PSYC4072: Everyday Life and Social Interaction

Prof. Kevin Whitehead

The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something – because it is right before one's eyes.) The real foundations of his [sic] enquiry do not strike a man at all. Unless that fact has at some time struck him. – And this means: We fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and powerful.
(Ludwig Wittgenstein)

One commonly tends to avoid making 'obvious' observations because it is not obvious what thereafter is to be done with them. ... Rather, we need to see that with some such mundane recurrences we are picking up things which are so overwhelmingly true that if we are to understand that sector of the world, they are something we will have to come to terms with. And, as it happens, they are a tremendous resource.
(Harvey Sacks)

This module introduces students to a theoretical framework and analytic approach for studying everyday life and social interactions. The module is based primarily on materials (both classical and contemporary) from the phenomenological, ethnomethodological, conversation analytic, and discursive psychological traditions. It includes examination of a number of fundamental social scientific issues that underpin everyday life and interactions, including: 1) theories of social action, 2) the nature of intersubjectivity, 3) everyday (and scientific) "practical reasoning", 4) the social constitution of knowledge, and 5) structures of social interaction. These materials will be examined for their significance for an interdisciplinary social science of everyday life, with special reference to their implications for understandings of psychology.

Learning objectives:
- An understanding of everyday social action and interactions from a broadly ethnomethodological perspective.
- Familiarity with some of the ordinary structures of conversational interactions.
- An understanding of how particular "types" of people are produced and reproduced in everyday interactions.
- Ability to apply these perspectives to consideration of the traditional concerns of the discipline of psychology, and thus critical engagement with psychology's theoretical knowledge bases and empirical research outputs.

Seminar outline and readings:

Seminar 1: Introduction
- Goffman, E. (1964). The neglected situation. *American Anthropologist*, *66*(6), 133-136.
- Edwards, D. (2012). Discursive and scientific psychology. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *51*, 425-425.
- Heritage, J. (1984). *Garfinkel and ethnomethodology*. Cambridge: Polity Press. Ch. 1: Introduction.

Seminar 2: The nature of social action
- Heritage (1984), Ch. 2: A Parsonian backdrop.
- Heritage (1984), Ch. 3: The phenomenological input.

Seminar 3: Rules, norms, and interpretive activity
- Heritage (1984), Ch. 4: The morality of cognition.
- Heritage (1984), Ch. 5: Actions, rules and contexts.

Seminar 4: Accounts and accountability
- Heritage (1984), Ch. 6: Accounts and accountings.
- Heritage (1984), Ch. 7: Maintaining institutional realities.

Seminar 5: Normative and interactional bases of mental illness
- Scheff, T. J. (1970). Schizophrenia as ideology. *Schizophrenia Bulletin*, *1*(2), 15-19.
- Smith, D. (1978). K is mentally ill: The anatomy of a factual account. *Sociology*, *12*, 23-53.
- McHoul, A. & Rapley, M. (2005). A case of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder diagnosis: Sir Karl and Francis B. slug it out on the consulting room floor. *Discourse & Society*, *16*(3), 419-449.

Seminar 6: Studying interaction systematically
- Heritage (1984), Ch. 8: Conversation analysis.
- Schegloff, E. A. (2006). Interaction: The infrastructure for social institutions, the natural ecological niche for language, and the arena in which culture is enacted. In N. J. Enfield & S. C. Levinson (Eds.), *Roots of human sociality: Culture, cognition and interaction* (pp. 70-95). London: Berg.

Seminar 7: Gestures and embodiment in interaction
- Goodwin, C. (1986). Gestures as a resource for the organization of mutual orientation. *Semiotica*, *62*(1-2), 29-50.
- Liberman, K. (2013). The local orderliness of crossing Kincaid. In Liberman, K., *More studies in ethnomethodology* (pp. 11-43). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Seminar 8: Interaction, experience, and culture
- Sacks, H. (1984). On doing "being ordinary". In J. M. Atkinson & J. Heritage (Eds.), *Structures of social action* (pp. 413-429). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Levinson, S. (2006). On the human interaction engine. In N. Enfield & S. Levinson (Eds.), *Roots of human sociality: Culture, cognition and interaction* (pp. 39–69). Oxford: Berg.

Seminar 9: Interaction in a developmental perspective
- Jones, S. E. & Zimmerman, D. H. (2003). A child's point and the achievement of intentionality. *Gesture*, *3*(2), 155-185.
- Kidwell, M., & Zimmerman, D. H. (2006). "Observability" in the interactions of very young children. *Communication Monographs*, *73*(1), 1-28.

