

## **The Social Psychology of Inequality**

Wednesday, 4-6pm

203 Wheeler

### **Instructor: Rachel Wetts**

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OH Sign-up: Please sign up at [wejoinin.com/sheets/iagpn](http://wejoinin.com/sheets/iagpn)

OH Location: TBD

### **Course Description**

Social and economic inequality are pervasive features of societies, formal organizations, and group interactions, despite the fact that most people, in most places, express preferences for more egalitarian societies and relationships. This paradox is at the heart of this class, and arguably at the heart of much contemporary sociology. While many courses in sociology address structural systems that maintain inequality, in this class we will primarily explore the ideological and social psychological ‘face’ of power and inequality. We will ask how and why individuals (who say that they would prefer equality) nevertheless perpetuate and indeed actively support (sometimes to the point of engaging in violence) social systems that continue to allocate far greater influence and resources to certain individuals and groups than to others. In the process, we will discover that some of the same forces that can lead people to actively or implicitly support highly undesirable social systems can also lead them to engage in emancipatory collective action for social change.

We will draw from a wide range of sociological and psychological literature, from classic and contemporary social theory to sociological theories of race relations to experimental research on small-group status hierarchies. In the first part of the course, we will analyze Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem* along with a handful of social psychological studies to discover how norms, authority, and institutions interact to create situations in which normal people can perpetrate acts of extreme violence. Next, we will discuss how status processes in everyday interactions and the ideological work of political elites each contribute to the maintenance of inequality. We will then discuss political psychological theories discussing the social values, personality dimensions, and cognitive biases that lead people to justify the status quo, even (and sometimes especially) when it disadvantages them. Next, we will discuss social identity theory, politicized identity, and the promises these theories hold for collective action. Finally, we will end the course by discussing concrete applications (chosen both by myself and by each of you), so that we can see how the concepts we’ve discussed throughout the course can help us better understand the social psychological dynamics of particular social problems – and give us some tools to change them.

### **Required Texts**

- Arendt, Hannah. 2006 [1963]. *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Penguin.
- Veblen, Thorstein. 2007 [1899]. *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. Oxford University Press.
- All other texts available in the course reader and on the class bCourses page

## Grade Distribution

- *Participation* – 10%
- *Ten Reading Response Memos* – 10%
- *Original Research Project* – 80%
  - *Research Topic Proposal and Discussion* (10%)
  - *Literature Review* (20%)
  - *Methods and Data Collection Memo* (20%)
  - *Final Paper* (30%)

## Course Requirements

### *Participation – 10%*

This is a discussion-based course, led by primarily by you. I may provide some background information at the beginning of class, but the bulk of the class time will be devoted to discussion. Your questions, comments, and ideas will be the driving force of our discussions. Your participation begins with coming to class having carefully completed the readings. All of these ways of participating are valid and welcome: sharing thoughts during discussion, active listening, thoughtful preparation, asking questions in class or over email, helping a classmate understand a concept, or coming to office hours.

### *Ten Reading Response Memos – 10%*

Over the course of the semester, you will be required to turn in 10 weekly commentaries on the readings. The commentary should be no more one page long (around 500 words) and it should be organized in the following manner. First, I want you to explain something you understood from the readings. This can be a key concept, an important argument, or the broader debate the authors are engaged in. Second, I want you to mention something that you did not understand or are having difficulty grasping. There may be a passage from the reading you are struggling with or an idea that does not quite make sense to you. Finally, I want you to illustrate an aspect of the reading with an example taken from an experience of your own. For example, if we were studying Status Characteristics theory, you might describe a social interaction in which your own ability to perform up to your potential was helped or harmed by others' expectations and treatment of you, based on your social position. In this portion, you can also describe instances where the concepts we are studying failed to account for your own experiences and what other (perhaps more structural) factors were more important in understanding your experience.

You should post your comment on the course's bCourses site by Monday at 10pm each week.

### *Research project – 80%*

You will conceptualize and execute an independent research project on a topic of your choice related to how social psychological processes work to maintain systems of social and economic inequality, or how they facilitate collective action and social change. This project can be either 1) *an analysis of a particular empirical case* (e.g., a contemporary or historical social issue or social movement) using many different social psychological theories and concepts we've discussed throughout the course, or 2) can be focused on *exploring a novel theoretical question* that you've conceptualized through engagement with the course concepts, your prior coursework, and your independent social and intellectual interests.

In either case, you will engage in original empirical research designed to explore your topic of interest. For example, if you're analyzing a particular empirical case, you might interview or observe activists involved with LGBTQ issues and discuss how well theories of social identity and status concerns account for why and how they participate as they do. If you're interested in exploring a novel theoretical question, your choice of research method will largely depend on your research question. For example, if you have a specific hypothesis about how biases toward system justification affect people's desires to protest instances of injustice, you might design a survey or experiment testing your causal claims. If you're interested in exploring how racial identity and class identity interact in contemporary America, you might perform interviews with people of different racial/ethnic groups and socioeconomic positions to try to develop a novel understanding of how different social identities interact and affect one another.

