

Psychology 2800
Social Psychology
Section A: Fall 2009
10:50-12:05, Tuesday & Thursday, PE250

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Objective

"No man is an island, entire of itself
Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main"

John Donne, Meditation XVI I

"In my opinion, all men are islands.
And what's more, now's the time to be one.

This is an island age...

I like to think I'm pretty cool.

I like to think I'm Ibiza."

Nick Hornby, "About a Boy"

The objective of this course is to explore several topics in the area of social psychology and, in essence, gain a better understanding of why it is that we do what we do. On one level, of course, you don't need to take a class to understand this: we are already expert social psychologists. We simply couldn't function in human society if we weren't. Nevertheless, it is sometimes interesting to take a step back and look at ourselves from the outside and consider some more detailed questions about the human condition. Are we all islands, for example? Could some of us, in fact, be Ibiza? Or are we linked together in ways that we don't even realize? Could a human even survive - would we even be considered human at all - without social contact? To answer these questions, we need to consider human social life and psychology with respect to a number of processes - evolutionary, developmental and cultural - and understand how they link together. Over the coming weeks, the issues we'll consider will include the following: how biology and culture co-evolve, the importance of bonding and attachment in development and social life, the sociocultural nature of development, our constructions

of the self, the evolution of cooperation, the role that conformity, harmony, obedience and gullibility play in human social life, the links between psychology, culture and society, inter-personal relationships and social institutions, madness, marriage and death...

Textbook

The textbook for the course is a book of readings available from the bookstore. It consists of a series of articles from the primary literature - both reviews and empirical papers - a number of book chapters and some journalism. These articles have been selected either because they have something different and interesting to say about the nature of human life and sociality or because they are classic studies in social psychology or because they help illustrate some of the theoretical concepts we'll be discussing with real life examples. You are expected to read and think about them, but you're not expected to agree with everything they say nor are you expected to learn them by heart.

Structure of the Course

The course will proceed roughly in the order of the readings in the course-pack (see timetable below for more details). The emphasis in the first instance will be on gaining a clear understanding of the issue at hand, how the readings relate to this issue, leading into a more wide-ranging discussion regarding how humans came to be the way they are (both evolutionarily, developmentally and culturally). In addition, we will also be watching a series of videos that will provide further discussion points, and allow us to assess the degree to which people's lives can be predicted from the hypotheses put forward by social psychology.

The "UP" series

In 1964, when England was considered the pop-culture centre of the world (The Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Carnaby Street), the British film-maker, Michael Apted (among others, he directed *Gorillas in the Mist*), was given his first job: to research a film called *7^{UP}*. It was to be broadcast on television as part of a series called *World in Action* – a current affairs programme – and its aim was to ask whether the current cultural changes sweeping through and transforming the structure of British life were having a genuine impact on the British people. Were they going to lead to real differences in the lives of 1964's seven-year olds compare to those of their parents and grandparents? (seven year olds were chosen as the programme's focus as a nod to the Jesuit dictum: 'give me the child until he is seven, and I will give you the man'). Was the apparent crumbling of class barriers going to result in everybody having a fair chance in life, or did an accident of birth still bring power, wealth and success to only a few? What made a child into a winner or a loser?

Apted found fourteen 7-year old children from a variety of backgrounds. He interviewed and filmed them, asking them about their lives and other, more general, topics. He returned to film them again when they 14, and again at 21, and then he continued to do so every seven years throughout their lives. The last film was made in 2005, when the children of 1964 were just a year shy of hitting their half-century.

These films make for fascinating viewing for three reasons. First, we're all interested in other people's lives, and here you see them unfold before you in 'real-time'; the

individuals in the film cannot edit their own life stories into a neat and tidy narrative that fits with their current view of themselves. Instead, you see how they contradict themselves, change their views, revise their goals and ambitions, make mistakes and enjoy successes that are often accidental as much as planned: you see how messy life can actually be. Second, watching these films in the 21st Century, we begin to realise just how much the world has changed since 1964: the clothes, attitudes and lifestyles seem very quaint and old-fashioned. In 1964, for example, there were no mobile phones, no ipods, no personal computers, no Starbucks, no internet and no cheap air-travel. Neil Armstrong hasn't yet walked on the moon. As the childrens' stories unfold over time, you realise that aspects of our lives that we often view as quite superficial (e.g., hairstyles and clothing) can be a very powerful means for expressing one's identity. You'll also notice, as Canadians, that the British class system, and the attitudes expressed, can seem quite bizarre (as, of course, they are...). Third, as the children reach adulthood, they begin to question the film-maker's intentions, which raises issues about the nature of documentary making itself, and the purpose it serves for us as part of our social lives and for society as a whole.