Seminar 10: Psychotherapeutic and counselling interactions
- Peräkylä, A., & Vehviläinen, S. (2003). Conversation analysis and the professional stocks of interactional knowledge. *Discourse & Society*, *14*(6), 727-750.
- Kaufman, S., & Whitehead, K. A. (2016). Producing, ratifying and resisting support in an online support forum. *Health: An Interdisciplinary Journal for the Social Study of Health, Illness and Medicine*. DOI: 10.1177/1363459315628043.

Seminar 11: Constructing and using identity categories in interactions
- Kitzinger, C., & Mandelbaum, J. (2013). Word selection and social identities in talk-in-interaction. *Communication Monographs*, *80*(2), 176-198.
- Whitehead, K. A. (2012). Racial categories as resources and constraints in everyday interactions: Implications for racialism and non-racialism in post-apartheid South Africa. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *35*(7), 1248-1265.

Seminar 12: Conflict and violence in interactions
- Whitehead, K. A., Bowman, B., & Raymond, G. (forthcoming). "Risk factors" in action: The situated constitution of "risk" in violent interactions. *Psychology of Violence*.
- Mair, M., Watson, P. G., Elsey, C., & Smith, P. V. War-making and sense-making: Some technical reflections on an instance of "friendy fire". *The British Journal of Sociology*, *63*(1), 75-96.

Seminar 13: Revision and final paper preparation (based on excellent student papers from previous years)
- Maseko, L. (2014). Accounting for school shootings.
- Matthews, D. (2014). A reconciliation of "intersubjectivity" and "intersubjectivity": Conversation analysis vs psychoanalysis.
- Tladi, B. (2014). Sheldon Cooper has Asperger's Syndrome? An interactional re-specification of Asperger's Syndrome symptomatology.

Assessment:

Assessment will consist of marks for participation in seminar discussions, an observational exercise, a set of brief (approximately two-page) responses to the assigned readings (four in total), and a final written paper which will be exam-equivalent. Further details on all these assignments will be provided separately. The weightings for each are shown below:

Seminar participation	10%
Observational exercise	10%
Analytic exercise	10%
Brief reading response papers (4)	20%
Exam-equivalent final paper	50%

Instructions for assessment tasks:

Observational exercise (10%):
What is required of you for this exercise is at the same time very simple/straightforward and very complex/challenging. The primary requirement for the exercise is that you spend some time "doing nothing" in a crowded, public place (e.g., somewhere on campus, in a shopping mall, or somewhere similar), and record your observations about this process. The requirement for "doing nothing" should be interpreted as literally as possible: It means no talking, texting, or checking Facebook on your cell phone; no looking around or pretending to wait for someone; no "people watching"; no occupying yourself by daydreaming, thinking about the past or the future, etc. You should thus be standing still with your arms at your sides looking straight in front of you and focusing entirely on noticing how and when other people notice you, how they respond to you (if at all) when they do, and how you feel about or experience what is happening.

You should aim to spend at least 10 minutes doing this, and you should write down some rough notes about your observations and experiences as soon as you have done it, so that they are as fresh in your mind as possible. You can then refine your notes into your write-up for the exercise, which should be approximately two to three pages long (12-font, double-spaced), or roughly 800-1200 words. **Note:** This write-up should consist purely of *descriptions* of what you have observed, and should not contain any interpretations or analyses – i.e., you should only be addressing "what" (what you did, what you saw, etc.), and should say *nothing* about "why" (why the things you saw might have happened, why you think people acted the way they did, etc.). There will be ample opportunity in the following (analytic) exercise to offer analyses and interpretations, so you should not waste the limited space you have for this exercise by including them here.

Having completed an exercise similar to this myself, I can attest to the courage it will take to do this, and the discomfort you may feel at various points in the process. I am not aiming to subject you to this discomfort gratuitously – rather (as we will see during the course of the semester), the observations and experiences resulting from this exercise will offer valuable first-hand insights that will have direct relevance for many of the things we will discuss in the remainder of the course. However, if you find the discomfort to be so extreme that you feel you cannot complete this exercise without suffering potential psychological damage, then please let me know and I will find a way to accommodate you without any penalty to your mark for the course.

If you are still uncertain about how to approach this task, please don't hesitate to consult with me!

Analytic exercise (10%):
This exercise builds upon the work you will have done in the previous (observational) exercise. Whereas the previous exercise required you to make some observations about your experiences of "doing nothing" in a public place, the task for this exercise is to develop some analytic insights about those observations.

Your write-up should be approximately three to four pages long (12-font, double-spaced), or roughly 1200-1500 words. The reading material covered during Seminars 2, 3, and 4 should serve as an important set of resources for this task, and you may see fit to refer to various concepts introduced in these materials as part of your write-up. However, your write-up should be primarily grounded in your own observations from the observational exercise – i.e., you should be working toward an analysis of the things you have observed in terms of the reading materials, rather than simply summarizing the reading materials.

