

University of Toronto, Scarborough
PSYD15 (Lec 01): Current Topics in Social Psychology
Fall 2017

Social Psychology in the Social Media Context

Instructor: Connie Boudens, PhD.

Class times: Thursdays 15:00 – 17:00

Class location: SW316

Office: PO103, room 123

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Office Hours: Thursdays 13:30 -14:30

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 (4 @ 5% each) 20%

Class Participation 20%

Research Outline 5%

Research Proposal 20%

Final Exam 35%

Reaction Papers (4 @ 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 four 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 four if you so choose. If you do submit more than four reaction papers, only the

top four 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 neither cover pages nor abstracts are 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 in hard copy **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 6pm every Wednesday.** These submissions will be used as part of the Thursday discussion, so make sure that they are open-ended and likely to further the discussion rather than truncating it.

Research Outline and Research Proposal

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 outline should be a first draft of your proposal, and should be 2-3 pages long. The format for your outline 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 keys 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 are able to 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 7: Introduction to the course, Writing (and reading) empirical journal articles.

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

Week 2: September 14: Orienting ideas

Reading: Bargh & McKenna (2004)

Week 3: September 21: 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: Craig & McInroy (2014); Elias & Lemish (2009)

Week 4: September 28: Identity (con't)

Reading: Guegan, Moliner & Buisine (2015)

Week 5: October 5: 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: Stephure, Boon, MacKinnon, & Deveau (2009); Muchnik, Aral & Taylor (2013)

Week 6: Reading Week

Week 7: October 19: 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: Scott, G. G. (2014); Ellison, Heino & Gibbs (2006)

Week 8: October 26: 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 2: Helping Behaviour

Research outlines 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: Martin & North (2015); Ryder, Loewenstein & Seltman (2013)

Week 10: November 9: Helping Behaviour (con't)

Reading: van Bommel, van Prooijen, Elffers & Van Lange (2016)

Week 11: November 16: 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: Zadro, Williams, & Richardson (2004); Law, Shapka, Domene & Gagné (2012)

Week 12: November 23: Aggression (con't)

Research proposals are due today

Reading: Hsueh, Yogeewaran, & Malinen (2015)

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. doi:10.1146/annurev.psych.55.090902.141922
3. Craig, S. L., & McInroy, L. (2014). You Can Form a Part of Yourself Online: The Influence of New Media on Identity Development and Coming Out for LGBTQ Youth. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*, *18*(1), 95-109. doi:10.1080/19359705.2013.777007
4. Elias, N., & Lemish, D. (2009). Spinning the web of identity: The roles of the internet in the lives of immigrant adolescents. *New Media & Society*, *11*(4), 533-551. doi:10.1177/1461444809102959
5. Guegan, J., Moliner, P., & Buisine, S. (2015). Why are online games so self-involving: A social identity analysis of massivel y multiplayer online role-playing games. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *45*(3), 349-355. doi:10.1002/ejsp.2103
6. 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*(3), 658-681. doi:10.1111/j.1083-6101.2009.01457.x
7. Muchnik, L., Aral, S., & Taylor, S. J. (2013). Social influence bias: A randomized experiment. *Science*, *341*(6146), 647-65. doi:10.1126/science.1240466
8. Scott, G. G. (2014). More than friends: Popularity on facebook and its role in impression formation. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *19*(3), 358-372. doi:10.1111/jcc4.12067
9. Ellison, N., Heino, R., & Gibbs, J. (2006). Managing impressions online: Self-presentation processes in the online dating environment. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *11*(2), 415-441. doi:10.1111/j.1083-6101.2006.00020.x
10. Martin, K. K., & North, A. C. (2015). Diffusion of responsibility on social networking sites. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *44*, 124-131. doi: 10.1016/j.chb.2014.11.049
11. Ryder, C. E., Loewenstein, G., & Seltman, H. (2013). Goal gradient in helping behavior. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* *49*(6), 1078-1083. doi:10.1016/j.jesp.2013.07.003
12. van Bommel, M., van Prooijen, J., Elffers, H., & Van Lange, P. A. M. (2016). The lonely bystander: Ostracism leads to less helping in virtual bystander situations. *Social Influence*, *11*(3), 141-150. doi:10.1080/15534510.2016.1171796
13. 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. doi: 10.1016/j.jesp.2003.11.006
14. Law, D.M., Shapka, J. D., Domene, J. F., & Gagné, . H. (2012). Are Cyberbullies really bullies? An investigation of reactive and proactive online aggression. *Computers in Human Behavior* *28*(2), 664-672. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2011.11.013
15. Hsueh, M., Yogeewaran, K., & Malinen, S. (2015). "Leave your comment below": Can biased online comments influence our own prejudicial attitudes and behaviors? *Human Communication Research*, *41*(4), 557-576. doi:10.1111/hcre.12059

