

PSYC412-52628

Current Topics in Social Psychology

Mind and Society: Thinking, Feeling, and Deciding in Everyday Life

Fall 2023 – Mon & Wed, 2-3:50 pm, KAP 167

Norbert Schwarz

norbert.schwarz@usc.edu

What is this class about?

This class applies principles of social and cognitive psychology to judgment and decision making in daily life. We begin with the observation that people respond to the world as they see it and ask how this construction of reality works – how do we make sense of the world around us? Next, we explore what these basic processes imply for decision making in our personal lives. Subsequently, we turn to how we think about society and explore the implications for political polarization, conspiracy theories, and the spread of fake news and misinformation.

This preliminary syllabus provides you with enough information to decide whether the class is for you. I also link some select readings. The final syllabus will live on Blackboard and may change in response to class discussions and student interest. There is no assigned book and all readings, podcasts, and related materials will be on Blackboard.

This 400-level class is open to advanced psychology undergraduates and MA students from any social science area.

A. How do we make sense of the world around us?

How we see the world and our own place in it is strongly influenced by how we happen to think about it. But throughout, we experience our own construals as real – the world is the way I see it and if you see it otherwise, you're probably wrong! We review the processes underlying this "naïve realism" and discuss their implications, from personal life to national politics. Ross & Ward's chapter provides a great introduction to this topic

Ross, L. & Ward, A. (1996). Naïve realism in everyday life: Implications for social conflict and misunderstanding. In E. S. Reed, E. Turiel, & T. Brown (eds.), *Values and knowledge*. New York: Psychology Press [[pdf](#)]

B. What does this imply for our personal lives?

How do we think about our own lives? How do we imagine the future and remember the past? How does that impact our preferences and daily decisions? What do we enjoy and regret? And why are we often wrong in what we think we'd enjoy or regret? Schwarz & Strack's chapter discusses how people figure out whether they find their lives satisfying or not and provides some tongue-in-cheek advice on how to think about your life.

Schwarz, N., & Strack, F. (2007). Thinking about your life: Healthy lessons from social cognition. In M. Hewstone, H. A. W. Schut, J. B. F. de Wit, K. van den Bos, & M. Stroebe (eds.), *The scope of social psychology: Theory and applications* (pp. 121-136). Philadelphia, PA: Psychology Press. [\[pdf\]](#)

C. What does this imply for society?

Many political disagreements reflect deeper differences in moral beliefs and perspectives. We discuss different psychological perspectives on the moral convictions that keep liberals and conservatives from agreeing on core issues and analyze their implications for key political controversies. We will also address issues of misinformation and fake news and explore the nature of conspiracy theories. Of interest is how people decide whether something is true or false and what we can do to limit the spread and acceptance of misinformation.

As an example for readings in this section you can look at Schwarz & Jalbert's (2021) discussion of what makes fake news feel true.

Schwarz, N. & Jalbert, M. C. (2021). When fake news feels true. Intuitions of truth and the acceptance and correction of misinformation. In R. Greifeneder, M. Jaffé, E.J. Newman, & N. Schwarz, N. (Eds.), *The psychology of fake news: Accepting, sharing, and correcting misinformation* (pp. 73-90). London, UK: Routledge/ Psychology Press. [\[pdf\]](#).

Format

The class meets twice a week. Each topic domain will be introduced with an overview lecture, followed by several meetings with class discussions of required readings and short student presentations of select studies.

Prerequisites

This is a 400-level class, which is open to juniors and seniors as well as MA/MS level students in the behavioral sciences. You should have taken PSYC 274 (introductory statistics) and PSYC 314 (introductory research methods) or their equivalents in your program.

Grading

Over the course of the semester, there will be 3 short quizzes, covering key issues of preceding classes. Each quiz will take 15 minutes. I drop your weakest quiz and the remaining two make up 45% of your grade. In addition, students will enrich the discussions by making short presentations that summarize key points of one reading. You can expect to make 2 or 3 short presentations. I drop your weakest one and the remaining presentations make up 45% of the grade. Discussion participation counts 10%. There is no final exam and no term paper.

Instructor

My own research interests are in the areas we discuss in this class [\[homepage\]](#) | [Google Scholar](#)