The Psychology of Prejudice and Discrimination

PSYCHOLOGY 361
WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY
SPRING, 2011

Meeting Time: 1:10-4:00 pm, Mondays
Location: Room 113, Judd Hall
Section Limit: 18 students
Instructor: Scott Plous
Office: Room 219, Judd Hall (Phone: 685-2368)
Office Hours: 3:00-4:00 pm Tuesdays and by appointment

Summary

This course explores the psychological underpinnings of prejudice and discrimination. In addition to covering well-recognized forms of prejudice and discrimination, such as racism, sexism, antisemitism, and hererosexism, the course examines exploitation and domination more broadly, including the exploitation and domination of indigenous peoples, animals, and the natural environment.

Course Requirements

PREREQUISITES -- Social Psychology (either Psyc260 or Psyc263) is a firm prerequisite for taking this class.

READINGS -- All required readings should be completed prior to class. These readings will come from the following anthology, supplemented with recent journal articles:


To gain access to library reserve readings:

2. Locate Psychology 361 by typing "361" in the search field.
3. Click on PSYC361.
4. Type the password given in class
5. Click on "Open/Close All Folders" to open all folders so that you can see the PDF files.
6. Click on the PDF file that you want to view or print.

To read more about any topic covered in the course, please see the UnderstandingPrejudice.org Reading Room: http://www.understandingprejudice.org/readroom/
CLASS PARTICIPATION -- Because this seminar relies heavily on discussion, attendance is essential. Please be punctual in your arrival and your return from holiday breaks (in fact, attendance and punctuality are important enough that they will be factored into your participation grade). The value of our seminar depends on what you bring to it; each member of the class is personally responsible for the quality of our time together, and I welcome your contributions to the course.

To participate fully, please: (1) complete all readings before we meet, (2) come with a few good questions or issues for discussion, (3) contribute to the group without dominating the discussion, (4) help create a climate in which others can comfortably share their opinions, and (5) on the final day of class, submit a high quality paper copy of at least one reading under 30 pages, or a DVD title and year of release, that might improve future generations of this seminar, and paperclip to it a cover sheet with your name and the full citation (author, year, location, publisher, etc.).

Note: The latter assignment carries a 5-point penalty if missed, with no extensions, so please don't forget it! I've placed a deadline reminder under the last class session later in the syllabus.

ASSIGNMENTS -- Beyond class participation, you'll be asked to submit a journal entry every few weeks, write a final paper, and deliver a brief class presentation.

Journal Entries

What insights have you had during the past few weeks? What did you think of the readings? Have you seen prejudice at work?

Journal entries are a place to offer psychological analyses, show you're a keen observer of human behavior, and make creative connections between the course material and daily life. The challenge here is to see whether you can go substantially beyond the readings, DVDs, and class discussions to offer your own unique social psychological analyses and insights. In other words, rather than simply illustrating course material with examples from current affairs or your own life (as you would in a personal journal), see if you can delve deeper, take the course material beyond what you were given, and create a "journal of psychological insights." In doing so, don't be afraid to research your topic, interview other people, experiment with your life, engage in social justice activism, and/or suggest specific remedies when discussing social problems.

Each journal entry should be 2-3 typed pages, double-spaced with 12-point font and one-inch margins. Anything related to the course is fair game: insights about yourself or others, social observations, commentaries on the readings or class discussions, etc. (given the 3-page limit, though, it's generally best to pick one central theme). Each journal entry should apply social psychology to the topic at hand, and each should be followed with a "Springboards for Discussion" page containing a few questions for class discussion (ideally, on the topic being covered in class the day that journal entries are due). Also, be sure to include an essay title and page numbers.

Journal entries will be graded primarily on the basis of creativity and critical thinking, but variety and style will also be considered. That is, entries should not become repetitive (e.g., month after month of research critiques), and they should not be sloppy. To prevent sloppiness, spell-check your paper and proofread the printed version for typos. The grading for each journal entry will range from 0-5 points along the following scale:
Final Paper

Final papers should be 10-15 typed, double-spaced pages (including references) and are due no later than 2:00 pm, Tuesday, May 10th (5 points will be deducted for each day the paper is late, except in the event of a health problem or family emergency). You are free to choose any paper topic that shows original, creative, and insightful thinking about prejudice and discrimination. Here are a few sample topics that would be appropriate:

Topic #1: Do something novel that succeeds in reducing prejudice or discrimination, and write about what you did. What were the psychological principles that made it work? Could others do what you did? How could your idea be further improved?

Topic #2: Create an original classroom activity, student assignment, web demonstration, tutorial, or other pedagogical resource that promotes social justice at the same time that it teaches about psychology. Then write a paper describing it and explaining the psychological principles involved.

Topic #3: Write a paper that compares the common psychological mechanisms involved in two different forms of discrimination (e.g., sexism and racism, hererosexism and animal abuse). Cite relevant psychological research whenever possible, following a format similar to that found in psychology journals.

