

phase 1

DIDACTIC ORIENTATION

unit 1.2

February 10

Theme:

**The Science of Social Psychology and Vice Versa I:
The Modern Scientific Approach:
Substantive, Procedural and Ethical Issues in
Experimental Social Psychological Research**

FACILITATION: **instructors**

PREPARATION OVERVIEW:

Note: All assignments should be done conscientiously and **in the order as numbered**. Don't just "scan." Read closely. Strive for **understanding**. Does everything make sense? If not, seek clarification from groupmates, classmates and/or teaching staff before proceeding.

READ by **yourself** then DISCUSS in your **study group**:

1.2 – 1 this Syllabus

1.2 – 2 Aronson's The Social Animal (hereafter SA):
Front Matter (pp. I-xviii)
Back Matter (pp. 453-548)
Chapter 1: What is Social Psychology? (pp. 1-9)

VIEW by **yourself** or with others then DISCUSS in your **study group**:

1.2 – 3 S. Milgram, Obedience to Authority
(videotape - viewing time 51 mins.)

READ by **yourself** then DISCUSS in your **study group**:

1.2 – 4 S. Milgram, (1974) The Perils of Obedience (summary of
the experiment), Harper's Magazine (year uncertain)
on-line copy:
<http://home.swbell.net/revscat/perilsOfObedience.htm>

1.2 – 5 Aronson's The Social Animal:
Chapter 9: Social Psychology as a Science (pp. 329-347)

1.2 – 6 Baumrind, D. (1964) "Some Thoughts on the Ethics of
Research: After Reading Milgram's 'Behavioral study of
obedience'". American Psychologist, 19, 421-423

1.2 – 7 Milgram, S., (1964) "Issues in the Study of Obedience: A Reply
to Baumrind". American Psychologist, 19, 848-852

1.2 – 8 E. Aronson and D. Bridgeman (1979) Jigsaw Groups and the
Desegregated Classroom: In Pursuit of Common Goals

THINK OVER by **yourself** then DISCUSS in your **study group**:

1.2 –1 This Syllabus

Read carefully all the introductory parts up to and including the detailed syllabus for this class session. Glance through the rest, trying to get some idea of what lies ahead.

1.2 – 2 Aronson's The Social Animal

Front Matter (pp. I-xviii): Note the number of the author's 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 epigram that Aronson borrows from Aristotle's *Politics*.

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 begins with illustrative examples of the issues that scientific social psychologists are concerned with. The author defines social psychology as "the study of social influence," and introduces us to what he calls his "first law," that "people who do crazy things are not necessarily crazy."

This "law" is intended to help you to learn to adopt a scientifically credible approach to understanding human behavior in social contexts. It cautions us against the tendency to commit what social psychologists call "the fundamental attribution error" (more about that later). The same caution applies to the problem of understanding other people's behavior when you observe them doing or saying things that appear "stupid," "irresponsible," "hateful," "mean," "insensitive," "bad," "cruel," "vile" 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 social psychology takes **persons in contexts** as its preferred units of analysis and is wary of attempts to attribute the "root causes" of behavior to presumably fixed inherent attributes of particular individuals. Accordingly, please try to distinguish "dispositional" explanations (from "situational" explanations which focus on "persons-in-contexts."

1.2 – 3 videotape Obedience to Authority

In this original film Milgram documents the actual participants in a session of the famous experiment. In unit 2.2 we will return to a consideration of the experimental details. For present purposes we want to focus on the study as a rather extreme but not atypical example of experimental social psychological studies based on a version of the modern scientific laboratory model that requires the experimenters to engage in deception of the experimental subjects and fail to obtain fully informed consent of participants.

1.2 – 4 The Perils of Obedience

This text (which appeared in Harper's Magazine – year is not certain) is abridged and adapted from Obedience to Authority by Stanley Milgram, 1974. In it, Milgram summarizes the essential features of the experiment, and revises his original article Behavioral Study of Obedience, which was published in The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology in 1963.

By way of context: Adolph Eichmann's main wartime job as a government bureaucrat in Nazi Germany during the 1940s was to organize and supervise the transport of European Jews to concentration, labor, and extermination camps where they were subsequently incarcerated, exploited and killed. Hannah Arendt's 1964 book Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil, published after Eichmann's capture and trial in an Israeli court, depicts him as a psychologically man, who was a "joiner," a conformist ... a leaf in the whirlwind of time" (p. 32). As his job shifted from forcing Jews from their homes to arranging for them to be killed, Arendt reports, "he was troubled but felt duty-bound to obey his superiors. In fact, he said that not following orders was the only thing that would have given him a bad conscience." With considerable insight and detail, Arendt further explains how Germany's leaders created social conditions in which "conscience as such had apparently got lost." There were individuals who resisted, she notes, but "their voices were never heard" (p. 103). 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). She 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." Eichmann turns out not to be a "monster." Is this a good or a bad thing in terms of its implications for the future?

It was in an attempt to inquire scientifically into such important questions that Stanley Milgram, then a young social psychology professor at Yale, undertook what has since become one of the most notorious, controversial and shocking of all laboratory-based social psychological experiments.

1.2 – 5 Aronson – Chapter 9

1.2 – 6 Baumrind on the Ethics of Research

1.2 – 7 Milgram's Reply to Baumrind

Reflect on the questionable ethics of deception in social psychological experiments.

Does debriefing suffice as an ethical counterpoise to deception?

Do researchers have responsibility for how their findings are used?

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

By the way: The judgment in Eichmann's trial states 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). In what sense could this be said about Milgram's experiment?

1.2 – 8 Jigsaw Groups

As we proceed, we will organize ourselves into a collaborative learning system that enables us to pursue some common learning goals without resorting to deception.

This article describes something closely related. As you consider the approach, please look beyond the specific context of the article (i.e. recently racially desegregated classrooms at primary and secondary levels in the 1950s and 1960s) and consider the applicability of the model to other learning contexts, including post-secondary (e.g. MIT undergraduate) classrooms and, more particularly, to our present situation in 9.70.

Further information available on line at: <http://www.jigsaw.org/>