

Contemporary Topics in Social Psychology

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Class Meeting: Tuesday & Thurs, 11:30-12:50
Smith Hall, Room 351A

Office Hours: Tuesday, 2:30-4:00, and by appointment

Overview

Social psychology has, from its inception, struggled with its identity. When asked to define their field, many social psychologists will first respond with an awkward pause, and then supply one or more of the following answers:

- The study of how people perceive, evaluate, and understand others and themselves.
- The study of how situations, especially social situations, shape people's behavior.
- The study of small groups and the dynamics of social systems.
- The study of enduring social issues such as prejudice, helping, conformity, and communication.

Considering this broad landscape of purposes, directions, and applications social psychology can appear to be the Los Angeles of the social sciences; a buzzing, energetic sprawl without a theoretical civic center. As both a native Los Angeleno and an ardent social psychologist, I would like to say that there is very much a core to both my geographical and academic hometowns; you just need to know where to look.

A Dynamic Approach to Social Psychology. Kurt Lewin, who is generally regarded as the father of modern social psychology, said that behavior is a function of the person and the situation [$B = (P * S)$]. Note that Lewin was talking about "persons" and not about "organisms". Lewin did not regard humans as mainly passive recipients of external stimulation, waiting to be zapped by a stimulus before they could emit a corresponding reaction. While recognizing that situations could exert powerful forces on behavior, and could profoundly shape the nature of actors, Lewin also firmly believed that people were capable of acting upon and with their environments according to meaningful goals. And, importantly, he believed that the interactions between people's inner lives and their overt behavior could be empirically explored.

Lewin's perspective, enunciated mainly through a number of essays and translated by a cadre of tremendously influential students, charts out central themes in social psychology. These themes start with the recognition that humans are self-conscious—that they are aware of themselves as selves with internal lives that must negotiate and communicate to an outside world filled with other beings who have their own internal lives. What does this sense of self mean? How do people come to know who they are, and who others are, as people? How do people's goals, feelings, and mental habits affect the way they see others and themselves? These are the particular problems faced by creatures who are as elaborately self aware and as inextricably social as are humans. And these problems, I believe, are at the core of much of social psychology. Welcome to downtown!

The Focus of This Class: I could have named this class "The Dynamics of Social Psychology" because in it I emphasize the psycho-dynamic theories and research that informs much of social psychology's mission. The class is roughly divisible into two main parts. Part 1 considers the role of emotions in behavior: specifically, how emotions affect judgment, perception, and thinking; how people manage their emotions and the consequences of efforts to control thoughts and feelings; and the role of emotions in development. Part 2 considers the issue of the self. What is the self? How do people remain true to their selves against intense social pressures? In what ways do efforts to maintain self-regard affect decision-making and reasoning? And is the self a tyrant bent on twisting reality to fit its own needs or is it a hero striving to get things right? This, in brief, is what the class will cover.

Class Structure

This is a seminar, which means that much of the time will be filled with class discussion. YOU and I will lead the class through conversation aimed at probing the readings in depth. I have selected readings that provide fertile ground for criticism, argument, and idea-generation. That's the outcome I'd like to see emerge during our weekly sessions. To help make this happen, I will assign to each of you the job of developing a summary and set of discussion questions for the week's readings. Thus, during each class session 2-3 students will be assigned 1-2 readings. They will be expected to have read these readings very closely, to present a concise (5 – 8 min) summary of the reading, and to generate 6 - 8 questions that prompt the rest of us to consider the assertions, methods, and implications of these readings.

Grading

Discussion is a key component to this class, and for that reason grading and evaluation have been designed to encourage *informed* and regular participation. Evaluations will be based on the following four activities:

1. *Position papers:* You must prepare three position papers on class readings; 2 before spring break and 1 after spring break. You choose which readings you wish to summarize. These position papers should be 1.5 pages (and NO LONGER), provide 1-2 paragraphs summarizing the main point of the paper, and at least 2 paragraphs regarding your ideas, criticisms, or question regarding the paper. You may also relate the paper to others we have read, and in fact are encouraged to do so. I expect a *full* page, typed, double-spaced with standard font and 1 inch margins.

2. *Discussion Leads:* You will lead discussions on 3-4 sets of readings, which will include a brief summary of main points from the reading and 6 to 8 discussion questions. I will evaluate these summaries and questions in terms of their depth, insight, and originality.
3. *Attendance and participation:* I expect you to show up, and to contribute to the class discussion. This means you've read the articles in depth.
4. *Take home final:* The final exam will be an open-book, take-home test. It will consist of a number of essay questions that will involve integrating the readings that comprise this class. You will have one full week to complete the exam. Because of the open-book format and the extended time available to answer questions, I will expect thorough, thoughtful integrations. The exam is really a set of mini-papers, and the intent is to help you learn the material in depth.