Throughout the semester, you will complete smaller assignments that will ultimately comprise your final research paper. I have structured the seminar in this way so that I can offer you substantial feedback on your research in progress.

- *Research Topic Proposal and Discussion* (10%): Before the sixth class meeting, you should come to my office hours to discuss the topic or topics you are interested in pursuing for your research project. While you do not need to have done extensive background research on your topic before this meeting, you should have prepared by considering two or three empirical cases or theoretical questions that interest you, and thought about how you might perform some exploratory research on the question. You should also have thought about what kind of feedback and advice you'd most like from me (e.g., help narrowing or developing your research question, suggestions for relevant literature, brainstorming different methods you might use to research your topic, etc.).
- *Literature Review* (20%): The purpose of a literature review is to offer your readers a concise synthesis of the previous work done by others on your topic. The process of writing a literature review is also an excellent way to further develop your own understanding of the topic and discover the key tensions and unanswered questions that you will pursue. Though the literature review is not the point in your paper where you will explicitly state and explain your own thesis, it is a good way to set the paper up for making your own argument and justifying why your research is important. Therefore, this second assignment will encourage you to prepare yourself to become a participant in the scholarly conversation on your topic by requiring that you research and write a 4-6 page summary review of the existing literature on the topic you chose. I will also distribute additional instructions and helpful tips for doing a literature review during the semester.
- *Methods and Data Collection Memo* (20%): After completing your literature review, you will have sufficient knowledge of your topic to refine your research question and develop a plan for how you will carry out your research. You can propose any research method you like (e.g., an original experiment or survey, interviews, participant observation, or analysis of pre-existing data or texts). You will be evaluated on how well the method you choose can help to answer or explore the research question or empirical case of your choice. Keeping in mind that you will have about a month until you submit your final paper, you should also include a timeline of how and when you will collect and analyze your data. Again, I will distribute additional instructions during the semester, and you are strongly encouraged to talk to me about your choice of research method in office hours.
- *Final Paper* (30%): Your final paper will consist of polished versions of your literature review and methods assignments as well as a discussion of the findings of your own research. I will offer you written feedback on each of your shorter written assignments. As you address this feedback, continue

your research, and learn more about your topic throughout the semester, you will edit and compile these shorter assignments into the first part of your final paper. The second part of your final paper will be a discussion of the findings from your original research, and a conclusions section where you explore the practical and academic implications of your findings, including 1) how your research connects with, challenges, or adds new insight to the existing literature you described in your literature review and 2) what your research might suggest about social change strategies for dealing with the issue you discuss. The end result will be a 13-17 page, double-spaced, polished paper due the first day of Finals Period (Monday, December 14<sup>th</sup>).

**Course Schedule – Overview:**

<b>Session</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Session 1	Aug 26	Introduction and Overview	
<i>Part 1: Norms, Authority, and Social Organization in the Tolerance of Injustice</i>			
Session 2	Sept 2	The Banality (and Social Organization) of Evil	
Session 3	Sept 9	The Banality (and Social Organization) of Evil, continued	
Session 4	Sept 16	Authority, Norms, and Conformity in Perpetuating the Status Quo	
<i>Part 2: Status, Stereotypes, and Elites in the Maintenance of Hierarchy – and in Facilitating Collective Action</i>			
Session 5	Sept 23	Everyday Interactions in the Maintenance of Stereotypes and Status Hierarchies	This week has a relatively light reading load. The next week has a particularly heavy reading load. Plan ahead!
Session 6	Sept 30	Status Concerns and Consumption in Maintaining Class Hierarchies	<b>Last Week for Topic Proposal &amp; Discussion</b>
Session 7	Oct 7	Status Concerns in the Maintenance of Group Hierarchies – and in Promoting Collective Action	
<i>Part 3: The Political Psychology of the Status Quo</i>			
Session 8	Oct 14	Personality and Value Theories of Political Attitudes	<b>Literature Review Due in Class</b>
Session 9	Oct 21	Universal Biases toward Justification of Inequality	
<i>Part 4: Social Identity Theory and the Promise of Collective Action</i>			
Session 10	Oct 28	Social Identity Theory: Overview and Related Theories	
Session 11	Nov 4	Politicized Identity and Collective Action	<b>Methods and Data Collection Report Due in Class</b>
	Nov 11	No class.	
Session 12	Nov 18	Applications: Environment	
	Nov 25	No class. Enjoy the holiday!	
<i>Part 5: Applications and Synthesis</i>			
Session 13	Dec 2	Student-Chosen Applications and Synthesis	
	Dec 9	Reading Period.	I'll hold office hours during our scheduled class time.
	Dec 14	Turn in final projects to my box in 410 Barrows Hall by 2pm on Monday, December 14.	<b>Final Project Due</b>

