

PSYD15HF: Current Topics in Social Psychology

Empathy

Fall 2020

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Course Overview

Empathy, or feeling what someone else feels, is a fundamental component of navigating social life. Despite its benefits, there is good evidence to suggest that empathy is not always automatic – for example, people often choose to walk past (rather than engage with) homeless people on the street, ostensibly turning empathy down or off without necessarily intending to. Why does empathy fail in so many situations? What makes us more or less likely to engage it when the opportunity presents itself?

This course focuses on the study of empathy in social psychology (and related disciplines). We will start with an introduction to empathy research, including a discussion of methodology and prominent theoretical models of empathy. We will then discuss the study of individual differences in empathy (e.g., gender, group status), and the many functions of empathy in social life (e.g., emotion regulation, motivating moral action). Finally, we will discuss disorders characterized by a lack of empathy (i.e., autism and psychopathy).

Throughout this course, we will examine empathy from a scientific, empirical perspective. We will use mostly primary and some secondary journal articles as our main reading material, and will critically discuss the methods, generalizability, and implications of empirical results.

Learning Outcomes:

- I. Understand how empathy is defined, measured, and studied in social psychology.
- II. Understand how empathy is understood and approached as a topic in other areas of psychology (e.g., cognitive, clinical, educational, neuroscience)
- III. Critically engage with how empathy research might be applied in the real-world, focusing on the potential benefits and pitfalls.
- IV. Become more comfortable reading, understanding, and using primary-source research articles as sources of information.
- V. Develop professional communication skills, including presentation, discussion, and writing skills.

Grade Components

Class and Discussion Participation

15%

In a seminar-style class, attendance is expected and participation is essential. I will keep a record of participation throughout the term. Your participation grade will depend on quality, as well as quantity, of participation. Signs of good participation include attendance and punctuality; contribution to small group and/or class-wide discussions; eagerness to participate in activities; offering constructive feedback, questions, and comments; and paying attention to classroom activities and others' presentations.

Flash Talk Presentation

20%

On one week during the semester, you will present one of the week's readings in a "flash talk" format (10 minutes, max).

With a slide (e.g., powerpoint, google slides) and audio/video presentation, clearly describe the main ideas and findings from your assigned required reading (10 minutes). We should hear your voice and see your slides during the presentation. The presentation should summarize the most important parts of the assigned reading. You won't have time to summarize everything! Part of the assignment is being able to choose the most important elements (i.e., which parts of the background, methods, results, and discussion of your assigned required reading are most crucial to the story?). Optionally, you may supplement the presentation with evidence from other research articles or sources, to give students a broader sense of other research being conducted on your topic.

Panellist Assignments

40%

4 total.
10% each.

On four weeks during the semester, you will serve as a facilitator of the discussion by acting as a "panellist" for the week's assigned readings. This is a group assignment, but you will be graded individually.

Your role is to facilitate discussion about the readings by posing questions, responding to other people's comments, and even (optionally) creating activities for the class that are related to the week's general topic. Panellists should be prepared to guide discussion so that the discussion is fluid, lively, and interesting for everyone. You can be creative by incorporating multimedia and class activities into their discussions (e.g. surveying class participants for their perspectives, adding multimedia components to the discussion boards). Though not required, familiarity with other related readings will help you develop expertise on your topic, and so consulting with outside sources is encouraged.

Feel free to ask me ahead of time for other related articles or ideas that might supplement your presentation and discussion facilitation.

Final paper

25%

Students must submit a major (i.e., ~2000-2500 words) paper at the end of the term. Each student should begin by choosing a topic related to the study of empathy. This topic can be one discussed in class, or some other topic not discussed (e.g., empathy interventions in schools or the workplace; positive empathy; empathy deficits in sex offenders; empathy and video game use; empathy and burnout in physicians/nurses; empathy in policing; empathy in business settings).

More detailed instructions for this paper will be provided later in the semester, in class and on Quercus.

Final paper due December 7th at 11:59pm EST via Quercus.

Course Policies

Emails & Communication:

- I will always respond to emails within one to two working days – that means if I receive an email on Friday, you may not get a response until Tuesday. Emails are best for when you have simple questions that are not already answered in the syllabus. If you have longer questions about course content, presentations, or written assignments, I recommend that you come to office hours, or email me to set up a different time to meet.

Disabilities:

- Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities who are registered with AccessAbility Services (<http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/~ability/>). 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. There is little to nothing that I can do for you after an assignment.

