

PSYD15 – LEC30: Current Topics in Social Psychology
Ritual & Religion
(and some other fun stuff, too)
Fall 2017

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Class Time and Location: Thursday 7:00 – 9:00PM, SW316

Website: <https://portal.utoronto.ca/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp>

Office: SY162

Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description

What are rituals and why are they so fundamental to the human species? What functions do they serve, and what psychological/neural underlie them? How does religiosity, another universal phenomenon spanning time and culture, tie into ritual? When it comes to religion, who believes, and why? What psychosocial outcomes spring out of religious belief? For thousands of years, some of the greatest thinkers and philosophers have asked these questions. Only recently have scientists (and social psychologists in particular) joined in on the debate of what ritual/religion means for the human species. Daniel Dennett says, “Religions are an important phenomenon. We should study them scientifically with the same intensity that we study all other important natural phenomena.” I submit the study of ritual to the same critical analysis.

In this course, we will discuss and debate concepts, both old and new, related to the scientific study of ritual and religion (and the related implications, including group behavior, emotional wellbeing, motivated performance, and much, much more). Each week will touch on a different research theme, where we will discuss a set of empirical and/or theoretical papers. Be prepared to discuss ideas at all levels of psychological science – from methodologies, experimental design and statistical analyses, to abstract theoretical concepts and puzzling philosophical questions. It’s all fair game in this class.

My one rule of thumb is: Come to class prepared and willing to discuss.

The general **goals and objectives** of the course are to help students:

- a) Learn and gain mastery over basic facts, research findings, terminology, principles, and theories important in the social psychology and cognitive science of religion and ritual.
- b) Practice and develop critical thinking skills, written and oral communications skills.
- c) Analyze current issues and controversies in the field of social psychology.

Given the upper level and seminar format of this course, the main objective will be to expose you to new ideas, and to encourage you to develop and expand the way you think about and express your own ideas. In pursuit of these goals, a large portion of class time will be spent discussing ideas with your classmates. These discussions will be supplemented by in-class demonstrations, and activities to promote the learning and application of course material. You should read the assigned papers prior to coming to class and give the material careful

thought, as doing so will facilitate our class discussions and your understanding of the material. Asking questions and making comments during class is highly encouraged.

Class Website: Blackboard will be the course website. Here, you can obtain copies of the syllabus, assigned readings, relevant articles and web links. Although any changes in the course schedule or class location will be announced in class, they will also be posted as announcements on Blackboard.

Assigned Reading: The readings for this class will be comprised of journal articles, book chapters or news articles that are related to course topics. I will post these articles on the course Blackboard website.

Writing: A main goal of this course is to build on students' competency in academic writing skills and to extend those skills through the instruction of normal writing standards in the discipline of psychology. Written assignments will require coherent, logical, and carefully edited prose. In order to succeed at the writing assignment you will have to demonstrate higher-level critical thinking skills such as analysis and synthesis, rather than mere summarization. Your writing will be graded and commented upon and become part of the assigned grade. I will provide evaluation criteria for the writing assignment during class and on blackboard later in the term. There will be ample time for questions about the evaluation criteria prior to the due date. If you have concerns about your preparedness for the writing demands of this course, please see me during office hours and I will try my best to help you and I will also point you to additional resources that can help you to build your writing skills.

Late Assignments: All discussion questions are due at 12pm each Tuesday, before the beginning of class. **The final paper is due at 8pm on Friday, December 1st, 2017.** Late discussion questions will **not** be accepted, thus impacting your participation grade. Late assignments will be accepted with a penalty of 10% for every day (after 8pm December 1st counts as a day) that the assignment is late.

Grade Breakdown

Class Facilitation – (20%): Once during the semester, you and your group (consisting of 3-4 people) will serve as facilitators of the discussion for the week's assigned readings. Class facilitation will include three components:

- 1) Reading the "optional" reading for that week (if there is one included)
- 2) Clearly and concisely describe the main ideas and findings from your articles with the aid of a PowerPoint presentation (20-30 minutes).
- 3) Facilitating the class discussion through discussion questions (these will be provided by your classmates).
- 4) Presenting the material in a unique, engaging, and interactive way.

Given the size of the groups, these two tasks should be broken down so that each group member shows that they were actively involved with their group and can demonstrate mastery of the material. The discussion leaders will come into class prepared to lead and guide the discussion so that the discussion is fluid, lively, and interesting for all the students in the class. I encourage all leaders to be creative by incorporating class activities (e.g. breaking class into small groups to discuss different perspectives of the readings) and multimedia into their discussions. Though not required, familiarity with other relevant readings will help you develop "expertise" on your topic. Your group will receive a single collective grade.

Class Participation, Attendance, and Weekly Discussion Questions – (25%): In a seminar-style class, attendance is expected and participation is essential. In order to get the most out of the course, we need **everyone** actively engaged and participating! Your participation grade will depend on quality as well as quantity of participation. I will keep a record of participation throughout the term. Signs of good participation includes: Attendance, punctuality, eagerness to participate, showing respect to others' contributions, paying careful attention to classmates' presentations, and offering constructive feedback, questions, and comments.

