DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

Department of Psychology & Neuroscience

PSYO 4080: Topics in Social and Personality Psychology: ***How to Be Social***

Instructor(s): Chris Moore moorec@dal.ca Office hours by appointment

Classes: Fall 2026, Friday 11.35–13.25

Course delivery: In-person LSC 5208

Course Description

The theme of this course is "How to be social." We focus on how people relate to each other and explore four different 'modes' of social relations and the psychological mechanisms that enable these relations. These four modes are interconnected, but ultimately separable and *incommensurable*. **Interpersonal relations** involve psychological mechanisms that allow individuals to interact, communicate, and collaborate. **Group relations** distinguish ingroups and outgroups and involve psychological mechanisms that support ingroup cohesion, such as cultural practices, and outgroup competition, such as prejudice. **Hierarchical relations** organize individuals according to dominance hierarchies. Psychological mechanisms governing dominance and subordination serve to maintain and sometimes challenge such hierarchies. **Reproductive relations** involve psychological mechanisms that organize interactions around various behaviors that enable reproduction. Each of these modes may be explored from many different theoretical and empirical perspectives, but we will concentrate on three: mechanism, evolution/phylogeny, and development.

Having elaborated the theoretical and empirical bases for social psychology in this way, we will turn our attention to how this framework may be applied to a variety of social issues that seem to be perennial and intractable. We will explore whether debates and disagreements about societal issues are the result of clashes among incommensurable ways of relating to others.

Students will be expected to read assigned work and, through independent research, develop their own ideas in relation to these topics. Classes will include a combination of instructor and student presentations and students will be expected to contribute actively to class discussion. Assessment will be based on student presentations, article summaries, and a final paper in both written and oral form.

Course Prerequisites

Registration in the Psychology or Neuroscience Honours program. No course prerequisites but preference given to students who have completed either or both of PSYO 3082 Experimental Social Psychology and PSYO 3280 Personality.

Course Exclusion

None

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Learning Objectives

- Broad understanding of the ways in which human social life is structured and the psychological mechanisms that organize social behaviour.
- Skill at summarizing research articles.
- Skill at making brief oral presentations and leading discussion.
- Analysis of the relevance of psychological science for societal issues and ability to produce a paper demonstrating this relevance that is appropriate for a general audience.

Course Materials

Course Brightspace page

Course Assessment

For four of the classes, you are required to find a research paper relevant to the theme of the course: *How to Be Social*. You must choose one paper for each mode of how to be social (interpersonal, group, hierarchical, reproductive) and at least one paper must be on each of three perspectives on how to be social (mechanism, evolution and phylogenesis, development). You will prepare and deliver a brief presentation on the paper you have chosen and lead a short discussion on it by posing at least two questions for the class to consider. Your presentation and discussion should be about 15 minutes. You need to submit a pdf of the research paper and a ≤ 300-word summary (in Word format) two days in advance of the class at which you will present it.

The last two days of class will be student presentations on a particular societal issue analyzed according to the modes of *How to Be Social*. The presentation and discussion should be approximately 15 minutes. You will also prepare an essay (op-ed style; ≤ 1500 words, double spaced) on this topic. You are welcome to be 'provocative' in these pieces, and you are welcome to pick and support 'one side,' so long as you recognize why there is a conflict between different values. The due date for the essay is the last day of classes (December 9th).

All presentation dates and orders will be determined randomly in advance.

Grading scheme:

- Each research paper summary (7%) and presentation (7%): 14% (total 56%)
- Final societal topic presentation: 20%
- Final societal topic paper: 24%

Other course requirements

Participation in discussion of classmates' presentations (not graded but important for the class to work!).

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Meet with Chris Moore individually within the first four weeks to discuss your topic for your final presentation and paper. Ideally, I would like to work with you throughout the semester to help guide and focus your topic.

Conversion of numerical grades to Final Letter Grades follows the Dalhousie Common Grade Scale

A+ (90-100)	**B+** (77-79)	**C+** (65-69)	**D** (50-54)
A (85-89)	**B** (73-76)	**C** (60-64)	**F** (<50)
A- (80-84)	**B-** (70-72)	**C-** (55-59)	

Course Policies on Missed or Late Academic Requirements

If for some reason (health-related, scheduling conflict), you cannot make an assigned presentation date, let me know as far as possible in advance and we will find an alternate time. If you cannot make an assigned presentation time, you should attempt to switch your presentation with another student (this may mean presenting twice in one class) or let me know and I will find an alternate time.

Failure to deliver a scheduled (or rescheduled) presentation by the end of the semester will result in a 0 for the grade (out of 14) for that paper. You can regain up to 7 marks for each missed paper by submitting the summary by the end of the semester.

