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SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Textbooks:

The Social Animal (12th edition), by Elliot Aronson

Readings in Social Psychology (8th edition), edited by Wayne Lesko.

(For affordability issues, see the note on my website – syllabi page – about the textbooks.)

Catalog description: (3 credit hours; prerequisite PSY 101 plus three additional hours in PSY or SOC): “A scientific study of the influence of people on the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of other people. This course examines how individuals affect and are affected by others. Topics include impression formation, conformity and social influence, self-perception, attitudes, aggression, prejudice, helping, attraction, group processes, and other components of social interaction.”

Social psychology investigates the mental processes, situational factors, individual differences, and group phenomena that influence **the way psychologically-healthy people think about the world and interact**. The range of topics covered by social psychology is limited only by the degree to which the topic involves **the influence of people on psychological experience**.

Social psychology is a broad field that tries to scientifically investigate the cognitive and behavioral aspects of our interactions with people. It looks at the ways people *influence one another*, at the ways people *think about one another*, at the ways we come to *think about ourselves*, at the ways these thoughts *influence our actions* around other people, and so on. Some of the specific topics that we'll cover in this class are: **person perception** (how we process thoughts about people and draw conclusions about them); **self** (how we come to think about ourselves and get others to think of us); **conformity** and **social influence** (how others get us to do what they want); **attitudes** (how we develop and act upon preferences, including prejudices); **aggression** (how we come to harm others); **helping** (how we come to assist others); **attraction** (how we come to like or dislike others); and perhaps certain **group processes** (esp. prejudice and discrimination).

The course takes a psychological perspective of most of these topics, although social psychology includes both psychological and sociological viewpoints. Some of the topics allow us to do as much sociology as psychology (we'll clarify the difference between the two in class). One of the main aspects of a psychological approach is the method of study: **strictly scientific, and mostly experimental**. We'll spend a little time reviewing how social scientists actually do their work.

I teach this course with an emphasis on *abstract thinking* rather than definition and fact memorization. You'll need to learn terminology, but meaningfully, not just recited as definitions. Abstract thought is essentially an ability to connect ideas so that you recognize generalities. With abstract thought you can apply ideas; without abstract thought you might only recite definitions and names for things.

The departmental **Course Learning Outcomes** state that successful students should be able to:

- * Recognize major theories of social psychology related to cognitive and behavioral phenomenon.
- * Describe the scientific methods used to obtain knowledge about social behavior.
- * Analyze the complexity of action in social contexts by combining factors related to the person and the situation.
- * Describe situational factors that constrain human action.
- * Describe social factors that affect personal motivations.
- * Analyze contemporary events using social psychological theories or concepts.
- * Examine the effects of implicit and explicit prejudice on cognition and behavior.
- * Write formally using APA style.

Additional objectives:

- * In general, you should seek to understand the patterns of thoughts and actions that social psychologists have discovered and discussed, the ways these patterns have been broken down into component parts, the explanations given for the various patterns, the way they've been researched, and the applications that come from knowing the material.
- * A secondary objective, as always, is to contribute to your general education: developing an ability to distinguish details in challenging topics, and acquiring the attitudes and behaviors (especially those expressed through written communication) that are necessary to survive and thrive in college and beyond, and to become college-educated people.

THIS IS NOT CLINICAL

Most of the core courses in psychology at the college and university level are investigating the ordered, “healthy,” “normal,” human experience. They are pursuing answers to big questions like, “how does human mind and behavior function?” “what do humans do?” and “what do humans experience?” (i.e, what makes us tick as we do in the many similar ways as one-another, and in the many different –but still functional– ways from one-another?). They are *not* investigating pathologies and mental problems or treatments (with the exception of the *clinical* courses, of course). *Social Psychology* is a core part of the psychology curriculum, attempting to decipher what humans do, how they function, and what they experience, *as a result of living among other humans* (that’s the “social” part). It is not a subset of clinical psychology.

GRADES

There will be **four short-essay styled tests** and your combined test grade is worth **60%** of the final course grade (in other words, each test is worth 15% of the total course grade). We’ll have a **formal term paper** worth **20%** of the total course grade, a few homework assignments totaling **15%**, and the remaining **5%** is for class participation. There is no final exam. You’ll need a total grade of 93 for an A (which represents excellent work and is exceptional), 90 for an A–, 87 for B+, 83 for B, 80 for B–, 70 for C–, and so on when all is completed.

Don’t *not* submit an assignment: the score of zero has a terrible effect on overall grades.

(Anyone using documented testing accommodations must inform me one week before the test.)

The term paper will be detailed in class. You’ll have a variety of options to choose from for the term paper. I think of term papers as a form of independent learning, and not as some tedious formality, so I expect you to use the term paper assignment as an opportunity to learn something about psychology outside of our regular class work.