Grading

1. Summaries and Discussion questions	30 %
2. Midterm	30 %
3. Attendance & Participation	05 %
4. Final	35 %

Readings

Class reader, available at Main Office

Class Sessions

Sept. 4: Gestalt Roots of Social Psychology

- a. Marx & Hillix: Gestalt psychology
- b. Marx & Hillix: Varieties of Field Theory

Sept. 6: Kurt Lewin

- a. Lewin: Problems in social psychology
- b. Lewin: Time perspective and morale

Sept 11: Freud

- a. Freud Lecture 1
- b. Freud Lecture 2
- c. Freud Lecture 3

Sept 13: Neo-Freudian Theory / Ego Psychology

- a. Mitchell: The relational matrix
- b. Mitchell: D.W. Winnicott

Sept. 18: Emotions and Social Development I

- a. Video on social development

Sept. 20: Emotions and Social Development II

- a. Stern, et al.: Affect attunement
- b. Bowlby: The role of attachment in personality development

Sept. 25: Emotions and judgment: The New Look and Relatives

- a. Feshbach & Singer: The effects of fear arousal and suppression of fear upon social perception
- b. Feshbach: The effects of emotional restraint upon the projection of positive affect
- c. Hardaway: Subliminally activated symbiotic fantasies

Sept. 27: Current views on psychodynamic social psychology: New Looks 2 & 3

- a. Weston: The scientific status of unconscious processes
- b. Winkielman, Berridge, & Willbarger: Unconscious affective reactions to faces.

Oct. 2: Current views on psychodynamic social psychology: New Looks 2 & 3 (II)

- a. Greenwald: Unconscious cognition reclaimed
- c. Jacoby: Unconscious influences revealed: Attention, awareness, and control
- d. Shidlovski & Hassin: When pooping babies become more appealing

Oct. 4. Motives, Emotions, and Perception

- a. Schnall, Harber, Stefanucci, & Proffitt: Social support and the perception of geographical slant
- b. Zhou, Vohs, & Baumeister: The symbolic power of money
- c. Ein-Dor, Mikulincer, & Shaver: Attachment insecurities and threat information.

Oct. 9: Emotions and cognition I:

- a. Video: The adventures of Baron Munchausen clip
- b. Jefferson: My head and my heart
- c. Schachter & Singer: Cognitive, social, and physiological determinants of emotional state.
- d. Storms & Nisbett: Insomnia and the attribution process

Oct. 11: Emotions and cognition II:

- a. Saint Exupery: Wind Sand & Stars
- b. Zajonc: Preferences need no inferences
- c. Lazarus, R.S. (1982). Thoughts on the relation between emotion and cognition.
- d. Sobel: The wisdom of the gut

Oct. 16: Emotions and Social judgment: Current approaches

- a. Bower & Forgas: Mood effects and person-perception judgments
- b. Batson: How social an animal? The human capacity for caring
- c. De Becker: The Gift of Fear

Oct. 18. Attribution Theory: It's not emotional, but it's important.

- a. Ross: The intuitive psychologist and his shortcomings: Distortions in the attribution process.

Oct. 23: Emotion Management I:

- a. Wegner: Ironic processes of mental control
- b. Pennebaker: Confession, inhibition, and disease

Oct. 25: Emotion Management II:

- a. Harber & Pennebaker: Overcoming traumatic memory
- b. Harber: Emotional Broadcaster Theory

SYLLABUS FOR REMAINDER OF SEMESTER, FALL 2012

Nov. 15: Self and Self Theory: Wilm. James I

- a. Manchester: A world lit only by fire (excerpts)
- b. James: The self

Nov. 20. Self and Self Theory II

- a. Goffman: The presentation of self in everyday life
- b. Gellhorn: Miami – New York
- c. Twain: Huckleberry Finn, excerpt

Nov. 22: THANKSGIVING

Nov. 27: The Self and the Collective I

- a. Asch: Conformity
- b. Darley & Latane: Bystander intervention in emergencies.
- c. Darley & Batson: From Jerusalem to Jericho.

Nov. 29: The Self and the Collective II

- a. Milgram: Obedience Film
- b. Milgram: Compliance, obedience, and altruism
- c. Williams & Nida: Ostracism: Consequences and coping.

Dec 4: Cognitive Dissonance

- a. Aronson: Cognitive dissonance

Dec 6: Self-Affirmation

- a. Steele: Self-affirmation
- b. Cohen, Aronson, & Steele: Self-affirmation and openness to opposing views

DISTRIBUTION OF TAKE HOME FINAL

Dec 11: Self Theory: Contemporary Approaches; Good ego, Bad Ego I

- a. Greenwald: Totalitarian ego
- b. Harber: Self-esteem and affect as information

Dec. 13: Existential Social Psychology

- a. Hammett: "Flitcraft", Maltese Falcon
- b. Dennett
- c. Kasser & Sheldon: Nonbecomnig, alienated becoming, and authentic becoming.

Dec. 13: Catch-up Phase II: The Self

Dec 18: Take-home final due, 12:00 Noon.

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