

Current Topics in Social Psychology (PSYD15H Lec02)
Summer, 2009
Social Psychology in the "Facebook" Era

Instructor: Connie Boudens, PhD.

Class times: Wednesdays 19:00 – 21:00

Class location: BV 363

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 17:00 -19:00 or by appointment

Course Description:

For better or for worse, a great deal of our communication now takes place over the internet, by text message, or through other forms of electronic communication. In addition to serving as a mode of communication, the internet is also a source of information about a wide range of topics and, for many individuals, serves as their main source of news and information. The prevalence of this mode of interaction and information gathering raises a number of issues that pertain to social psychology, including the effects that it has on social structures, the ways in which it influences helping behaviour and aggression, how it affects the way groups are formed, and group norms established and maintained, and what impact it has on initial attraction and the formation of offline relationships. In this seminar, we will consider several key topics in social psychology and examine the ways in which these play out in the context of the "wired world", as compared to the way they influence behaviour, emotions and thought in the offline world. As a class we will attempt to address the question of whether existing theories and concepts can be used to understand the social world of the internet, or if fundamentally new ways of conceptualizing our relationships to others (broadly defined) are needed in order to study social psychology in the online universe.

Readings:

There is no assigned text for this course. All of the readings will be provided for you by email in the first few weeks of the course, and in the form of a course reader for the rest of the term. I will update you in the availability of the reader when it has been reproduced and packaged for sale. You are required to prepare for class by reading and reflecting on the assigned articles and coming to class with your questions and thoughts written down.

Grading Summary:

Reaction papers (5 @ 5% each) 25%

Class Participation 10%

Research Brief 10%

Research Proposal 20%

Final Exam 35%

Reaction Papers (5 @ 5% each)

Reaction papers help to prepare you for class by encouraging you to think about the readings before the discussion takes place. Over the course of the term, you are expected to produce five reaction papers. You may choose the weeks in which you do reaction papers, however **at least three of them must be submitted by June 17th**. You are welcome to hand in more than five if you so choose. If you do submit more than five reaction papers, only the top five will be used to calculate your grade. Reaction papers should be approximately 2 double-spaced pages in length and must follow APA guidelines as to format and style.

You have considerable latitude in what you talk about in the reaction papers, but you must do the following:

- BRIEFLY Summarize the readings and/or highlight the key findings
- Identify connections between the readings for the week and/or readings for the related week(s)
- Relate the readings to the topic for the week

Other things you can include in your reaction papers are:

- Critiques of the method or discussion sections of the readings
- Ideas about where this research could be taken in the future

Reaction papers are due **at the beginning of class**. Due to the nature and purpose of these papers, late submissions will not be accepted.

Class Participation

Attendance and participation are crucial for a seminar-style class. Although I will provide the basic structure for each seminar meeting, students are expected to take an active role in maintaining an environment of productive discussion. Note that the quality of participation is just as important as the quantity; distracting commentary and anecdotes should be avoided so that the focus remains on the exchange of ideas and the discussion of issues and problems relevant to the topic under consideration.

Preparation is the key to ensuring that your participation is of high quality. Be sure to prepare in an active manner, by engaging with the material rather than simply reading it. Take notes as you are reading, and write down ideas and questions as they occur to you. **To assist you with preparing for class, you are required to submit two questions, ideas or comments to me by email no later than midnight every Tuesday.** These submissions will be used as part of the Wednesday discussion, so make sure that they are open-ended and likely to further the discussion rather than truncating it.

Research Proposal and Research Brief

For this assignment, you will design a study to address a research question of your choice. The question must of course relate to the overall theme of the course, but you are welcome to choose a topic area from social psychology outside of the ones we have covered in the course. The proposal should consist of all of the sections normally found in an empirical article or lab report, up to and including the method section. You are to write the proposal as if you intend to conduct the actual study, keeping in mind any ethical and logistical restrictions that would normally impinge on you and on a study of the type that you propose. The finished proposal should be 8-10 pages, exclusive of the cover page and references, and should include a minimum of 10 original references (i.e. references that are not from the course). The research brief should be a first draft of your proposal, and should be 2-3 pages long. The format for your brief is open, as the exercise is intended to keep you on track with your progress toward the final proposal, and to give you an opportunity to get early feedback and suggestions from me. You may choose to do this assignment in groups of up to 3 people, but be aware that the grade will be the same for all 3 students, and that I will not mediate any conflicts that occur among you.

Final Exam

The final exam will be an essay exam. You will be given a choice of 5 or 6 questions and you must answer 3 of these. The overall length of each answer is at your discretion, but must be *no longer* than 3 double-spaced pages. The timing of the final exam will be provided later in the term.