Guidelines: The formal term paper should be 1200–1600 words in length. It will be due in parts; I will write comments about thought content, clarity, and English (grammar, syntax, spelling, organization, etc.) on your paper’s introduction, which will be due first, as homework. Thereafter it will only get a grade. See the tips for writing at the end of this syllabus.

Homework will be infrequent, but will require approximately one single-spaced typed essay in response to a prompt handed out in class. Copies of assignments (including the term paper, above) will be placed in our course shell in Brightspace (in case you miss receiving it in class). If you turn your homework in on time and get a low grade, you may resubmit it (rewritten, within a week) for a better grade.

Tests in this course will *sample* your knowledge and understanding of the material studied in the sections covered by each test (e.g., test 3 will only cover material subsequent to test 2, but will have only a few questions rather than a thorough quizzing of all topics; anything studied or assigned is “fair game” for a test, though I might decide, in class, to eliminate some material from tests). Tests will be short essay style.

MICHAEL S. OFSOWITZ

Born and raised here in the Rochester area. Studied psychology and sociology at The University of North Carolina-Charlotte, before going to Tulane University (New Orleans) for graduate study in social psychology. I joined Monroe Community College in the fall of 2002, and spent 13 of the preceding years teaching to (mostly) Americans in Germany (in military environments) with the University of Maryland. I teach psychology (intro, social psych, behavior mod, superstitions, research methods) and have also taught sociology (intro, social problems, social psych, self, American society). I'm widowed, have one child (a son), enjoy French and Middle Eastern food, cooking, forests, racquetball, softball, pickleball, literary fiction, and comedy, and I also speak German. I'm a full professor here at MCC. Feel free to call me anything polite (Mike, Michael, Mr. Ofsowitz, professor, even "teach"). I have a web site at <http://sites.monroec.edu/mofsowitz>.

Office Hours:

Come see me whenever you feel like it. I'm easy to visit. My office hours are posted on my web site and on my office door, and I may be there more often than the times posted. Don't let your frustrations or confusions get the upper hand; if you're having problems in class, come talk with me in my office. Of course, you don't have to have problems to seek me out: there are no prerequisites to office visits. If necessary, we can arrange a personal Zoom session online.

A little note-taking advice:

Take notes. Take lots of notes. Even when you seem to be following a clear discussion that you completely understand, write down something to help you remember it and details that were in the discussion. Active note-taking is an important part of the learning/remembering process. Don't write my exact words, though: write the gist of the ideas (and if it triggers thoughts of your own, write those down as well). Rewrite your notes at some point. Take notes from your readings, too. It would be very nice if you'd be willing to share notes with students who are occasionally absent from class (it's easy to share a photo of your notes by text, etc.).

Laptops:

Psychological research has shown that note-taking via laptop is less effective than note-taking by pen/pencil. Unless you have a handwriting disability, you should avoid taking notes on a laptop. If you do use a laptop in class, *do not surf the web, play games, watch videos, etc.* And also, try to write the gist of what's being said in class, like I just described above; laptop notes tend to be more verbatim, which is less helpful.

Quirks about the way I grade:

A checkmark (✓) is a good sign. It means "yes," or "right," or "good." If I actually write "good," I really mean it; I use superlatives ("great paper," "excellent") rarely. On the whole, when I grade your written work, I point out the weaknesses and errors in the optimistic hope that you'll learn to correct them in the future. It also expresses my assumption that your self-esteem is not so fragile that it'll crush under the weight of a short series of corrections from a college teacher. Expect to have your mistakes corrected; it's good for you. But it doesn't represent what I think of you as a person; if you behave politely in class I respect you thoroughly, no matter how good or bad your writing or test-taking skills. The comments and grades only refer to the quality of the work you submitted, not to the quality of you as a person.

Learn from your mistakes:

You'll make plenty; most people do. Pay attention to them. (Don't ignore them as most people do.) Your test scores and test or assignment feedback let you know about your mistakes. Perhaps as you get more experience in school, you'll make fewer of them. If you attend to the mistakes, you'll probably improve your reading, your studying, and your knowledge. If you ignore them, you'll feel better for a little while. But you're not in school to protect your self-esteem; you're here to improve your reading, studying, knowledge, etc. (which will give you *reason* to feel good). So do your best to attend to those mistakes and to figure out how to learn from them.

