

The University of Manitoba
Department of Sociology
Social Psychology in Sociological Perspective
SOC 2330 A01

January 2009
3 credit hours

Professor: Rod Kueneman
Office: 302 Isbister Building
Phone: 474-6501 (office)
452-4560 (between 10:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m.)
Class Location: 301 Tier
Class Time: Slot 7 Mon., Wed. and Fri. 12:30 -1:20 p.m.
Office Hours: Slot 6 or by appointment
E-mail: rod_kueneman@umanitoba.ca

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Charon, Joel. *Symbolic Interactionism: An Introduction, An Interpretation, An Integration*, 9th edition, Prentice Hall, 2007.

Symbolic interactionism is a perspective that emphasizes the role of mind, language, symbolism, self, and shared meaning in the understanding of human behaviour. Symbolic interactionists emphasize the importance of society and socialization in the creation of language, mind, and self. This perspective has dominated the social psychology area in Sociology since the 1920s. Charon's book is an excellent introduction to social psychology from a symbolic interactionist perspective.

Becker, Ernest. *The Birth and Death of Meaning*, 2nd ed., Free Press, 1971.

The late Ernest Becker reworked the neo-Freudian understanding of personality as a defense mechanism. His work attempts to understand human behaviour as a fusion of influences from both mind and body. His central argument is remarkably compatible with the symbolic interactionist perspective although it greatly enhances and extends it.

OPTIONAL TEXTS: (select one of the following)

Schreiber, Flora. *Sybil*, Warner Books, 1974.

Each of these optional books is concerned with a destructive pattern of human interaction. *Sybil* is a book about a woman with a multiple personality. As a young child, she was subjected to abuse; her defense was to fragment her memories into distinct personalities. The relationship between personality, defense mechanisms, faulty socialization, and recovery can be examined.

Shkilnyk, Anastasia. *A Poison Stronger Than Love*, Yale University Press, 1985.

Anastasia Shkilnyk documents the decline of the Grassy Narrows Indian Reserve near Kenora, Ontario. This distressing text makes evident how important self-esteem is to human well-being. It

is a testimony to the destructive consequences of institutional racism in Canada and clearly links the individual consequences of dehumanizing social institutions.

Anderson, Kim. *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood*, Sumach Press, 2000

Kim Anderson discusses the identity search of a Cree/Métis woman who struggles to develop a conception of self which affirms the dignity of all aspects of her self in the face of others who attempt to cast it in negative identity terms. It is the story of her resistance against such efforts and more importantly her re-conceptualization of her being in life-affirming ways which translate tradition into contemporary contexts in ways that allow her to contribute to the well-being of Native communities.

Perkins, John. *Confessions of an Economic Hitman*, Paperback edition by Penguin, 2004.

John Perkins recounts his career as an economic hitman who worked for an international consulting firm. His job was to provide exceptionally optimistic projections about the economic growth that would flow from various proposed mega-projects in many developing countries. These forecasts would help secure loans from international financial lending institutions which could never be paid back. In order to renegotiate the terms for these loans, these countries had to agree to structural adjustment programs which amounted to a loss of economic sovereignty. Perkins was torn by the damage that he knew he was helping create and yet, for many years, was unable to resist his participation in empire building. His autobiographical work provides insight into the corrosive effects of capitalism as it facilitates personal aspirations such as greed and envy which are so disruptive of positive social interaction.

Broszmitter, Franz. *Ecocide: A Short History of the Mass Extinction of Species*, Pluto Press, 2002.

Franz Broszmitter recounts how we human beings have despoiled our local environments ever since becoming cultural and symbolically directed creatures. The history of our species is a string of 'civilizations,' which have arisen, flourished, overshot the carrying capacity of the local environment and then crashed as a result. Broszmitter takes us through a short tour of these civilizations and then discusses the current global situation with all eye to how we human beings must re-conceptualize our understanding of our relationship with the rest of the web of life if we are to avert a global ecocide. It provides us with an opportunity to use course material to reflect on the various ways that human beings might react to such knowledge.

McChesney, Robert. *The Problem of the Media: U S. Communication Politics in the 21st Century*. Paperback edition by Monthly Review Press, 2004.

