch, In for a Mile: the Power of Commitment

- Cialdini, Robert B. *Influence: Science and Practice*. Chapter 3. “Commitment and Consistency” pp. 53-97.

**Friday, 10/19** Midterm Exam

### **Week 8. Social Influence: Changing Behavior, Part I. Conformity and Compliance**

**Monday, 10/22** Kinds of Social Influence

- Brown, Chapter 8. “Social Influence” pp. 274-315.

**Wednesday, 10/24** Conformity and Compliance

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

**Friday, 10/26** Discussion

- Reaction Paper #1 due on Cialdini, Chs. 3 and 4.

### **Week 9. Social Influence: Changing Behavior, Part II. Obedience to Authority**

**Monday, 10/29** The Power of Authority

- Film: “Obedience” (in class)
- Cialdini, Robert B. *Influence: Science and Practice*. Chapter 6. “Authority” pp. 178-202.

**Wednesday, 10/31** Milgram’s Theory of the “Agentic State”

- Miller, Arthur G. *The Obedience Experiments*. Chapter 3 “The Obedience Experiments: Theme and Variations,” pp.37-66, and Chapter 8, “Milgram’s Theory of Obedience: An Appraisal,” pp.221-255.

**Friday, 11/2** Discussion

### **Week 10. Groups and Group Dynamics**

**Monday, 11/5** The Nature, Function, and Dynamics of Groups

- Reaction paper #2 due on Miller, Chs 3 and 8.
- Brown, Chapter 9. “Groups” pp. 316-350.

**Wednesday, 11/7** Deindividuation and Social Control

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

**Friday, 11/9** Discussion

**Week 11. Aggression and the Shootings at Columbine**

**Monday, 11/12** The Nature and Causes of Aggression

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

**Wednesday, 11/14** Intra-group Aggression: The Case of Columbine

- Brown, Brooks and Rob Merritt. Chapters 1-9. *No Easy Answers: The Truth Behind Death at Columbine*. pp. 1-104.

**Friday, 11/16** Discussion

- Brown & Merritt, *No Easy Answers*, Chapters 10-12, pp. 105-145 and Chapter 14, pp. 157-167.

**Week 12. Aggression, Influence, or Group Dynamics? The Case of Jonestown**

**Monday, 11/19** The Allure of Unity: Discipline, a Shared Dream, and Charismatic Leadership

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

**Nov. 21-25 NO CLASS. THANKSGIVING BREAK.**

**Monday, 11/26** When Unity Turns Deadly: Suppression of Dissent, Blind Loyalty, and Learned Helplessness

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

**Week 13. Waller's Model of Genocide: Nature and a Particular Kind of Nurture**

**Wednesday, 11/28** Who Participates in Genocide?

- Waller, *Becoming Evil*. Introduction and Chapter 1, pp. 3-31 and Chapter 5, pp.137-169

**Friday, 11/30** Discussion.

- Outlines for final papers due.

**Week 14. Waller's Model of Genocide, cont'd.**

**Monday, 12/3** Constructing a Genocidal Worldview and the Psychological "Other"

- Waller, *Becoming Evil*. Chapters 6-7, pp. 171-229.

**Wednesday, 12/5** The Social Construction of Cruelty and Lessons Learned

- Waller, *Becoming Evil*. Chapters 8. pp. 230-271.

**Friday, 12/7**      Applying Waller's Model: Reserve Police Battalion 101

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

**Monday, 12/10**      Last Day of Class.

- In-Class Essay on Waller's model.

**Tuesday, 12/18**      **Final Paper Due at 9:00am in my Faculty Box, McGuinn 426.**