

# **PSYC2820**

## **Culture, Evolution & Human Social Life**

Fall 2011

Tuesday & Thursday, 10:50-12:05, PE250

### Instructor:

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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 XV11

“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 an area that we can broadly characterize as social psychology. In essence, we'll be attempting to 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 all 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 a distance, 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, the nature and origins of the self, the role of language in creating human persons and selves, the evolution of cooperation, the role that conformity, harmony, aggression, obedience and gullibility play in human social life, the links between psychology, culture and society, inter-personal relationships and social institutions, and some interesting thought on marriage and death.

## Textbook

There is no textbook for this course. Instead you will be provided with a detailed set of lecture notes (intended to become a textbook at some point in the near-ish future; any comments or suggestions about these are therefore most welcome). These will be complemented by a course-pack available from the bookstore. The latter consists of a series of articles from the primary literature (both reviews and empirical paper), a number of book chapters and some pieces of journalism. These have been selected either because (i) they have something different and interesting to say about the nature of human life and sociality (ii) they are classic studies or (iii) because they help illustrate some of the theoretical concepts that we'll be discussing with real life examples. You will benefit enormously if you read and think about these articles (and some of them are very thought-provoking), and you will get much more out of the course if you do, but you're not expected to agree with everything they say nor are you expected to learn them by heart. They are intended to deepen your understanding of the issues we're dealing with, as well as introduce you to areas of research, works and authors that you might like to discover more about, and pursue in more depth.

## 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 may also watch some 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.

## 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. We may also give some class time over to discussion to expand on points made in lectures, or raised by the video material.

## Course Web Sites

The main course website is found on Moodle. 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 35% respectively and a final exam worth 35%. The exams will contain multiple-choice questions. Each exam will be computer administered via Moodle. It will be your responsibility to go the testing centre within the allotted period and take the exam. In each case, you will be given four days to take the exam, including a weekend, and you will have no Tuesday class in the week of a mid-term exam. 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 7<sup>th</sup>—11<sup>th</sup> : FIRST midterm exam period. No TUESDAY CLASS.

November 4<sup>th</sup>—8<sup>th</sup> :SECOND midterm exam period. No TUESDAY CLASS.

Final Exam: December 12th – 16th (i.e., during final exam period).

# Timetable

Date	Topic	Reading
Sept 8th	Course Introduction	No reading
Sept 13 & 15th	Biology and Culture	1. Durham
Sept 20 & 22	How we become human	2. Vygotsky
Sept 27 & 29	Bonding & Attachment	3. Hrdy
Oct 4 & 6	Social Brains	4. Broks
Oct 11 & 13	The “I” illusion <b>FIRST MIDTERM: NO TUESDAY CLASS</b>	5. Gawande
Oct 18 & 20	Being your ‘self’: interdependency & sociality	6. Dreger
Oct 25 & 27	Cooperation, Culture & Complexity	7. Henrich & Henrich
Nov 1 & 3	Obedience, authority & gullibility	8. Milgram
Nov 8 & 10	Costly information: Conformity, Success & Prestige <b>SECOND MID-TERM: NO TUESDAY CLASS</b>	9. Hyde
Nov 15 & 17	Dispositions and situations	10. Haney et al
Nov 22 & 24	Interpersonal relationships & social institutions	11. Coontz
Nov 29 & Dec 1	Social Life and Death	12. Lock
Dec 6 & 9	NO CLASSES	