

Perception & Cognition in Social Life
Psychology 2270UN - Spring 2025
Time: 2:40-3:55; Location: URIS 330

Instructor: Prof. Meghan Meyer (she/hers)
Office: Schermerhorn 371 (in suite 369)
Email: mlm2378@columbia.edu
Office Hours: Mondays 4:15pm-5:15pm
Class Email Address: per.cog.social.life@gmail.com

Use this email address for any and all questions you have related to the class

Teaching Assistants: Amisha Vyas, Elizabeth Galles

Course Overview: This course focuses on perception and cognition in social life. We start by addressing the core social motivations we experience in everyday life (e.g., our desire to feel like we belong to a group). Next, we examine how these motivations shape our basic sensory experiences—for example why we can't help but anthropomorphize inanimate objects or enjoy holding hands with our partner. We then examine the mental strategies we use to meet our social needs, such as how we figure out other people's thoughts and feelings, as well as our own. Finally, we wrap up by examining how these motivations, perceptions, and cognitions play out not just within one mind – but also between minds in everyday social interaction. This course will not only teach you the fundamental science behind the social mind. It will also let you see your own social life through a whole new lens.

Course Learning Goals and Outcomes:

- Learn the fundamentals of how the mind works in social life
- Hone critical thinking skills by learning how scientists test their hypotheses about the social mind

Prerequisites: Science of Psychology (UN1001) or Mind, Brain, & Behavior (UN1010).

Role in the Curriculum:

This is an undergraduate, intermediate-level lecture course, open to undergraduates and students in the post-baccalaureate Psychology program. It can be used to fulfill the following requirements:

- For the psychology major or concentration in the College and in the School of General Studies, for the psychology minor in Engineering, and for the psychology postbac certificate, this course will fulfill the Group 1 Perception and Cognition distribution requirement.
- For the Neuroscience & Behavior major, this course can be used toward the P4 Additional 2000-level lecture course.
- For other undergraduate students, this course will fulfill one term of the social science requirement of the School of General Studies.

Important Dates:

- Exam 1: Monday, Feb 24th
- Exam 2: Wednesday, April 2nd
- Exam 3: Monday, May 5th
- Select Research Critique Paper: Wednesday, March 6th on Canvas (closes at 11:59pm)
- Research Critique Paper due: Friday, May 9th (closes at 11:59pm)

Assignments:

Exams

There are three, non-cumulative exams total. Exam questions will be based on material presented and/or discussed in class, material from the reading assignments that are included in the lectures and will require you to go beyond memorization and apply, analyze, and synthesize information. Due to class size, the format of the exams will be multiple choice, with each exam containing 25 multiple-choice questions.

“Two-Stages” of Exams.” We take the importance of human social interaction seriously in this class! Our exams will therefore follow a “two-stage exam” format. For the first 40 minutes of the exam, every student completes it on their own. After a 5-min transition period, groups of 4 students will complete the same exam again. The exam score of each student is calculated as 85% individual score + 15% group score. In the rare cases when an individual outperforms their group, that individual’s exam score will equal 100% of their individual score. This process, including formation of groups, will be explained before the first exam.

If you know that you will be missing an exam for a university-approved reason (e.g., religious observation, athletic competition, etc.), it is your responsibility to bring this to our attention as early as possible, and at the very latest at least one week before the scheduled exam date. Make-up exams are not given except for university-approved reasons or emergency situations that can be verified.

Research Critique Paper

The objective of the research critique paper is for you to gain practice (1) reading scientific research articles, (2) thinking critically and independently about psychology research and (3) communicating your ideas effectively. For this short paper assignment, you will select a target primary research article (from a set of 4 pre-selected articles indicated on the syllabus reading list).

The paper will begin with a brief summary of the article and then provide a critique of the research (positive and negative points are both acceptable). Papers should connect the work to concepts and related studies covered in class. The papers can also describe creative ways to improve or expand on the primary research and/or future studies that could specifically remedy issues you’ve identified with the primary research. The paper should be no longer than 4-5 pages double-spaced. The usual formatting: 1” margins with Times New Roman, Arial, or Helvetica 11-12 pt. font. Late papers will be penalized by a full letter grade per each day overdue.

