

Social Psychological Theories

Lecturer: Dr. Kate A. Ratliff

Office: Prisma 810

Email: k.a.ratliff@uvt.nl

Office Phone: (013) 466-2483

Office Hours: By Appointment

Monday Classroom: PZ-17

Thursday Classroom: WZ-202

Course Description

This is an interactive, advanced course designed to provide insights into classic and recent theories in social psychology. In addition to learning the content of each theory, you will learn how to think critically about the value and application of a theory. Particular emphasis will be placed on critically evaluating the merits and limitations of scientific findings.

Course Structure

A typical class meeting will consist of 30-45 minutes of lecture, a 15-minute break, and then class discussion for the remainder of the time. Guest lecturers will sometimes lead the class so that you have the opportunity to meet members of our department and to learn from their expertise.

Grading and Course Requirements

Weekly Reading and Discussion Questions (20% of final grade). For each class meeting students are required to read the assigned articles and to submit one discussion question inspired by the readings. Your discussion question should be submitted on Blackboard by 17.00 the day before the class meeting. Generating discussion questions should help you to think critically about the theory prior to coming to class and should help the discussion leaders in determining what the class is interested in, so it is important that you put thought into your discussion questions. Your discussion questions will count for 20% of your final grade. See the evaluation form on Page 4 for the specific criteria that will be used in grading your discussion questions.

Course Participation (10% of final grade). Attendance and punctuality are required. Each time you miss a class will cost you a ½-point reduction in your overall course grade. You are allowed to have one absence without penalty if you make prior arrangements with the instructor. You are not only required to attend the course, but also to actively participate.

Contributing to the class discussion is mandatory for this course. Meaningful, in-depth discussion is critical for learning and students are expected to be engaged and to participate fully. Your contributions will be noted and you will be evaluated by both the instructor and your peers. Your participation will count for 10% of your final grade (5% from me, 5% from your peers). See the evaluation form on Page 5 for the specific criteria that will be used in grading your participation.

Leading Class Discussion and the First Speaker Role. For each class meeting one student will be in charge of leading the class discussion and one student will be assigned the role of “first speaker”. Before class the discussion leader will organize the discussion questions as they see best and will bring a handout of the questions for each class member. If you are discussion leader for a class that has a guest lecturer, please send the handout to the guest lecturer before class begins. During class the discussion leader will facilitate the class discussion.

The best discussion leaders get classmates to answer their questions, offer opinions (often in the form of other questions) and debate one another. Avoid the tendency to dominate the discussion. As discussion leader, you should know the topic better than any other student in the class. The first speaker is responsible for getting the discussion started by answering the first question that the discussion leader raises. The first speaker should provide their answer to the question in a way that generates further questions and conversation, not in a way that suggests their answer is the final answer. Your performance as the discussion leader or first speaker will be used to round your final grade up or down where necessary.

Writing Assignments (70% of final grade). Students are required to complete seven short critical reaction papers during the course of the semester (each worth 10% of your final grade). You should write two papers on topics from classes 2, 3, 4, or 5, two papers from classes 6, 7, 8, or 9, two papers from classes 10, 11, 12, or 13, and a paper for class 14 (the final class meeting). Within each section you may choose which topics you prefer to write about. Your critical reaction paper must be submitted to the instructor via email by 23.00 on the day before the class meets to talk about that topic. Please note that you are expected to do the assigned readings and to submit a thoughtful discussion question even for those topics for which you do not hand in a written assignment.

Your critique should include:

- General introduction to the theory – what are the main tenets of the theory?
- Critique of the theory – is this a “good” theory (according the criteria identified during Class 1)? What are the strong and weak points of the theory? Do the data or arguments presented support the theory? Is there an alternative theory that might better account for the evidence?
- The larger context – what is the relation (if any) with other theories? Are there real world applications of the theory?

Each assignment should be less than two double-spaced pages long (11-pt font minimum) and should follow APA format for citations. Remember that critique is the thoughtful, well-argued analysis of the merits and limitations of a piece of work; it does not necessarily mean criticism. In addition to content, your assignments will be graded on writing style. Plagiarism, even when unintentional, is a serious offense and will not be tolerated. See the evaluation form on Page 6 for the specific criteria that will be used in grading your critical reaction papers. Your papers will be returned to you with feedback within one week of submission.