Note that the analytic points you develop in this exercise need not (and may not be able to) cover the full scope of the observations on which they will be based. Thus, what is important here is not that you do an

analysis of *everything* that you observed, but rather than you develop analytic accounts of at least some of your observations, using the readings for conceptual guidance in doing so.

Brief reading responses (4 x 5% = 20%):
You are required to write a total of four brief reading response papers, each of which should be approximately two pages long (12-font, double-spaced), or a maximum of 800 words. The purpose of these response papers is to (briefly) discuss one or more points or issues that the prescribed readings for the week have raised for you.

Your response papers should not be merely a summary of the prescribed readings for the week, and they may not necessarily even mention more than one of the readings. Instead, they should include your own reflections, arguments, discussion, etc. of some aspect(s) of the readings, and/or discussion of how the readings have implications for topics, issues, etc. that are not explicitly mentioned in the readings. This, may involve producing partial summaries of the readings, quoting significant parts of them, etc., but this type of content should serve as a basis for launching your own discussion, rather than being all that you include in your papers.

Each reading response should also include at least one clearly articulated question that the readings raise for you, and/or an application of the concepts/materials in the readings to a real-world example of your own choosing or to materials from other classes you have completed this year or previously. Your paper may engage in some attempt to address or answer this question, but this is not a requirement, and the questions may instead (or in addition) be raised for discussion in class.

Despite my best efforts to give provide thorough instructions on how to produce these response papers, I am aware that doing so is an acquired skill, and that it may be difficult to know exactly how to approach them at first. In order to assist you in this regard, an example of a paper of this sort (written for a different course, but in a format/structure similar to what I am looking for in this course) is attached as an appendix to these instructions.

To prevent you from being tempted to leave all your reading responses until the last four weeks of the semester, you are required to write at least two of them within the first six weeks of the semester, and you may not write one for the final seminar (26 October).

Exam-equivalent final paper (50%):
The course materials for this module have implications for a number of fundamental social scientific issues that underpin everyday life and interactions, including: 1) everyday (and scientific) "practical reasoning", 2) the nature of intersubjectivity, 3) theories of social action, 4) the social constitution of knowledge, and 5) structures of social interaction. Moreover, many of the prescribed readings explore or touch upon the implications of these issues for "re-specifying" conventional or "mainstream" theorising and research in psychology, by focusing on the ways in which they are underpinned by everyday interactional structures and contingencies.

Your final paper should draw upon these insights, while extending them to (an) area(s) of psychological theory or research that have *not* been extensively addressed in the course materials (although they may have been briefly mentioned or discussed in one or more of the prescribed readings). This may include a theory/research approach you have previously studied in an undergraduate or Honours class, or may simply be something you have an interest in and would like to explore further. It may also be based on your empirical observations of an "in-the-world" event that you have observed, something you have read or heard about in the news, or other aspects of your own personal experiences. Any number of traditional areas of psychology (e.g., child development, cognition, emotion, motivation, personality, psychopathology, social/group dynamics, etc.) can be examined in this way, but some aspects of these areas may be more suitable than others for this kind of treatment.

Although you may structure your paper as you see fit, a possible basic template is as follows:
1. *Introduction*: Including an overview of the paper and a brief description of its main argument(s).
2. *Discussion of conventional psychological theory(ies)/ approach(es) and/or personal observations/experiences*: Description of way(s) in which "mainstream" psychological theory and/or research has tackled the topic of interest, and the main outcomes or implications thereof, and/or discussion of the common-sense ways in which you may have understood or accounted for your observations/experiences prior to encountering the reading materials for this module.
3. *Application of course materials to abovementioned approach(es)/theory(ies)/observation(s)/ experience(s)/account(s)*: "Re-specification" of the theory/research/experiences/observations/ accounts discussed in 2 above, in terms of everyday interactional considerations, and discussion of the implications of doing so for psychological theory and practice and/or for common-sense understandings of phenomena.
4. *Conclusions*: Revisiting and tying together the central points and arguments of the paper.

The paper will be awarded a mark (as a percentage, weighted at 50% of the overall mark for the module, as noted above) based on an holistic assessment of the following criteria:
1. Demonstrated adequate understanding of, and sustained engagement with, the course materials drawn upon in the paper.
2. Quality of application of the course materials to conventional psychological theories and/or approaches written about in the paper.
3. Demonstrated ability to move beyond what is contained explicitly in the course materials and to construct an original argument or analysis with respect to the chosen topic.
4. Overall clarity and coherence of writing, including "flow" between and within the sections, and appropriate use of academic style and referencing.