Topic #4: Watch at least three minutes of video clips within each of the subcategories listed on UnderstandingPrejudice.org/links/animals.htm#videos (or, if you prefer, Peaceable Kingdom, a 2004 documentary on library reserve) and discuss: (a) whether the animal use you observe involves prejudice, (b) the relation between animal cruelty and biases against human outgroups, and (c) effective ways to reduce speciesism.

Topic #5: Analyze the role of prejudice in one or more international conflicts, such as the wars in Iraq and/or Afghanistan, the war on terrorism, or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Then see if you can use social psychology to generate specific practical suggestions for U.S. citizens who would like to help bring about peace.

Note: At the beginning of our April 25th class session, please submit a tentative paper title and a typed one-paragraph description of the paper you intend to write.
Class Presentations

What if you stood before the United Nations, with TV cameras and translators at the ready? What words of wisdom would you have to share on the topic of prejudice? On our last class, we'll hold a roundtable session in which each student delivers a 5-minute talk on the topic of prejudice and discrimination. This talk should: (1) draw upon what you've learned during the semester; (2) show your ability to think independently, deeply, and creatively by going beyond simple summaries of course material; and (3) be designed to have a lasting effect on your listeners -- to change their views or behavior (Hint: Use vivid, memorable material rather than abstract generalities). After the talks, I'll collect a typewritten copy of your presentation, and we'll hold a final class discussion.

Grading -- The distribution of final grades for this seminar is similar to that of other classes, but the grading will not follow arbitrary cutoffs determined in advance (e.g., 92%=A). Rather, grades will be based on previous norms for this class as well as my subjective judgment of where the grade cutoffs should most reasonably be drawn. Four components will enter into your grade:

(1) Class participation -- worth 30 points
(2) Journal entries -- worth 20 points (5 points each)
(3) Final class presentation -- worth 20 points
(4) Final paper -- worth 30 points

Note: As with many seminars, half of your grade will be determined from assignments at the end of the semester. Although this method of grading makes it difficult to project what your final grade will be, the advantage is that it ultimately yields the fairest grades (because it measures course mastery after all class material has been presented, rather than part way through).

Laptops and Special Needs -- Laptops are permitted, but studies suggest that they lower student performance and grades (e.g., from surfing the web in class, answering email, and multitasking), so I'd advise against bringing one unless you absolutely need it. Also, if you have a disability or any special needs, please notify me and the Dean's Office during the first week of the semester, and I'll do my best to accommodate them. I'm committed to creating the most inclusive and supportive learning environment possible, and it's Wesleyan's policy to:

...provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. Students, however, are responsible for registering with Disabilities Services, in addition to making requests known to me in a timely manner. If you require accommodations in this class, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, so that appropriate arrangements can be made. The procedures for registering with Disabilities Services can be found at: www.wesleyan.edu/deans/disability-students.html

Honor Code -- Please read the Wesleyan Honor Code and abide by it closely (a copy is posted at http://www.wesleyan.edu/studenthandbook/3_honorsystem.html). All papers, journal entries, and presentations for this class must be original -- not reprinted, excerpted, or adapted from existing work (e.g., papers for other classes, books, articles, web pages). Similarly, any text, tables, figures, or images reproduced from other sources must include clear reference citations, and all quoted passages must use quotation marks to indicate that they are quotations. If you're not sure about how to reference something, please ask me rather than running a risk of violating Wesleyan's Honor Code.
Statement on
Course Organization & Philosophy

Organization: In the first session, students will create a baseline record of their attitudes toward prejudice and discrimination, and they'll begin the process of getting to know each other. Next, the course will examine several psychological factors that promote and maintain prejudice and discrimination. This examination will begin at a general, decontextualized level, but it will soon move to consider the unique political, historical, cultural, and economic factors involved in specific forms of prejudice. After this micro-analysis of specific forms of prejudice, the course will then draw back for a final look at the macro level, emphasizing interconnections and common themes. In the final two sessions, students will also be able to review their baseline attitudes and see how their perspectives have changed during the semester.

Philosophy: There is no single best method for learning about prejudice, no simple road map to take us where we need to go with this subject material. Hence, we'll work to build an understanding of prejudice together. My responsibilities will be to: (1) structure the course; (2) select thought-provoking discussion topics, readings, and DVDs; (3) facilitate the seminar discussions; and (4) make myself available to you. Your responsibilities will be to: (1) complete all the required readings before we meet, (2) attend and participate fully in every session, and (3) reflect deeply on the course material.

A core assumption of this course is that there is no way to have a deep understanding of prejudice without first having a deep understanding of yourself. Accordingly, we'll use our own prejudices as a vehicle for understanding the prejudices of other people. Because this type of exploration is not as safe as the standard approach to studying prejudice, we will need to: (1) create a comfortable climate for discussion and dissent, (2) maintain strict confidentiality with any personal material shared in the seminar, and (3) treat each other with respect, regardless of whatever differences we may have in opinion or lifestyle choices. If we cherish the ideals of tolerance and diversity, the best place to begin is with this seminar.
Tentative Course Outline and Readings

**NOTE:** Required readings are marked with ▶ and should be read before the session they appear under (UPD = *Understanding Prejudice and Discrimination*). All DVDs, web sites, and other items are simply provided in case you’re interested in learning more about a topic.

