

Social Psychology in Sociological Perspective SOC 2330

Syllabus

Welcome to SOC 2330.

Contacting your instructor

For information on contacting your instructor as well as other important information from your instructor see the Instructor Letter link in your course website.

Course description

Why do human beings act the way they do? Why is human behaviour so different from one culture to the next? What is the nature of our human nature? What forces impinge on us as human animals to help shape our behaviour, our thoughts, and our will? This course has been written to help shed light on such topics. While you may already have answers for such questions, the following discussion will draw issues to your attention that may assist in developing more sophisticated questions and a framework for the pursuit of such answers. You may find that the issues become more complex and that “answers” are elusive or unsatisfying. But social science seems to shed its greatest light in the creation of proper questions rather than in the production of simplistic answers. In this sense, the course content will be more theoretical and reflective than empirical and deductive.

Social psychology as a perspective

Human beings are agents; we act and exert our personal powers in our milieu and cause things to happen. The conduct of individuals is understood, in part, by reference to their psychological makeup. Each person has perceptions and conceptions of the nature of reality; each of us has thoughts, attitudes, values, principles, and feelings that give substance and direction to our bodily energy. We need to examine how psychological forces contribute to our understanding of human behaviour. From the point of view of the psychology of the individual, we will examine how the person organizes daily life and what each of us is trying to achieve in the process, not only in terms of behavioural outcomes but also in terms of our internal feeling states, so our point of departure will be the psychology of the individual. But human beings are not autonomous agents. Our powers of perception and our capacity for action are not purely personal attributes; they are abilities that have been cultivated in each of us by other members of society. As each human community makes its way through the events of its collective history, it fashions a style of thinking, doing, and feeling in the world. Each new generation of members is initiated into this life-world and learns to be human at the hands of its significant others. As each person confronts the problems, challenges, and tragedies of human existence, advice is readily given by family, elders, leaders, and friends as how to best think about and respond to them. The personal motives, intentions, and plans of action are not the private creations of independent actors; they are social products, the fruits of collective interaction, interpretation, and judgment. The point of departure is the **psychology** of the individual, **BUT** the appropriate unit of analysis is the individual within a **social** group, hence a social psychology. And so the course description in the *Undergraduate Calendar* is an accurate portrayal of this course’s orientation:

The course examines the interrelations of the individual, the group, and society, with emphasis on interaction as the process that gives form, direction, and meaning to the everyday lives of people.

This course is directed towards any person who believes in the value of a liberal arts education. The careful and thoughtful consideration of the issues discussed in this course can sensitize any adult to the issues, choices, and challenges associated with nurturing the development of human potential. It is of particular relevance to parents, and other educators, to those in positions of trust as child-care workers, to those who care for the casualties of poor parenting, and for those who work against the debilitating effects of institutionalized racism. This course is based on a human rights and an ecological agenda. Any truly democratic community depends on a citizenry that is sensitive, reflective, flexible, and yet

driven with a sense of conviction, and buoyed up with hope in the perfectibility of human institutions. Some of the insights of social psychology may perhaps contribute to a more adequate understanding of modern history, which is rife with examples of destructive conflicts between groups. We will also reflect upon what it is about the social psychology of humans that has made us such a danger to the ecological well-being of the planet.

An introductory course in Sociology (the normal prerequisite for the course) or in any other social science discipline (especially Psychology and Anthropology) will certainly help any student undertaking this course. But, since this is an introductory level course, mature students who are experienced with the use of conceptual reasoning will be able to meet the challenges offered.