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 (Note that some of these do not apply to online students):

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 as soon as possible. AccessAbility Services staff (located in Rm SW302, Science Wing) are available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals and arrange appropriate accommodations 416-287-7560 or email ability@utsc.utoronto.ca. The sooner you let us know your needs the quicker we can assist you in achieving your learning goals in this course.
2. **Turnitin:** Students will be required to submit their course essays to Turnitin.com for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of the Turnitin.com service are described on the Turnitin.com web site.
3. 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.
4. **Laptops and other electronic devices should only be used in class for course-related purposes. If you are using them for another purpose, you will be asked to stop.**
5. 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. If you must send email, *please include the class you are in and the topic of your email in the subject line.*
6. **Respect for all class participants is essential, 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.
7. **Distracting behaviour will not be tolerated.** This includes chatting with fellow classmates, playing video games, texting, surfing the internet, arriving late or leaving early, and attempting to redirect the discussion to a topic that is not relevant to the class.
8. Assignments are due at the beginning of class. Work that is handed in late will be penalized 10% for each working day or weekend that it is late.
9. I will not give extra-credit assignments or other opportunities to improve on your course grade, so make sure you work hard during the term.
10. I will attempt to upload my slides (if any) before lecture, but occasionally that's not possible, so please come prepared to take your own notes.

Psychology Missed Term Work due to Medical Illness or Emergency Policy:

All students citing a documented reason for missed term work must bring their documentation to the Psychology Course Coordinator, Ainsley Lawson, **within three (3) business days** of the assignment due date.

**** All requests must be accompanied by the [Request for Missed Term Work form](http://uoft.me/PSY-MTW) **** (<http://uoft.me/PSY-MTW>)

In the case of missed term work due to **illness**, only an **original copy** of the official [UTSC Verification of Illness Form](http://uoft.me/UTSC-Verification-Of-Illness-Form) will be accepted (<http://uoft.me/UTSC-Verification-Of-Illness-Form>). Forms are to be **completed in full**, clearly indicating the start date, anticipated end date, and severity of illness. The physician's registration number and business stamp are required.

In the case of **medical emergency**, an original copy of the record of visitation to a hospital emergency room should be provided.

In the case of a **death of a family member**, a copy of a death certificate should be provided.

In the case of a **disability-related** concern, an email communication should be sent directly to the Course Coordinator (psychology-undergraduate@utsc.utoronto.ca) from your Disability Consultant at AccessAbility Services. The course instructor should also be copied.

For U of T **Varsity athletic commitments**, an email communication should be sent directly to the Course Coordinator (psychology-undergraduate@utsc.utoronto.ca) from a coach or varsity administrator should be submitted, **in advance** of the missed work.

Documents covering the following situations are **NOT acceptable**: medical prescriptions, anything related to personal travel, weddings/personal/work commitments.

Your [request form](#) and [medical](#)/other documents must be submitted in person **within 3 business days** of the missed test or assignment. Forms should be submitted to **SW427C between 9 AM - 4 PM**, Monday through Friday. You will receive an email response from the Course Instructor / Course Coordinator detailing the accommodations to be made (if any). You are responsible for checking your official U of T email daily, as accommodations may be time-critical. The Course Instructor reserves the right to decide what accommodations (if any) will be made for the missed work.

Note that this policy applies only to missed term work (assignments and midterms). Missed final exams are handled by the Registrar's Office (<http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/registrar/missing-examination>)

Failure to adhere to any aspect of this policy may result in a denial of your request for accommodation

Academic Integrity:

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/Assets/Governing+Council+Digital+Assets/Policies/PDF/ppjun011995.pdf>) 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; and
- When you knew or ought to have known you were doing it.

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; and
- When you knew or ought to have known you were doing so.

All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following procedures outlined in the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters. If students have questions or concerns about what constitutes appropriate academic behaviour or appropriate research and citation methods, they are expected to seek out additional information on academic integrity from their instructors or from other institutional resources.

Note:

You may see advertisements for services offering grammar help, essay editing and proof-reading. Be very careful. If these services take a draft of your work and significantly change the content and/or language, you may be committing an academic offence (unauthorized assistance) under the *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters*.

It is much better and safer to take your draft to the Writing Centre as early as you can. They will give you guidance you can trust. Students for whom English is not their first language should go to the English Language Development Centre.

If you decide to use these services in spite of this caution, you must keep a draft of your work and any notes you made before you got help and be prepared to give it to your instructor on request.