Course Schedule & Readings

The readings for each week are written below, and will also be available on the course webpage on Quercus. You are responsible for reading the two required readings for each week before class.

Sept 8th – Models of empathy: Perception-Action Model and Attachment

1

Batson, C. D. (2009). These things called empathy: Eight related but distinct phenomena. In Decety, J. E., & Ickes, W. E. (Eds). *The social neuroscience of empathy*, 3-12, MIT Press.

Davis, M. H. (1983). Measuring individual differences in empathy: Evidence for a multidimensional approach. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 44(1), 113-126.

Jordan, C. H. & Zanna, M. P. (2000). How to read a journal article in social psychology. R. F. Baumeister (Ed.), *The Self in Social Psychology* (pp. 461-470). Philadelphia: Psychology Press. Retrieved from <http://www.uvm.edu/%7Edguber/POLS234/articles/read.htm>

Preston, S. D. (2007). A perception-action model for empathy. *Empathy in Mental Illness*, 428-447.

Shaver, P. R., Mikulincer, M., Gross, J. T., Stern, J. A., & Cassidy, J. A. (2016). A lifespan perspective on attachment and care for others: Empathy, altruism, and prosocial behavior. In Cassidy, J.; Shaver, PR (ed.), *Handbook of attachment: Theory, research, and clinical applications (3rd ed.)*, 878-916.

Sept 15th – Is empathy good?

2

McAuliffe, W. H., Forster, D. E., Philippe, J., & McCullough, M. E. (2018). Digital altruists: Resolving key questions about the empathy–altruism hypothesis in an Internet sample. *Emotion*, 18(4), 493.

Van Lange, P. A. (2008). Does empathy trigger only altruistic motivation? How about selflessness or justice. *Emotion*, 8(6), 766-774. doi:10.1037/a0013967

Weng, H. Y., Fox, A. S., Shackman, A. J., Stodola, D. E., Caldwell, J. Z. K., Olson, M. C. et al. (2013). Compassion training alters altruism and neural responses to suffering. *Psychological Science*, 24(7), 1171-1180.

Sept 22nd – Is empathy bad?

3

Batson, C. D., Klein, T. R., Highberger, L., & Shaw, L. L. (1995). Immorality from empathy-induced altruism: When compassion and justice conflict. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 68(6), 1042.

Pierce, J. R., Kilduff, G. J., Galinsky, A. D., & Sivanathan, N. (2013). From glue to gasoline: how competition turns perspective takers unethical. *Psychological Science*, 24(10), 1986-1994. doi:10.1177/0956797613482144

Galinsky, A. D., Maddux, W. W., Gilin, D., & White, J. B. (2008). Why it pays to get inside the head of your opponent: The differential effects of perspective taking and empathy in negotiations. *Psychological science*, 19(4), 378-384.

Sept 29th – Is empathy a choice (1)?

4

Cameron, C. D., Hutcherson, C. A., Ferguson, A. M., Scheffer, J. A., Hadjiandreou, E., & Inzlicht, M. (2019). Empathy is hard work: People choose to avoid empathy because of its cognitive costs. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 148(6), 962–976.

Schumann, K., Zaki, J., & Dweck, C. S. (2014). Addressing the empathy deficit: Beliefs about the malleability of empathy predict effortful responses when empathy is challenging. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 107(3), 475-493.

Oct 6th – Is empathy a choice (2)?

5

Ferguson, A. M., Cameron, C. D., & Inzlicht, M. (2020). Motivational effects on empathic choices. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 90, 104010, doi: 10.1016/j.jesp.2020.104010

Hasson, Y., Tamir, M., Brahm, K. S., Cohrs, J. C., & Halperin, E. (2018). Are liberals and conservatives equally motivated to feel empathy toward others?. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 44(10), 1449-1459.

Oct 13th – READING WEEK

6

No Readings ☺

Oct 20th – Empathy and emotion regulation

7

Cameron, C. D., Harris, L. T., & Payne, B. K. (2016). The emotional cost of humanity: Anticipated exhaustion motivates dehumanization of stigmatized targets. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 7(2), 105-112.

Cosley, B. J., McCoy, S. K., Saslow, L. R., & Epel, E. S. (2010). Is compassion for others stress buffering? Consequences of compassion and social support for physiological reactivity to stress. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 46(5), 816-823.

Oct 27th – Empathy and development

8

Ang, R. P., & Goh, D. H. (2010). Cyberbullying among adolescents: The role of affective and cognitive empathy, and gender. *Child Psychiatry & Human Development*, 41(4), 387-397.