Watching these videos, then, will bring home the essentially practical nature of social psychology – it's something we all do every day of our lives, and not something confined to books and theory. Hopefully, it will prompt you to ask questions of yourself and of other people in your life.

Questions and Discussion

All questions and discussion about course material should occur in class time (including any questions about exams, grades etc), so that everyone can benefit from the discussion. You can also use the discussion board on Blackboard (webCT) and you will receive a prompt answer.

Course Web Sites

The main course website is found on Blackboard (<https://courseware.uleth.ca/webct>) and this is where you will find course materials, take the exams and view your grades.

Evaluation

Your grade in this course will be based on two midterm exams worth 30% and a final exam worth 40%. The exams will contain multiple-choice questions. Each exam will be computer administered via webCT. It will be your responsibility to go the testing centre within the allotted period and take the exams. In each case, you will be given five days to take the exam, including a weekend, and you will have no Thursday class in the week of the mid-term. The material to be covered by each exam will be specified in class. NB: Make-up exams will not normally be provided. Your final letter grades will be calculated as shown in the table below.

| | | | |
|----|--------|----|---------|
| A+ | 91-100 | C+ | 67-69 |
| A | 86-90 | C | 63-67 |
| A- | 81-85 | C- | 60 – 62 |
| B+ | 78-80 | D+ | 55 – 59 |
| B | 73-77 | D | 51 – 54 |
| B- | 70-72 | F | < 50 |

Experimental Research Participation

This course is designed to provide students with an opportunity to participate in active research programs with faculty members. Calls for volunteers to assist in these projects will be made during the semester, in class or via email. If you are asked to volunteer, and you accept, each project usually requires one hour or less of your time, but this will depend on the individual research project. In recognition of your time, and in recognition that you are learning something about the discipline of psychology beyond that you would gain in the standard classroom environment, an extra credit of 1-2% will be added to your grade to a maximum of 2%. Note that there is no guarantee that all students will be able to gain the extra credit. These extra credits are added only after all grade cut-offs have been established such that students who choose not to participate are not disadvantaged. Please check with the research assistant for the experiment to ensure that you have not completed this study previously or have done a similar study.

Important Dates

October 7th - 11th: FIRST midterm exam period. No THURSDAY CLASS.

November 10-15th: SECOND midterm exam period. No THURSDAY CLASS.

Dec 14th - 22nd: Final examination period. Dates for final exam will be given closer to the time.

Timetable

| Date | Topic | Reading |
|-----------------|--|-----------------------|
| Sept 10 | Introduction: What is Social Psychology? | No reading |
| Sept 15 & 17 | Biology and Culture | 1. Durham |
| Sept 22 & 24 | How we become human | 2. Wertsch & Tulviste |
| Sept 29 & Oct 1 | Bonding & Attachment | 3. Bretherton |
| Oct 6 & 8 | Social Brains | 4. Broks |
| | FIRST MIDTERM: NO THURSDAY CLASS | |
| Oct 13 & 15 | The "I" illusion | 5. Gawande |
| Oct 20 & 22 | Being your 'self': interdependency & sociality | 6. Dreger |
| Oct 27 & 29 | Cooperation, Culture and Complexity I | 7. Boyd & Richerson |
| Nov 3 & 5 | Cooperation, Culture and Complexity II | 7. Boyd & Richerson |
| Nov 10 & 12 | Obedience, authority and gullibility | 8. Milgram |
| | SECOND MID-TERM: NO THURSDAY CLASS | |
| Nov 17 & 19 | Costly information: Conformity, Success & Prestige | 9. Hyde |
| Nov 24 & 26 | Dispositions and situations | 10. Haney et al |
| Dec 1 & 3 | Interpersonal relationships & social institutions | 11. Coontz |
| Dec 8 & 10 | Social Life and Death | 12. Taylor |
| Dec 14 – 22 | FINAL EXAM PERIOD | |