EVALUATIONS IN SOCIAL INTERACTION
(Tuesday, 2-5 p.m., Tarbutton Hall 206)

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Hours: Mon/Wed, 1-2 p.m. & by appointment
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Course Objectives

How do people evaluate the dynamics of social interaction? Components of those dynamics include the perceivers themselves as well as other people. To assess an interaction requires consideration of what people—consciously or not—think and how they feel. Moreover, the multifaceted evaluation process reflects the interdependence of actors and their behaviors. In this course, we will examine fundamental processes that provide a basis for the evaluations that individuals make in the context of social interaction.

We begin by focusing on social cognition and ask, “What are the ways in which individuals process, organize, structure, and retrieve information in order to make sense out of themselves, other people, and situations?” We examine how underlying objective, subjective, and comparison processes drive automatic and controlled categorization processes to give rise to social cognitions. In addition to perceptions about people and contexts, individuals also respond to them emotionally.

The second part of the course asks “What contributes to stimulating emotional experiences and shaping emotional expressions?” We discuss debates regarding the roles of biology and cognitions in creating and controlling emotions. We draw largely from theoretical approaches in Sociology pertaining to the construction of emotions and their consequences for interaction.

Finally, we bring together our analysis of social cognitions and emotions by focusing on their role in fairness evaluations. In this third part of the class, we presume that “Justice is in the eye of beholder” and thus relies upon people making sense out of a situation. Generally, we focus on the question, “How do people perceive and respond to injustice?” In doing so, we consider the antecedents and consequences of distributive, procedural, and interactional injustice.

Germane to all sections of the course are the implications of these evaluations for interaction. Students should acquire an understanding of the central issues and debates in these sub-fields of social psychology. In addition, the course should prepare students to formulate their own critical assessments of areas and the potential for links between them.

Course Readings

The course outline indicates readings for specific topics from various sources. Articles and chapters will be available through the electronic reserves system, with the exception of the text: Fiske, Susan T. and Shelley E. Taylor. 2017. Social Cognition: From Brains to Culture (3rd edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage (abbreviated SC below). Items marked with * are optional.
Course Requirements

You are, of course, expected to attend class regularly, to complete all assigned readings before class, and to participate actively in class discussions. If you should foresee missing a class session due to illness, please notify me so that we do not delay the start of class waiting for you. Missing more than two class sessions may jeopardize your grade for the class. In addition to participation, your course grade will be based on the following: (parenthetical expressions indicate percent of your total grade).

1. Reading Memos (15%)

For each weekly topic, class members will offer reviews of the readings. Typically, two or three class members will write and circulate reviews, which will be used as a basis of discussion. The nature of the review will vary, depending upon the type of reading; a chapter from Social Cognition may be less amenable to the criteria noted below.

A memo on an article consists of a summary of the piece, identification of its strengths and weaknesses (including critical comments), statement of how a reading fits with others, and identification of new questions stemming from the article. Class members will choose, or I will assign, readings to review within each section of the course. Students should write up their critiques in about one type-written page (per article) and circulate them to other class members 24 hours before the class session. (Depending on the topic and the reading to be covered, students will meet with me to discuss how we will coordinate our roles in class.) We will make sure that students do about the same number of critiques during the semester. These will be graded satisfactory/unsatisfactory. The memo is based on thoroughness and thoughtfulness. Students will have to re-write any review on which they receive an unsatisfactory.

At the beginning of class sessions, each student will offer a question raised by the set of readings (which may coincide with the reading critiques offered by others). These questions will be addressed during the class discussion at appropriate times.

2. Essays (25%)

To provide students with the opportunity for expressing their individual analyses of issues pertaining to each general topic, the course includes three essay exams. Students will complete one exam on a topic other than the topic addressed in their papers. Each exam requires students to respond to one of two essay questions, much like questions appearing on preliminary exams. I will hand out an exam prior to the end of each course section. Responses may be up to 10 pages in length (double-spaced, 12-point type) and will be due about two weeks later.

