

Spring 2004
WWS 595: Psychological Roots of Conflict

Professor: Emily Pronin
Class time: Tuesdays 1:00-4:00
Class location: TBA
Office hours: Th. 1:30-2:30, Green 2-S-6

Description

This course examines psychological roots of human conflict. We will study the ways in which conflicts can stem from, and be exacerbated by, psychological phenomena involving the perceptions, judgments, emotions, and attitudes we have about ourselves, our “opponents,” and the relevant issues of conflict. We will also apply this knowledge to investigating and developing psychologically-informed ways of *overcoming* conflicts. We will examine conflicts ranging from those involving individuals in dispute to those involving societies at war.

Grading

Class participation: 30%
Weekly policy commentaries: 30%
Final paper: 40%

Tentative Course Outline

1. *Tues. Feb. 3* – **Introduction, and the Social Psychology Perspective**

Topics: Experimental method. Situationism. Subjectivism. Tension systems.
Studying the “real world” in the “lab.”
Tentative Readings: Ross & Nisbett, Chapter 1.

2. *Tues. Feb. 10* – **Policy Implications of Self-Conflicts**

Topics: Multiple selves. Immune neglect. Availability and the focusing illusion.
Applications to substance abuse, environmental protection, political constitutions, education.
Tentative Readings: Schelling; Elster. (Optional: Gilbert et al.)

3. *Tues. Feb. 17* – **Costs of Social Misperception**

Topics: The fundamental attribution error. The bias blind spot. Applications to conflicts about homelessness, racial division, international diplomacy, disagreements about health-care reform, accounting reform.
Tentative Readings: Pronin, Gilovich, & Ross; Dana & Loewenstein (Optional: Jones & Nisbett)

4. Tues. Feb. 24 – **Interpersonal Conflict and “Egocentrism”**

Topics: Perspective-taking. Confusing the subjective with the “objective.”
Applications to negotiation, arbitration, mediation, management conflicts.

Tentative Readings: Stone, Patton, & Heen (Chapter 1); Babcock et al. (Optional: Ross & Sicoly; Gilovich, Medvec, & Savitsky)

5. Tues. Mar. 2 – **Societal Conflict: 2 Big Theories**

Topics: Realistic conflict. Minimal groups. Social identity. Group mobilization.
Applications to large-scale social conflicts, ethnic conflict, international disputes, protest and revolution.

Tentative Readings: Pruitt & Kim

6. Tues. Mar. 9 – **Social Traps and Conflict Escalation**

Topics: Commons dilemmas, prisoners dilemmas, dollar auctions. Entrapment and escalation. Groupthink. Applications to environmental protection, military policy, management, welfare reform.

Tentative Readings: Platt; Janis; Axelrod

7. Tues. Mar. 23 – **The Role of Cognitive Biases in Creating Conflict**

Topics: Prospect theory. Framing. Loss aversion. Applications to domestic policy debates (e.g., welfare, abortion, affirmative action) and international diplomacy

Tentative Readings: Kahneman & Tversky

8. Tues. Mar. 30 – **Culture and Conflict**

Topics: Impact of culture on perception, attitude, and action. Applications to cross-cultural conflicts (at-home and abroad), management across cultures, international diplomacy, policy implementation, negotiation.

Tentative Readings: Nisbett & Cohen; Markus & Lin (Optional: Markus & Kitayama)

9. Tues. Apr. 6 – **Psychological Barriers to “Conflict” Resolution**

Topics: Reactive devaluation. Hostile media/mediator effect. Optimistic overconfidence. False polarization. Divergent construal. Applications to wide range of conflicts that seem “unresolvable.”

Tentative Readings: Ross & Ward; Vallone, Ross, & Lepper. (Optional: Lord, Ross, & Lepper)

10. Tues. Apr 13: **Overcoming Barriers to Dispute Resolution**

Topics: Procedural justice. Joint problem-solving. Role of third-parties.

Applications to wide range of conflicts that seem “unresolvable.”

Tentative Readings: Rouhana & Kelman; Lind et al. (Optional: Lord, Lepper, & Preston)

11. Tues. Apr. 20: *Class Presentations I*

12. Tues. Apr. 27: *Class Presentations II*