Psy 630: Social Cognition and Social Perception

Professor: Allen McConnell  
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Class meets in: 207 Benton Hall  
Day: Tuesdays  
Time: 7:00 – 9:40 p.m.  
Webpage: www.users.muohio.edu/mcconnar/psy630.html

Course prerequisite
• Graduate standing in psychology or the instructor’s permission

Readings
• Course readings, available for photocopying in the Graduate Student Computer Lab, Benton Hall  

Course overview
Since the 1980s, the social cognition movement has emerged as the dominant paradigm in social psychology. Social cognition seeks to explore the cognitive underpinnings of numerous social psychological phenomena, including impression formation about individuals, group stereotyping, attributional thinking, self knowledge, affect, and judgment and decision making. One of the primary goals of this research is to better understand the processes that underlie many of the forces that shape, and are shaped by, social interaction. In addition to re-exploring traditional topics in social psychology (e.g., stereotyping and prejudice), social cognition has examined less traditional topics in social as well (e.g., the role of unconscious thought in social interaction). Thus, social cognition represents less of “an area in” and more of “an orientation to” social psychology. Each week, students will lead discussions about, write and submit reaction papers to, and critique readings from scientific research journals and edited volumes. The primary project in the class will be a research proposal due at the end of the semester.

Most of the success in this course rests with the students and their preparation. The format of the course has students who lead discussions each week, with a pair of students (facilitators) determining how to best organize and facilitate discussion on the week’s topics. Because this is a small class, contributing to group discussion is essential. Moreover, it is through the process of discussion and debate that one’s research acumen becomes defined and sharpened. One of the major goals of this class is to help develop one’s thinking and problem solving skills, and this is best accomplished by expressing your ideas in writing and in class discussions.

Grades
Discussion facilitation during the semester .................................................. 20%  
Weekly reaction papers (4% per paper, 6 papers maximum) ........ 24%  
Class participation (when not facilitating)...................................................... 20%  
Research proposal ......................................................................................... 40%  
Due Tuesday, December 13th
Facilitating
During the semester, students will have the responsibility of facilitating discussion. Facilitators will need to determine how best to accomplish this goal for the readings. As facilitators, it is not your responsibility to explain the readings to others or review the important points of each paper. Instead, your role is to provide a framework that seems sensible for discussing the topic. For example, you may want to circulate questions via e-mail before class to pose questions of your colleagues. Perhaps you might present an initial framework at the beginning of class (on the board or via overhead) to highlight common (or divergent) themes that run throughout the readings. There are no right or wrong ways to facilitate. The goal of facilitation is to provide structure and direction for fellow students during discussion, not be the discussion.

Reaction papers
Each week, students will submit a brief reaction paper (2-3 double-spaced pages) describing their reactions to the week’s readings during weeks that they do not facilitate class discussion. They must be typed, but they need not conform to APA style. This assignment is very open-ended and subject to great latitude in interpretation. Because some students specialize in different disciplines (e.g., clinical, cognitive psychology), they may want to “spin” the week’s themes in a reasonable fashion toward their interests, which is fine. The goal is to make sure that students come to class not only with the readings read, but come to class having put some degree of thought into the implications of, and interconnections among, the readings. Each acceptable reaction paper contributes 4% to the overall grade. Students must submit their reaction papers by e-mail attachment to the instructor before 6 p.m. of the day before class (i.e., by Monday at 6 p.m.). The instructor will return them at the beginning of class (i.e., Tuesday). Late reaction papers, regardless of the circumstances, will not be accepted.

Research proposal
Students will submit a major paper by choosing a topic in social cognition based on their own interests and developing a research proposal. The topic need not be one that a student facilitated, though doing so may benefit some students. The research proposal must address an important research question from the perspective of social cognition. Students outside of social psychology are encouraged to relate social cognition to their area (e.g., developmental psychologists may want to study the formation of group stereotypes in children, clinical psychologists may want to explore how nonconscious processes affect client-therapist interactions). Although students will not be required to carry out the research they propose, the opportunity to develop a well-thought-out proposal should be helpful to those who wish to develop new lines of research or explore ideas relevant to theses, minor projects, and dissertations. This paper must take the form of a research proposal — it cannot be simply a literature review. The instructor will be available to help students refine their ideas and suggest appropriate references. There is no correct page length. Papers must be written in accordance with the APA Publication Manual (5th ed.). Additional details and guidelines will be provided later this semester. Topics must be approved by the instructor no later than Tuesday, November 29, at the end of class. The paper is due by noon, on Tuesday, December 13 in the instructor’s mailbox, Benton Hall (please submit a hard copy, not an attachment, to avoid any problems with formatting, printing, etc.). Being late with either deadline (topic approval or submitting the final paper) without documentation of personal emergency or illness will incur a 10% deduction in the paper’s final grade for each 24-hour period that the relevant assignment is late.
Social Psychology Resources

Top-tier, primary journals (featuring primary research):
Journal of Personality and Social Psychology
Journal of Experimental Social Psychology
Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin

Second-tier, area-specific, primary journals:
Social Cognition
Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes (groups and industrial-organizational)
Sex Roles (gender issues)
Journal of Basic and Applied Social Psychology

Top-tier, secondary journals (reviews and theoretical integration):
Psychological Review (original theoretical statements and commentary)
Psychological Bulletin (integrative literature reviews and interpretations)
Personality and Social Psychology Review
Advances in Experimental Social Psychology

General secondary books and volumes:

Specific topic secondary books and volumes:
Course Reading List

8/23 — Organizational meeting

8/30 — Major themes in social cognition

9/6 — No class: Monday-Tuesday switch day

9/13 — Social categories: Activation and implications

9/20 — Limits to our understanding of ourselves
9/27 — Goals

10/4 — No class: Person Memory/SESP

10/11 — Self-regulation

10/18 — Affect influencing thinking and perceiving

10/25 — Cognitive consistency and self-perception
11/1 — Attitudes


11/8 — Stereotyping and prejudice


11/15 — Coming to understand individuals


11/22 — No class: Thanksgiving week

11/29 — The self (class to be held from 4-6:30)


12/6 — No class: Writing day

12/13 — Paper due