Robert McChesney examines the changing place and role of the media in the history of the United States. In the early days of the Republic it served as a vehicle or the dissemination of various points of view on the burning issues of the day. He then describes how the media has increasingly come under the control of powerful capitalist owners and advertisers who are not interested in providing access to the full range of debate about current issues, especially those that are critical of big corporate business. McChesney examines various myths about the media and shows how powerful interests shape and limit its critical content. He goes well beyond the print media and includes penetrating analysis of the process of ideological hegemony as they are also

worked out in digital TV, digital radio, the internet, and the profession of journalism. He gives us an opportunity to reflect on the adage that “you are what you think,” because you can only think in terms of the information that you are allowed acquire.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students will be evaluated by way of the following activities:

- 3 in-class tests. Test 1 and 2 are worth 25%, test 3 is worth 20% of your grade. The tests are 50 minute essay type. Study questions are provided in this outline. There will be some choice of questions for each test.
- One take home assignment, worth 30% of the final grade and due at the end of the term. It will be based on lectures, any applicable course handouts, and one of the optional texts for the course. You will receive more detailed directions in class.

DUE DATES AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

FIRST TEST **February 2nd**
 READINGS: Becker Ch. 1, 2, 3, 4; Charon Ch. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
 QUESTIONS: 1, 2, 3

SECOND TEST **March 6th**
 READINGS: Becker Ch 5, 6, 7, 8, 9; Charon Ch. 8
 QUESTIONS: 4, 5, 6

VOLUNTARY WITHDRAWAL DATE - March 19th

THIRD TEST **March 25th**
 READINGS: Becker Ch.10, 11, 12 (skip pp. 164-174), 13; Charon Ch. 9, 10, 11, 13
 QUESTIONS: 7, 8

TAKE HOME ASSIGNMENT - due last class April 8th

READINGS: One of the six optional texts
 QUESTIONS: One of 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, or 14
 DO NOT USE A COVER PAGE ON YOUR ASSIGNMENT

Students who fail to write tests on assigned dates or who do not turn in the take-home assignment when due will receive a grade of F for that part of the course grade unless an alternative date has been agreed to by the instructor. Such arrangements should be made in advance whenever possible. Missed tests or the assignment due dates must be rescheduled within 7 days of the above published dates. Rescheduled dates will only be approved for good reasons.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The course will be divided into two parts. In the first part, we examine the work of Charon and Becker in order to develop some key concepts to enable us to think about human beings from a social psychological perspective. A brief review of the attached study questions will give you some idea of the topics that we will consider.

The second part of the course will be devoted to an application of these concepts to some different types of social relationships to see how well they help us understand human behaviour. We will focus in the classroom, at a general level, on the six possible topics that you can select for your take home assignment for the course. Each of the optional readings assigned for this course will allow you to delve more deeply into one of these issues. We will focus on the destructive psychological consequences of physical and sexual abuse as they manifested themselves in the multiple personality of Sybil. We will also examine the destructive consequences of the loss of the traditional way of life of the Ojibway people at Grassy Narrows as well as the effects of institutional racism. We will explore the challenges to and the opportunities for reconstructing a life affirming identity of native womanhood which offers lessons for positive self-affirmation for individuals and their communities. We will consider the proposition that capitalism is a form of “logic” which exploits the human capacity for imagining alternative futures in such a way as to foster destructive social formations and harmful interpersonal relations. We will reflect on how humans have come to think of themselves as outside of nature and have a long legacy of ecocidal behaviour. We will consider how the “powers that be” are in a position to shape the content of news and information systems in liberal democracies in ways that have been characterized as manipulation and propaganda and to consider the consequences for human actors in such an environment.

It is my contention that we need to reflect on the kinds of social situations which provide obstacles to the creation of positive social interaction from a social psychological vantage point. It is through the analysis of these difficult realities that we will be better able to understand the more mundane reality of positive social relationships. You will choose one of these case studies and complete either question 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 or 14 as a take home assignment. This assignment is due on the last day of classes.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Question 1

Simon and Gagnon wrote a chapter on Lesbians in a book entitled Sexual Deviance in 1967, and concluded their discussion with the following quote,

"We are not trying to argue that female homosexuality is natural. To the contrary, we are arguing that it is unnatural, but unnatural in a way that all human behaviour is unnatural; that is, it is without an absolutely pre-determined and fixed shaped and content, and it is a complex condition which derives from [our] unique abilities to think, act and remember and [our] need to live with other humans."

- a) Begin unpacking this quote by defining the terms “natural” and “normal.” (Please refer to a dictionary). In what way are these terms referring to a common meaning, and in what way(s) should they be seen as meaning very different things? How can they be related to the ideas about human nature advanced by Berger and Luckmann?
- b) In what way can homosexuality and heterosexuality be considered normal **and** natural?

Do you think that homosexuality requires more or less of a sociological explanation for its existence than heterosexuality?

