

PSYD15H3S – LEC30: Current Topics in Social Psychology Multidisciplinary Approaches to Causation in Human Social Behavior

Instructor: Nathaniel Brown, MA

E-mail: nat.brown@mail.utoronto.ca

Class Time and Location: Thursday 5:00 – 7:00PM, BV363

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

Office: SY162

Office Hours: By appointment, preferably Mondays or Thursdays

Course Description

With technological advancements in computing power and social media, social psychology is rapidly becoming a multidisciplinary subject. Social psychologists are now collaborating with computer scientists to study social networks, with neuroscientists to study decision-making, with geneticists to study infectious disease, with political scientists to study international conflicts, and so forth. Inhabiting a critical space between the natural and social sciences, the subject of social psychology is uniquely set to answer some of the most important and pressing questions of our time: What makes people happy and satisfied with their lives in the 21st century? How are technologies like smartphones changing the way children and adolescents interact? What causes people to get divorced, or become addicted to drugs, or suffer a psychotic episode? What will happen to families when jobs are replaced by automation?

Answering these questions will require mutual understanding between scholars of different disciplines about the causes of human behavior. But most academic disciplines—including social psychology—are studied in isolation from one another. In this course, we will focus on some major topics in social psychology and try to understand them through the lenses of other disciplines. After completing this course, you will be better prepared to analyze complex social phenomena through multiple levels of analysis simultaneously, and have a more comprehensive understanding of what causes humans to behave the way they do.

The general **goals and objectives** of this course are to:

- a) Gain a broad and nuanced understanding of the causal factors that contribute to complex human social behaviors
- b) Practice and develop critical thinking, written communication, and oral communications skills
- c) Study in-depth some interdisciplinary topic in the domain of human social behavior that is relevant to your personal, intellectual, or career-related interests

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 write notes about the assigned readings and media prior to coming to class, 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 and/or emailed to you through Blackboard, and therefore I recommend you check this website frequently, especially if you must miss a class.

Assigned Readings and Media: The weekly readings and media for this class will be comprised of journal articles, book chapters, or online videos that are related to course topics. I will post these assigned readings and media on the course Blackboard website.

Writing: This course will build on students' competency in academic writing and extend those skills through the instruction of normal writing standards in psychology. Written assignments will require coherent, logical, concise, and carefully edited prose. To succeed at writing assignments of this course, you will have to demonstrate higher-level critical thinking skills such as analysis and synthesis, *rather than mere summarization*. Expectations for each assignment involving writing are specified below. 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 point you toward additional resources that can help you to build your writing skills.

Late Assignments: All discussion questions and comments are due at 5pm each Tuesday, before the beginning of class. **The final paper is due at 8pm on April 10th, 2018.** Late reaction papers and discussion board questions will *not* be accepted. Late assignments will be accepted with a penalty of 10% for every day (after 8pm April 10th counts as a day) that the assignment is late.

Grade Breakdown

Class Facilitation – (25%): Once during the semester, you and your group (consisting of 3-4 people) will serve as facilitators and leaders of the discussion for the week's assigned readings. Class facilitation will include two main components:

- 1) Clearly and concisely describing the main ideas and findings from the assigned articles with the aid of a Powerpoint presentation (20-30 minutes total)
- 2) Facilitating the class discussion through discussion board questions (provided by your classmates two days earlier) and activities

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 multimedia and class activities into their discussions (e.g. breaking class into small groups to discuss different perspectives of the readings, surveying class participants for their perspectives and then discussing them, etc.), and I will help leaders come up with activities or approve of ones they have already chosen. Though not required, familiarity with other relevant readings will help you develop “expertise” on your topic, and so consulting with outside sources is encouraged. Your group will receive a single collective grade.

Class Participation and Attendance – (15%): In a seminar-style class, attendance is expected, and participation is essential. 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 include attendance, punctuality, eagerness to participate, actively listening and respecting others’ contributions and thoughts, paying careful attention to classmates’ presentations, offering constructive feedback, questions, and comments to class activities, etc.

Reaction Paper and Discussion Questions - (10%): To facilitate critical thinking about the readings, students are required to submit a short reactionary paper (1 double-spaced page with normal margins, or around 250 words) with 2 discussion questions **on the Tuesday at 8PM two days before each class** on Blackboard. Prepare two questions *for each posted article* (usually two of them, so usually four questions in total). You will need to do this for each week’s readings, except the week when you are facilitating the discussion. This means that you must do all the reading and writing for each week two days before the upcoming class.

These reaction papers and discussion questions should be thoughtful responses to the assigned readings and media, not requests for clarifications (although you are welcome to ask clarifications questions in addition to your discussion questions). In forming your discussion questions, you may want to consider practical implications of the findings, challenge the authors’ conclusions, or relate the reading to other topics. Reaction papers will not be marked based on a specific rubric – they should reflect the fact that you have read the papers and understand them to a certain degree, and have thought about what they have to do with each other, with causality in psychology, and/or with concepts we have already discussed in class up to that point. See Blackboard for more examples of possible ways to write up the reaction paper. Each set of reaction papers will be marked out of five (total of 35 possible marks for 7 submissions). Class facilitators should look on the public Blackboard discussion group to record the questions class members have posted by Tuesday at 8pm, and incorporate them into their presentation.

