MSc module
Applications of Social Psychology (921C8)
Autumn Term 2013

Module Convenor: Professor Rupert Brown

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Objectives

The core objective of this advanced level module is to introduce students to contemporary theorising in social psychology that has the potential to address today’s most pressing social issues. Throughout the module there will be a continual emphasis on the application of theoretical models to particular social contexts so as to deepen students’ understanding of the utility and the limitations of these models in practice. By the end of the module students will be expected to:

1. Demonstrate a critical understanding of the strengths and limitations of social psychology for contributing to the amelioration of societal problems
2. Communicate their knowledge about the applicability of social psychology effectively both orally and in writing

Level and Duration

The module will last for one term and will be offered to Masters students in Psychology. It will assume some basic knowledge of social psychology gained from undergraduate degree modules.

Assessment

The module will be assessed through a 3000 word essay (80%), submitted at the end of this term, and a 10 minute presentation using Powerpoint during the term (20%). Regarding the latter, the time limit for these presentations is **10 minutes**, and you are advised to stick strictly to this. Within such a time-frame, do not attempt to present a detailed account of the whole paper or every study in it (in a multi-study paper). Rather, use your judgement to decide: which are the key ideas under examination, which findings are most important to illuminate those ideas, and what are the main conclusions we should draw from it? Don’t forget to leave yourself a minute or so at the end for your own critical evaluation of the paper.

The deadline for the essay is published on Sussex Direct. It should be handed in at the Psychology Office in the normal way.

Teaching Methods

Teaching is through lectures and small group seminars. The group will meet weekly with the module teacher for a 2 hour lecture/seminar. During each class one student (or pair of students) will take responsibility for a presentation of a particular paper relevant to that week’s topic. Together with a brief summary of the previous week’s class, this presentation is made available on the module web page by the start of the following week’s seminar.

This module puts a higher premium than usual on student preparation and active participation. What you will learn will be in direct proportion to the amount of effort you are prepared to expend engaging with the module materials and the seminar discussions.
Contributing faculty
Rupert Brown (RB)
Richard De Visser (Rdev)
John Drury (JD)
Donna Jessop (DJ)
Karen Long (KL)
Viv Vignoles (VV)

Module Texts

There is no single text for this module, given the wide-ranging nature of the material covered. However, there are a few books that you may find useful:


Journals that cover applied social psychology include,

Basic and Applied Social Psychology
Health Psychology
Journal of Applied Social Psychology
Journal of Social Issues
Psychology and Health
Social Issues and Policy Review

Seminar Topics and Reading Lists

Below are the seminar readings. For each topic there is an asterisked (*) essential background reading. Everyone should read this as a minimum requirement. Then there are several further readings, usually reports of empirical studies, that will be assigned to individuals to read and report back on to the rest of the group. The lists are extensive partly to ensure that everyone is able to read something for each week, and partly to assist you in preparing assignments. I have tried to ensure that all readings are available electronically through the library’s on-line journals collection or through pdf files located on the module web-site. If you really cannot locate particular references, use your own initiative to find substitute papers on related topics. The Current Periodicals Section of the Library and PsychInfo are good places to browse for these. In other words, “I couldn’t find the reading” is not an acceptable excuse for failing to prepare for a seminar!
After the introductory session, the module is organised into two parts. The first part focuses on applications which are rooted in group and intergroup processes; the second part focuses more on changing individual behaviours.

1. Introductory session (RB)

Orientation. Allocation of student presentations.
Some core issues in applying social psychology.
Political and ethical limits of applied social psychology

Readings

[A] Group and Intergroup Processes in Society

(2) Intergroup contact and prejudice: panacea or pacifier? (RB)


For general background on intergroup contact:

And a recent vigorous critique of contact as a strategy for reducing intergroup inequality:


(3) **Real-world interventions aiming to improve intergroup relations (RB)**


For a comprehensive review of prejudice reduction efforts:


(4) **Intergroup reconciliation in post-conflict societies (RB)**


For other work on intergroup reconciliation:


(5) **Acculturation and immigration (RB)**


For general background on acculturation and intergroup relations:

(6) Understanding cultural differences (VV)


For an extensive overview of research into cross-cultural psychology:


Selected writings by some key cross-cultural theorists:


(7) Mobilizing collective action for social change (JD)


Integrative reviews:


(8) Collective resilience in emergencies and disasters (JD)


http://dspace.udel.edu:8080/dspace/bitstream/handle/19716/683/PP313.pdf?sequence=1


Reviews of the literature and recommendations:


[B] Changing behaviour in society

**TOPIC 6: Fear appeals (DJ)**


For a meta-analysis of protection motivation theory:


(10) **Social relationships and social media (KL)**


General background reviews:


(11) **Using and abusing alcohol (RdeV)**


(12) Sexual relationships and sexual health (RdeV)


General:


Essay titles

1. Critically examine the thesis advanced by Dixon et al. that contact can do more harm than good.
2. What gives social psychologists the right to intervene? Discuss the ethics and politics of applied social psychology.
3. Assess the potential role(s) that social psychology can play in the aftermath of severe intergroup conflict.
4. Is an acculturation strategy of ‘integration’ always good for you?
5. Compare and contrast two theoretical approaches to explaining cross-cultural variation in behaviour. Which do you find more convincing, and why?
6. How do social psychologists say collective action can contribute to social change? How can they help subordinate groups trying to change their situation?
7. How can an understanding of collective psychology help policy-makers and professionals plan for emergencies and disasters?
8. Does the empirical evidence support the widespread use of fear appeals by health promoters? Might alternative approaches to encouraging behaviour change be more effective?
9. To what extent do online social networks offer psychological benefits to their users?
10. How useful are unit-based guidelines for efforts to curb excessive alcohol consumption? Suggest alternative / additional approaches that may help to curb excessive alcohol consumption.
11. If you were to design a public health campaign to increase condom use among young people, what variables would you focus on? Justify your choices.
Assessment Criteria for Assessed Presentations

Presentations are assessed on each of the following 7 criteria:
1. Analysis,
2. Content,
3. Structure,
4. Delivery,
5. Materials.