**JANUARY 24 -- COURSE OVERVIEW, SURVEYS, AND SLIDE TOUR OF PREJUDICE**

**JANUARY 31 -- THE ROOT OF IT ALL: A PSYCHOLOGICAL OVERVIEW**

▶ Preface (pp. ix-xiii, *UPD*)
▶ Glossaries I and II (pp. 557-560, *UPD*)
▶ Section I. *Homo Stereotypus*: Wired for Trouble (*UPD*)
In-Class Demonstration: *The Mechanics of Stereotyping and Segregation*
In-Class Video: *Race: The Power of an Illusion* [28 minutes, edited]

-----------------------------

**FEBRUARY 7 -- STIGMAS OLD AND NEW**

⇒ Journal Entry #1 Due

▶ Section II. Stigmatization (*UPD*)
In-Class Video: *Coming to Terms* [9 minutes, edited]
In-Class Video: *Little People* [42 minutes, edited]
In-Class DVD: *Larger Than Life: A Cinematic Portrait of Michael Q. Schmidt* [5 minutes]

-----------------------------

**FEBRUARY 14 -- HISTORIC FORMS OF RACISM**

▶ Section III. Racism Then (*UPD*)
In-Class Video: *A Time for Justice* [38 minutes]
In-Class Video: *Martin Luther King "I Have a Dream" Speech* [17 minutes]
In-Class Video: *Right America: Feeling Wronged* [7 minutes, edited]
Recommended Video: *The Life and Times of Sara Baartman: The Hottentot Venus* (1998, 52 minutes)

-----------------------------

**FEBRUARY 21 -- CONTEMPORARY FORMS OF RACISM**

▶ Section IV. Racism Now (*UPD*)
In-Class Video: *Unnatural Causes: In Sickness and in Wealth* [13 minutes, edited]
FEBRUARY 28 -- THE CHANGING FACE OF SEXISM
➤ Journal Entry #2 Due

➤ Section V. Sexism (UPD)
In-Class Video: Gender Equity in Health Care [3 minutes]
In-Class Video: Killing Us Softly 4 [45 minutes]
In-Class Video: The Pornography of Everyday Life [13 minutes, edited]

MARCH 7 AND 14-- SPRING BREAK!

MARCH 21 -- ANTISEMITISM AND THE HOLOCAUST

➤ Section VI. Antisemitism: Peering into the Void (UPD)
In-Class Video: Interview with Raul Hilberg [11 minutes, edited]
In-Class Video: America and the Holocaust: Deceit and Indifference [71 minutes, edited]

MARCH 28 -- GENOCIDE HERE AT HOME
➤ Journal Entry #3 Due

➤ Section VII. It Could Never Happen Here: Genocide in America (UPD)
In-Class Video: The Canary Effect [65 minutes]
In-Class DVD: Lou Dobbs Tonight [4 minutes, edited]

Recommended Periodicals:

News from Indian Country (Native American newspaper -- see http://www.indiancountrynews.com)
Native Peoples Magazine (widely read national magazine -- see http://www.nativepeoples.com)

APRIL 4 -- HETEROSEXISM AND TRANSGENDER BIAS

➤ Section VIII. Heterosexism (UPD)
In-Class DVD: Middle Sexes: Redefining He and She [32 minutes, edited]

Recommended Videos:

Coming Out Under Fire (70 minutes) -- award-winning history of gays in the U.S. military
Get Real (111 minutes) -- British film about what it's like to be a closeted gay 16-year-old
Celluloid Closet (102 minutes) -- shows how homosexuality has been presented in film
APRIL 11 -- SPECIESISM: PREJUDICE OR POLITICAL CORRECTNESS?

► Appendix. Animals as an Outgroup (UPD)
In-Class Video: Bucking the Myth [6 minutes]
In-Class DVD: Meet Your Meat [12 minutes]
In-Class Video: The Animals Film [9 minutes, edited]
In-Class Video: A Cow at My Table [8 minutes, edited]
In-Class Video: The Witness [2 minutes, edited]

APRIL 18 -- INTERBEING: THIS IS LIKE THIS, BECAUSE THAT IS LIKE THAT
► Journal Entry #4 Due

► Section IX. Making Connections (UPD)
In-Class Video: The Practice of Peace [13 minutes, edited]
In-Class Video: Unnatural Causes: Place Matters [19 minutes, edited]
Recommended Web Site: http://www.parallax.org/ (Parallax Press, publisher of Thich Nhat Hanh)

APRIL 25 -- CONFRONTING PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION: WHAT THEN MUST WE DO?
► Deadline for Typed Title and One-Paragraph Description of Paper Topic

► Section X. Reducing Prejudice (UPD)

MAY 2 -- REFLECTIONS AND CONNECTIONS
► Turn in Typed Copy of Your Presentation and a Future Reading or Video Title
► Deadline for Final Paper is at 2:00 pm, May 10th

Roundtable Session: 5-Minute Class Presentations