Class Participation

Although this is a lecture class, I invite and encourage you to ask and answer questions as they arise. Some days you may be asked to submit an individual reflection of a discussion held during class. In those cases, you will be expected to write your reflection on your own. Instructions for such assignments will be clearly specified.

Grading:

3 Exams: each 25% of grade
Research Critique Paper: 20%
Class participation 5%

Grading is as follows: A = 94-100; A- = 90-93; B+ = 87-89.9; B: 83-86.9; B-: 80-82.9; C+: 77- 79.9; C: 73-76.9; C-: 70-72.9; D: 60-69.9, E: 0-59.9. Grades will not be rounded up; for example, a 93.9 is an A-.

Lectures: Lectures slides will be posted on Canvas the day before each class.

Readings: The readings for this class include 1) a mix of chapters from social cognition textbooks, 2) chapters from books written for the public by social cognition researchers, and 3) scientific publications in academic journals. This range of readings is designed to 1) give you breadth and depth into this area of psychology, 2) show

you the multiple formats academics write in and 3) keep the readings fun and engaging. Information covered in the readings will appear on exams only if they were also covered in lectures. All readings will be posted on canvas— you do not need to purchase anything.

Attendance: Please do your best to attend class and arrive on time. A key factor in student success is class attendance, which is not easily replaced by copying someone else's notes. Lecture slides will be posted, but these outlines are brief, and are not meant to substitute for participation. Students are responsible for all material, including changes to the syllabus presented in class or noted on Canvas.

Diversity & Inclusion: My aim is to foster a learning environment that supports a diversity of perspectives and experiences and honors your identities. Please reach out to me with any concerns or suggestions you may have to better address your learning needs and to improve the effectiveness of this course. I look forward to working together to create a classroom community built on mutual respect and inclusivity.

Accommodations: Students who may require accommodations should make an appointment to see me as soon as possible, at least by the end of the second week of class. If you have not already done so, stop by the Office of Disability Services (ODS) on the 7th floor of Lerner Hall to register for support services. ODS often requires two weeks to process an application, so please contact them as soon as you can, preferably before the course begins.

Academic Integrity: The University now requires that syllabi include discussion of the importance of academic integrity in your studies at Columbia:

The intellectual venture in which we are all engaged requires of faculty and students alike the highest level of personal and academic integrity. As members of an academic community, each one of us bears the responsibility to participate in scholarly discourse and research in a manner characterized by intellectual honesty and scholarly integrity. In practical terms, this means that, as students:

- You must be responsible for the full citations of others' ideas in all of your research papers and projects
- You must be scrupulously honest when taking your examinations
- You must always submit your own work and not that of another student, scholar, or internet agent.

From the Faculty Statement on Academic Integrity (www.college.columbia.edu/academics/integrity-statement):

- Students are expected to do their own work on all tests and assignments for this class and act in accordance with the Faculty Statement on Academic Integrity and Honor Code established by the students of Columbia College and the School of General Studies.
- Because any academic integrity violation undermines our intellectual community, students found to have cheated, plagiarized, or committed any other act of academic dishonesty can expect to receive a zero for the work in question and may fail the class.
- Students will also be referred to the Dean's Disciplinary Process (see: www.college.columbia.edu/academics/disciplinaryprocess).

It is students' responsibility to ensure their work maintains expected standards. Should you have any questions or concerns regarding these expectations, please:

- Talk with the instructor
- Refer to the Columbia University Undergraduate Guide to Academic Integrity: www.college.columbia.edu/academics/academicintegrity

