Social Interaction
Spring 2022
GU4696

Instructor: Katherine Thorson
Email: kthorson@barnard.edu
Office: 415D Milbank (Barnard Campus)
Student hours: TBD
Class meetings: TBD
Class location: TBD

Course Description

In this seminar, we will read and discuss current literature in psychology related to social interaction. We will examine fundamental processes involved in social interaction, consider how social interaction varies as a function of people’s social identities (e.g., gender, social class, and race), and discuss how social interaction influences close relationships, intergroup attitudes, and well-being. We will pay close attention to how these topics are studied (e.g., to methods, samples, and researcher identities) and to the broader implications of the research.

This course is an advanced seminar, designed particularly for graduate students, for advanced undergraduates who are majoring in Psychology or in Neuroscience and Behavior, and for students participating in the Postbaccalaureate Psychology Program. These students will have priority in registration, followed by junior majors and then non-majors.

Prerequisites for this course include one course in introductory psychology, one course in research methods or statistics, one course in social psychology, and/or instructor permission.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this course, students should be able to do the following:

• Explain fundamental processes involved in social interaction from perceiver and target perspectives
• Identify how people’s social identities influence their own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors during social interaction (as well as those of their interaction partners)
• Describe how social interaction influences close relationships, intergroup attitudes, and well-being
• Understand and evaluate empirical research on psychological processes relevant to social interaction
• Propose an empirical study to address an unanswered question regarding social interaction

Course Requirements

Course Readings: We will read a set of papers (listed in the syllabus and posted on CourseWorks on the “Modules” page) prior to each class meeting. You should read each paper actively—I encourage
taking notes as you read. After reading each paper, you should be able to (1) state the key points and conclusions the authors are making and (2) describe the data the authors are using to support those key points and conclusions. Please note that each week there is not nearly enough reading to thoroughly cover the topic we are discussing! I will typically send out additional, optional readings after each class discussion that I think may be of interest to the class and/or useful in developing your final research project.

**Discussion Questions:** For each of the class sessions, you will submit one or two discussion questions to the Discussion Board on CourseWorks no later than 5 p.m. on the day preceding the class meeting. Questions should reflect thoughtful analysis of the assigned reading and should be capable of generating discussion. Appropriate questions include, but are not limited to, those that address critical aspects of the research methods or theoretical perspective, those that relate different readings to each other (either readings from the same week or from a prior week), those that relate the findings to your life experiences or to material you have learned in other courses, and those that address the implications of the findings. If you are not sure how to write discussion questions or what constitutes a good discussion question, please see me during student hours—I can help! Make sure you spend some time considering how you would answer your discussion questions, as you will likely be asked to speak first for any questions you develop. These will be graded as check plus (A), check (B+), check minus (B−), or not submitted (0).

**Reaction Papers:** To help you prepare for discussion and to practice your writing, you will submit two 1- to 1.5-page, single-spaced reaction papers on the readings no later than 5 p.m. on the day preceding the relevant class meeting. Your papers should convey and elaborate on one clear thesis statement. This might be an idea for future research or a critique of the research we read. You need to show clear evidence that you carefully read and understood the articles you are discussing. You are free to choose which weeks you want to submit reaction papers (the first possible week is Week 2 and the last is Week 13), but you must submit at least one of them by Week 7.

Tips for writing reaction papers:

- To generate ideas for your paper, consider the following questions: What did you learn? What was surprising? How do the conclusions relate to prior readings in this class, material from other courses, or your life experiences? What questions were left unanswered for you? Did you agree with how the authors characterized their findings – why or why not? What did you find missing from the papers or discussion of this topic? Do you have any new questions or hypotheses based on the current research? Do you see any novel applications of the research? Consideration of these questions may help you figure out what to write about.

- Convey one complete, novel thought – with a beginning, middle, and end. If you have several ideas for that week, choose the best one. Your thought should not be a question. You may begin your paper with a question but then you should attempt to answer that question throughout your paper.

- If you want to critique the methods of the research, describe why this critique matters. Every study has shortcomings. Why do these shortcomings matter? Why do you expect that the results
of the study would be different if the methods were different? How would you design a new study to address these shortcomings? What would that contribute to our knowledge?

- You do not need to discuss every aspect of every (or even one) reading in your paper, but it does need to be clear that you thoroughly read and understood the readings from that week.
- No points will be awarded for reaction papers that only summarize the readings.

**Participation**: Everyone is expected to attend every class and be prepared to contribute to the class discussion. If you must miss a class, you must speak with me in advance (as soon as possible). I will provide three participation grades that are equally spaced throughout the semester and which will be based on both the quantity and quality of your involvement. If you are not sure what constitutes good participation or if you are uncomfortable participating, please see me during student hours—I can help!

As a group, we will draft a set of guidelines regarding discussions and classroom etiquette on the first day of the course. In these guidelines, we will address questions such as the following: What is the goal of discussion in this course? What do we expect of each other in terms of preparation for each class session? How can we make our class a safe space to talk about sensitive topics or to voice confusion? What makes a respectful listener? How can we effectively disagree with each other? What policies would we like to have regarding potential classroom distractions (being late, bringing food to class, using phones and laptops, etc.)? These guidelines will be distributed after our first class and will function as a “contract” regarding class discussions throughout the semester.