3. Research Paper and ALTERNATIVE (50%)

The intent of the research paper is to allow you to study in detail a topic that is specific to your own purpose. (You may “piggy-back” this paper on an assignment for another class if the paper’s topic reflects the content of this class in some way. You must discuss this with me prior to submitting your paper proposal.) The research paper may take one of the following forms:
(A) a position paper presenting a cogent argument regarding a theoretical or empirical issue on a topic relevant to evaluations in social interaction;
(B) a research proposal that includes a review of relevant literature, hypotheses, and tentative research methods; or
(C) report of your own empirical research, which possibly completes research proposed for another class (this option would include a literature review and theoretical statement in addition to empirical results);
(D) an analytical synthesis of topics stemming from two different parts of the course.

To facilitate development of the research paper, a one-page prospectus is due October 2. Preliminary drafts should be completed one week prior to the class discussions (i.e., Tuesday, December 4). We will discuss papers on December 11. Final papers are due no later than Tuesday, December 18, in my box by 5 p.m.

ALTERNATIVE: Because students take this course for various reasons and at various points in their graduate careers, sometimes it does not make sense to devote effort to the development of a research paper that will be solely an exercise and never used for other scholarly purposes. Thus, as an alternative to the research paper, students may opt to take all three essay exams (one for each topic).

4. Paper Critiques (5%/5%)

Seminar members will read and critique papers of at least two of their classmates. Authors are responsible for providing all class members with an electronic copy of their papers approximately one week before discussion dates; please provide the instructor with a paper copy (which I will make available to others who might like one). Readers will take the role of "journal reviewer" in examining the papers. Each review (approximately one type-written page) should critique the author's argument and identify other inadequacies while at the same time offer constructive suggestions for revisions. Readers should provide electronic copies of their reviews to all class members. The critiques will form the basis for the paper discussions; authors will have the opportunity to address the criticisms of classmates and use the reviews as a basis for revising their papers.

Course Outline

I. Introduction
   (4 September)

II. Social Cognition

   A. What drives categorization and other mental representations?  
   (11 September)

SC: Chapter 1, Introduction
Chapter 2, Dual Modes in Social Cognition
Chapter 3, Attention and Encoding (pp. 63-65, 70-86)
Chapter 4, Representation in Memory (pp. 110-23)


B. How are perceptions shaped by the “self,” comparisons, and shortcuts? (18 September)

SC: Chapter 5, Self in Social Cognition (pp. 127-37, 145-57)
Chapter 7, Heuristics and Shortcuts


C. How do people assess others’ behavior and situations? How “accurate” are their perceptions? (25 September)

SC: Chapter 6, Attribution
Chapter 8, Accuracy and Efficiency in Social Inference (pp. 218-40)
D. How do cognitions underlie stereotyping? How do such assessments affect subsequent behavior? (2 October)


SC: Chapter 11, Stereotyping: Cognition and Bias (plus pp. 336-39)
Chapter 15, Behavior and Cognition (pp. 431-53)


Fall Break (9 October)

III. Emotions

A. What are emotions? (16 October)


*SC: Chapter 13, From Social Cognition to Affect (skim)


**B. How do emotional experiences emerge?** (23 October)

*SC*: pp. 161-162 (description of Schachter and Singer 1962)


**C. How are emotions managed?** (30 October)


D. How does group structure and the context affect emotions? (6 November)


JUSTICE SECTION NOT YET REVISED!!!
IV. Justice Processes

A. What is justice? (13 November)


B. How do people perceive injustice? (20 November)


C. How do people respond to injustice? (27 November)


D. How do justice processes play out in interaction and society? (4 December)


NEW ARTICLES

Relative Standards and Distributive Justice: How Social Comparison Orientations Moderate the Link between Relative Earnings and Justice Perceptions
Simone M. Schneider, Peter Valet,
First Published August 11, 2017

Justice Standard Determines Emotional Responses to Over-Reward
First Published February 9, 2016; pp. 44–67