THE SOCIAL SELF

CLPS 1782 CRN 25939
M W F 10:00-10:50am
Barus & Holly 157
Canvas.brown.edu/courses/1071856

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION:

Dr. Patrick R. Heck

Patrick_Heck@Brown.edu

Professor Heck's office hours:

Tuesdays & Thursdays, 9:30-10:20am.

OR by appointment.

Metcalf 323 (Krueger Lab)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The Self is a necessarily social construct. This course will explore the inter- and intra-personal factors that influence how we perceive ourselves, judge others, and make decisions in a social context. Drawing from theories of egocentrism, rationality, morality, and cultural evolution, we will explore the processes, outcomes, and innerworkings of the Self in a social world. This course will take an experimental approach to understand both how individuals *should* behave (as prescribed by a social norms and prescriptive rationality) and how they *actually* behave. Students in this course will be armed with a theoretical and methodological knowledge base of the ingredients of the social Self, accuracy and bias in self- and social-judgment, and the (epi)phenomena we experience in daily life. Much of the research we will explore in this course can be integrated into your own life to make more informed and rational decisions in the social context.

In this course, students will gain a working knowledge of the factors that underlie how we make, think about, and perceive, social judgments and decisions. We will emulate the methods used in the papers we read and present. In many cases, I will collect data from the course in order to demonstrate (or refute) an effect during the following class meeting. This course will be useful for students interested in the psychological science, inference and scientific method, and human behavior and idiosyncrasies. These skills will provide a foundation for study in advanced topics in experimental social psychology, teaching experimental and logical thinking skills useful for conducting senior thesis projects, independent study, and post-baccalaureate education.

This course is a natural next step after having had an introduction to social psychology and research methods & statistics. In terms of practical takeaway, this course will improve students' critical thinking, writing, understanding of the scientific method (yes, including inferential statistics), and discourse in presentation and discussion. There are no exams in this course; aside from a midterm paper and final paper, the majority of your workload will come from writing online commentaries, leading a presentation, and engaging your classmates in discussion.

COURSE GOALS

By the end of this course, students will be able to do the following:

a.) Articulate major theories, methods, and data in research on the self and social judgment.
b.) Contrast prescriptive rationality (what norms and rationality tell us we *should* do) with observed behavior (what the data tell us we *actually* do).
c.) Comprehend and question empirical journal articles (including statistical results).
d.) Lead a critical discussion of a contemporary research article among peers.
e.) Read and critique a modern trade book in popular Psychology.
f.) Propose a logical and tractable extension or supplement to a recent published experiment.

EVALUATION

Students will be evaluated according to the following criteria.

Participation & engagement (20%)
In-class presentation (20%)
Weekly online commentary posts (15%)
Mid-term paper on Paul Bloom's *Against Empathy* (20%)
Final paper proposing a theoretically and empirically novel experiment (25%)
Extra credit (3%)

Participation

Your *participation* grade will reflect your level of engagement with the material and contribution to the class. This means attending classes, doing the reading when assigned, and contributing to the discussion in a meaningful way during most class sessions. **Attendance will be considered in your participation grade.** This is because active discussion requires active individuals in the room. Each student will be allowed a reasonable number of absences (generally two class sessions excepting extreme circumstances) before losing points for participation.

Similarly, we will walk through experimental procedures together in order to grasp the methods used to study the Self. Thus, this course will require interaction, honesty, and a bit of self-disclosure to function effectively. I recognize that students vary in their level of comfort when it comes to speaking up in class, so I would like to emphasize early that students who *never* participate in class discussion are unlikely to achieve a top grade. Having said this, there will be other methods of participation available to students who may not naturally thrive in a lively classroom. Specifically, students will be able to comment on others' online commentaries on weekly readings (see Weekly Commentaries, below).

Presentation (dates to be assigned in class)

Each Monday, a student or a small group of students will lead an *in-class presentation*. These presentations will include two components. First, students will summarize and clarify the theory, method, and results of a target paper (15 minutes). All papers will be drawn from peer-reviewed journals and many of them will be dense or report results from multiple studies. It is your job to

communicate these papers to your classmates, who will have read and written a short commentary post on the course website.

