Theories of Social Psychology: Health Applications
PSY 558: Fall, 1998

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Prerequisite: Graduate Statistics (e.g., PSY 501) or currently registered for PSY 501, and familiarity with regression analyses.

Description: This course applies social psychological theory to health. It attempts to present theoretically-driven research in health psychology in a format more akin to a research seminar. The content reflects my interest in trying to bridge the gap between social psychology and health psychology. As a relative new "hybrid" area, the findings are sometimes tentative rather than well-established. Each week a social psychological theory will be examined and health-related research discussed. Included also is published articles by our graduate students (identified by an asterisk), mostly in highly rated journals, as examples of research that they developed from the theories and ideas discussed in this course. Your papers, described below, will also ask you to think critically, theoretically, and creatively about the various topics you decide to write about. You may even want do a study one day on one of your papers!

overview of readings: Articles have been selected with the following in mind:

1. Some historical introduction to the theory.
2. A review article on each topic, or one with a point of view.
3. Empirical research from a variety of illnesses and health issues, including cancer, rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes, renal disease, heart disease, abortion, SIDS, adjustment to surgery, survival, obesity and dieting, pregnancy, and with articles also focusing on women and cultural issues.
4. A mixture of correlational studies, laboratory and field experiments.

Papers and Grading: Grading is based on 3 six-page, double lined, typewritten papers (70% total) critically evaluating one of the weekly research areas. Quality rather than quantity is emphasized with a focus on providing a critical analysis of one of the weekly research topics. A review or survey of research findings is not wanted. Assume the reader (me) knows the content of the research area so that a review is not necessary. I am interested in your perspective, slant, or idea about the weekly research topic. The three topics should be chosen from the first (Sep 3-Oct 1), second (Oct 8-Nov 29) and third (Nov 5-Dec 3) parts of the outline. The papers are due at class meetings (Oct 8; Nov 5; Dec 3). The other 30% is for 1) class participation and attendance
(20%) for which you are expected to attend at least 11 of the 12 weekly topic sessions from Sep 10-Dec 3, with points deducted for sessions missed or partly attended and 2) a 20 minute group oral exam will take place in class time (2.30-5.30) on December 10 (10%), in which I will ask each you, formed into groups of 4, questions about the course material and class discussion.

Since there is no written exam to review your understanding of the course material not covered by your 3 papers, your weekly preparation, attendance, participation, and oral exam on the remaining topics will be important in determining your final grade. It is important that you come to class having read the material well. You should have written summaries of the main parts of each article and questions to ask about the material.

**Student weekly presentation and class format:** Each week a graduate student(s) will introduce an article from the reading list (identified by a + on reading list) and act as discussant/facilitator for that part of the session. You will prepare and distribute a 2-3 page outline of the article to class members at class time (see example). It should include some of the main concepts, definitions of the theory and research, and two or three interesting discussion questions.

Typically, each week, I will give an introduction to the theory or topic followed by the student presentation of the article, followed by discussion of other readings. All students should bring the weekly articles to class for reference.
Psychology 558 (Friend)
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Theories of Social Psychology: Health Applications

SEPT 3: Introduction

SEPT 10: Social Psychology in History


SEPT 17: The Health Psychology Challenge


SEPT 24: Social Comparison Theory


OCT 1: Attributions

Review Ross and Nisbett, "Labeling versus exhortation to achieve behavior change" (pp. 228-230).


OCT 8: Self-efficacy (Paper 1 due in class)


OCT 15: Personal Control


OCT 22: Interpersonal expectations

Review Ross and Nisbett, "Social labels and self-fulfilling prophecies" (pp. 227-228) and "Placebo effects and reverse placebo effects (pp. 235-237).


OCT 29: Cognitive Dissonance


Review of Ross and Nisbett, "Motivational consequences of superfluous inducements" (pp. 230-232).


NOV 5: Social Support (Paper 2 due in class)

Wills, Social Support (1990) Brownell (Eds.), Behavioral medicine in women's health (pp.118-123). New York: Guildford.


NOV 12: Problematic Social Relations and Health


NOV 19: Health Belief Model


DEC 3: Surgical stress and affiliation (Paper 3 due in class)


DEC 10: Oral exam.

+ Article to be summarized by two students (10 minutes) using outline distributed in class

* SUNY Graduate Student MA/PhD

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