- c) In what sense can the capacity for reproduction be claimed as a “proof” of the normalcy of a sexual orientation? If any couple has a meaningful, satisfying, longstanding, and intimate relationship which is also childless, on what grounds could you (or would you?) argue that it neglects some of the needs of the human species?

Question 2

"We experience the world not as it is but as we are."

- a) In what ways is this statement both fundamentally correct and incorrect?
- b) Comment on the physical, individual (personal), and social sources of order for human beings.
- c) What are the advantages and risks that stem from the fact that human beings are able to make up their own reality?

Question 3

In 1902, Charles Horton Cooley wrote the following statement (in the male-dominated language of the day):

"A man's sympathies as a whole reflect the social order in which he lives, or rather, they are a particular phase of it. Every group of which he is really a member, in which he has any vital share, must live in his sympathy; so that his mind is a microcosm of so much society as he truly belongs to." (1902:144)

The Webster's Dictionary defines sympathy as "the inclination to think or feel alike".

- a) Use concepts such as mind, self, and reference group to demonstrate that Cooley's statement is sound from a social psychological point of view.
- b) Discuss the concept of self paying attention to the work of Charon and Becker as you include both dimensions of sympathy (thinking and feeling) in your discussion and extend the analysis of self to include both cognitive and affective dimensions.

Question 4

Becker begins Chapter 5 with this quote from Thomas Treherne:

"It is not our parents' loins, so much as our parents' lives, that enthrals and blinds us."

- a) Paying attention to both mind and body, discuss how parents are able to enthrall (to bind, to hold, or reduce to slavery) their children.
- b) Why is it possible and impossible for parents to create autonomy in their children?

Question 5

Each human being negotiates the world via a self-regulating structure (variously referred to as mind, ego, self, personality, character).

- a) Discuss the notion of a self-regulating structure and discuss how is this structure formed?
- b) What are its purposes for the individual?
- c) In what ways does this structure have an "individual" as well as a "social" axis of organization?
- d) Why is it difficult for the person to bring this structure under his or her control?

Question 6

Discuss how and why human beings align themselves. Be sure to consider both the concrete, physical alignments which occur between people in direct social interaction as well as the cognitive realignments which may occur within the mind of the individual. Be sure to include material both from the assigned readings and lecture material.

Question 7

- a) Briefly distinguish doxa, heterodoxy, and orthodoxy.
- b) What are the advantages and disadvantages for human beings living within each of these symbolic universes?
- c) Becker connects despair and the death of meaning with the experience of

heterodoxy and would argue that those cultures that operated within a singular world view were spared the death of meaning to a greater extent. Kueneman would argue that small scale communities (which were also operating within a doxa) would experience less despair, but for very different reasons. Contrast these positions.

Question 8

Becker believed that the social sciences, as a result of their knowledge of cultural plurality, were in a position to make important contributions to social life.

- a) Why did he believe this to be true?
- b) What effect could such a shift in role have on science as an institution?
- c) What effect could such a shift in role have on the average citizen, the state, and moral discourse?

Question 9 TAKE HOME ASSIGNMENT - Schreiber Option

- a) Briefly describe Sybil's early relationships with significant others and discuss how this interaction met (and failed to meet) her basic need for safety and significance.
- b) Sybil had several central and peripheral alter personalities in her multiple personality complex. Discuss the structure and roles of her major "alter" personalities and discuss how some of the concepts developed in this course can make sense of what this constellation of alters was designed to achieve for the original personality.
- c) We have discussed some basic social psychological terms in this course. Take the case of Sybil and extend the analysis of the following terms: mind/ego, self, identity, the unconscious, problems-in-living.
- d) From a social psychological point of view, what would you recommend to your family, friends, and government to stop the creation of further Sybils?

OR

Question 10 TAKE HOME ASSIGNMENT - Shkilnyk Option

- a) Briefly describe the long term and recent historical changes that contributed to the dislocation of Native Culture at Grassy Narrows. Discuss how these changes contributed to the undermining of both safety and significance.
- b) Briefly describe the dominant features of community life at Grassy Narrows.

Discuss how some of the concepts developed in this course can make sense of what the community is doing to itself and its members.

- c) We have discussed some basic social psychological terms in this course. Take the case of Grassy Narrows and extend the analysis of the following terms: self, self-concept, self-esteem, despair, normal neurosis and the restriction of experience, and historical psychology.
- d) From a social psychological point of view, what would you recommend to your family, friends, and government to redirect communities like Grassy Narrows towards a better future?

