

PSYD15H3S: Current Topics in Social Psychology

Empathy

Winter 2021

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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 Participation

15%

In an online 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; **having your camera on**; 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 (**5 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 (**<5 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 Assignment

35%

On one week during the semester, you and your group (of 2-3 people) will serve as a facilitators of the discussion by acting as a "panellist" for the week's assigned readings.

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). 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.

Empathy in the Wild assignments

30%

2 total
15% each

The purpose of these assignments is to apply the concepts learned in class to everyday experiences of empathy. For each assignment you will find a video clip (e.g., from YouTube; TV shows, movies, cartoons, whatever), and analyze it using a particular theory or model of empathy (**see instructions and grading scheme posted on Quercus**).

Empathy in the Wild assignments due on Feb 12 and March 26 at 11:59pm EST.

Course Policies

Emails & Communication:

- I will attempt to 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 email me to set up an office hours appointment.

Disabilities:

- Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities who are registered with AccessAbility Services (<http://www.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 required readings for each week before class.

Jan 14 th – Empathy in social psychology: An introduction
<div>1</div> <div><p>Batson, C. D. (2009). These things called empathy: Eight related but distinct phenomena. In Decety, J. E., & Ickes, W. E. (Eds). <i>The social neuroscience of empathy</i>, 3-12, MIT Press.</p><p>Jordan, C. H. & Zanna, M. P. (2000). How to read a journal article in social psychology. R. F. Baumeister (Ed.), <i>The Self in Social Psychology</i> (pp. 461-470). Philadelphia: Psychology Press. Retrieved from http://www.uvm.edu/%7Edguber/POLS234/articles/read.htm</p></div>
Jan 21 st – Models of empathy
<div>2</div> <div><p>Preston, S. D. (2007). A perception-action model for empathy. <i>Empathy in Mental Illness</i>, 428-447.</p><p>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.), <i>Handbook of attachment: Theory, research, and clinical applications (3rd ed.)</i>, 878-916.</p><p>Zaki, J. (2014). Empathy: A motivated account. <i>Psychological Bulletin</i>, 140(6), 1608-1647. doi:10.1037/a0037679</p></div>
Jan 28 th – Is empathy good?
<div>3</div> <div><p>Batson, C. D., Klein, T. R., Highberger, L., & Shaw, L. L. (1995). Immorality from empathy-induced altruism: When compassion and justice conflict. <i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i>, 68(6), 1042.</p><p>Depow, G. J., Francis, Z. L., & Inzlicht, M. (2020). The experience of empathy in everyday life. <i>In press at Psychological Science</i>. https://psyarxiv.com/hjuab/download?format=pdf</p><p>Van Lange, P. A. (2008). Does empathy trigger only altruistic motivation? How about selflessness or justice. <i>Emotion</i>, 8(6), 766-774. doi:10.1037/a0013967</p></div>
Feb 4 th – Is empathy a choice (1)?
<div>4</div> <div><p>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. <i>Journal of Experimental Psychology: General</i>, 148(6), 962–976.</p></div>

	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. <i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i> , 107(3), 475-493.
Feb 11 th – Is empathy a choice (2)?	
5	<p>Ferguson, A. M., Cameron, C. D., & Inzlicht, M. (2020). Motivational effects on empathic choices. <i>Journal of Experimental Social Psychology</i>, 90, 104010, doi: 10.1016/j.jesp.2020.104010</p> <p>Hasson, Y., Tamir, M., Brahms, K. S., Cohrs, J. C., & Halperin, E. (2018). Are liberals and conservatives equally motivated to feel empathy toward others?. <i>Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin</i>, 44(10), 1449-1459.</p>
Feb 18 th – READING WEEK	
6	No Readings ☺
Feb 25 th – Empathy and emotion regulation	
7	<p>Brethel-Haurwitz, K. M., Stoianova, M., & Marsh, A. A. (2020). Empathic emotion regulation in prosocial behaviour and altruism. <i>Cognition and Emotion</i>, 34(8), 1532-1548.</p> <p>Cameron, C. D., Harris, L. T., & Payne, B. K. (2016). The emotional cost of humanity: Anticipated exhaustion motivates dehumanization of stigmatized targets. <i>Social Psychological and Personality Science</i>, 7(2), 105-112.</p> <p>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. <i>Journal of Experimental Social Psychology</i>, 46(5), 816-823.</p>
Mar 4 th – Empathy and development	
8	<p>Ang, R. P., & Goh, D. H. (2010). Cyberbullying among adolescents: The role of affective and cognitive empathy, and gender. <i>Child Psychiatry & Human Development</i>, 41(4), 387-397.</p> <p>Vossen, H. G., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2016). Do social media foster or curtail adolescents' empathy? A longitudinal study. <i>Computers in Human Behavior</i>, 63, 118-124.</p> <p>Roth-Hanania, R., Davidov, M., & Zahn-Waxler, C. (2011). Empathy development from 8 to 16 months: Early signs of concern for others. <i>Infant Behavior and Development</i>, 34(3), 447-458.</p>
Mar 11 th – Empathy and relationships	

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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.