Debate – (15%): On March 22nd and 29th, we will be holding two in-class debates based on two controversial topics on causality in psychology that we will be covering. The two topics, the groups, and the “sides” of the topics will be chosen several 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.

Final Integration Paper: - (35%) This paper will involve researching a topic of the students' own interest related to causality in psychology. Students will pick some form of human social behavior they are interested in, find two papers of *different* academic disciplines that discuss that behavior, and synthesize them to demonstrate a broader understanding of the topic. Detailed instructions and a grading rubric for this paper will be provided in class and on Blackboard later in the term. The final paper is due at 8pm on April 10th, 2018.

Final Grade:

Class Facilitation	25%
Participation	15%
Discussion Questions	10%
Debate	15%
<u>Final Integration Paper</u>	<u>35%</u>
Total	100%

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. Thus, 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. This means choosing your words carefully before you speak, actively listening to your classmates when they offer their perspective, and to finding a good balance between making yourself understood and making sure you understand others.

If you are concerned about content in the syllabus or with certain topics discussed by students or myself in class, please let me know as soon as possible so we can talk about how to make this course the best possible environment for you to learn.

Emails: All emails you send should include **PSYD15** in their title. This will greatly help me in responding to emails promptly. I will try my best to respond to all emails within 24 hours (Monday-Friday).

Disabilities: Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities who are registered with AccessAbility Services. Students who register and utilize the AccessAbility services will not be identified on their transcript as receiving accommodations. Information disclosed to the service is confidential and is disclosed only with the student's permission. Students in need of disability accommodations should schedule an appointment with me early in the semester to discuss appropriate accommodations for the course. Talking with me well in advance is always better. There is little to nothing that I can do for you after an assignment is due.

Academic Integrity: Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own can result in disciplinary action. The University of Toronto's Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters outlines the behaviours that constitute academic dishonesty and the processes for addressing academic offences.

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 Emergency:

All students citing a documented reason for missed term work (this includes assignments and midterm exams) must bring their documentation to the Undergraduate Course Coordinator, Ainsley Lawson, **within three (3) business days** of the term test / assignment due date. All documentation must be accompanied by the departmental [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/PSY-MED) (<http://uoft.me/PSY-MED>) will be accepted. 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 other emergency, a record of visitation to a hospital emergency room or copy of a death certificate may be considered.

Forms should be dropped off in SW427C between 9 AM - 4 PM, Monday through Friday. Upon receipt of the documentation, you will receive an email response from the Course Instructor / Course Coordinator within three business days. 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 dealt with by the Registrar's Office (<http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/registrar/missingexamination>).

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

Week	Topic	Readings
January 11th	Introduction	1. How to Read a Journal Article in Social Psychology 2. Read the syllabus!
January 18th	Attribution Bias in Social Domains – “Establishing Causality is Important and We’re Pretty Bad at It”	1. Schtudiner, Klein, & Kantor, 2016 2. Kneer & Bourgeois-Gironde, 2017
January 25th	Investigating Social Behavior Across Multiple Levels of Analysis - “The Natural and Social Sciences Should Be Friends”	1. Keltner & Haidt, 1999 2. Cacioppo, Berntson, Sheridan, & McClintock, 2000
February 1st	Ultimate & Proximate Causation – From Evolution to Culture to Cognition to Neurons	1. Scott-Phillips, Dickins, & West, 2011 2. Francis & Inzlicht, 2016
February 8th	Mental Illness – Biological, Social, and Cultural Considerations	1. Grossman et al., 2015 2. Luhrmann, Padmavati, & Osei 2015 3. Thomas Insel’s “Transforming Diagnosis”
February 15th	Sexuality – Relationships Between Behavior, Preference, and Identity	1. Camperio-Ciana, Corna, & Capiluppi, 2004 2. Valentova et al., 2017
February 22nd	Reading Week – No Class	
March 1st	I am away – TBD	
March 8th	Prejudice - The Development of Intergroup Biases	1. Bar-haim, Ziv, Lamy, & Hodes, 2006 2. Gonzalez, Dunlop, & Baron, 2016
March 15th	Language – Colour Names & Spatial Cognition Across Cultures	1. Vox: The Surprising Pattern Behind Color Names Around The World 2. BBC Horizon: Colour is in the Eye of the Beholder 3. Cibelli et al., 2016 (Long paper, start early!) 4. Majid et al., 2004
March 22nd	Debate	
March 29th	Debate	

April 5th	Final Integration Paper Prep – time & space to work on the paper and receive help from me	
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