Social Psychology Sample Syllabus

Social psychology is the study of the effect of others (real, imagined, and perceived) on individuals' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Topics will include the science of Social Psychology, social cognition, self and identity, social perception, attitudes, persuasion, social influence, group dynamics, stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, aggression, prosocial behaviors, attraction and close relationships, and applications of Social Psychology to health, law, and business. All learning outcomes for a traditional Social Psychology course will be satisfied.

Please note that this sample syllabus draws on a sample Social Psychology syllabus created by the faculty at Florida Tech University.

Course Objectives
Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Define Social Psychology and discuss its history and applications
- Discuss the methodologies of basic and applied research, as well as research theories and ethics
- Identify the components of self concept and the concepts of self schemas
- Distinguish between stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination
- Define and discuss the techniques used to examine and report attitudes
- Compare and contrast the different types of compliance
- Explain the theories and dynamics of groups (roles, norms, and cohesiveness)
- Define aggression and its associated theories
- Explain the theories of justice and the purpose of the legal system
- Describe the process of jury deliberation within the context of social psychology

Textbook:
Evaluation:

In-class exams: 40%

Writing Assignments: 30%

Informal Writing and activities: 10%

Final Exam: 20%

WEEK 1
Lecture: Introduction to Social Psychology
Outcomes

- Define Social Psychology and discuss its applications
- Explain how the findings of Social Psychology do not necessarily coincide with common sense
- Discuss the history and development of the field and the major contributors

WEEK 2
Lecture: Social Psychology Research
Outcomes

- Explain the important steps in research, including the development of a hypothesis and a theory
- Discuss the difference between basic and applied research and give an example of both
- Discuss the process of moving from a concept to an operational definition to measurement of a variable
- Distinguish between descriptive research, correlational research, and experiments
- Identify the independent and dependent variables in a study
- Explain the concept of statistical significance
- Differentiate between experimental realism and mundane realism
- Discuss research ethics and the role of Institutional Review Boards

WEEK 3
Lecture: The Social Self
Outcomes

- Explain the ABCs of the self and the idea of self-concept and self-schemas
- Discuss self-esteem and why we have a need for it
- Define self-discrepancy theory, self-awareness, and self-regulation
- Explain the four methods of self-enhancement: self-serving cognitions, self-handicapping, basking in reflected glory, and downward social comparison
- Discuss how different cultures conceptualize the self

WEEK 4
Lecture: Perceiving Persons

Outcomes

- Define social perception and explain how it can be influenced by people, situations, and behavior
- Discuss the attribution theories of Heider, Jones, and Kelley
- Define and give examples of cognitive heuristics and the fundamental attribution error
- Explain the two-step model of the attributional process and why it may not be followed
- Discuss cultural and motivational influences on attributions and our perceptions of other people
- Define information integration theory
- Explain the three “deviations” from the arithmetic in information integration: perceiver characteristics, priming effects, target characteristics, and the primacy effect
- Discuss confirmation biases and the contributions of perseverance of beliefs, confirmatory hypothesis testing, and the self-fulfilling prophecy

WEEK 5

Lecture: Stereotypes, Prejudices, and Discrimination

Outcomes

- Distinguish between stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination
- Discuss how social categorization, ingroup vs. outgroup thinking, and implicit personality theories lead to stereotype formation
- Explain how illusory correlations, attributions, subtyping and contrasting, and confirmation biases contribute to the survival of stereotypes
- Discuss the automatic activation of stereotypes and the effect that may have on people’s actions and perceptions
- Compare and contrast the following theories of prejudice: intergroup conflict, social identity theory, and social dominance orientation
- Discuss how culture and the media contribute to hostile and benevolent sexism
- Explain what is meant by a “threat in the air” and stereotype threat
- Discuss various ways to reduce stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination

WEEK 6

Lecture: Attitudes

Outcomes

- Define attitudes and compare and contrast the three ways to study attitudes: self-report, covert measures, and the implicit association test
- Discuss the link between attitudes and behavior and research supporting and refuting this link
- Explain the factors that affect the strength of an attitude
- Compare and contrast the central and peripheral routes of persuasion and give an example of each
- What research says about the importance of credibility and likability of the source of a message and the related phenomenon called the sleeper effect
- How a message is best communicated and when a communicator may want to appeal to fear and emotion and when to stick to the facts
How a subject's need for cognition influences persuasion and discuss the inoculation hypothesis and psychological reactance

Explain the theory of cognitive dissonance using examples of current and classic research

Compare and contrast Bem’s self-perception theory, impression management theory, and self-esteem theories

WEEK 7
Lecture: Social Influence
Outcomes

Define social influence and compare and contrast conformity, compliance, and obedience

Compare Asch and Sherif's studies on conformity and explain the difference between public and private conformity

Explain the difference between normative and informational influence

Compare and contrast majority and minority influence

Discuss the difference types of compliance including the norm of reciprocity, foot-in-the-door, door-in-the-face, and low-balling

Describe Milgram’s famous experiment and what it tells us about obedience to authority

Explain how cultural differences play a role in social influence

The role of advertising; central and peripheral routes to persuasion

WEEK 8
Lecture: Group Processes
Outcomes

Define a group and a collective

Compare and contrast social facilitation and social loafing

Discuss the mere presence theory, the evaluation apprehension theory, and the distraction-conflict theory