Mar 18th – Empathy and gender

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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.

Mar 25th – When empathy fails (1)

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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.

Hudson, S. K. T. J., Cikara, M., & Sidanius, J. (2019). Preference for hierarchy is associated with reduced empathy and increased counter-empathy towards others, especially out-group targets. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 85, 103871.

Apr 1st – When empathy fails (2)

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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

Dinsdale, N., & Crespi, B. J. (2013). The borderline empathy paradox: evidence and conceptual models for empathic enhancements in borderline personality disorder. *Journal of personality disorders*, 27(2), 172-195.

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.

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.

Psychology Department Missed Term Work Policy, WINTER 2021

For missed term work (assignments and term tests) due to illness, emergency, or other mitigating circumstances, please follow the procedures outlined below.

Notes:

- The following reasons are not considered sufficient for missed term work: travel for leisure, weddings, personal commitments, work commitments, human error.
- Missed Final Exams are handled by the Registrar's Office and should be declared on eService: <http://www.utoronto.ca/registrar/missing-examination>
- 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.utoronto.ca/registrar/term-work>

Accommodations for Illness or Emergency:

For missed work due to ILLNESS OR EMERGENCY, please complete the following **two-step** process:

1. Complete the **Request for Missed Term Work Accommodations Form** (<http://uoft.me/PSY-MTW>) and email it to Keely Hicks at keely.hicks@utoronto.ca ,
and
2. **Declare your absence** on [ACORN](#) (Profile & Settings > Absence Declaration)

Deadline: You must complete the above steps **within 3 business days** of the missed work.

Note: For this semester, we do not require any additional supporting documentation (ex. medical notes) to support your missed term work accommodation request.

Accommodations for Academic Conflicts:

For missed term work due to an ACADEMIC CONFLICT (i.e. two quizzes or tests scheduled at the same time), please complete the following process:

1. Complete the **Request for Missed Term Work Accommodations Form** (<http://uoft.me/PSY-MTW>), choosing "Other" as your reason for missed work and explaining the conflict in the space provided.
2. Take screenshots of your course homepages that demonstrate the conflict.
3. Email the form and screenshots to Keely Hicks (keely.hicks@utoronto.ca).

Deadline: You should report the conflict to Keely Hicks (keely.hicks@utoronto.ca) **at least two weeks (10 business days) before the date of the activity**, or as soon as possible if it was not possible to identify the conflict earlier.

Note: Multiple assignments due on the same day are not considered conflicts. Accommodations may only be possible in the case of quizzes and tests that are both scheduled during the same discrete period. Back-to-back tests/quizzes are not considered conflicts.

Note: Students are responsible for keeping their course timetables conflict-free. Students who choose to register in two synchronous courses with overlapping lecture/tutorial/lab schedules may not necessarily be accommodated.

Accommodations for Religious Conflicts:

For missed term work due to a RELIGIOUS CONFLICT, please complete the following process:

1. Complete the **Request for Missed Term Work Accommodations Form** (<http://uoft.me/PSY-MTW>), choosing “Other” as your reason for missed work and noting “Religious conflict” in the space provided.
2. Email the form to Keely Hicks (keely.hicks@utoronto.ca).

Deadline: You should report the conflict to Keely Hicks (keely.hicks@utoronto.ca) **at least two weeks (10 business days) before the date of the activity**, or as soon as possible if it was not possible to identify the conflict earlier.

Accommodations for 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, please complete the following process:

1. Complete the **Time Zone Conflict Form** (<https://uoft.me/PSY-TimeZone>), and
2. Email the form to Keely Hicks (keely.hicks@utoronto.ca)

Deadline: You should report the conflict to Keely Hicks (keely.hicks@utoronto.ca) **at least two weeks (10 business days) before the date of the activity**, or as soon as possible, if it was not possible to identify the conflict earlier.

Accommodations for Students Registered with AccessAbility Services:

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

- **Contact 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 3 days):
 1. Complete the **Request for Missed Term Work Accommodations Form** (<http://uoft.me/PSY-MTW>).
 2. Email the form and your **Accommodation Letter** to Keely Hicks (keely.hicks@utoronto.ca).
- 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):

1. **Contact your AccessAbility consultant** and have them email Keely Hicks (keely.hicks@utoronto.ca) detailing the accommodations required.

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 and declare your extended absence on ACORN.

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**.

Questions?

If you have any questions about this Missed Term Work policy, please contact Keely Hicks (keely.hicks@utoronto.ca) **well before** the date of the test / assignment deadline to describe your circumstances and inquire about procedures.