Course objectives

This course has several objectives:

- We will examine the continuities and discontinuities between humans and other forms of animal life. While much of animal behaviour is controlled by instinctual structures repositied in the animal's physiological makeup, humans are surprisingly underdetermined by their biology. This openness or plasticity leaves the human animal deprived of a species-specific relationship to the environment and creates the need for the development of human cultural solutions to the problems of existence.
- The creation of culture is undertaken by self-conscious human actors, so we will focus on the role of consciousness in the creation of social reality. Phenomenological sociologists and symbolic interactionists both emphasize the critical and central role of mind in explaining human activity. We will examine the importance of shared meanings, language, memory, and consciousness for an adequate understanding of human nature and human interaction.
- In this course, the central importance of an individual's "self" will be stressed. The young neophyte lacks a sense of self and even fails to recognize that its hands and feet are part of its self. As the mind develops, the person learns who it is. Significant others teach us the properties, the uses, and capacities of objects in our world, and this knowledge helps us deal with such things in appropriate and successful ways. Humans have the ability to understand our "selves" as one such object, so we are able to see ourselves from the outside (as an object in the minds of significant others). As a result, we can work directly on who we **are** in accordance with our ideas of our capacities (strengths, limitations, and potential). Because we can view ourselves as objects, we have an enhanced capacity to be intentional subjects in the course of our daily lives. Because we can think of our "selves" as an object, we can turn back on ourselves, we can (re)direct ourselves. Our mind uses this self to assist us in controlling our basic anxiety; the self plays a pivotal role in the cultivation of personal feelings of worth and purpose in our lives; our conscious attempts at directing our lives are predicated on our self-concept.
- In spite of the critical role of mind in guiding human behaviour, the mind is still housed inside a body. We will examine the ways in which the body and the states that arise from it affect human behaviour. Hunger, thirst, sexual arousal, anxiety, and fear all surface in the person and become available for reaction and contemplation. Behaviourists have explored how human behaviour is controlled and shaped by directly conditioning the body through reinforcement and punishment. In addition to cognitive memory, we will explore the conditioning of behaviour via motor/muscular memory and contemplate how complex social behaviour can be shaped in human beings without their knowledge or consent.
- One of the most ambitious objectives of this course is to fuse mind/body dualism as laid out and played out by the symbolic interactions and the behaviourists. The human animal is a body and yet views itself as having a body. It has consciousness and is self-conscious. But perhaps the most rounded understanding of human behaviour comes with a continuing attention to the duality of mind and body, which continually assert their influence on the human agent.
- Much of the writing about human behaviour deals with the person in a residual way by making the human being a vessel filled with the content of culture. While culture and social forces constrain and direct human beings it is the person who **acts**; human agency is the central phenomena and causal reality. A myriad of influences converge in the person, and from this centre of social and psychological reality emerge thoughts, judgments, feelings, and the actual behaviour; stuff of real human history. In keeping with the Freudian tradition, especially as reformulated by Ernest Becker,

we will consider the extent to which the person can be viewed as shaping his or her personality as a defense mechanism to help control anxiety about safety and significance. We can approach the individual's behaviour by viewing it as organized by the person, or perhaps as a personality, which contributes to the development of its own character (armour). To varying degrees, and with varying degrees of self-awareness, individuals shape a personal agenda that helps to simultaneously fashion their social life **and** their very selves. It is the interpenetration of the personal and the social, and not the reduction of one to the other that must be kept in our conceptual awareness.