OR

Question 11 TAKE HOME ASSIGNMENT - Anderson Option

- a) Briefly describe the various factors which contributed to the construction of a negative identity of Aboriginal women and discuss how these factors undermined Native women's basic need for safety and significance.
- b) Using Diagram 1 (Recognition of Being, pg. 16), outline the various dimensions of self concept and identity which, in conjunction, provide the basis for the development of positive social interaction in family and community life.
- c) Discuss how the author's work enriches some of the key concepts used in this course. Are there additional concepts from her work that you think should be incorporated into a social psychological approach? Please elaborate.
- d) From a social psychological point of view, what advice would you have to offer family, friends, and government with respect to how to contribute to the creation of more positive social relationships for women and men, Native and non-native?

OR

Question 12 TAKE HOME ASSIGNMENT - Perkins Option

- a) Briefly describe the political economic system Perkins calls the "corporatocracy" and describe the role of an "economic hitman" (EHM) within it. Use social psychological terms from this course to help demonstrate how the social, economic, and political structures in place encourage a particular way of thinking, feeling, and acting for the EHM.
- b) Outline the features of the EHM career that made it attractive to Perkins (think not only about self esteem, reference groups, and self-fulfilling prophecies, but also about material rewards and incentives). Outline the features of this career that made it repulsive to him as well.
- c) Becker discussed the call to heroism as a vehicle for self esteem as a dominant

motive for human action. In what way does Perkins allow (even require) you to reconsider this rather optimistic formulation of what attracts human beings to their callings"? Do you think that the notion of human "frailties" is a necessary addition to Becker's discussion of self-esteem?

- d) Charon discusses concepts such as altercasting, self-perception, self-judgment, self-control, and reference groups to discuss how individuals forge a self concept which helps shape the course and content of their social interactions. Are they useful in understanding this case? Perkins experienced an elevated sense of ambivalence over his career as an EHM which ultimately lead him to end it. Discuss the main details of his autobiography which documents the material and the social psychological pushes and pulls which alternatively spurred him to embrace and reject this career. What ultimately tipped his decision?
- e) Perkins makes some suggestions about how to bring about social change with respect to education and the dissemination of information. These suggestions make sense in a social psychology course framework, but do you think this would be enough to extinguish the corporatocracy or do measures suggested by Kovel and Kueneman in the commentary seem necessary?

OR

Question 13 TAKE HOME ASSIGNMENT - Broswimmer Option

Broswimmer recounts how human's cognitive capacity and prevalent cultural beliefs are bringing our species closer to extinction.

- a) Outline how human evolution as a cultural rather than a biological process has contributed to our longstanding practice of ecocide. How does Broswimmer's theoretical approach mesh with that of symbolic interactionism and the writings of Ernest Becker?
- b) Describe the social construction of the "human - nature relationship" of modern society as outlined by Broswimmer and others. Contrast this to the understanding of earlier human groups and discuss why we may have changed our mind about the nature of this relationship. Becker may be of assistance here.
- c) Outline why Broswimmer thinks that our views about nature, consumption, reproduction, science, technology, and war are perpetuating and deepening the ecological crisis which we have brought upon ourselves. How does Becker think humans handle such anxiety-provoking information (both positive and negative ways)?
- d) Briefly outline the four most important changes in human behaviour that you consider essential. Describe what changes in our view of our relationship to nature will be necessary to spur these changes and outline a few concrete steps that could be taken to change the social construction of the human's place in the web of life.

OR

Question 14 TAKE HOME ASSIGNMENT - McChesney Option

- a) What role does McChesney think the media could (should) play in the creation of a functioning democracy and a healthy culture? How does his view fit with the ideas set forth by Charon and Becker?
- b) What are the effects of private ownership of the media on the achievement of that role? Think about some of the specific consequences of private ownership such as its effect on **two** of the following: journalism, knowledge about candidates' election platforms, the possibility of starting up new media outlets, the presence and perception of bias (both conservative and liberal), hyper-commercialism and the shaping of human nature, or the depth of factual coverage and diversity of opinion in the news.
- c) Discuss the effects of concentration of ownership across the various types of media on the process of ideological hegemony. Sallach speaks of hegemony. McChesney speaks of synergy; what is the relationship? Be sure to include the consequences of horizontal and vertical integration of the media to map out the structural form of concentration, Then link these structural realities with the social-psychological consequences that flow from them (e.g. uniformity of message, the introduction of externalities such as violence in programming, etc.).
- d) Would McChesney's analysis concern Becker and Charon? Why or why not? What are the problematic consequences of the capture of the media by powerful interests on the nature of human nature, social reality, and democracy?
- e) What are the possibilities for reinvigorating the media to expand the possibilities of an informed awareness context for the general public? Be sure to include some discussion on **two** of the following: alternative forms of media ownership, the place of a non-commercial media sector, the possibilities presented by digital technology for TV and radio, changes in copyright law, and government media policies.