Explain the concept of deindividuation

Describe the three essential components of groups: roles, norms, and cohesiveness

Describe the process of group polarization

Describe the process of groupthink

Discuss the concept of brainstorming and whether or not it is beneficial for group performance

Define a social dilemma and explain the prisoner’s dilemma and resource dilemmas

Suggest ways to solve social dilemmas

WEEK 9
Lecture: Attraction and Close Relationships
Outcomes

Define the need for affiliation and compare it to our resentment of loneliness

Explain the principle components of attraction, including proximity and the mere exposure effect
• Provide arguments to support the idea that beauty is an objective standard
• Provide arguments to support the idea that beauty is a subjective standard
• Define the what-is-beautiful-is-good stereotype and discuss if there is any truth to it
• Describe the factors involved in becoming interested in someone and starting a relationship
• Discuss evolutionary and cultural contributions to relationships
• Compare and contrast the social exchange theory and the equity theory of intimate relationships

WEEK 10
Lecture: Helping Others
Outcomes
• Explain the evolutionary approaches to helping
• Describe how possible rewards could increase helping
• Discuss the debate over egoism and altruism; that is, whether or not true altruism can exist
• Explain the empathy-altruism hypothesis and the negative state relief model
• Give the five steps to helping in an emergency and the influential factors at each step
• Describe the bystander effect and diffusion of responsibility
• Discuss the effects of time constraints, mood, culture, role models, and social norms on decisions to help
• Describe the people we are most likely to help

WEEK 11: Aggression
Outcomes
• Explain why defining aggression may be difficult
• Distinguish between emotional and instrumental aggression
• Describe various culture and gender differences in aggression expression
• Describe theories of aggression that propose aggression is an innate characteristic, including instinct, evolutionary, and biological theories
• Explain the role of learning, modeling, and socialization
• Define the frustration-aggression hypothesis and research supporting or refuting it
• Explain the roles that affect, arousal, and cognition have on aggression
• Describe how the media contributes to violence and aggression
• Discuss pornography and sexual aggression

WEEK 12
Lecture: Law
Outcomes
• Discuss the process of jury selection and what is meant by scientific jury selection
• Discuss death qualification and its ramifications
• Explain the nine steps of interrogation and how some of the approaches can lead to false confessions
Using concepts from previous modules discuss how a jury may react to confession evidence

Explain some of the problems with eyewitnesses and eyewitness identifications at the stage of information acquisition, storage, and retrieval

Discuss how eyewitness evidence may be interpreted by a juror and the different topics that an eyewitness expert may discuss if asked to testify

Explain, using concepts from previous modules, how pretrial publicity, inadmissible testimony, and the judge’s instructions can affect a juror’s verdict

Describe the process of jury deliberations and the different factors involved

Discuss sentencing and relate the Stanford Prison Study to a person’s experience in jail

Discuss different theories on justice and the purpose of the legal system

**Formal Writing Assignment**

In this assignment, I would like you to write an essay in which you consider the impact of others on our behaviors and in particular, under what circumstances others can cause a person to violate her/his own personal code of ethics. Please use the readings on both Milgram’s obedience study and Kitty Genovese to consider this issue. You may also draw on our class discussions/notes and the video of Milgram’s study that we watched in class.

Please note that the Milgram and Kitty Genovese readings are available under “course documents” on blackboard.

In your essay, please make sure to include the following:

- A solid argument or position concerning the impact of others on our ability to help or harm another person.

- A clear description of Milgram’s study and the specific conditions that both increased and decreased obedience levels.

- A clear description of the Kitty Genovese tragedy and the factors that prohibited people from calling for help.

- A connection that you find between Milgram’s obedience study and the Kitty Genovese tragedy. How do both illustrate the impact of others on our behaviors?

- Some reflection on the degree to which individual responsibility is moderated by the presence of authority figures or other persons. Please give your opinion and feel free to draw on evidence from your own everyday experiences.
Technical stuff:

- Typed, double-spaced, 12 point font.
- Minimum of three typed pages
- Absolutely everything must be in your own words or quoted from the readings provided in class and/or posted on blackboard. Please no outside sources.

***Please note that drafts 1 and 2 will not be graded but must be submitted! Draft 3 will be assigned a grade.

Informal Writing Assignments and Learning Activities

1. Find examples of Social Psychological concepts in your reading of newspaper and magazine articles. Describe the concepts in your own words and discuss how you find them illuminated within the articles.

2. Imagine that the shocks in Milgram's study were real and that the learner died because the teacher obeyed orders. If you were a lawyer, would you prosecute the person? Why or why not?

3. Describe conformity in your own words and give examples from your own life of when you chose to conform and/or not conform. What factors do you believe make you more or less likely to conform?

4. Describe stereotype threat in your own words. Were you surprised by Claude Steele’s findings? Can you give an example of where you have observed stereotype threat in your own life?

5. Define stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination in your own words. Give an example of each in your own everyday life.

6. What are the factors make people more and less likely to say “yes” to a request? How might you use these factors to get a professor to postpone a test date?
7. What are three social roles that you play in your own everyday life? How did Zimbardo reveal the danger of social roles in his famous prison experiment?

8. What has social psychological research about the problems and inaccuracies of eyewitness testimony? What problems, specifically, have been identified at the stages of information acquisition, storage, and retrieval?