- Self and self-esteem staging do not occur in a vacuum. The life choices and life chances of the individual are constrained by the social structure and culture that he or she is delivered into at birth. This collectivity will provide the individual with roles and rules and other constraining expectations. Each neophyte becomes a particular kind of person within the constraints of social interaction. By successfully staging occasions to garner self-esteem, the person sustains a positive face in the community of significant others; through the processes of role taking and role making each person shapes and is shaped by a collective vision of social reality. The forces of culture and social structure direct each person to forge a personal **identity** and to cultivate self-restraint based on this identity. We will examine how the fusion of personal and social forces in individual consciousness and habitual behaviour serves to limit and direct the malleable biogram of the neophyte as it is transformed into a social being. We will examine the remarkable differences in becoming human in cohesive small-scale tribes as opposed to impersonal, industrial states.
- Each culture tells persons who they are and why they are important. While cultural expectations are constraining, they are also reassuring guidelines for successful activity and personal gratification. But culture is also relative; the anthropological record is rich in cultural variation. Human nature has many different forms. We will examine how each type of community socially constructs its own reality in response to the exigencies of its collective life and then acts as if this is the only (or the best) way to be human. We will look at why **ethnocentrism** is so comforting to the human animal. It seems reassuring for us to deny the fictional and largely arbitrary nature of social reality in order to sustain conviction in our cultural hero systems. Cultural recipes for living become a kind of **character armour** for us and we are inclined to give over responsibility for our lives (**transference**) to the collectivity in exchange for a secure sense of reality. Through the process of **reification**, all collectivities have, for the most part, forgotten that social reality is humanly constructed and have fused culture with nature or have perceived it as a product of supranatural forces. As a consequence, much social behaviour is an unreflective and uncritical conformity to cultural expectations.
- There are cognitive and emotional advantages for individuals who uncritically follow a cultural script in daily life. As social scientists, however, we have a vantage point which allows us to transcend the bind of ethnocentrism, at least to a certain extent. Each society meets the needs of its members in a unique way. From any given vantage point, some are more successful than others in meeting the material and emotional needs of its members. From a human rights vantage point, some socio-cultural systems create more good than others. While each offers its new members a system, societies vary in the amount of satisfaction that is generated. They vary in the extent to which it is distributed to the members; and they vary in the amount of human suffering required to operate. From an ecological perspective, some societies develop ideas, practices, and technologies which are extremely damaging to the rest of the community of life on this planet while others work to maintain a balanced relationship with other members of the local ecosystem. We will spend some time examining the various hero systems of small-scale society, nazism, institutional racism, pathological family systems, and material consumerism in order to identify how each cultural configuration succeeds and fails to meet the needs of its membership. This exercise in historical psychology seeks to point out the danger inherent in following cultural scripts, uncritically and unreflectively.
- Each of us is involved in our own self-development. Some of us seek to take greater responsibility for our own personalities and characters. In recognizing the risks attendant upon living an unexamined life, we have an opportunity to seek some measure of de-reification. We have the enlarged capacity to resist an automatic transference of responsibility for our action to a cultural leader and a greater change

Course materials

Required

Bookstore

The following required materials are available for purchase from the [University of Manitoba Bookstore](#). Please order your materials immediately, if you have not already done so. See your [Distance and Online Education Student Handbook](#) for instructions on how to order your materials.

The Charon and Becker books are required texts for all students. You are to pick one of the six optional texts and to complete the assignment for it.

- **Required textbooks**

- Charon, Joel. *Symbolic Interactionism: An Introduction and Interpretation, An Integration*, 10th ed., Prentice Hall, 2010.

Symbolic interactionism is a perspective that emphasizes the role of mind, language, symbolism, self, and shared meaning in the understanding of human behaviour. Symbolic interactionists emphasize the importance of society and socialization in the creation of language, mind, and self. This perspective has dominated the social psychology area in Sociology since the 1920s. Charon's book is an excellent introduction to social psychology from a symbolic interactionist perspective.

- Becker, Ernest. *The Birth and Death of Meaning*, 2nd ed., Free Press, 1971.

The late Ernest Becker reworked the neo-Freudian understanding of personality as a defense mechanism. His work attempts to understand human behaviour as a fusion of influences from both mind and body. His central argument is remarkably compatible with the symbolic interactionist perspective although it greatly enhances and extends it.

- **Optional textbooks**

You must select one of the following books and complete the assignment for it. Each of these books is concerned with a destructive pattern of human interaction.

- Schreiber, Flora. *Sybil*, Warner Books, 1974.

Sybil is a book about a woman with a multiple personality. As a young child, she was subjected to abuse; her defense was to fragment her memories into distinct personalities. The relationship between personality, defense mechanisms, faulty socialization, and recovery can be examined.

- Shkilnyk, Anastasia. *A Poison Stronger Than Love*, Yale University Press, 1985.

Anastasia Shkilnyk documents the decline of the Grassy Narrows Indian Reserve near Kenora, Ontario. This distressing text makes evident how important self-esteem is to human well-being. It is a testimony to the destructive consequences of institutional racism in Canada and clearly links the individual consequences of dehumanizing social institutions.