Vossen, H. G., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2016). Do social media foster or curtail adolescents' empathy? A longitudinal study. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 63, 118-124.

Nov 3rd – Empathy and relationships

9

Cohen, S., Schulz, M. S., Weiss, E., & Waldinger, R. J. (2012). Eye of the beholder: The individual and dyadic contributions of empathic accuracy and perceived empathic effort to relationship satisfaction. *Journal of Family Psychology, 26*(2), 236.

Sassenrath, C. (2019). "Let me show you how nice I am": Impression management as bias in empathic responding. *Social Psychology and Personality Science, 11*(6), 752-760.

Nov 10th – Empathy and gender

10

Sokolov, A. A., Krüger, S., Enck, P., Krägeloh-Mann, I., & Pavlova, M. A. (2011). Gender affects body language reading. *Frontiers in Psychology, 2*, 16. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2011.00016

Klein, K. J. K., & Hodges, S. D. (2016). Gender differences, motivation, and empathic accuracy: When it pays to understand. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 27*(6), 720-730.

Thomas, G., & Maio, G. R. (2008). Man, I feel like a woman: When and how gender-role motivation helps mind-reading. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 95*(5), 1165.

Nov 17th – When empathy fails

11

Cikara, M., Bruneau, E., Van Bavel, J. J., & Saxe, R. (2014). Their pain gives us pleasure: How intergroup dynamics shape empathic failures and counter-empathic responses. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 55*, 110-125.

Gutsell, J. N., & Inzlicht, M. (2010). Empathy constrained: Prejudice predicts reduced mental simulation of actions during observation of outgroups. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 46*(5), 841-845.

Nov 24th – Disorders of empathy

12

Clark, T. F., Winkielman, P., & McIntosh, D. N. (2008). Autism and the extraction of emotion from briefly presented facial expressions: Stumbling at the first step of empathy. *Emotion, 8*(6), 803.

Meffert, H., Gazzola, V., Den Boer, J. A., Bartels, A. A., & Keysers, C. (2013). Reduced spontaneous but relatively normal deliberate vicarious representations in psychopathy. *Brain, 136*(8), 2550-2562.

Thoma, P., Zalewski, I., von Reventlow, H. G., Norra, C., Juckel, G., & Daum, I. (2011). Cognitive and affective empathy in depression linked to executive control. *Psychiatry Research, 189*(3), 373-378. doi:10.1016/j.psychres.2011.07.030

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.

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, ask me.

Time Zone conflicts

If you are physically in a different time zone and a quiz or midterm is scheduled outside of 7:00am to midnight in your local time, you may use the following form to request special arrangements. Note that the form is only for term work. [Final exam conflicts](#) are handled by the Registrar's Office.

The form must be submitted **at least ten (10) business days before the activity**.

Form: <https://uoft.me/PSY-TimeZone>

Submit via email to: Keely Hicks, Departmental Assistant, keely.hicks@utoronto.ca

Missed Term Work due to Medical Illness or Other Emergency

All students citing a documented reason for missed term work must submit their request for accommodations **within three (3) business days** of the deadline for the missed work.

Submit via email to: Keely Hicks, Departmental Assistant, keely.hicks@utoronto.ca

Students must submit **BOTH** of the following:

- (1.) A completed **Request for Missed Term Work Accommodations form** (<http://uoft.me/PSY-MTW>), and
- (2.) **Appropriate documentation** to verify your illness or emergency, as described below.

Appropriate documentation:

For missed **ASSIGNMENTS** or **TERM TESTS** due to **FLU-LIKE SYMPTOMS** or **SELF-ISOLATION REQUIREMENTS:**

- Email the Request for Missed Term Work Accommodations form (uoft.me/PSY-MTW) to Keely (keely.hicks@utoronto.ca), and
- **Declare** your absence on **ACORN** (Profile & Settings > Absence Declaration)

For missed **ASSIGNMENTS** due to **OTHER ILLNESS:**

- Email the Request for Missed Term Work Accommodations form (uoft.me/PSY-MTW) to Keely (keely.hicks@utoronto.ca), along with the Self-Declaration of Student Illness Form (uoft.me/PSY-self-declare-form).

