Phase 1 – Didactic Orientation
Week 2. Unit 1.2. THE SCIENCE OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY AND VICE-VERSA I. PARADIGM 1:
The Modern Scientific Approach: Substantive, Procedural and Ethical Issues

FACILITATION: Instructors

OVERVIEW OF ASSIGNMENT:
        READ by yourself then DISCUSS in your study group:
                1.2-1 This syllabus
                1.2-2 [SA] Front and back matter & Chapter 1
                1.2-3 The Perils of Obedience
                1.2-4 Baumrind article
                1.2-5 Milgram article
                1.2-6 [SA] Chapter 9
        VIEW by yourself or with others then DISCUSS in your study group:
                1.2-7 *The Human Behavior Experiments* (video viewing time 66 mins)
        READ by yourself then DISCUSS in your study group:
                1.2-8 Aronson and Bridgeman article

ASSIGNMENT DETAILS: THINK OVER by yourself then DISCUSS in your study group:

1.2 –1 The Syllabus
Read carefully all the introductory parts up to and including the detailed syllabus for this class and the next couple of sessions. Glance through the rest. Try to get some idea of what lies ahead.

1.2 – 2 Aronson's The Social Animal; 11 Ed. (hereafter SA).
Peruse the "Front Matter (pp. i-xviii)": Note the author's other publications and the range of his interests. Check out the dedication and the table of contents, read the author's Preface: "Why I Wrote this Book", and Acknowledgments. Reflect on the meaning to you of the opening epigram that Aronson borrows from Aristotle's Politics. **What does it mean to say that we are "social animals"?**

Look through the "Back Matter (pp. 453-548)": Check out the Glossary (pp. 453-461)
How many of the terms do you recognize? Which can you already define? Start getting familiar with the meanings of those technical terms/concepts.

Browse through References (pp. 443-495) and the Indexes (pp. 531-548). Are you beginning to get some sense of the territory to be covered?

Chapter 1: What is Social Psychology? (pp. 1-11) begins with illustrative examples of some of the issues with which scientific social psychologists are concerned. The author defines social psychology as **"the study of social influence"**, and introduces us to what he calls "Aronson's First Law" which states that "People who do crazy things are not necessarily crazy." **Explain.**

The usual unit of analysis in the study of social influence is "persons in contexts" and this "law" is intended to help you to learn to adopt a scientifically credible approach to understanding human behavior in social contexts. It helps us to understand that our proper units of study are not some internal or underlying sociobiological determinants but rather the play of circumambient social influences on persons in situations." It emphasizes the need for the social psychologist to begin any line of inquiry with **"a definition of the situation"** and it cautions us against the tendency to commit what social psychologists call "the fundamental attribution error" (more about that later).

Of course, the same caution applies to the problem of understanding what is going on when you observe yourself or others doing or saying things that might appear "stupid", "irresponsible", "hateful", "mean", "insensitive", "bad", "cruel", "evil", etc. It also applies, of course, in situations where people are observed making statements or engaging in actions that might be described as "brilliant", "responsible", "loving", "kind", "sympathetic", "good", etc.

By stressing the importance of "Aronson's first law" to the beginning student of our subject, we aim to emphasize that human social behavior is multifariously influenced by internal factors (memories, moods, motives), and external conditions in which the person finds herself/himself. We are rightfully wary when confronted with mechanistic or reductionistic attempts to locate "root causes" in (e.g.) allegedly inborn, genetically fixed, or dispositionally inherent attributes of people (in general, or particular individuals or members of particular groups). Our more immediate and proximal locus of interest -- as already mentioned, is on individuals in contexts.

Accordingly, in approaching things and events with a view toward the attainment of a scientifically credible social psychological perspective, we will follow Aronson in distinguishing between **"dispositional"** interpretations (which emphasize the influence of personal attributes – possibly even "underlying pathologies") and **"situational"** explanations which focus on the interplay (both universal and specific) of "social influences" arising in "the course of human events"

1.2 – 3 S. Milgram. 1974. The perils of obedience. Harper's Magazine
<http://harpers.org/archive/1973/12/the-perils-of-obedience/>
This text (which appeared in Harper's Magazine 1974) is abridged and adapted from Obedience to Authority by Stanley Milgram, 1974. In it Milgram summarizes the essential features of the experiment, and revisits his original article "Behavioral Study of Obedience", which was published in The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology in 1963. By his own account, Milgram's experiment was partly inspired by his reading of Hannah Arendt's 1964 book Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil. The book (whose subtitle deserves careful consideration) recounts the story of Eichmann's capture and trial in an Israeli court.