Class Schedule

Date	Lecture #	Topic
W 1/22	1	Why are humans so social and why does it matter?
M 1/27	2	Motivation: Core social motivations in everyday life
W 1/29	3	Motivation: Shared Reality
M 2/3	4	Motivation: Social Pain
W 2/5	5	NO CLASS
M 2/10	6	Motivation: Social Pain
W 2/12	7	Motivation: Social Pleasures
M 2/17	8	Motivation: Social Pleasures
W 2/19		<i>*In class exercises</i>
M 2/24		Exam 1
W 2/26	9	Perception: Subjective Construal & Naïve Realism
M 3/3	10	Perception: Mind Bias in Visual Perception
W 3/5	11	Perception: Affiliative Touch
M 3/10	12	Perception: Smelling Fear & Friends
W 3/12	13	Perception: Taste & Sound in Social Life
M 3/17		SPRING BREAK
W 3/19		SPRING BREAK
M 3/24	14	The Perception-Morality Link
W 3/26		<i>*In class exercises</i>
M 3/31		NO CLASS <i>*Select Research Critique Paper to write about for your paper (selection due on Canvas)</i>
W 4/2		Exam 2
M 4/7	15	Cognition: Reasoning about others' minds
W 4/9	16	Cognition: Reasoning about others' minds
M 4/14		NO CLASS
W 4/16	17	Cognition: Reasoning about your own mind
M 4/21	18	Cognition: Reasoning about your own mind
W 4/23		<i>*In class exercises</i>
M 4/28	19	Interacting Minds: Synchrony
W 4/30	20	Interacting Minds: Social Networks
M 5/5		Exam 3
Fri 5/9		*Paper Due on Canvas

Readings

I. Motivation

1. Social by Default
Lieberman, M. (2013). The brain's passion. Chapter 2 from *Social: Why our brains are wired to connect*
Accompanies Lecture 1
2. Shared Reality
Higgins, T. (2019). Sharing is believing. Chapter 1 from *Shared Reality: What makes us strong and tears us apart*.
Accompanies Lecture 3
3. Social Pains & Pleasures
Eisenberger, N.I. (2016). Social pain and social pleasure: Two overlooked but fundamental mammalian emotions? In: L.F. Barret, M Lewis, J. Haviland-Jones (Eds.), *The Handbook of Emotions*. New York, NY: Guilford Press, pp. 440-452.
Accompanies Lecture 4-8
4. Social Pains & Pleasures
Lieberman, M. (2013). Fairness tastes like chocolate. Chapter 4 from *Social: Why our brains are wired to connect*
Accompanies Lecture 7-8

II. Perception

5. Mind Bias in Visual Perception
Epley, N. How we anthropomorphize. Chapter 4 from *Mindwise: Why We Misunderstand What Others Think, Believe, Feel, and Want*
Accompanies Lecture 10
6. Affiliative Touch
Coan, J. A., Schaefer, H. S., & Davidson, R. J. (2006). Lending a hand: Social regulation of the neural response to threat. *Psychological science*, 17(12), 1032-1039.
This is an option for a paper critique article
Accompanies Lecture 11
7. Smell, Taste, & Sound in Social Life
Ravreby, I., Snitz, K., & Sobel, N. (2022). There is chemistry in social chemistry. *Science Advances*, 8(25), eabn0154.
This is an option for a paper critique article
Accompanies Lecture 12
8. The Perception-Morality Link
Wheatley, T., & Haidt, J. (2005). Hypnotic disgust makes moral judgments more severe. *Psychological science*, 16(10), 780-784.
This is an option for a paper critique article
Accompanies Lecture 14

III. Social Cognition

9. Reasoning about others' minds

Lieberman, M. (2013). Mental Magic Tricks. Chapter 5 from *Social: Why our brains are wired to connect*.
Accompanies Lecture 15-16

10. Reasoning about our own minds

*No reading associated with this lecture topic

IV. Interacting Minds

11. Synchrony

Gallotti, M., and Frith, C.D. (2013). Social cognition in the we-mode. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 17, 160-165.
Accompanies Lecture 19

Launay J., Tarr B., Dunbar R.I.M. (2016). Synchrony as an adaptive mechanism for large-scale human social bonding. *Ethology*, 122, 779–789
Accompanies Lecture 19

12. Social Networks

Basyouni, R. & Parkinson, C. (2022). Mapping the social landscape: Tracking patterns of interpersonal relationships. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 26(2), 204–221
Accompanies Lecture 20

Dunbar, R.I.M. (2017). The anatomy of friendship. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 22, 32-51.
Accompanies Lecture 20