Topics and Readings

McKenna and Bargh (2000) noted that communication via the internet differs from “real life” in four key ways. First, people are able to remain anonymous in the interactions they engage in online. Second, physical distance becomes less important than it is in the offline world. Third, the pace and timing of interactions is affected in various ways, including the fact that single conversations can be spread out over a much longer period of time, and that we can edit and rephrase our communications at our leisure. Finally, physical appearance and other visual information is not as readily available, and can be withheld at the discretion of the user. To the last point I would add that other non-verbal information is also not available, making the information that we are able to access online that much more important. Each of these features of online communication has an impact on a variety of social psychological concepts, theories and phenomena. With these key differences in mind, students are invited to read and engage with the material that follows:

Week 1: May 6: Introduction to the course, Writing (and reading) empirical journal articles.

Readings: Bem (2009), Bargh & McKenna (2004) (optional)

Week 2: May 13: Social Ostracism

In the offline world, social ostracism often involves a degree of physical rejection, and can be aided by gestures, facial expressions, and physical avoidance of the rejected party. Online, ostracism must be accomplished by other means. This week, we will consider the nature and mechanisms of social rejection in the online world.

Readings: Smith & Williams (2004), Zadro, Williams & Richardson (2003), Molden et al. (2009)

Week 3: May 20: Attraction

Many of the factors that influence initial attraction to another person or to a group are not available in the online world, but we do have access to a great deal of other cues and information. In addition, certain types of information become more salient online, and this may affect the material we eventually use when we are forming an attraction to a person or a group. In this class session and the one next week, we will consider some of the broad factors that differentiate online from offline attraction.

Readings: Montoya (2008), Walther et al. (2009)

Week 4: May 27: Attraction (con't)

Readings: Lea, Spears & de Groot (2001), Walther, Slovacek & Tidwell (2001)

Week 5: June 3: Aggression

Recent instances of cyber-bullying with tragic outcomes, ready access to hate groups, and opportunities to purchase weapons through contacts made online have led to a reconsideration of the aggression that is made possible by the internet and other means of electronic communication. In this class session and next weeks, we will consider some of the special forms that aggression takes on the internet, and the factors that may influence expansion of violent motives beyond the online world.

Reading: Anderson & Bushman (2002)

Week 6: June 10: Aggression (con't)

Readings: Douglas et al (2005), Mullen & Nadler (2008)

Week 7: June 17: Discussion of research ideas/proposals

At least 3 reaction papers are due by this date

By this week, you should be prepared to discuss some ideas you have for your research proposal. Use this class session to get feedback from the rest of the class, and from the instructor.

Week 8: June 24: Helping Behaviour

Research briefs due today

This week we will consider two aspects of this broad topic that are particularly relevant to the overall focus of the course. The first of these is the bystander effect as it plays out online, and the second is the use of “weak ties” in help-seeking. The articles for this week only touch briefly on the topic of helping and help-seeking, therefore students are reminded to keep the focus on the key differences between “real life” and the online world that were outlined by McKenna and Bargh (2000).

Readings: Constant, Sproull, & Keisler (1996), Voelpel, Eckhoff & Förster (2008)

Week 9: July 1 – Canada Day! No Class.

Week 10: July 8: Impression Management

Online communication makes it possible for people to craft their image to an even greater extent than they can in the offline world. This week and next, we will some of the unique features of online self-presentation and their relationship to the various aspects of person perception and impression management.

Readings: Toma, Hancock & Ellison (2008), Bargh, McKenna, & Fitzsimmons (2002)

Week 11: July 15: Impression Management (con't)

Readings: Buffardi & Campbell (2008), Walther et al. (2008)

Week 12: July 22: Persuasion/Attitude Change

Online resources offer us the opportunities to access a wealth of information, and also provide us with information and sources of influence that we did not seek out. Doubtless much of what we encounter in the online world affects our attitudes, and much of this information is there for exactly that purpose. In the last two weeks of the course, we will examine the unique contribution of online sources to the psychology of persuasion.

Reading: Barden & Petty (2008)

Week 13: July 29: Persuasion/Attitude Change (con't)

Research proposals are due today

Readings: Tormala & Clarkson (2007), Lee & Leets (2002)