GRADING PROCEDURES

The following description of my grading scheme should make it possible for you to calculate your final grade in the course. You are urged to make your own computations to ensure that I have not made an error.

I find the normal grading system too constraining, so I have modified it to a limited extent by introducing the minus grade (e.g. A-, B-, C-). In the final grade submitted, however, I must conform to the university scheme.

Your answers are being evaluated on a letter grade system, not on a point system which is converted to a letter grade. The main benchmarks for the grade ranges can be described as follows:

D/F = an answer which is factually weak, faulty analysis, and very poor organization.

C= an answer which is mostly complete in terms of facts but suffers from poor analysis, organization and integration. Knowing the facts is a good start, but only a beginning.

B= answer is factually accurate and mostly complete as well as organized and integrated.

A= answer factually complete, well organized, sophisticated analysis which demonstrates a good degree of comprehension.

There is no grading curve used in the evaluation of our answers, as class could do very well or very poorly, I feel no obligation to artificially manipulate the distribution into a bell curve. Each letter grade has been assigned a numerical value to allow for averaging and the calculation of a final grade. The numerical value has been assigned to convert the letter grade into an interval scale. Thus a C \neq 30% rather a C is equidistant from a C+ (4) and a C- (2) on the scale; a C is a factually complete answer which suffers from limited analysis. Mechanically, you assign each of your letter grades the comparable numerical weight in your calculation in the following way:

A+ = 10	B+ = 7	C+ = 4	D = 1	
A = 9	B = 6	C = 3	F = 0	
A- = 8	B- = 5	C- = 2		

On a test with two questions, which received a letter grade of A- and C+, your average grade is $8 + 4 \div 2 = 6$ or B. I take all of your tests and assignments and calculate them together, as weighted by their relative value and derive a final numerical value for the course. The final cutting points for your letter grade are very important, because the minus grades must now disappear. They give you a higher final numerical grade because a weak A answer was an A- instead of a B+. But in the final analysis, all A- would become a B+. You would need some A or A+ grades to pull you over the cutting point. The cutting points are:

A+	(9.6 - 10) exceptional
A	(8.3 - 9.5) excellent
B+	(6.6 - 8.2) very good
B	(5.3 - 6.5) good
C+	(3.6 - 5.2) satisfactory
C	(2.3 - 3.5) adequate
D	(0.5 - 2.2) marginal
F	(0.0 - 0.4) failure

This grading scheme gives you the benefit of the buoyancy of the minus grade. If you fail to make it over a threshold, even by a fraction, it is unlikely that I will raise your grade unless you have shown significant improvement over the term; have submitted an exceptional piece of work, or have made positive contributions to class discussion. Otherwise, an 8.24 will remain a B+ and not an A.

Student Responsibility and Academic Integrity

I encourage collaborative and cooperative work ethics. Feel free to discuss your thoughts with other members of the class and thereby develop your comprehension and critical analysis. But remember, when it is time to submit your assignments, do your own work. The written material of your colleagues is the fruit of their labour and under no circumstances should you avail yourself of it when

preparing your own answers. Likewise the printed work of other scholars must be properly recognized. Students should acquaint themselves with the University's policy on 'Examinations: Personations' (pg. 27) and 'Plagiarism and Cheating' (pg. 28) found in the Undergraduate Calendar. Note especially the following statement: "...**students are expected to acknowledge the sources of ideas and expressions they use in their written work, whether quoted directly or paraphrased**", and "To provide adequate documentation is not only an indication of academic honesty but also a courtesy which enables the reader to consult your sources with ease. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism." The Faculty of Arts also reserves the right to submit student work that is suspected of being plagiarized to internet sites designed to detect plagiarism.

Disruptions due to excessive talking or early departures from the classroom are especially distracting in large classes. Please be considerate and respectful of the needs and rights of others in the class. Students should be aware that persistent disruption may result in debarment from the course. Any student who has a legitimate reason for leaving class early should inform the instructor at the beginning of class.

The new Aurora student system is currently experiencing difficulty in determining whether you have the proper pre-requisites for this course (which is a grade of C or better in Introduction to Sociology). If you do not, withdraw now. If you continue and I learn that you are here without the proper pre-requisite, I will debar you from the class and enter F grades for any outstanding work. You have been notified during the course registration process that it is your responsibility to ensure that you have the proper pre-requisites.