**Classroom Presentation and Final Paper**: The final project in this course will be a research proposal, in which you propose a study to improve our knowledge of any aspect of social interaction. You may choose a topic that is closely related to the readings in this course or one that we have not covered but is of interest to you. The final paper should be 15 to 20 pages long and written according to the guidelines in the APA Publication Manual, 7th edition. I will provide feedback on your materials along the way, as well as detailed grading rubrics for both the presentation and paper as you are working on them. In addition, you will also work in small feedback groups throughout the second half of the semester to provide feedback and support to one another regarding your final projects. Aside from the presentation, all assignments related to this project should be turned in on CourseWorks.

Please make note of the following dates regarding this project:

1. A one-page, single-spaced description of your proposal is due by 5 p.m. on TBD (graded as pass/fail and will count for 3% of final paper grade).
2. A list of at least ten articles or chapters that will be background reading for your project is due by 5 p.m. on TBD (graded as pass/fail and will count for 3% of final paper grade).
3. A two-page, single-spaced description of your proposal is due by 5 p.m. on TBD (graded as pass/fail and will count for 3% of final paper grade).
4. Your research presentation will occur in class on Week 14 (last day of class).
5. Your final paper is due by 5 p.m. on TBD.
### Requirement Weights

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<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion Questions</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td>Reaction Papers</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>Participation</td>
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<td>Classroom Presentation</td>
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<td>Final Paper</td>
<td>35%</td>
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Numeric scores will be rounded up or down to the nearest whole number. Below are the numeric cutoffs for letter grades:

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<th>A+</th>
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### Course Schedule

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Final Project Assignments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Introduction; Reading Scientific Papers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Part 1: Fundamental Processes in Social Interaction</strong></td>
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<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Communication</td>
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<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Social Perception</td>
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<td>Week 4</td>
<td>“Successful” Social Interactions</td>
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<td>Week 5</td>
<td>“Unsuccessful” Social Interactions</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Part 2: Influence of Social Identities on Social Interaction</strong></td>
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<td>Week 6</td>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td>Week 7</td>
<td>Power and Status</td>
<td>One-page description of proposal due</td>
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<td>Week 8</td>
<td>Social Class</td>
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<td>Week 9</td>
<td>Race and Ethnicity</td>
<td>List of readings due</td>
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<td>Week 10</td>
<td>Culture</td>
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<td><strong>Part 3: Outcomes Associated with Social Interaction</strong></td>
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<td>Week 11</td>
<td>Close Relationships</td>
<td>Two-page description of proposal due</td>
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<td>Week 12</td>
<td>Intergroup Attitudes</td>
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<td>Week 13</td>
<td>Well-Being</td>
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<td>Week 14</td>
<td>Class Presentations</td>
<td>Final paper due TBD</td>
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Course Policies and Resources

Announcements: I may make small changes and additions to this syllabus. I will announce these changes in class and/or via CourseWorks.

Student Hours: Student hours are listed at the top of the syllabus and are by appointment also (i.e., by any other time that you and I mutually agree upon). During these times, I am available to discuss questions regarding this course, and I’m also available to discuss other topics in psychology, your education more broadly, and career development. These hours are for you – please do not worry that you are interrupting me or my work by coming to them. I am eager to talk to you!

Honor Code: I expect students to adhere to the honor code of their school. Be honest about your work. This is your education, so use it wisely. Examples of academic dishonesty include but are not limited to plagiarizing (copying someone else’s work or ideas and misrepresenting them as one’s own), falsification (making up fictitious information and presenting it as real or altering records for the purpose of misrepresentation), and facilitation (helping another student to cheat, plagiarize, or falsify). If you are unsure about what constitutes an honor code violation, please ask me.

Academic Accommodations: If you believe you may encounter barriers to the academic environment due to a documented disability or emerging health challenges, please contact me and/or the relevant center at your school for assistance.

Affordable Access to Course Materials: All students deserve to be able to study and make use of course texts and materials regardless of cost. All the course readings in this class are freely accessible to you as a member of the Columbia community and are posted on CourseWorks.

Missed Class for Holidays: If you are observing religious holidays this semester and you need accommodations for any class or assignment, please contact me at least one week in advance of class or the assignment due date.

Wellness: Being a student can be stressful, and it is important to recognize and identify the different pressures, burdens, and stressors you may be facing, whether personal, emotional, physical, financial, mental, or academic. Supporting your own health and well-being will help you get the most out of your student experience. I urge you to take care of yourself – get enough sleep, eat healthy, exercise, and spend time with friends. Columbia has several resources that can help you in different areas of your life, and I encourage you to take advantage of them at any point during the semester. If you need assistance connecting with resources, please let me know.

Course Readings

Week 1: Reading Scientific Papers (Optional)


Week 2: How do we communicate with others?


Week 3: How do we perceive others?


Week 4: What happens during “successful” social interactions?


**Week 5: What happens during “unsuccessful” social interactions?**


Kumar, A., & Epley, N. (2020). It’s surprisingly nice to hear you: Misunderstanding the impact of communication media can lead to suboptimal choices of how to connect with others. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, 150*(3), 595–607.

**Week 6: How does gender influence social interaction?**


**Week 7: How do power and status influence social interaction?**


**Week 8: How does social class influence social interaction?**


**Week 9: How do racial and ethnic identities affect social interaction?**


**Week 10: How does culture influence social interaction?**


**Week 11: How do we develop close relationships via social interaction?**


**Week 12: How do social interactions influence intergroup attitudes?**


**Week 13: How do social interactions influence well-being?**