Readings

1. Bem, D. J. (2009, April 29). *Writing the empirical journal article*. Retrieved from <http://dbem.ws/Writing Article.pdf>.
2. Bargh, J. A., & McKenna, K. Y. A. (2004). The internet and social life. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *55*, 573-590.
3. Smith, A., & Williams, K. D. (2004). R U there? Ostracism by cell phone text message. *Group Dynamics: Theory Research, and Practice*, *8*, 291-301.
4. Zadro, L., Williams, K. D., & Richardson, R. (2004). How low can you go? Ostracism by a computer is sufficient to lower self-reported levels of belonging, control, self-esteem, and meaningful existence. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *40*, 560-567.
5. Molden, D. C., Lucas, G. M., Gardner, W. L., Dean, K., Knowles, M. L. (2009). Motivations for promotion following social exclusion: Being rejected versus being ignored. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *96*, 415-431.
6. Montoya, R. M. (2008). I'm hot so I'd say you're not: The influence of objective physical attractiveness on mate selection. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *34*, 1315-1331.
7. Walther, J. B., Van Der Heide, B., Hamel, L. M., & Shulman, H. C. (2009). Self-generated versus other-generated statements and impressions in computer-mediated communication: A test of the warranting theory using facebook. *Communication Research*, *36*, 229-253.
8. Lea, M., Spears, R., & de Groot, D. (2001). Knowing me, knowing you: Anonymity effects on social identity processes within groups. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *27*, 526-537.
9. Walther, J. B., Slovacek, C. L., & Tidwell, L. C. (2001). Is a picture worth a thousand words? Photographic images in long-term and short-term computer-mediated communication. *Communication Research*, *28*, 105-134.
10. Douglas, K. M., McGarthy, C., Bliuc, A., & Lala, G. (2005). Understanding cyberhate: Social competition and social creativity in online white supremacist hate groups. *Social Science Computer Review*, *23*, 68-76.
11. Mullen, E., & Nadler, J. (2008). Moral spillovers: The effect of moral violations on deviant behavior. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *44*, 1239-1245.
12. Constant, D., Sproull, L., & Kiesler, S. (1996). The kindness of strangers: The usefulness of electronic weak ties for technical advice. *Organization Science*, *7*, 119-135.
13. Voelpel, S. C., Eckhoff, R. A., & Förster, J. (2008). David against Goliath? Group size and bystander effects in virtual knowledge sharing. *Human Relations*, *6*, 271-295.
14. Toma, C. L., Hancock, J. T., & Ellison, N. B. (2008). Separating fact from fiction: An examination of deceptive self-presentation in online dating profiles. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *34*, 1023-1036.
15. Bargh, J. A., McKenna, K. Y. A., & Fitzsimmons, G. M. (2002). Can you see the real me? Activation and expression of the "true self" on the internet. *Journal of Social Issues*, *58*, 33-48.
16. Buffardi, L. E., & Campbell (2008). Narcissism and social networking web sites. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *34*, 1303-1314.
17. Walther, J. B., Van Der Heide, B., Kim, S., Westerman, D., Tong, S. T. (2008). The Role of friends' appearance and behaviour on evaluations of individuals on facebook: Are we known by the company we keep? *Human Communication Research*, *34*, 28-49.
18. Barden, J., & Petty, R. E. (2008). The mere perception of elaboration creates attitude certainty: Exploring the thoughtfulness heuristic. *Attitudes and Social Cognition*, *95*, 489-509.
19. Tormala, Z. L., & Clarkson, J. J. (2007). Assimilation and contrast in persuasion: The effects of source credibility in multiple message situations. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *33*, 559-571.
20. Lee, E., & Leets, L. (2002). Persuasive storytelling by hate groups online: Examining its effects on adolescents. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *45*, 927-957.

Additional reference: McKenna, K. Y. A., & Bargh, J. A. (2000). Plan 9 from cyberspace: The implications of the internet for personality and social psychology. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *4*, 57-75.

Rules and Regulations Pertinent to This Class:

1. In accordance with the Provost's guidelines on appropriate use of information and communicative technology, and for reasons of privacy and copyright protection, you may not record class session in either audio or video format without the explicit consent of the instructor.
2. Cell phones and laptops should not be used in class unless absolutely necessary. Should you require the use of either of these, please consult with me before class.
3. Email policy: Whenever possible, please talk to me in person if you have a question or problem. Typing an email requires a great deal more time than a verbal response, and talking in person makes it easier for me to understand what you are asking and give an appropriate response. When this is not possible, please do not expect an immediate response to your email. I will respond to emails within 48 hour (exclusive of weekends).
4. Respect for all class participants is essential for a seminar, and it is something that I insist on as an instructor. When another member of the class is speaking, everyone else is expected to give that person their full attention
5. Extensions on graded assignments *may* be granted depending on the circumstances, but you must speak to me in advance of the due date. Each case will be considered individually, so please be prepared to tell the reason you need the extension, and how much more time you think you will need to complete the work. Work that is handed in late and has not been approved for an extension will be penalized 5% for each working day that it is late.
6. Academic integrity is one of the cornerstones of the University of Toronto. It is critically important both to maintain our community which honours the values of honesty, trust, respect, fairness and responsibility and to protect you, the students within this community, and the value of the degree towards which you are all working so diligently. According to Section B of the University of Toronto's *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* (www.utoronto.ca/govcncl/pap/policies/behaveac.html) which all students are expected to know and respect, it is an offence for students:
 - To use someone else's ideas or words in their own work without acknowledging that those
 - ideas/words are not their own with a citation and quotation marks, i.e. to commit plagiarism.
 - To include false, misleading or concocted citations in their work.
 - To obtain unauthorized assistance on any assignment.
 - To provide unauthorized assistance to another student. This includes showing another student completed work.
 - To submit their own work for credit in more than one course without the permission of the
 - instructor.
 - To falsify or alter any documentation required by the University. This includes, but is not
 - limited to, doctor's notes.
 - To use or possess an unauthorized aid in any test or exam.
 - There are other offences covered under the *Code*, but these are by far the most common. Please
 - respect these rules and the values which they protect.