Psychology 945
Special Topics in Social Psychology - Judgment and Decision-Making
Winter 2026

Basics
My Office: Craine 320
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Office Hours: by appointment
Required Texts will be provided in onQ

Course Overview:
The goal of this course is to acquaint students with classic and current issues in social judgment and decision-making. The course will also focus on developing students' ability to critically evaluate theory and research and to formulate fruitful, original research ideas. Each week, students will be expected to read several pieces on a topic in judgment and decision-making, write reaction papers, and participate in classroom discussion. Towards the end of the semester, students will develop a study that applies some aspect of judgment and decision making to their area of research interest. Students will present their hypotheses and project designs in class for workshopping before writing a research paper on their proposed study as a final project.

Assignments and Evaluation:
Weekly reaction papers and discussion questions (25%). Each week you will submit a 1 to 2 page (double spaced) reaction paper. These are designed to help you organize your thoughts for the class discussion and to help us identify the questions and issues that are most interesting to the class. You can use the papers to:

> Relate the readings to other points that have come up in class discussions or topics in previous weeks.
>
> Relate the readings to your own research.
>
> Point out problems with the theory or methods in the readings, or contradictions between these readings and other ideas that have come up in the course. Be curious and constructive, not nasty.

Please do not merely summarize the content of the paper as your reaction paper. I've read the papers; a summary of what's in them does not help me. Additionally, please do not use ChatGPT or other LLM tools to generate your reaction papers.

As part of your papers, you should draft **two questions or issues** to raise to the class. These should be well thought-out questions that really interest you, as they will be our guide to structuring the discussion. In class, I will call on some of you to pose your questions/points, so make sure they are clear in your own mind. I realize that some of you will find some weeks' topics more interesting that others, so if a topic is particularly important to you, make a note at the beginning of paper, so that I can make sure your issues are covered in the discussion.

Reaction papers and discussion questions are due by midnight every Monday prior to class so that I can review them on Tuesday and plan accordingly. Because class activities depend upon reaction papers, extensions are not permitted.

Class participation (25%). The quality of this course depends critically on our ability to generate illuminating discussions of the readings and topic as a whole. So you will be evaluated at the end of the year on the degree to which you contributed to and were an active participant in classroom discussions.

Sometimes we may range way beyond what was included in the readings, and you should let this stimulate you, not feel that you have to stick to the readings or the questions you handed in. If an exciting discussion develops that has little to do with what you said in your reaction papers, that's fine with me.

Note that if you do not attend, you cannot participate. Thus, part of participation is i) actually coming to class and ii) being actively-, physically-, and mentally-present and engaged (not on your computer the whole time online shopping). Participate thoughtfully and enjoy the opportunity to engage with your peers!

Research presentation (25%). Towards the end of the semester, you will present a novel research idea in class that proposes one to two original studies addressing some topic related to judgment and decision making, synthesizing theory and material from the course and your own research interests. The topic may also incorporate other issues in judgment and decision-making that were not covered by the class. As long as you have an answer to the question "how does this involve judgment or decision-making," you are good. **Students are strongly encouraged to run their topic ideas by the instructor for approval.**

The goal of this research presentation is for students to get feedback on their ideas. Think of it as more of a lab meeting presentation than a brownbag or conference presentation. Discuss the background for the hypothesis, conceptual rationale, proposed methods, and expected results. Try to do all of this in 5 to 10 minutes (depending upon how many students we have presenting). The audience will help workshop the idea in order to help the presenter form a more valid, fruitful, and theoretically-interesting proposal.

Final research proposal (25%). As a final project, students are to write a research proposal for their idea (10 to 20 double spaced pages of main text - excluding title page, abstract, and references). Proposals should include a title page, abstract, conceptual rationale for the proposed project, a description of the proposed methods for the study, a description of the expected results, a discussion of the implications of the expected results, and references. This proposal will be due sometime during the Final Exam period (due date will be determined later).

In developing the conceptual rationale for your proposal, try to develop ideas that address unanswered questions in the literature, shed light on new ways of thinking about how humans think, test the predictive validity of competing theoretical accounts, provide a scientific explanation for a funny quirk of thinking that seems to happen in everyday life, or tests the decision-making implications of something with real-world importance.

Avoid developing ideas that simply cross X with Y because no one has crossed those two variables before. As a rule of thumb, if I ask you "why is this study important?", your answer should not be "because no one has looked at this before." If that's the case, you need to spend more time developing the conceptual rationale. Maybe the reason why no one has looked at it before was because it wasn't all that interesting. In academia, a good research question with a poor method for testing it beats a poor question with a good method for testing it. Good

questions are remembered, discussed, and perpetuated, so this exercise is aimed at helping you develop good questions.