OUTLINE OF LECTURES AND ASSIGNMENTS:

(The dates below typically represent a week of class; specific quiz dates are planned. "Chapter" refers to assigned readings in the Aronson textbook. "Article" refers to the numbered article in the Lesko Readings book. "Extra" refers to chapters from two books found in Brightspace (one I'm calling Principles, and the other, NOBA). You should read all material prior to the class scheduled so that you'll be prepared to participate in class discussions. You should re-read the "chapter" assignments after class so that it'll really sink in. Most class handouts will be available in Brightspace, as will the "articles" and extra chapters)

<u>Week of</u>	<u>Topic (& reading)</u>
Aug 29:	Introduction to social psychology (chapter 1; read lightly sections 1.1 and 1.2 in Extra, <i>Principles</i> , chapter 1).
Sep 05:	Science in social psychology (chapter 9; articles 1 & 3; see extra <i>Principles</i> 1 section 1.3, NOBA 2).
Sep 12:	More on science; Social cognition, part I (chapter 2, pages 13-36; article 7).
Sep 19:	Social cognition, part I, cont. TEST 1 (Thursday)
Sep 26:	Social cognition, part II (chapter 2, pages 36-55; articles 4, 5, & 6).
Oct 03:	The self (Extra, <i>Principles</i> 4, NOBA 6, 12; articles 8 & 15).
Oct 10:	Cognitive dissonance and self-justification (chapter 3; articles 11 & 12).
Oct 17:	TEST 2 (Tuesday); Conformity (chapter 4; articles 25, 26, & 27).
Oct 24:	Conformity, cont.
Oct 31:	Persuasive influence on attitudes and behavior (chapter 5; article 17; extra <i>Principles</i> 5).
Nov 9:	<i>No classes Tuesday.</i> Prosocial behavior (Extra, NOBA 19, <i>Principles</i> 9; article 29).
Nov 14:	TEST 3 (Tuesday); Aggression (chapter 6; articles 32 & 33).
Nov 21:	Aggression, cont. <i>Thanksgiving break (Thursday) (Withdrawal deadline)</i>
Nov 28:	Prejudice and discrimination (chapter 7; articles 16 & 18).
Dec 05:	Attraction, liking, and love (chapter 8; articles 19 & 20; extra NOBA 8, 21).
Dec 12:	Attraction, liking, and love, cont. <i>Last day of class is Dec 14 (term paper due);</i> TEST 4 (Thursday).

The fine print

A note on attendance, absences, and make-ups:

Very simply, if you want to learn the material, you need to come to class. MCC requires that I report attendance, since it might affect eligibility for financial aid. Their computers also monitor the attendance reports and may send warnings (if you have too many absences) that sound as if I prompted them, but they are automated and written by staff. If you miss a test, you must make it up ASAP. Make-up tests must be completed within one week from the original date, unless valid excuses (medical emergency, business travel, military deployment) keep you from returning to class. (Such absences require documentation.) *If you feel ill, don't come to campus.* If you're going to miss class, send me an E-mail.

Incomplete (grade of I):

The grade of I, or incomplete, is available for special, rare cases where a student is unable to finish the course by the scheduled end of the term. To receive an I, a student having problems finishing the course as scheduled must fulfill the following requirements: 1) complete 60% of the graded assignments before the course ends; 2) attend 60% of the class by the end of the course; 3) provide evidence of a valid reason for not finishing the graded assignments by the end of the course; and 4) request an incomplete in writing, prior to the last day of the course, including the reason for the extension and a date by which the work for the course will be completed (which should not exceed one week from the expiration of the reason for the I). Granting the grade of I, and setting a date for its completion remain at the total discretion of the instructor. For students who are unable to finish the course as scheduled, alternatives to the grade of I include the W (withdrawal, see below) and the F (failure).

Plagiarism and cheating:

Plagiarism is academic dishonesty. In other words, it's a big word for cheating. If you're caught plagiarizing, or cheating in some other form, you may wind up failing the assignment and being reported to the college. The Psychology Department's policy on plagiarism, available in the "courses" folder of the M-drive, describes the conditions that define plagiarism for this course. The most common form of plagiarism is using someone else's work as if it were your own. That is, by copying the *work* of another person and presenting that work as if *you* wrote it, you are plagiarizing. To avoid plagiarism you should learn how to paraphrase and how to use *quotation marks*. If you put someone else's *ideas* into *your own words* (and not just a rearrangement of the original words) you don't need the quotation marks but you still need to cite your source. Citing your source is necessary, but often not sufficient to avoid plagiarism.

Under no circumstances may you ever use the work of a fellow student in any of *your* written work. You must write your own product. Use of artificial intelligence (AI) to generate text is strictly prohibited. Submission of text generated by AI, even if you slightly modify it, will be considered a violation of academic integrity (i.e., cheating).

I highly recommend that you get an English manual of some sort to help you avoid some of the common mistakes that result in accusations of plagiarism. *Diana Hacker's Pocket Style Manual* (including MCC's custom version) is one such guidebook. I also have a web page at <https://sites.monroecc.edu/mofsowitz/apa-style/plagiarism/> that will be of help.