> By way of context: Adolph Eichmann was a minor government bureaucrat in Nazi Germany during the 1940s. His job was to organize and supervise a key aspect of the genocidal Nazi program aimed at "the final solution of the Jewish problem"; specifically, the transport by trainloads of captive European Jews condemned by Nazi authorities to surrender their goods, separate from their families, and suffer under inhumane conditions in concentration, labor, and extermination camps where they were incarcerated, exploited, experimented on, worked to death, tortured, gassed, shot, or otherwise killed.

> Arendt depicts Eichmann as a psychologically normal and quite ordinary person; a "cog in the machine" – a conventionally honest, narrowly ambitious middle-class man, a "joiner... a conformist ... a leaf in the whirlwind of time" (p. 32). As his job shifted from (a) forcing Jews from their homes, confiscating their belongings and arranging for them to be transported and killed, to (b) overseeing the whole murderous operation, Arendt reports, "he was troubled but felt duty-bound to obey his superiors. In fact, he said that not following their orders was the only thing that would have given him a bad conscience."

> In Arendt's view, Eichmann's decisive flaw was his "almost total inability ever to look at anything from the other fellow's point of view" (pp. 47–48). Echoing her subtitle, Arendt concludes that the real "lesson that this long course in human wickedness had taught us (is) the lesson of the fearsome, word-and-thought-defying banality of evil" (p. 252). It seemed to her that "in politics obedience and support are the same" (p. 279) and that "under conditions of terror most

people will comply but some people will not". As it developed, the judgment in Eichmann's trial stated that "the degree of responsibility increases as we draw further away from the man who uses the fatal instrument with his own hands" (p. 247). So, if the one who does evil things turns out not to be a "complete monster", what is to be concluded about responsibility for the evil that was done?

With considerable insight and detail, Arendt further explores the process by which Germany's leaders created social conditions in which "conscience as such had apparently got lost". There were individuals who resisted, she notes, but not many, and "their voices were never heard" (p. 103).

1.2 – 4 (Optional) Baumrind, Diana. "Some thoughts on ethics of research: After reading Milgram's" Behavioral study of obedience"." American Psychologist 19, no. 6 (1964): 421.

1.2 – 5 (Optional) Milgram, Stanley. "Issues in the study of obedience: A reply to Baumrind." American Psychologist 19 (1964): 848.

1.2 – 6 [SA] Chapter 9.

1.2 – 7 *The Human Behavior Experiments*. **Directed by Alex Gibney. 2006. Fearless symmetry production company, USA, digital production.**

This 2006 film centers on and draws some important implications from Milgram's famous and ethically controversial scientific social psychology experiments. Through a number of troubling contemporary counterparts, the film demonstrates the relevance of classic social psychological research on the perils of obedience (to authority) and conformity to social influence.

We are back in the 1950s, observing as if from behind a "one-way screen", as Milgram makes the documentary about his controversial "Obedience to Authority" experiment. The setting is a scientific laboratory in the Experimental Social Psychology Laboratory of a major, reputable university. The man in the white coat is identified as the assistant to the director of the laboratory. Milgram here stages a situation in which deception and illusion play prominent roles, with two seemingly unsuspecting volunteers serving as normal human subjects of experimental research on obedience in what is deceptively disguised as a routine word-pair learning experiment

We will revisit the Milgram and Zimbardo experiments later. For present purposes, however, we want you to focus on the fact that the design and conduct of such experimental social psychological studies is based on a version of the modern scientific laboratory model that [necessarily and unavoidably] requires the experimenter to resort to the intentional deception of the experimental subjects, and where, in this instance, the experimenters were not required to obtain from the participants in advance anything even remotely resembling "fully informed and free consent".

Pay close attention to the ways in which punishment and the dynamics of inaction are reinforced in these situations.