In order to facilitate critical thinking about the readings, students are required to submit a short reactionary paper (1 page double-spaced) with 2 discussion questions **on the Tuesday at 12PM** before each class. Choose one of the week's articles/papers and propose a thought or question related to the theories and/or findings of the article. The question/prompt should be a thoughtful response. In order to receive the full participation "check," you need to show that you've actually read the

Prepare one question for each posted article (two of them). You will need to do this for each week's readings (excluding the week when your group is presenting). These reflections and discussion questions should be **thoughtful responses** to the readings, not mere summaries of the study findings. Though there will be 3-4 papers each week, you can choose to focus on 2 for your reflection and discussion questions.

In forming your discussion questions you may want to consider practical implications of the findings, challenge conclusions, or relate the reading to other topics. I will then send these questions to the presenting group who should incorporate the questions into their presentation. Each set of weekly questions will be marked out of four (total of 24 possible marks for 6 submissions).

Debate – (15%): On November 23rd and November 30th, we will be holding two in-class debates based on two controversial topics in religion/ritual psychology that we will be covering. The two topics, the groups, and the "sides" of the topics will be chosen a few weeks into class, in order gauge relevant and controversial topics in the field. There will be approximately 12 people per topic, and 6 people arguing for either side of that topic. More information about the format of the debate, as well as the grading rubric, will be provided later in the term.

Research Proposal: - (40%) The research proposal will involve researching a topic of the students' own interest related to the social psychology of religion, ritual, and group dynamics. Specifically, this assignment will entail writing a detailed description of a specific model, theory, or hypothesis, reviewing the literature, and writing a research proposal to further examine that model, theory, or hypothesis. Detailed instructions for the research proposal will be provided in class and a grading rubric will be posted on blackboard later in the term.

Classroom Expectations

Class Participation: As a special topics seminar, this class is structured primarily around class discussion. Thus, it is imperative that students actively participate in class discussions, activities, and exercises. This will greatly enhance the classroom experience. It will make learning more interactive, more fun, and more personally relevant.

Use of Electronics: Turn off cell phones, digital assistants, mp3 players, and/or any device that makes noise during class. Answering a phone call, text messaging, or sending e-mail during class is inappropriate. Also, if you are bringing a laptop to class, only use it for appropriate activities (e.g. taking notes).

Classroom Civility: We hope to create an environment where open discussion can happen about topics in psychology. By virtue of this, there are going to be discussions about sensitive topics that individuals will hold differing opinions on. Please respect the opinions and perspectives of your classmates.

Emails: All emails you send should include **PSYD15 in their subject line**. I will try my best to respond to all emails within 24 hours (Monday-Friday).

AccessAbility: 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.

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.

Scholastic Dishonesty: Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis. In this course, a student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to and including an "F" or "N" for the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, ask me.

Missed Term Work due to Medical Illness or Other Emergency:

All students citing a documented reason for missed term work must bring their documentation to the Psychology Course Coordinator in SW427C within three (3) business days of the assignment due date. You must bring the following: (1.) A completed Request for Missed Term Work form (<http://uoft.me/PSY-MTW>), and

(2.) Appropriate documentation to verify your illness or emergency, as described below.

Appropriate Documentation: In the case of missed term work due to illness, only an original copy of the official 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, detailing the accommodations required. The Course Instructor should also be copied on this email.

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, detailing the dates and nature of the commitment. The email should be sent well 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.

Procedure: Submit your (1.) request form and (2.) medical/other documents 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. If you are unable to meet this deadline for some reason, you must contact the Course Coordinator via email (psychology-undergraduate@utsc.utoronto.ca) within the three business day window. Exceptions to the documentation deadline will only be made under exceptional circumstances.

Within approximately one week, 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 and Blackboard course announcements 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.

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

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>)

Week	Topic	Readings
Sep 7	Introduction and group assignments	1. Hobson et al., 2017 _a
Sep 14	Group preparation and discussion	NA
Sep 21 (Group 1)	Ritual calms : The palliative function of ritual	1. Lang et al., 2015 2. Brooks et al., 2016 3. Norton & Gino, 2014
Sep 28 (Group 2)	Ritual prepares : The regulatory function of ritual	1. Vohs et al., 2014 2. Tian et al., 2017 3. Hobson, Bonk, & Inzlicht, 2016
Oct 5 (Group 3)	Ritual binds (1): The social function of ritual	1. Xygalatas et al., 2013 2. Hobson et al., 2017 3. Konvalinka et al., 2011
Oct 12 (Group 4)	Reading Week – NO CLASS	
Oct 19	Ritual binds (2): The social function of ritual	1. Paez et al., 2015 2. Hopkins et al., 2015 3. Fischer et al., 2013
Oct 26 (Group 5)	Ritual shares : The norm transmission function of ritual	1. Herrmann et al., 2013 2. Watson-Jones et al., 2015 3. Sezer et al., 2016
Nov 2 (Group 6)	When Believing Binds (and Blinds): Religion and (anti)sociality	1. Purzycki et al., 2016 2. Ginges, Hansen, & Norenzayan, 2009 3. Gervais, Shariff, & Norenzayan, 2011
Nov 9 (TBD)	Who Believes And Why? Religion and Differences in Culture & Personality	1. Tsai, Miao, & Seppala, 2007 2. Gervais & Norenzayan, 2012 3. Ritter, Preston, & Hernandez, 2014
Nov 16 (Debates)	Debating a seminar topic	Information TBD
Nov 23 (Debates)	Debating a seminar topic	Information TBD
Nov 30	Open class for concluding remarks and final research paper	