- Anderson, Kim. *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood*, Sumach Press, 2000

Kim Anderson discusses the identity search of a Cree/Métis woman who struggles to develop a conception of self which affirms the dignity of all aspects of her self in the face of others who attempt to cast it in negative identity terms. It is the story of her resistance against such efforts and more importantly her reconceptualization of her being in life affirming ways which translate tradition into contemporary contexts in ways that allow her to contribute to the well-being of Native communities.

- Perkins, John. *Confessions of an Economic Hitman*, Paperback edition by Penguin, 2004.

John Perkins recounts his career as an economic hitman who worked for an international consulting. His job was to provide exceptionally optimistic projections about the economic growth that would flow from various proposed mega projects in many developing countries.

These forecasts would help secure loans from international financial lending institutions which could never be paid back. In order to renegotiate the terms for these loans, these countries had to agree to “structural adjustment programs” which amounted to a loss of economic sovereignty. Perkins was torn by the damage that he knew he was helping create and yet, for many years, was unable to resist his participation in empire building. His autobiographical work provides insight into the corrosive effects of capitalism as it facilitates personal aspirations such as greed and envy which are so disruptive of positive social interaction.

- Broswimmer, Franz. *Ecocide: A Short History of the Mass Extinction of Species*, Pluto Press, 2002

Franz Broswimmer recounts how we human beings have despoiled our local environments ever since becoming cultural and symbolically directed creatures. The history of our species is a string of ‘civilizations,’ which have arisen, flourished, overshot the carrying capacity of the local environment and then crashed as a result. Broswimmer takes us through a short tour of these civilizations and then discusses the current global situation with an eye to how we human beings must reconceptualize our understanding of our relationship with the rest of the web of life if we are to avert a global ecocide.

- McChesney, Robert. *The Problem of the Media: U.S. Communication Politics in the 21st Century*, Paperback edition by Monthly Review Press, 2004.

Robert McChesney examines the changing place and role of the media in the history of the United States. In the early days of the Republic it served as a vehicle for the dissemination of various points of view on the burning issues of the day. He then describes how the media has increasingly come under the control of powerful capitalist owners and advertisers who are not interested in providing access to the full range of debate about current issues, especially those that are critical of big, corporate business. McChesney examines various myths about the media and shows how powerful interests shape and limit its critical content. He goes well beyond the print media and includes penetrating analysis of the process of ideological hegemony as they are also worked out in digital TV, digital radio, the internet, and the profession of journalism. He gives us an opportunity to reflect on the adage that “you are what you think.” Because you can only think in terms of the information that you are allowed acquire.

Required readings

Mark Miller and Barbara Kantowitz, *Unmasking Sybil: A Re-examination of the Most Famous Psychiatric Patient in History*. Newsweek, New York: Jan. 25, 1999. Vol. 133, Iss. 4; pp. 66. 3 pps. This reading is available to you from the University of Manitoba Libraries and is linked to the library database in Unit 9.

Frederick Crews, *The Trauma Trap*. You can find the reading in the Content section of your Course Materials.

Course overview

The structure of each unit

Unit introduction

Each unit will begin with a brief discussion of the major issues to be considered. This will reveal to the instructor’s purpose for studying the topic as well as providing a brief introduction to each of the assigned readings for the unit.

Learning objectives

This section presents a description of what you are expected to have accomplished upon completion of the unit. You should be able to relate the instructional content, readings, learning activities, and evaluation to these learning activities.

Assigned readings

Chapters will be assigned from the required text or from articles selected for this course.

How to proceed

In this section the recommended steps that you should complete as you proceed through the unit are described. Frequently the order of the steps is important.

Reading overview

Before undertaking each reading, there is a brief overview provided to help orient you to gain maximum advantage.

Study questions

Upon completion of the reading there will be study questions available to help you capture and record pertinent material. It is essential that you spend the time to draw out your own conclusions from this reading before proceeding to the commentary on this material provided by the instructor. You owe it to yourself to form your own ideas before exposing yourself to those of the instructor. The goal is for you to develop your own ideas and abilities, not to memorize the mind set of your instructor.

Commentary

In the commentary, the instructor will elaborate, extend, and critique the assigned reading. It is here that you will be exposed to any concerns and reflections on the significance of the topic under consideration.