Passing the Course

You will have two chances for each critical reaction paper that you submit on time. Revisions must be submitted within two weeks of receiving feedback. You may not rewrite a paper that was submitted late. In order to pass the course your average grade must be at least a 6.

Course Schedule

Class 1: Monday, August 29: What is a Theory and Why is it Important? (Kate Ratliff)

Class 2: Thursday, September 1: Automaticity (Kate Ratliff)

Class 3: Monday, September 5: Culture and the Self (Kate Ratliff)

Class 4: Thursday, September 8: Terror Management Theory (Travis Proulx; t.proulx@uvt.nl)

Class 5: Monday, September 12: The Need to Belong (Kate Ratliff)

Class 6: Thursday, September 15: Evolutionary Theory (Rob Nelissen; r.m.a.nelissen@uvt.nl)

Class 7: Monday, September 19: Happiness and Well-Being (Kate Ratliff)

Class 8: Thursday, September 22: Mood Theories (Yana Avramova; y.r.avramova@uvt.nl)

Class 9: Monday, September 26: Construal Level Theory (Colin Smith; colin.smith@ugent.be)

Class 10: Thursday, September 29: Models of Close Relationships (Kate Ratliff)

Class 11: Monday, October 3: Morality (Yoel Inbar; y.inbar@uvt.nl)

Class 12: Thursday, October 6: Ambivalent Sexism (Kate Ratliff)

Class 13: Monday, October 10: Power (Joris Lammers; j.lammers@uvt.nl)

Class 14: Monday, October 17: What is a Theory and Why is it Important? (Kate Ratliff)

Discussion Question Evaluation

At the end of the course I will evaluate each student's discussion questions (as a whole) using the rating scale below. You will receive feedback about your progress midway through the course or anytime you ask.

- **10/10--Excellent.** Always posts thoughtful, insightful questions that prompt theory-relevant discussion. Always integrates the assigned articles and asks questions about the “bigger picture” rather than small details. Questions always clear. Questions always contain rich and fully developed new ideas, connections, or possible applications. Questions always submitted on time and with no grammatical or spelling errors.
- **8/10--Good.** Mostly posts thoughtful, insightful questions that prompt theory-relevant discussion. Mostly integrates the assigned articles and asks questions about the “bigger picture” rather than small details. Questions always clear. Questions mostly contain rich and fully developed new ideas, connections, or possible applications. Questions always submitted on time and with few grammatical or spelling errors.
- **6/10--Satisfactory.** Sometimes posts thoughtful, insightful questions that prompt theory-relevant discussion but sometimes the questions are weak and commonplace. Sometimes integrates the assigned articles and asks questions about the “bigger picture” but other times the questions concern minor or irrelevant details of a specific article. Questions sometimes clear. Questions make limited connections, and those are often cast in the form of vague generalities. Questions contain few new ideas or possible applications, but instead are often a rehashing or summary of other questions. Questions often seem commonplace, obvious, or off-topic. Questions mostly submitted on time and with some grammatical or spelling errors.
- **4/10--Poor.** Like the satisfactory questions, but the problems are more serious or more frequent. Questions often submitted late and with frequent grammatical or spelling errors.
- **2/10--Fail.** Shows obviously minimal lack of effort. Questions frequently submitted late or not submitted at all.

Class Participation Evaluation

At the end of the course I will evaluate each student's class participation using the rating scale below. You will receive feedback about your progress midway through the course or anytime you ask. Additionally, each student will be required to evaluate a subset of their classmates at the end of the course using the same scale.