That said, don't overlook your method section in this paper. The best papers combine good questions with good methods. You should describe your proposed method thoroughly enough that you could use your proposal method section for a pre-registration of the study (see www.aspredicted.org).

Notes:

Computers and electronics in class. I recognize the benefit of being able to take notes and annotate papers using your laptop. Therefore, at the grad level, I won't expressly prohibit using these tools. However, one of the benefits of this class is being able to interact with your peers and engage in fruitful discussion on the topic, which laptops often inhibit. Also, research demonstrates that cognitive performance suffers dramatically with multi-tasking (but the multitasker isn't usually aware of the detrimental effect). **Texting, gaming, online shopping, and the like are obviously not appropriate behavior during class discussions.**

Changes. The syllabus and/or course schedule may be modified in extreme circumstances at my discretion. I will announce changes in class or via email.

Accommodations. Queen's University is committed to achieving full accessibility for persons with disabilities. Part of this commitment includes arranging academic accommodations for students with disabilities to ensure they have an equitable opportunity to participate in all of their academic activities. If you are a student with a disability and think you may need accommodations, you are strongly encouraged to contact Student Wellness Services (SWS) and register as early as possible. For more information, including important deadlines, please visit the Student Wellness website at: http://www.queensu.ca/studentwellness/accessibility-services/

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academic integrity forms a foundation for the "freedom of inquiry and exchange of ideas" essential to the intellectual life of the University.

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Late assignment and extension policy:
A late final proposal paper will be penalized a full letter grade per day. The paper will not be accepted more than one week after it is due.

Course Schedule:

Jan 7 – intros, syllabus, opening exercises

Jan 14 – the classics

Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. (Chapters 1, 2, and 3; pp 19-49).

Tversky, A., & Kahneman, D. (1981). The framing of decisions and the psychology of choice. *Science*, *211*(4481), 453-458.

Kahneman, D., & Tversky, A. (1979). Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision under Risk. *Econometrica: Journal of the Econometric Society*, 263-291.

Tversky, A., & Kahneman, D. (1974). Judgment under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases. *Science*, *185*(4157), 1124-1131.

Jan 21 – twists on the classics – heuristics as adaptive / naturalistic

Gigerenzer, G., & Goldstein, D. G. (1996). Reasoning the fast and frugal way: models of bounded rationality. *Psychological review*, *103*(4), 650.

Gigerenzer, G., & Gaissmaier, W. (2011). Heuristic decision making. *Annual review of psychology*, *62*(2011), 451-482.

Dawes, R. M. (1979). The robust beauty of improper linear models in decision making. *American Psychologist*, *34*(7).

Klein, G. (2015). A naturalistic decision making perspective on studying intuitive decision making. *Journal of applied research in memory and cognition*, *4*(3), 164-168.

Jan 28 – Motivated reasoning

Jefferson, H., Neuner, F. G., & Pasek, J. (2020). Seeing blue in black and white: Race and perceptions of officer-involved shootings. *Perspectives on Politics*, 1-19.

Kahan, D. M., Peters, E., Dawson, E. C., & Slovic, P. (2017). Motivated numeracy and enlightened self-government. *Behavioural Public Policy*, *1*(1), 54-86.

Kunda, Z. (1990). The case for motivated reasoning. *Psychological bulletin*, *108*(3), 480.

Lord, C. G., Ross, L., & Lepper, M. R. (1979). Biased assimilation and attitude polarization: The effects of prior theories on subsequently considered evidence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 37*(11), 2098-2109.

Feb 4 – overconfidence

Dunning, D. (2011). The Dunning–Kruger effect: On being ignorant of one's own ignorance. In *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 44, pp. 247-296). Academic Press.

Sanchez, C., & Dunning, D. (2021). Jumping to conclusions: Implications for reasoning errors, false belief, knowledge corruption, and impeded learning. Journal of personality and social psychology, 120(3), 789.

Sanchez, C., & Dunning, D. (2018). Overconfidence among beginners: Is a little learning a dangerous thing?. *Journal of personality and Social Psychology*, *114*(1), 10.

Moore, D. A., & Healy, P. J. (2008). The trouble with overconfidence. *Psychological review*, *115*(2), 502.

Feb 11 – self-enhancement

Pronin, E., Lin, D. Y., & Ross, L. (2002). The bias blind spot: Perceptions of bias in self versus others. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *28*(3), 369-381.

Peetz, J., & Wilson, A. E. (2008). The temporally extended self: The relation of past and future selves to current identity, motivation, and goal pursuit. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, *2*(6), 2090-2106.
O'Brien, E., & Kardas, M. (2016). The implicit meaning of (my) change. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 111(6), 882-894.
Sedikides, C., & Gregg, A. P. (2007). Portraits of the self. *Sage handbook of social psychology*, 93-122.