Respect:

- **Don't use your phone during class** (unless looking up something for class).
- Try to be patient with fellow students and assume they have good intentions. Listen to what they're saying.
- Don't dominate discussions: allow time for others, who might be shier than you, to respond.
- We're playing with ideas in class, so don't assume people believe what they're talking about.
- Take a joke, but don't insult anyone (or at least insult everyone equally and in good taste).
- Treat the classroom as a confidential situation, and don't gossip about it.
- Speak in the first person; recognize that your opinions are your own and that you don't speak for others.
- Be nice (respect others), try to learn something (respect college), and take responsibility for your future (respect yourself). If need be, at least fake it, and consider it a professional responsibility.

Learning Centers:

The Writing Center has been integrated into the Tutoring and Academic Assistance Center (TAAC, at Brighton, Learning Commons at Downtown; see their website for details: <https://www.monroecc.edu/depts/academic-foundations/tutoring/>) If your writing is at all weak, I *highly* recommend that you make use of the tutoring services. It's there to help you. Watch the feedback I give you on homework assignments: I might refer you to tutoring (for writing), and I expect you to seek it out if I do. If you have broader reading, study habit, or language problems, the TAAC is also the place to go.

Recordings:

Audio: only with explicit written permission from your professor. Photo/video: not permitted. Do not post any recordings on the web.

All the rest of the fine print information is on that formal, messy "course information sheet" that was designed by campus admin.

SOME TIPS FOR WRITING ESSAY ASSIGNMENTS

1. Always *think* before writing. Don't write a paper without thinking first. Jot down your ideas, then sort through them; they are not sacred, so discard those of little value, and arrange the others in some logical order, using an outline for organization.
2. Avoid *plagiarism* at all costs. When you copy words, an idea, or other information from another source, you *must* give credit to the original source. Failure to give credit for ideas, information, or words is called plagiarism, and may lead to failure on the assignment, or if intentional and repeated, failure in the course. (When you use the exact same words as you find in another source, such as a textbook, use quotation marks ["..."] in your paper around the copied selection when the selection is three successive words or more. If you alter the exact wording only a little, you can be in big trouble, so either copy exactly and quote, or paraphrase cleanly.) See tip five, below, for sources showing you how to give credit where credit is due, and also the "[Plagiarism](#)" page on my web site (under "Writing"). Seriously.
3. Begin your essay with a clear introduction. Your introduction should do two things: 1) it should introduce *the reader to the topic* while clarifying key concepts you bring in; and 2) it should show *the reader* what your intentions are for the remainder of the paper while transitioning to the main body. End the essay with a conclusion that summarizes the paper, and draws it to a natural, clean close.
4. Be clear about what you are writing. Clarity demands that you understand what you are talking about and that you communicate it to a reader who is not reading your mind, but is reading your writing. A terse style, or one using terminology carelessly, does not make for clear writing. Also, try avoiding wordy phrases. If necessary, work on your use of punctuation, past and present tense problems, the active voice, and other aspects of the English essay (see point 5).
5. Use an English handbook to learn what you need to learn about basic writing mechanics. In addition to the rules, they show plenty of examples. Diana Hacker's *A Pocket Style Manual* is a good source, as are the *Harbrace College Handbook*, Strunk and White's *Elements of Style*, the *American Psychological Association (APA) Publication Manual*, the *Chicago Manual of Style* and other such sources (including <http://www.refdesk.com/factgram.html>). Use a dictionary *and* spell-check for spelling and a thesaurus to improve your vocabulary. Visit the Writing Learning Center for tutoring.
6. Avoid sexist and other biased language. Be polite to groups of people. Avoid using "he or she" or "s/he." Use of first person "I" is fine, and third-person singular "they" is also fine when clear.
7. Cite your sources and show your bibliography in proper APA format (see point 5, and my web site).
8. *Proofread* what you've written. Once you're down to your final draft (which should be your *third* or *tenth* time editing your paper, not second), give it a final, careful proof. If needed, make corrections on the final draft in pencil before you turn it in. If you find too many errors, rewrite once more.
9. Double-space term papers. This means using a 2-line spread for a 12-point font. (Use an 11 or 12-point font. A 12-point Garamond is usually a good choice.) Do *not* add empty spaces between paragraphs as in a business letter. *Indent* the start of each *paragraph* half an inch. Leave margins around the entire text of the paper (about 1"). Do *not* align the text to the right margin of the paper (don't "right-justify" or "full justify").
10. Number all the pages in the upper-right corner, flush with the right margin. APA style no longer requires a "running head" on each page, but I do, all uppercase, and starting on the left margin. It is a shortened title.
11. In my classes only: you don't need a title page. Instead, you can start your paper with the title, and then have your name on the next line. Staple the pages together yourself (don't ask me to do it for you). No plastic folders! Paper (e.g., manila) folders are acceptable. (For electronically-submitted papers, include a title page.)
12. **Follow the guidelines above!**