- *5/5-Excellent.* Listens attentively and is engaged in class discussion. Talks in such a way that the conversation is moved forward productively by adding new information about the topic, disputing or questioning points under discussion, changing the topic when appropriate, noting exceptions, and/or providing observations from personal experience. Varies the type of contribution to discussion (e.g., factual statements, personal observations, etc.). Acknowledges and confirms the contributions of others by restating or referring to their points, asking for clarification, respectfully disagreeing with them. Is sensitive to the dynamics of the group, actively works to keep the discussion productive so that learning can occur and encourages others to contribute.
- *4/5-Good.* Listens attentively. Talks in such a way that discussion goes forward by adding new information, questioning or disputing, changing topic when appropriate, noting exceptions, and/or providing personal experience. Varies type of contribution (e.g., factual statements, personal observations, etc.). Acknowledges the contributions of others, is respectful, and does not dominate the discussion.
- *3/5-Satisfactory.* Listens attentively, but contributes infrequently. Talks with the intention of moving conversation forward (see above). Contributions may tend to one type (e.g., factual statements, personal observations, etc.) but demonstrates some sensitivity to group dynamics. Is respectful of others.
- *2/5-Poor.* Any of the following: Does not listen attentively (e.g., whispers to neighbors, reads or writes during discussion). Interrupts others. Talks extremely infrequently (e.g., less than once a day). Is limited to one type of contribution (e.g., disputing or questioning, talking from personal experience) with little sensitivity to group dynamics. Dominates conversation in a way that is resented by others.
- *1/5-Fail.* Any of the following: Talks only once or twice a week. Is disruptive. Demonstrates lack of respect for others.

Critical Reaction Paper Evaluation

Each critical reaction paper will be evaluated using the rating scale below.

- *10/10--Excellent.* Demonstrates an excellent understanding of the ideas in the assigned reading and critically evaluates/responds to those ideas in an analytical, persuasive manner. Paper has clear structure. Excellent transitions from point to point. Paragraphs support solid topic sentences. Evidence /argument used to support every point. Appropriate integration of quoted material into sentences. Avoids too much direct quotation. Analysis is interesting and exciting. Work displays critical thinking and avoids simplistic description or summary of information. All ideas in the paper flow logically; the argument is identifiable, reasonable, and sound. Author anticipates and successfully defuses counter-arguments; makes novel connections to outside material, which illuminate thesis. Creates appropriate academic tone. Sentence structure and grammar excellent. Correct use of punctuation and citation style. No spelling errors. No run-on sentences or comma splices. Uses active voice.
- *8/10--Good.* Demonstrates a good understanding of the ideas in the assigned reading and critically evaluates/responds to those ideas in a mostly analytical, persuasive manner. Generally clear structure, though may wander occasionally. May have a few unclear transitions, or a few paragraphs without strong topic sentences. Evidence /argument used to support most points. Quotes well integrated into sentences. Avoids too much direct quotation. Argument of paper is clear, usually flows logically and makes sense. Some evidence that counter-arguments acknowledged, though perhaps not addressed. Some insightful connections to outside material made. Mostly creates appropriate academic tone. Sentence structure and grammar strong. Mostly correct use of punctuation and citation style. A minor spelling error or two. May have one or two run-on sentences or comma splices. Mostly uses active voice.
- *6/10--Satisfactory.* Demonstrates a reasonable general understanding of the ideas in the assigned reading and only occasionally critically evaluates/responds to those ideas in a mostly analytical, persuasive manner. Generally unclear, often wanders or jumps around. Few or weak transitions, many paragraphs without topic sentences. Points sometimes lack supporting evidence or evidence used where inappropriate (often because there may be no clear point). Quotes may be poorly integrated into sentences or too much direct quotation. Even balance between critical thinking and description. Logic may often fail, or argument may often be unclear. May not address counter-arguments or make any outside connections. Occasionally creates appropriate tone but has some informal language or inappropriate slang. Problems in sentence structure and grammar (not major). Some errors in punctuation, citation style, and spelling. May have some run-on sentences or comma splices. Only sometimes uses active voice.
- *4/10--Poor.* Like the satisfactory paper, but the problems are more serious or more frequent.
- *2/10--Fail.* Shows obviously minimal lack of effort or comprehension of the assignment. Very difficult to understand due to major problems with mechanics, structure, and analysis. Has no identifiable arguments. Does not follow paper guidelines for length and format. Does not cite sources correctly.