Course Policies related to Academic Integrity and Artificial Intelligence

You are responsible for preparing your own papers, but you are welcome to collaborate with other students on literature searches and identification of relevant work. I view generative AI in the same way I view collaboration with humans. You are welcome to use AI (such as Dalhousie's provided Copilot Chat) to help you understand the course material better and to refine your thinking on the course content. Given the unreliability of AI recommendations, you need to check any and all sources that AI may recommend to you. Just as you are not allowed to copy someone else's writing for your assignment submissions (plagiarism), you are not allowed to include AI-generated text in your papers. AI writing is quite easily detectable and if detected in an assignment, your assignment will be submitted to the Faculty of Science as a suspected violation of Dalhousie's Academic Integrity Policy.

Course Content

The first two classes will be introductory and will be led by Chris Moore. Thereafter, students will lead choice of content within the course theme. The following schedule is subject to change depending on final enrolment.

Date	**Topic**	**Contents and preparation**
September 11th	Introduction to the class	Syllabus

		Come to class prepared to talk about how you identify as a social person. Also be prepared to talk about one societal issue that you care deeply about but which society finds challenging to resolve. Brief introduction to the main ideas of the course: • The four modes of *How to Be Social.* • The three perspectives on *How to Be Social.* • Value pluralism and incommensurability • Societal issues that are perennial and intractable
September 18th	Background theory and phenomena	Discussion of various topics related to the course theme
September 25th	Student research paper presentations	6 or 7 student presentations
October 2nd	Student research paper presentations	6 or 7 student presentations
October 9th	Student research paper presentations	6 or 7 student presentations
October 16th	Student research paper presentations	6 or 7 student presentations
October 23rd	Student research paper presentations	6 or 7 student presentations
October 30th	Student research paper presentations	6 or 7 student presentations
November 6th	Student research paper presentations	6 or 7 student presentations
November 13th	Fall break	No class

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November 20th	Student research paper presentations	6 or 7 student presentations
November 27th	Societal issues – student presentations	7 student presentations
December 4th	Societal issues – student presentations	6 student presentations

Readings

This is a selection of readings to give a flavour of the course (posted on BS). You do not need to know them in detail; they are offered to help frame the theme of the course.

I am working on a book that covers the topics of this course for a general audience (a so-called 'trade' book). I have included a few of the draft chapters as reading material for your interest. These are not finalized and appropriately footnoted and referenced yet but are included here to give you a flavour of the bigger project.

Draft chapters from *How To Be Social*

Chapter 1. The source of our disputes

Chapter 2. Human nature and the four modes

Chapter 4. Value that cannot be reconciled

Papers from the academic literature

Interpersonal relations

Clark, M. S., & Mills, J. R. (2012). A theory of communal (and exchange) relationships. In P. A. M. Van Lange, A. W. Kruglanski, & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of social psychology* (pp. 232–250). Sage Publications Ltd.

Melis, A. P., & Warneken, F. (2016). The psychology of cooperation: Insights from chimpanzees and children. *Evolutionary Anthropology*, *25*, 297-305.

Group relations

Dunham, Y. (2018). Mere membership. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, *22*, 780-793.

Rakoczy, H. & Schmidt, M. (2013). The early ontogeny of social norms. *Child Development Perspectives*, *7*, 17-21.

Hierarchical relations

Anderson, C. (2025). Social Hierarchy: Power, Status, and Influence. In D. Gilbert et al. (Eds.), *The Handbook of Social Psychology (6th ed.).* Situational Press.

Guyer, J. & Vaughan-Johnston, T. (2018). Upward and downward social comparisons: A brief historical overview. *Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences,* https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-28099-8_1912-1

Reproductive relations

Geary, D. C. (2010). *Evolution of Fatherhood. Chapter 6 in Male, female. The evolution of sex differences.* Washington, D.C. American Psychological Association.

Hazan, C. & Shaver, P. (1987). Romantic love conceptualized as an attachment process. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *52*, 511-524.

Herlitz, A. et al. (2023). A Systematic Review and New Analyses of the Gender-Equality Paradox. *Perspectives on Psychological Science. 20,* 503-539.

Social Psychological pluralism

Graham, J. et al. (2013). Moral foundations theory: The pragmatic validity of moral pluralism. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, *47*, 55-130.

Thomas, A. J. (2026). Cognitive Representations of Social Relationships and their Developmental Origins. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences.* e25

Syllabus Appendix

(Formerly University Policies and Statements)

Follow this link to view various supports, university policies, and guidelines.

Syllabus Appendix: Student Supports & University Statements, Policies, and Guidelines