The presenting student/s will then lead an open discussion on the most interesting or provocative points of the paper (25-30 minutes). Presentations must be at least 40 minutes in total. This is a substantial amount of time that will be difficult to fill by merely presenting bullet-point questions on a PowerPoint slide. I encourage presenters to be creative! Consider showing a relevant video, presenting an article that challenges the findings, assigning or discussing a popular news article that demonstrates or denies the findings, or enacting the experimental method on your peers. Interactive elements like this tend to breed lively discussion, which is good for you, the class, and your presentation grade. If you would like to take on an ambitious activity (like collecting data from the class or structuring an activity), let me know ahead of time and I will be happy to help.

Presentations and discussions will be evaluated according to clarity of presentation, theoretical engagement and comprehension of the material, and effective facilitation of open discussion.

The target papers available for presentation are listed on the syllabus and the course website. Early in the semester, students will sign up for particular papers and presentation dates by a lottery system.

Weekly Commentaries (due by midnight every Sunday preceding a paper presentation).

Each student will write a weekly commentary on the target paper scheduled for that week's presentation. You do not need to post a commentary if you are presenting that week!
The purpose of these commentaries is twofold: **first**, to prepare students for the discussion lead by the presenters each week, and **second**, to stimulate critical thinking in order to prepare students for their longer and more in-depth final paper due at the end of term.

Each commentary should be ~1 double-spaced, typed page in length, or, approximately 300 words. Commentaries are expected to put forth exactly one novel argument, whether it is in agreement or contention with the target paper. Commentaries will be assessed according to their understanding of the article's argument, logic and depth of their critique, and writing style. Each commentary will be graded as *excellent*, *satisfactory*, or *unsatisfactory*. **At the end of the semester, each student will have their lowest commentary grade dropped from their final weighted average.** This policy serves as a buffer for emergencies and when other coursework takes priority. Please note, however, that no other exceptions will be made for missed or unsatisfactory commentaries. Any commentaries submitted after the deadline (midnight on Sunday) will be penalized by 50%.

I encourage students to read and comment on others' commentary posts. Doing so is an effective way to 1.) engage in the material outside of class and 2.) supplement your participation grade.

Mid-Term Paper: Critique of *Against Empathy* (Due March 24th)

The two primary goals of this course are 1.) to give students an understanding of how the Self affects social judgments and interactions and 2.) to stimulate critical thinking of modern psychological theories and arguments. To this end, students will read and critique a brand new (and somewhat controversial) trade book in social psychology: Paul Bloom's *Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion*. Bloom is an influential cognitive-developmental-philosophical psychologist who argues that human empathy causes more harm than good.

The mid-term paper will be a vehicle for students' critiques, whether they are in favor of or against Bloom's notion of empathy. Students will write a 5-6 page paper that provides 1.) a brief summary of the claim or argument you aim to critique, 2.) your argument for or against Bloom's, and 3.) a way of testing the validity of your critique or contribution.

Finally, as an exercise in constructing concise criticism, each student will summarize their most substantial outstanding question on empathy in 140 characters. Students will tweet their questions at Dr. Bloom and we will see how he responds. If you do not have a Twitter account, or if you prefer not to use your own, I will tweet your question for you.

A detailed assignment guide and rubric will be posted on Canvas.

Final paper: Experiment Proposal (due May 15th)

The final paper (6-10 pages) is designed to allow students the freedom to theorize and propose their own experiment that supplements or extends one of the many papers we explore in this class. You may choose one of the papers we read for class, expand one of your online commentaries, or find a paper of your own. If you choose to find your own article, you must get it approved by me. Outside papers must be in peer-reviewed journals, have an experimental design (i.e. no chapters, reviews, or meta-analyses), and be published no earlier than 2007.

This is your chance to improve psychological science in your own way – feel free to be creative in your design. Your proposal doesn't have to be limited by available resources. Final papers will be assessed according to criteria of theoretical engagement, logic and tractability of the proposed experiment, consultation of outside sources, and writing clarity. Students will give a one-minute overview of their proposed experiment on the last day of class.

