

Current Topics in Social Psychology (PSYD15H Lec01)
Fall, 2009
Social Psychology in the “Facebook” Era

Instructor: Connie Boudens, PhD.

Class times: Mondays 11:00 – 13:00

Class location: AA204

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Office Hours: Mondays 13:00 -14:00 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 ways in which it influences helping behaviour and aggression, how it affects the formation of groups and the establishment of group norms, and what impact it has on initial attraction and the formation of 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 posted on Blackboard. 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 15%

Research Brief 5%

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 November 2nd**. 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, although a cover page and abstract are NOT required.

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
- 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
- Identify connections between the readings for the week and/or readings for the related week(s)

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 Friday.** These submissions will be used as part of the Monday 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 must 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 6 to 8 questions and you must answer 4 of these. The overall length of each answer is at your discretion, but must be *no longer* than the equivalent of 3 typed, double-spaced pages (approx 750 words). 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: September 14: Introduction to the course, Writing (and reading) empirical journal articles.

Reading: Bem (2009) (optional, but highly recommended)

Week 2: September 21: Orienting ideas

Bargh & McKenna (2004)

Week 3: September 28: Identity

Personal as well as social identity can be defined and refined by what we say in our online communication, what is said about us, and what we read online about the social groups we belong to and people who are similar to us. This week and next week we will consider several pieces of work that will give us insight into the formation and maintenance of personal and social identity in the online world.

Readings: Valkenburg & Peter (2009); Valkenburg & Peter (2008)

Week 4: October 5: Identity (con't)

Williams & Mendelsohn (2008); Yee, Bailenson & Ducheneaut (2009)

Week 5: October 12: Thanksgiving Monday – No Class.

Week 6: October 19 : 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, we will consider some of the broad factors that differentiate online from offline attraction.

Readings: Gibbs, J. L., Ellison, N. B., & Heino, R. D. (2006); Stephure, Boon, MacKinnon, & Deveau (2009)

Week 7: October 26: Person perception and Impression management

The online world can affect our perception of others by making certain cues more salient and omitting others. Online communication also makes it possible for people to craft their image to an even greater extent than they can in the offline world. This week we will discuss some of the unique features of online self-presentation and their relationship to the various aspects of person perception and impression management.

Readings: Walther, Van Der Heide, Hamel & Shulman (2009); Buffardi & Campbell (2008).

Week 8: November 2: 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 9: November 9: Helping Behaviour

Research briefs due today

The reach and availability of the internet have changed helping behaviour a great deal. Fundraisers are now able to contact more people at much lower cost, people are able to access information that can help them very quickly and without disclosing their identity, and help is easy to give as it is often in the form of advice or technical assistance. This week and next we will discuss the various ways in which the internet has affected helping behaviour and reflect on ways in which it may actually lead to a decrease in helping.

Readings: Garcia, Weaver, Moskowitz, & Darley (2002); Voelpel, Eckhoff & Förster (2008).

Week 10: November 16: Helping Behaviour (con't)

Readings: Sproull, Conley, & Moon (2005); Davison, Pennebaker & Dickerson (2000).

Week 11: November 23: 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 week's, 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.

Readings: Smith & Williams (2004); Zadro, Williams, & Richardson, (2004).

Week 12: November 30: Aggression (con't)

Research proposals are due today

Readings: Amichai-Hamburger & McKenna (2006). 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. Valkenburg, P. M., & Peter, J. (2009). Social consequences of the Internet for adolescents: A decade of research. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *18*, 1-5.
4. Valkenburg, P. M., & Peter, J. (2008). Adolescents' identity experiments on the internet: Consequences for social competence and self-concept unity. *Communication Research*, *35*, 208-231.
5. Williams, M. J., & Mendelsohn, G. A. (2008). Gender clues and cues: Online interactions as windows into lay theories about men and women. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, *30*, 278-294.
6. Yee, N., Bailenson, J. N., & Ducheneaut, N. (2009). The Proteus Effect: Implications of transformed digital self-representation on online and offline behaviour. *Communication Research*, *36*, 285-312.
7. Gibbs, J. L., Ellison, N. B., & Heino, R. D. (2006). Self-presentation in online personals: The role of anticipated future interaction, self-disclosure, and perceived success in internet dating. *Communication Research*, *33*, 152-177.
8. Stephure, R. J., Boon, S. D., MacKinnon, S. L., & Deveau, V. L. (2009). Internet initiated relationships: Associations between age and involvement in online dating. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *14*, 658-681.
9. 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.
10. Buffardi, L. E., & Campbell (2008). Narcissism and social networking web sites. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *34*, 1303-1314.
11. Garcia, S. M., Weaver, K., Moskowitz, G. B., & Darley, J. M. (2002). Crowded minds: The implicit bystander effect. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *83*, 843-853.
12. 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.
13. Sproull, L., Conley, C. A., & Moon, Y. J. (2005). Prosocial behavior on the net (Electronic version). In Yair Amichai-Hamburger (Ed.), *The Social Net: Human Behavior in Cyberspace* (pp. 139 – 162). *Internet*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
14. Davison, K. P., Pennebaker, J. W., & Dickerson, S. S. (2000). Who talks? The social psychology of illness support groups. *American Psychologist*, *55*, 205-217.
15. Smith, A., & Williams, K. D. (2004). R U there? Ostracism by cell phone text message. *Group Dynamics: Theory Research, and Practice*, *8*, 291-301.
16. 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.
17. Amichai-Hamburger, Y., & McKenna, K. Y. A. (2006). The contact hypothesis revisited: Interacting via the internet. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *11*, 825-843.
18. 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.

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 Policies Pertinent to This Class:

1. Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or the AccessAbility Services Office as soon as possible. I will work with you and AccessAbility Services to ensure you can achieve your learning goals in this course. Enquiries are confidential. The UTSC AccessAbility Services staff (located in S302) are available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals and arrange appropriate accommodations (416) 287-7560 or ability@utsc.utoronto.ca.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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).
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. 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. Academic integrity is essential to the pursuit of learning and scholarship in a university, and to ensuring that a degree from the University of Toronto is a strong signal of each student's individual academic achievement. As a result, the University treats cases of cheating and plagiarism very seriously. The University of Toronto's Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters (<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm>) outlines the behaviours that constitute academic dishonesty and the processes for addressing academic offences. Potential offences include, but are not limited to:
 - IN PAPERS AND ASSIGNMENTS: Using someone else's ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement. Submitting your own work in more than one course without the permission of the instructor. Making up sources or facts. Obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment.
 - ON TESTS AND EXAMS: Using or possessing unauthorized aids. Looking at someone else's answers during an exam or test. Misrepresenting your identity.
 - IN ACADEMIC WORK: Falsifying institutional documents or grades. Falsifying or altering any documentation required by the University, including (but not limited to) doctor's notes.

All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following procedures outlined in the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters. If you have questions or concerns about what constitutes appropriate academic behaviour or appropriate research and citation methods, you are expected to seek out additional information on academic integrity from your instructor or from other institutional resources (see <http://www.utoronto.ca/academicintegrity/resourcesforstudents.html>).

H1N1 STATEMENT

Students are advised to consult the university's preparedness site (<http://www.preparedness.utoronto.ca>) for information and regular updates regarding procedures relating to H1N1 planning and individual student responsibilities.