

Introduction to Social Psychology

Instructor: Edward (Ed) Royzman, Ph.D

Time and place: T-TH, 5:30 – 9:30 pm, B-35, Psych Lab Building.

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Following a two-lecture preamble dealing with the nature of social cognition, the course will take on three fundamental issues in psychology of social influence, namely (a) how the social world around us (the words and deeds of others) shapes our thoughts and deeds, (b) how, through our words and deeds, we attempt to shape the views that others (including ourselves) hold of us, and (c) how, guided by the social motives of aggression, altruism, and sex, we are striving to reshape the world around us.

Textbook and other readings: A course-pack covering select chapters from Social Psychology by John Sabini (2nd Edition) is available at Campus Copy (39th and Walnut) and a copy of Goldstein et al.'s "Yes: 50 scientifically proven ways to be persuasive" (related to the "Doing Psychology" exercise; please see below for details) may be ordered at the Penn bookstore or from your preferred on-line retailer. A set of complementary readings, mostly original research articles (henceforth, Bb readings), will be made available via the Blackboard.

Assignments

There will be two in-class exams, a midterm and a final, worth **30** and **40** points, respectively. There is also a brief (5 pages or less) reaction paper assignment (due on the last day of class), for which you will be asked to make a link between some aspect of your personal experience or some newsworthy event and one or more of the psychological phenomena discussed in the course. The completion of this assignment will count towards **10** points of the final grade.

In addition to the reaction paper, there are two "Doing psychology" exercises, each culminating in a brief oral report; the detailed instructions for either exercise can be found on the last two pages of the syllabus. Each exercise is worth **5** points.

Class/blackboard participation: First of all, I expect you to come to class on time and to come prepared. Preparation is how ready you are to volunteer comments and observations, how well you know the material when called upon and how much effort you put into making the class

work. Because the material of the course deals with the substance of everyday life, a test of its usefulness and of your understanding is to make contact between it and your own experiences. I expect that everyone will have something to contribute and I encourage you all to participate in class discussions. The in-class participation is worth **10** points.

Additional readings and opportunities for extra credit may be discussed as we go along.

Grading:

Midterm and (non-cumulative) final — 30 and 40 points, respectively

Class participation and blackboard participation — 10 points each.

Reaction paper — 10 points.

Doing psychology exercises — 10 points.

Points-to-grades cutoffs:

> 99 A+

> 94 A

90-93A-

87-89 B+

84-86 B

80-83B-

76-79 C+

70 – 75C

Schedule (subject to change)

Introductory remarks: methodology and general themes

Read: Chapter 1 (henceforth, all Arabic numerals refer to the Sabini course-pack).

(also read the syllabus, write down any questions you might have and raise them in class).

Social Cognition: The snare of cognitive illusions

Read: The Social Cognition chapter (included as part of the “Supplementary materials” in the course-pack). **Bb reading 1.**

The snare of cognitive illusions continued.

Read: The Social Cognition chapter.

Fundamentals of Social Influence (Sherif, Asch, Latane & Darley)

Sherif /Asch: Read: Chapter 2, pp. 19-33.

Latane and Darley Experiments. Read: Chapter 2, pp. 39-45;

Watch (in class): “Obedience”.

Milgram’s obedience studies

Read: Chapter 2, pp. 45-55; **Bb reading 2a and 2b.**

Obedience continued. Dehumanization (Zimbardo’s Mock Prison Study).

Read: Chapter 2, pp. 55-60.

Watch (in class): Zimbardo mock prison study clips. **Bb reading 3a and 3b.**

Midterm Review. **Midterm.** Norm violation reports.

Self-presentation and Cognitive dissonance

Read: Chapters 6, Chapters 16, **Bb reading 4.**

Altruism and Aggression.

Read: Ch.9. **Bb reading 5.**

Sex and Gender: Mating strategies and sexual desire

Read: Chapter 12.

Sex and Gender : Parental assurance and Physical attraction

Read: Chapter 12. **Bb reading 6.**

Final Review. **Final.** The influence strategy reports.

Doing Psychology 1: Norm violation.

If social psychology teaches us anything at all it is just how densely social norms surround us---guide us, possess us, control us, even if we are not usually aware of their presence or power...that is, until a norm is violated.

Norm violations can engender a range of emotional responses, from embarrassment to guilt to (some say) disgust.

Your assignment is to heighten your awareness of the omnipresence of social norms by **violating a social norm directed at another person, or in the presence of another person**. The norms you violate may be culture-specific, gender-specific, social role-specific, or all of the above. The exercise is, in effect, a very simple experiment (with an n of 1) conforming to the before-after type of experimental design (you observe the behavior of your subject before and after the experimental manipulation to make inferences about the manipulation's effect).

Start by selecting your "target" or "targets" (preferably, someone you know or someone in a situation where your actions *will not be perceived as a threat*) and observe them carefully for a few minutes to establish their base-line behavior. Then **observe** carefully what the other does in response to your violation, and how you feel. You will then present (aim for 3 minutes or so) a brief report describing what you did, what norms were involved, and how social psychology you've learnt so far can help explain what happened (including what you felt).

Do NOT do anything that will harm or humiliate anyone else, although a little bit of embarrassment and awkwardness, *especially for you*, is one of the main points of this assignment. You may want to tell the other people involved, afterwards, that this was a psychology project, but do not tell them within the first 2 minutes. Wait and see what happens. Then, if appropriate, ask them how they felt, and what they thought.

Doing Psychology 2: Influence strategies.

The aim of this exercise is to apply one or more influence strategy ideas from the “Yes” volume to your daily life, then present a brief verbal report (shoot for 5 min or so) describing what you did and the social outcome that followed. Below is an abbreviated transcript of a sample influence strategy report filed by a student in an earlier iteration of this course.

Chapter 19—“What persuasion tip can you borrow from Benjamin Franklin?”

“This chapter talks about how Benjamin Franklin got a hostile legislator to befriend him. He sent him a letter asking to borrow one of his books, and the man sent him the book. Franklin returned the book a week later with a nice note thanking him. The next time he saw him, the other man was very nice to Franklin, and eventually, the two became good friends. By asking the man to do him a favor, the man became friendlier and more willing to do him favors in the future.”

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“For my experiment, I wanted to use this technique to become closer to one of the girls I live with. We have never really talked, which makes it a little bit awkward in the house. I was baking a cake one night for a friend’s birthday, and this girl came down to the kitchen to make dinner. I told her I knew she was a good baker and asked if she would be willing to help me. She did, and I texted her the next day to tell her the cake turned out really well. Over the next couple days, I noticed that she seemed to be talking to me more and more when we saw each other, and that weekend she asked me if she could come out with me and my friends. I was actually amazed at how well this little experiment worked, and I think we have become better friends because of it.”

Recommended readings from “Yes” .

- Social Cognition*: “Yes”, Chps. 5, 34, 36.
- Sherif/Asch: Read*: “Yes”, Chps. 1-4, 24.
- Milgram*: “Yes”, Chps. 14, 45.
- Cognitive dissonance*: “Yes”, Chps. 14 –20.
- Aggression / Altruism* : “Yes”, Chps. 9-13.