Note:
- Your paper need not cite every reading in the course reading pack, but it should engage with those readings that are most clearly relevant to your topic and argument, and should be clearly connected to at least one of the central issues addressed in the course.
- If relevant, you may use some of the points, arguments, etc. from your response papers in your final paper, but you should not cut-and-paste verbatim from the response papers, and your paper should should not consist of nothing more than a recapitulation of the points you have made in your response papers.
- While there is no minimum required length, your essay should be *no longer than* 4000 words (excluding reference list but including in-text references), and should be typed in double-spaced 12-font. Penalties will be applied to papers that exceed the maximum word limit.
- I am aware that this is a very open-ended and challenging task that will require you to offer original thinking and analysis. I take it that developing the capacity to do this kind of thinking and analysis is an important outcome of a postgraduate degree, but I do not expect that all students will be able to do it immediately and without guidance or support. As such, I would *strongly* recommend that you consult with me *at least* once about your plans for your final paper before you begin writing it up, so that I can assist you in ensuring that your work meets the requirements for the task.

Sacks' work on membership categorization devices (MCDs) provides insight into some of the important mechanisms concerning power and inequality in interactional contexts. My observations in this regard relate firstly to how these insights may be used to investigate the production and reproduction of domination, and secondly to understanding a mechanism by which those being dominated can discursively resist their subordination.

In his discussion of Sacks' concepts on partitioning constancy and inconstancy, Schegloff (2007) notes that "Both partitioning constancy and inconstancy can serve as vehicles for replacing the relevance of one set of category terms by another, and can thereby serve as *cover* or *camouflage* identities, activating alternative bodies of common sense knowledge, inference, perception, etc., as relevant to conduct and understanding in the situation, and *of* the situation" (p. 469; emphasis in original). As a result of this, it is possible for claims to be made that inequalities or injustice are not intentionally perpetrated on the basis of group membership, but rather that members of a particular group "just happen" to be disproportionately affected. This is particularly important in light of the contemporary norms of "political correctness," which largely prohibit the expression of blatant prejudice (even if they do not always prevent such prejudice from occurring). This feature of MCDs thus serves as a resource both for producing and reproducing inequality, and for showing analytically how this process is achieved. For analysts, however, this also poses a difficult question, which is related to the goal of not imposing analytical categories on the data unless they are oriented to as relevant by the participants themselves: If participants are actively working to obscure the relevance of a category (i.e. they are doing not orienting to it and effectively making it invisible), even though it is in fact consequential to what is going on, then how can analysts produce an empirically-grounded account of the relevance of that category?

Sacks' (1979) account of "hotrodder" as a "revolutionary kind of category" (p. 8) shows one of the ways in which oppressed people can discursively resist their subordination. Sacks asserts that those who "own" a category are able to use it to effect how reality is perceived with respect to that category.

Thus, categories that are created and administered by a group other than that to which they apply may be used to negatively affect perceptions of members of the group. Conversely, if a group is able to modify the categories that apply to them, or create new ones, "*they* will recognize whether someone is a member of one or another category, and what that membership takes, and *they* can do the sanctioning" (Sacks, 1979, p. 11; emphasis in original). In other words, moves to modify or recreate categories, the rules for applying them, and what can be known about their members, can be seen as revolutionary acts. This can be observed in the way in which numerous oppressed groups have invented new categories, other than the ones used by the dominant group, to refer to themselves. For example, this type of revolutionary category was central in the strategy of the Black Consciousness Movement, in apartheid South Africa, of changing both the way oppressed people perceived themselves, and the way that their oppressors perceived them. By referring to all "non-white" people in the country as "black," rather than using the terms the government adopted for categorizing them (e.g., "African," "Indian" and "Coloured"), followers of the movement were able to take ownership of their group membership, and to control what it meant to be "black," rather than acquiescing to the state's conception of what it meant to be "African," "Indian" or "Coloured." Furthermore, this strategy served to unite all the oppressed groups in the country under one category, which they defined in positive terms, in direct opposition to the state's "divide and conquer" tactics and the negative connotations attached to official government terminology (Biko, 1996).

References

Biko, S. (1996). *I write what I like: A selection of his writings*. Randburg: Raven Press.

Sacks, H. (1979). Hotrodder: A revolutionary category. In G. Psathas (Ed.), *Everyday language: Studies in ethnomethodology* (pp. 7-14). New York: Irvington.

Schegloff, E. A. (2007). A tutorial on membership categorization. *Journal of Pragmatics, 39*, 462-482.