A detailed assignment guide and rubric will be posted on Canvas.

Extra credit (submission deadline: May 1st, 2017)

Finally, each student has the opportunity to earn 3% of his or her final weighted average back by submitting a double-spaced, one-page summary of an example of bad experimentation or inference. Students will find a news story on popular media and discuss how a.) the experimental approach taken in the story could be improved or b.) how the story's argument or conclusion could be strengthened by a well-designed experiment.

This assignment will be graded as *excellent* (3%), *satisfactory* (1.5%), or *unsatisfactory* (0%). With permission, I will post these responses publicly on the course website so that students can view others' critiques. Students cannot critique the same article, so if you find a story that inspires you, I recommend you submit your critique as early as possible.

Please note that **I will not round up final grades** at the end of the semester. The cutoff for an A is 89.45%. Any lower than that will fall into the next letter grade category. **The extra credit assignment is your opportunity to turn a high B into an A (or a high C into a B).**

A NOTE ON JOURNAL ARTICLES

There will be technical terms and statistics in every article we read. Do not be intimidated by jargon. Google the terms. Not all internet sites are accurate or helpful, so look for converging information. Often, most of the relevant information will be contained in the tables and figures in an article. You can consult your instructor as well, but doing your own research will help you better remember the article and its impact. Early in the course we will read Jordan & Zanna (1999), a useful roadmap for how to read and understand journal articles in social psychology.

A NOTE ON CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS

At times, we will review and discuss what many may perceive as difficult or controversial topics. Student presenters or I may open discussions on stereotyping, prejudice, self-esteem, and issues of gender and sexuality. This means that some of you may feel negative emotions when engaging with the topic. It is my request that you approach these topics with maturity, respect for others' backgrounds and experiences, and a scientific mindset. If any student has an issue with a particular article, class session, or discussion, I hope you will feel empowered to address this issue. If not, I am available in office hours and by appointment to discuss.

RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

Writing Center.
http://www.brown.edu/academics/college/support/writing-center/

Associates at the Center help students deal with writer's block, audience awareness, argumentation, organization, grammar, research skills, the conventions of academic writing, English as a Second Language, and issues of clarity and style.

Accessibility & SEAS.
https://www.brown.edu/academics/college/support/accessibility-support

If you have a physical, mental or learning disability, either hidden or visible, that may require classroom, test-taking, or other reasonable modifications, please see one of us as soon as possible. If you have not already done so, please be sure to register with the Office of Student and Employee Accessibility Services (SEAS)

COURSE SCHEDULE AND IMPORTANT DATES

Week of	Topic	Paper for Commentary & Presentation	Presenter/s	Important Dates
	Social Psychology			
1/30	Egocentrism	Epley, 2009	Prof. Heck	2/3: Start reading Bloom
2/6	Self-Enhancement	Davidai & Gilovich, 2016		
2/13	Biases and Social Reputation	Ovul, Gino, & Norton, 2016		2/17: Discuss first half of Bloom
2/20	Empathy	none (no class)		
2/27	Differentiation & Uniqueness	*Mon:* Ariely & Levav, 2000 *Wed:* Jeong, Christensen, & Drolet, 2016		3/3: Discuss second half of Bloom
	Game Theory			
3/6	Economic Games & Strategic Interaction	Frank, Gilovich, & Regan, 1993		
3/13	Cooperation, Defection, and Punishment	Fehr & Gachter, 2002 AND Hermann, Thoni, & Gachter, 2008		
3/20	Trust & Volunteering	*Mon:* Evans, Athenstaedt, & Krueger, 2013 *Wed:* Heck & Krueger, 2017		3/24: Submit critique of Bloom
	Cultural Evolution			
4/3	Political Orientation & Values	*Mon:* Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009 *Wed:* Schein & Gray, 2015		
4/10	Prosociality/Helping	Feldman-Hall et al., 2016		
4/17	Reasoning & Moral Judgment	*Monday:* Haidt, 2011 *Wednesday:* Starmans & Bloom, 2016		4/19: Submit experiment pre-proposal
4/24	Happiness	Ford et al., 2015		
5/1	Reading period			5/15: Submit Final Paper