## **Course Schedule – Weekly Topics and Readings:**

### **Week 1: Introduction and Overview**

- No readings

## **Part 1: Norms, Authority, and Social Organization in the Tolerance of Injustice**

### **Weeks 2-3: The Banality (and Social Organization) of Evil**

- Week 2:
  - Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (Chapters 1 – 6)
- Week 3:
  - *Eichmann in Jerusalem* continued (Chapters 7-8 and selected passages below)
    - The case of Denmark (pgs. 171-175)
    - The court's judgment of Eichmann (pgs. 244-252)
    - "Crimes against humanity" and Arendt's judgment of Eichmann (pgs. 267 – 279)
    - Arendt's elaboration on the banality of evil (pgs. 287-298)

### **Week 4: Authority, Norms, and Conformity in Perpetuating the Status Quo**

- Zimbardo, Philip. 2004. "A Situationist Perspective on the Psychology of Evil: Understanding How Good People Are Transformed Into Perpetrators." In A.G. Miller, ed., *The Social Psychology of Good and Evil*.
  - Read pgs. 1-10 (up to "Environmental Anonymity" section)
- Prentice, Deborah and Dale Miller. 1993. "Pluralistic Ignorance and Alcohol Use on Campus: Some Consequences of Misperceiving the Social Norm." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 64: 243-256.
- Willer, Robb, Ko Kuwabara, and Michael W. Macy. 2009. "The False Enforcement of Unpopular Norms." *American Journal of Sociology*. 115:451-490.

#### Recommended readings:

- Lovaglia, Michael. 2003. "From Summer Camps to Glass Ceilings: The Power of Experiments." *Contexts*. 2: 42-49. (Strongly recommended for students with limited prior exposure to social psychology)
- Milgram, Stanley. "Some Conditions of Obedience and Disobedience to Authority," *Human Relations* 18: 57-76, 1965. CR
- Asch, Solomon E. "Opinions and social pressure." *Readings about the social animal* 193 (1955): 17-26.

## **Part 2: Status, Stereotypes, and Elites in the Maintenance of Hierarchy – and in Facilitating Collective Action**

### **Week 5: Everyday Interactions in the Maintenance of Stereotypes and Status Hierarchies**

- Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, pgs. 1 – 51

- Berger, Joseph., Susan J. Rosenholtz, and Morris Zelditch, Jr. 1980. "Status Organizing Processes." *Annual Review of Sociology*, 6, 479-508.
- Note: You might want to get ahead on the readings for next week. It is a particularly heavy reading load!

Recommended readings:

- Magee, Joe C. and Adam D. Galinsky. 2008. "Social Hierarchy: The Self-Reinforcing Nature of Power and Status." In *The Academy of Management Annals*.
- Rudman, L. A., & Fairchild, K. (2004). Reactions to counterstereotypic behavior: the role of backlash in cultural stereotype maintenance. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 87(2), 157.
- Steele, Claude M., and Joshua Aronson. "Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans." *Journal of personality and social psychology* 69.5 (1995): 797.
- Ridgeway, C. L., Boyle, E. H., Kuipers, K. J., & Robinson, D. T. (1998). "How Do Status Beliefs Develop? The Role of Resources and Interactional Experience." *American Sociological Review*, 331-350.

### **Week 6: Status Concerns and Consumption in Maintaining Class Hierarchies**

- Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class*, Introduction through Chapter 6 + Chapter 8

Recommended reading:

- Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), Introduction, part of Ch. 1, and Conclusion (pp. 1-63 and 466-484).

**\*\*Last week to come see me in office hours for Topic Proposal and Discussion**

### **Week 7: Status Concerns in the Maintenance of Group Hierarchies – and in Promoting Collective Action**

- Blumer, H. (1958). "Race Prejudice as a Sense of Group Position." *The Pacific Sociological Review*, 1 (1): 3-7.
- Gusfield, J. R. (1986). *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement*. University of Illinois Press. Introduction and Chapter 1.
- Griskevicius, Vladas, Joshua M. Tybur, and Bram Van den Bergh. 2010. "Going Green to be Seen: Status, Reputation, and Conspicuous Conservation." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 98:392-404.
- Willer, Robb. 2009. "Groups Reward Individual Sacrifice: The Status Solution to the Collective Action Problem." *American Sociological Review*.