For missed **TERM TESTS** due to **OTHER ILLNESS:**

- Email the Request for Missed Term Work Accommodations form (uoft.me/PSY-MTW) to Keely (keely.hicks@utoronto.ca), along with a scan/photo of the **original** copy of the official UTSC Verification of Illness Form (uoft.me/UTSC-Verification-Of-Illness-Form) or an **original** copy of the record of visitation to a hospital ER.
- Forms are to be completed in full, clearly indicating the start date, anticipated end date, and severity of illness. The physician's registration # and business stamp are required.
- *Note: If an end date of "ongoing" is specified, the medical note will be assumed to cover a period of **two weeks**. If no end date / an "unknown" end date is specified, the note will be assumed to cover a period of **three business days** (starting from illness start date.)*

For missed **TERM TESTS** due to **ACCESSABILITY REASONS:**

- Meet with your **AccessAbility consultant** and have them email Keely (keely.hicks@utoronto.ca) detailing accommodations required.

For missed **ASSIGNMENTS** due to **ACCESSABILITY REASONS**:

- If your desired accommodation is **within the scope** of your Accommodation Letter (ex. your letter includes “extensions of up to 7 days” and you need 1-7 more days), email the Request for Missed Term Work Accommodations form (uoft.me/PSY-MTW) to Keely (keely.hicks@utoronto.ca), and attach a **copy of your letter**. Specify how many days extension you are requesting in your email.
- If your desired accommodation is **outside the scope** of your Accommodation Letter (ex. your letter includes “extensions of up to 7 days” but you need more time than that) you will need to meet with your **AccessAbility consultant** and have them email Keely (keely.hicks@utoronto.ca) detailing the accommodations required.

For missed **ASSIGNMENTS or TERM TESTS** in **OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES**:

Email the Request for Missed Term Work Accommodations form (<http://uoft.me/PSY-MTW>) form to Keely (keely.hicks@utoronto.ca), along with:

- For the **death of a family member/friend**, provide a copy of the death certificate.
- For U of T varsity-level or professional **athletic commitments**, an email from your coach or varsity administrator should be sent directly to Keely (keely.hicks@utoronto.ca) **well in advance** of the missed work, detailing the dates and nature of the commitment.
- For **religious accommodations**, please email Keely (keely.hicks@utoronto.ca) **well in advance** of the missed work.
- For circumstances **outside of these guidelines**, please email Keely (keely.hicks@utoronto.ca) **on or before the date of the test / assignment deadline** to describe your circumstances and determine appropriate documentation.

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

As stated above, your documents must be submitted **within three (3) business days** of the deadline for the missed work.

After submitting your documentation:

Within approximately one to five business days, you will receive a response from your instructor detailing the accommodations to be made (if any).

You are responsible for checking your official U of T email and Quercus course announcements daily, as accommodations may be time-critical.

You should continue to work on your assignments to the best of your ability, as extension accommodations may be as short as one business day, depending on the nature of the illness/emergency.

If an accommodation has been granted but you are unable to meet the conditions of the accommodation (ex. you need a longer extension, or you missed a make-up test), you will need to repeat the missed term work procedure and submit additional forms to request further accommodation. Note that in the case of a missed make-up test, an opportunity to write a second make-up test may not be provided.

Completion of this form does NOT guarantee that accommodations will be made. The course instructor reserves the right to decide what accommodations (if any) will be made. Failure to adhere to any aspect of this policy may result in a denial of your request for accommodation.

Missed Accommodations

If an accommodation is granted but a continued illness/emergency prevents you from meeting the requirements of your accommodation, you must repeat the missed term work procedure to request additional accommodations.

(E.g.) If you miss a make-up midterm, you would need to submit another Request for Missed Term Work Accommodations form. If your original medical note / documentation included the date of the make-up midterm, then only the Request form is required. If the date of the make-up midterm fell outside of the dates indicated on your original medical note/other documentation, then a new medical note/other appropriate documentation must also be submitted.

Importance of Three Business Day window:

If you are unable to submit your documents within the three business day window, **you must email Keely (keely.hicks@utoronto.ca) within the three business day window** to explain the nature of the delay, and when you will be able to provide your documents. Exceptions to the documentation deadline will only be made under exceptional circumstances.

NOTE: Assignments due at end of term

Instructors cannot accept term work any later than five business days after the last day of class. Beyond this date, you would need to file a petition with the Registrar's Office (<https://www.uts.utoronto.ca/registrar/term-work>).

NOTE: Final Exams

This policy applies only to missed assignments and term tests. Missed final exams are handled by the Registrar's Office (<http://www.uts.utoronto.ca/registrar/missing-examination>).