Reflect alone and then again together with your groupmates on the epistemological, axiological and methodological entailments of the modern scientific paradigm as it applies to social psychology. Consider the ethics of deception in social psychological experiments. Assume that the findings are – in fact – true; that some people can sometimes be induced to do things unto others that they would not at all want those others to do unto them.

Does debriefing suffice as an ethical counterpoise to deception?
Beyond the laboratory: Do researchers have responsibility for how their findings are used?
What (if anything) is known about the personal and social characteristics (including backgrounds and upbringings) of those who resisted, refused, defied, disobeyed, or defected?

After completing the foregoing assignments you should be able to define the following terms:
- experimental arrangements
- independent and dependent variables
- stimuli and responses
- causes and effects (correlation is not causation)
- technical issues in experimental design: the importance of random assignment
- control versus impact
- mundane and experimental realisms
- cover stories, confederates and lies

1.2 – 8 Aronson, Elliot, and Diane Bridgeman. "Jigsaw groups and the desegregated classroom: In pursuit of common goals." Readings on the social animal (1992): 430-440.
Further information is available on line at: http://www.jigsaw.org/

How are we doing? As we proceed, we are, hopefully, organizing ourselves into a collaborative learning system that will enable us to pursue some common learning goals without resorting to deception.

This article describes something closely related. The basic idea behind our approach to collaborative learning is prefigured by the approach that the authors describe. As you consider the approach, please try to look beyond the specific context of their article (they were working to promote meaningful interactions between students in recently racially desegregated US classrooms at primary and secondary levels in the 1950s and 1960s). We are reading about this work in a different time, under different conditions and with a diverse group of MIT undergraduates. Is the model applicable to post-secondary education? Could it be usefully adapted to suit MIT undergraduate classrooms? Is it appropriate to our present situation in 9.70?

In 9.70, the "jigsaw" method is further embodied in a broader pedagogical model that we call "Collaborative Learning". In this model, emphasis is on direct, hands-on, student-centered exploration of conceptually coherent subject matter. We view it as preferable to deadly dull rote assimilation and application (or worse yet, mere regurgitation) of factual material contained in text-based narratives, lectures, or other presentations at which students are mere passive "receptacles to be filled" (in Paulo Friere's memorable phrase) with knowledge originating at the front of the classroom.

We begin however (and are still very much in) a frankly hierarchical, text-centered, teacher centered or lecture centered pedagogy, (e.g. consider the prevailing social architecture) but we will shortly begin moving the "locus of control" more and more into a collaboration between this SYLLABUS and the students. Study groups should already be starting to shift into a more genuinely collaborative mode in which student discussion and active work with subject matter is emphasized. One of our key assumptions is that learning is at its best and most effective, and is easiest and most fun, when it takes the form of a self-organizing, active, (re) constructive context-dependent process.

Our central aim is to enable you to develop knowledge and attitudes and skills that are conducive to constructive involvement, cooperation, and teamwork with others, which will serve you well in future endeavors. To succeed, the process demands of all of us a serious exercise in civic responsibility. The process is also fun. Within undergraduate education, the approach we are taking has been and is being used by educators in fields ranging from reading and writing to mathematics, engineering, and the sciences.

Looking Ahead, our semester-long course of inquiry into the subject before us is designed to provide many and varied opportunities for you and us to work together to come to new understandings.

As students, you will have the ability (the power and the responsibility) to make many of the choices to be made here. Among other things, collaborative learning encourages us to directly address the way authority is normally distributed in the classroom. Gradually, we will be inviting you to take a more and more active role in facilitating the 9.70 learning process. As noted above, the kind of experiential education that we are here trying to implement is also happening in other organizational contexts, and not just among students. Why? Do you know of any relevant examples?

There is extensive literature regarding this approach. A search for "collaborative learning" on the internet will produce many relevant instances.

CAVEAT EMPTOR: As we will see quite clearly over the next few weeks, involvement in collaborative learning blurs boundaries between education and research. Insofar as we will be acquiring consensually valid knowledge in the classroom, might not the members of this class lay credible claim to membership in a " scientific community" that is essentially "real"?

Does the social character of scientific inquiry call into question the validity of the notion of "intellectual property"?

BRING TO CLASS:
your copy of this SYLLABUS,
your copy of SA,
your JOURNAL,
your TIMESHEET

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9.70 Social Psychology
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