Recommended reading (i.e., shameless self-promotion):

- Wetts, Rachel, and Robb Willer. 2015. "Anxiety and Austerity: A Group Position Account of White Americans' Opposition to Welfare." Working paper. University of California. Berkeley, CA. (Focus on Introduction, Literature Review and General Discussion)

### **Part 3: The Political Psychology of the Status Quo**

#### **Week 8: Personality and Value Theories of Political Attitudes**

- Jost, John T., Jack Glaser, Arie W. Kruglanski, and Frank J. Sulloway. 2003. "Political Conservatism as Motivated Social Cognition." *Psychological Bulletin* 129(3): 339-375.
  - This is a dense article summarizing diverse social psychological theories and reviewing many different empirical studies. Try to focus on understanding their larger theoretical argument (i.e., on getting a grasp on what they argue are the underlying motivations that lead people to adopt conservative ideologies) and pay less attention to the details. For example, feel free to skim discussions of particular study methods or results.
- Graham, Jesse, Jonathan Haidt, & Brian A. Nosek. 2009. "Liberals and conservatives rely on different sets of moral foundations." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 96(5), 1029 - 1046.

Recommended readings:

- Feldman, Stanley. 2003. "Enforcing Social Conformity: A Theory of Authoritarianism." *Political Psychology* 24: 46-74. (Start reading at the section titled, "A New Conceptualization")
- Martin, John Levi. 2001. "The Authoritarian Personality, 50 Years Later: What Questions Are There for Political Psychology?" *Political Psychology*, 22(1), 1-26.

**\*\*Literature Review Due in Class**

#### **Week 9: Universal Biases toward Justification of Inequality**

- Lerner, Melvin J. 2002. "Pursuing the Justice Motive." (Short excerpt) In M. Ross and D. T. Miller (Eds.), *The Justice Motive in Everyday Life*. (pp. 10-12). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
  - Read up to section entitled "Justice Takes More Forms than 'Equity.'"
- Hafer, Carolyn L. 2002. "Why We Reject Innocent Victims." In M. Ross and D. T. Miller (Eds.), *The Justice Motive in Everyday Life*. (pp. 109-126). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
  - Note: If you are reading this on bCourses, the pdf I have posted includes several chapters from the book in addition to the assigned chapter. You only need to read the first, assigned chapter.
- Jost, John T., and Mahzarin R. Banaji. 1994. "The role of stereotyping in system-justification and the production of false consciousness." *British Journal of Social Psychology* 33, no. 1: 1-27.

### **Part 4: Social Identity Theory and the Promise of Collective Action**

#### **Week 10: Social Identity Theory: Overview and Related Theories**

- Tajfel, Henri and John C. Turner. 1986. "A Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behaviour." In S. Worchel & W.G. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 7-24). Chicago: Nelson-Hall.

- Bettencourt, B., Kelly Charlton, Nancy Dorr, and Deborah L. Hume. 2001. "Status differences and in-group bias: a meta-analytic examination of the effects of status stability, status legitimacy, and group permeability." *Psychological bulletin* 127, no. 4. Selected portions:
  - Introduction and review of literature (pgs. 520-525, up to section entitled "Summary and Overview")
- Ethier, Kathleen A., and Kay Deaux. 1994. "Negotiating social identity when contexts change: Maintaining identification and responding to threat." *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 67(2), 243 - 251.

### **Week 11: Politicized Identity and Collective Action**

- Simon, Bernd, and Bert Klandermans. 2001. "Politicized collective identity: A social psychological analysis." *American Psychologist*, 56(4), 319-331.
- Elizabeth A. Armstrong. 2002. *Forging Gay Identities: Organizing Sexuality in San Francisco, 1950-1994* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press). Selected portions:
  - Chapter 2 and most of Chapter 3 (pgs 31 – 75).

**\*\*Methods and Data Collection Report due in class**

**\*\*November 11 is an academic holiday. Don't come to class! We won't be here!\*\***

### **Part 5: Applications and Synthesis**

#### **Week 12: Applications: Environment**

- Cialdini, Robert B. (2003) "Crafting Normative Messages to Protect the Environment." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 12, no. 4: 105-109.
- Feinberg, Matthew, and Robb Willer. (2010) "Apocalypse soon? Dire messages reduce belief in global warming by contradicting just-world beliefs." *Psychological Science*, 34-38.
- Feinberg, Matthew, and Robb Willer. (2013) "The moral roots of environmental attitudes." *Psychological science* 24, no. 1: 56-62.
- Review "Going Green to be Seen" (Week 7)

**\*\*No class on November 25<sup>th</sup> for Thanksgiving break. Enjoy the holiday!\*\***

#### **Week 13: Student-Chosen Applications and Synthesis**

- Find and read at least two articles on a social problem or social movement of your choice that incorporates social psychological concepts (such as status, identities, norms, and status quo biases) to better understand the dynamics of the issue/movement. Be prepared to share what you read with the rest of the class.
- If you are analyzing a particular case for your research project, you can also use this opportunity to discuss the case and your analysis of it with your peers for their feedback.