Feb 18 – Winter reading week, no class.

Feb 25 – no class

March 4 – advanced lessons in cognitive accessibility (priming)

Higgins, E. T. (1996). Knowledge activation: Accessibility, applicability and salience. *Social psychology: Handbook of basic principles*, 133-168.
Schwarz, N., & Bless, H. (1992). Scandals and the public's trust in politicians: Assimilation and contrast effects. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *18*(5), 574-579.
Bless, H., & Schwarz, N. (2010). Mental construal and the emergence of assimilation and contrast effects: The inclusion/exclusion model. In *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 42, pp. 319-373). Academic Press.
Oyserman, D. (2011). Culture as situated cognition: Cultural mindsets, cultural fluency, and meaning making. *European review of social psychology*, *22*(1), 164-214.

March 11 – feelings as information

Loewenstein, G., & Lerner, J. S. (2003). The role of affect in decision making. *Handbook of affective science*, *619*(642), 3.
Schwarz, N., & Clore, G. L. (1983). Mood, misattribution, and judgments of well-being: informative and directive functions of affective states. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *45*(3), 513.
Alter, A. L., & Oppenheimer, D. M. (2009). Uniting the tribes of fluency to form a metacognitive nation. *Personality and social psychology review*, *13*(3), 219-235.
Lerner, J. S., Small, D. A., & Loewenstein, G. (2004). Heart strings and purse strings: Carryover effects of emotions on economic decisions. *Psychological science*, *15*(5), 337-341.

March 18 – language

Keysar, B., Hayakawa, S. L., & An, S. G. (2012). The foreign-language effect: Thinking in a foreign tongue reduces decision biases. *Psychological science*, *23*(6), 661-668.
Hauser, D. J., & Schwarz, N. (2016). Semantic prosody and judgment. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, *145*(7), 882.
Fausey, C. M., & Boroditsky, L. (2010). Subtle linguistic cues influence perceived blame and financial liability. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, *17*(5), 644-650.
Thibodeau, P. H., & Boroditsky, L. (2011). Metaphors we think with: The role of metaphor in reasoning. *PloS one*, *6*(2), e16782.

March 25 – research proposal presentations and workshopping day 1

April 1 - research proposal presentations and workshopping day 2

Questions to consider for each reading and to guide your reaction papers and discussion questions:

These questions can guide your thinking about the empirical readings. They are the kind of questions you should always have in mind when you read research reports. As you'll notice over the course of the semester, there is no "perfect" study -- there's always some room for improvement and once the findings are in, everybody is smarter in hindsight.

Things to think about when reading empirical papers:

Introduction: Theory & predictions

- What problem was studied, and why?
    - How does this study relate to, and go beyond, past investigations of the problem?
- How did the researchers derive their hypotheses?
    - What are the theoretical assumptions they make?
        - Can they support these assumptions with earlier research?
    - Which predictions follow from them?
        - How well do these predictions follow?
        - Are there additional assumptions they have to make to get from here to there?
- Would you have arrived at different predictions?
    - If so, why? Explain your logic

Methods

- How do the authors test their predictions?
    - Is the study correlational or experimental (= based on random assignment)?
    - What are the independent and dependent variables?
        - Which independent variables are *manipulated*? How?
        - Which independent variables are *measured*? How?
        - How is the dependent variable assessed?
- Are the methods used adequate for testing the theoretical predictions?
- Is there something you would have done differently?
    - If so, why?

Results

- Is there a "manipulation check"? Should there have been?
    - Does it indicate that the manipulation "worked"?
    - Was it administered in a way that may have affected their conclusions?
- What are the major findings?
- Do these findings support or challenge or falsify the authors' predictions?
    - Support = the results are consistent with predictions
    - Challenge = the results are not quite what was expected although by and large they seem to support the bulk of the theorizing
    - Falsify = this is clearly not what was predicted and it is hard to see how the findings could be compatible with the theory

So what?

- What conclusions can be drawn from the study?
    - What are the key theoretical implications of the findings?
    - If what you read is right, what else would follow?
    - Does it challenge other things we think we know?
- Do the authors revise their theorizing in light of their results?
    - How?
- What are some of the applied implications of these findings?
    - What could one do with these insights?
    - How would you test if that works?

Things to write your reaction paper about - What's next?

- What would be a useful next step in this research program?
    - Important conceptual issues?
        - Conceptual clarifications?
        - Contradictions with other bodies of research?
    - Improvements on the experiment?
        - Better manipulations?
        - Naturalistic study?
        - New domain of application?
    - They're wrong!
        - How would you show that?
        - What would support your alternative explanation?
    - Any other exciting stuff coming to mind?