Assignment questions for the units

The course is divided into units. At the end of each unit, there is a question that you are to prepare to answer. At the time of the test, your instructor will choose one of the questions for which you have prepared answers. You will be allowed 48 hours to submit to the dropbox. If it is not received within that time deadline, it will not be accepted.

The instructor will choose the test questions as follows:

- Test 1: one question from either unit 1 or unit 2.
- Test 2: one question from units 3, 4 or 5.
- Test 3: one question from units 6, 7 or 8.

The question selection will be distributed to you via the online course website so you will require access to the Internet.

Final take-home examination

Your final examination is due as indicated in your Instructor's Letter. There are six different topics provided in units 9 to 14. You must choose one of the topics, read the assigned book, and then answer the question provided for it. Choose your topic early in the term, acquire the book and read it throughout the term. Do not leave it until the last section of the course in order to allow yourself sufficient time to complete it. Check the University of Manitoba academic schedule in your *Distance and Online Education Student Handbook* for the date of the last day of class.

There are commentaries for units 9 to 14 in the course manual, and the questions posed for each of them take those materials into account. Each unit uses the same format, and the organization assists you to work on this course in blocks of time. You should read an assigned reading, complete the study questions, and read the commentary on the reading at one sitting. Then review your readings, notes, and study question answers prior to completing the assignment questions for each unit.

Evaluation and grading

Course requirements

You will be evaluated on the basis of three tests and one take home examination. The tests and the take home examination must be prepared in essay format. Each test is worth 25% of your final grade and the take home examination is also worth 25% of your final grade. The tests are intended to assess your understanding of basic social psychological concepts and issues and are based on the assignment questions for units 1-8. The take-home examination provides you with an opportunity to apply the concepts learned in the first part of the course to assigned reading concerning the topic you select.

Distribution of marks

Evaluation	Percentage
Test 1	25%
Test 2	25%
Test 3	25%
Take-home examination	25%
Total	100%

Student responsibility and academic integrity

You are encouraged to use collaborative and cooperative work ethics. Feel free to discuss your thoughts with other members of the class and thereby develop your comprehension and critical analysis. But remember, when it is time to submit your assignments, do your own work. Your colleagues' written material is the fruit of their labour and under no circumstances should you avail yourself of it when preparing your own answers. Similarly, the printed work of other scholars must be properly recognized. You should acquaint yourself with the University's policy on "Plagiarism and Cheating" Section 7.1, and "Personation at Examination", Section 4.2.8, in *The University of Manitoba Undergraduate Calendar*. Note especially the following statement: "...students are expected to acknowledge the sources of ideas and expressions they use in their written work, whether quoted directly or paraphrased", and "To provide adequate documentation is not only an indication of academic honesty but also a courtesy which enables the reader to consult your sources with ease. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism." The Faculty of Arts also reserves the right to submit student work that is suspected of being plagiarized to Internet sites designed to detect plagiarism. Note: These policies are also located in your *Distance and Online Education Student Handbook* or you may refer to Student Affairs at <http://www.umanitoba.ca/student>

Grading scale

All submitted material must be prepared in essay format. Your answer should reflect a knowledge of and appreciation of the assigned readings and these course materials. Information from other sources is quite appropriate in the construction of your answer, but you do need to provide a reference source.

Letter grade	Percentage range	GPA	Description
A+	90 – 100	4.5	Exceptional
A	80 – 89	4.0	Excellent
B+	76 – 79	3.5	Very good
B	70 – 75	3.0	Good
C+	66 – 69	2.5	Satisfactory
C	60 – 65	2.0	Adequate
D	50 – 59	1.0	Marginal
F	less than 50	0	Failure

Note: All final grades are subject to departmental review.

Assignment due dates

Your assignment due dates are included in your instructor's letter that is found in your course website. If you are unable to submit an assignment on time, contact your instructor well in advance of the due date, for we cannot guarantee that the instructor will accept late assignments.

Distance and Online Education (DE) Student Resources

In your course website there are links for the following:

- Contact Distance and Online Education Staff
- Distance and Online Student Handbook
- Distance and Online Education Website

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