The five areas of assessment are emphasised differently in distinguishing between different classes of marks for presentation. For example, the quality of analysis and structure is likely to distinguish between a Distinction and Merit presentation; whereas content and structure are more prominent when differentiating Merit and Pass presentations. The following criteria must be interpreted with some flexibility – for example, an innovative approach to delivery or discussion may compensate for weaknesses elsewhere in a presentation. Presentations that run over the allocated time are likely to be penalised.

70% and above DISTINCTION
Distinction level presentations will demonstrate competence in all of the 5 areas specified above, with excellence in most. Marks will increase as the number of areas in which the standard of performance is high increases. Such presentations are likely to show originality in exposition as well as clarity, accuracy and thoroughness. Appropriate analysis will have been applied to the material presented, and clear and a well-organised powerpoint presentation will have been used. The presentation will be well structured and skilfully delivered, within the specified time limit.

60-69% MERIT
Presentations at this level will show competence in most of the 5 areas of assessment (with excellence in one or two areas). Marks will rise from 60-69% as presentations satisfy the requirement of competence more comfortably. Merit level presentations should have appropriate contents and a logical structure (introduction, development, conclusion). There should be a clear and focused exposition of the chosen material, with no major omissions. Presentations should be delivered clearly, using an adequate powerpoint presentation. Analysis of key conceptual and empirical issues will be evident, evidence will be used to support or illustrate theoretical points and interpretations.

50-59% PASS
Presentations at this level will show competence in only 1 or 2 of the specified areas. Typical presentations will comprise a predictable and unimaginative overview. They are likely to suffer from omission of key material and/or sub-optimal structure. There is unlikely to be much attempt at original analysis. The powerpoint presentation may be poor, exposition is likely to lack clarity and focus and may reflect lack of understanding of more complex arguments or evidence. Irrelevant material may be included. However, a basic, if perhaps unsophisticated, grasp of the topic area will be evident.

<50% FAIL
Presentations at this level are likely to be very basic in terms of topic coverage and are unlikely to contain information beyond that available from lecture notes or basic textbook review chapters. They are likely to be under-researched and inadequately prepared. Misunderstandings, omissions or errors are likely to combine with poor structure and lack of clarity. Delivery is likely to be poor, reflecting lack of preparation. In other words, Failing presentations are likely to be characterised by confusion, on the part of the presenter due to lack of understanding or preparation.
STUDENT........................................................................DATE/TIME..............................................

TOPIC........................................................................TUTOR..............

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Additional Comments and Suggestions for Improvement Next Time:

Overall Percentage: ______
1. Below are key questions which guide the assessment of your essay:

**Structure and Quality of Argument**
- Is the essay plan stated in the introduction?
- Is the overall structure of the argument clear and coherent?
- Are the points made in a logical sequence?
- Is the argument sufficiently analytical?
- Is the argument marred by inappropriate personal opinions and bias?
- Is there a conclusion?
- Does the conclusion address the essay question directly?
- Is the conclusion adequately supported by the preceding argument?

**Use of Evidence**
- Are the points made supported by evidence from cited sources?
- Are the sources drawn on sufficient and appropriate?
- If empirical evidence is used, is it described clearly and in appropriate detail?
- Does the evidence presented support the conclusions reached?
- Is the interpretation of the evidence presented appropriately qualified (i.e. avoiding overgeneralisations and sweeping statements)?

**Contents**
- Are the sources used subjected to analysis and critical reflection?
- Has the student researched the topic sufficiently?
- Are there any important omissions?
- Has the student thought about what they have read or simply reproduced material from sources?
- Is there evidence of critical thinking or an original synthesis?
- Has the student gone beyond the essential reading?

**Writing and Presentation Skills**
- Is the essay referenced correctly, with a clear distinction between primary and secondary sources?
- Are quotations identified and fully referenced?
- Are the ideas presented fully credited?
- Is there any evidence of plagiarism?
- Is the essay fluent and readable?
- Is the grammar and spelling adequate?
- Has the writer avoided sexist, racist or other discriminatory language?
- Has the writer made an effort to use their own words?
Assessment criteria for Assessed essays

Essays are assessed according to the following qualities:

Content
• Breadth of research; independent research, going beyond core reading.
• Novelty of argument; going beyond ‘standard’ treatments, synthesising relevant material from different topic areas
• Use of evidence. Argument must be backed up by relevant empirical findings or theoretical ideas. Appropriate interpretation of empirical evidence.
• Quality of argument.
• Independence of thought. Extent and depth of analysis and critical reflection.

Structure
• Introduction. Introduction sets out the argument to follow.
• Material presented in a logical order.

Writing and technical skills
• Style. Fluency, liveliness and readability.
• Grammar, spelling and punctuation
• Consistent referencing system, preferably APA style.
• Avoidance of derivative writing. Ideas expressed in the author's own words.

Marks of 70% or above: Distinction
Tutors should not be reluctant to award marks in the 80s or even the 90s in the case of really excellent work, although grades in the 90s should be reserved for work deemed to be outstanding. Students will have read widely around the topic and will show a thorough understanding and appreciation of the material. The essay will have a clear structure and will develop a coherent argument which shows signs of original or critical thought. The standard of English should be good with few errors of spelling or grammar, and the essay should be well presented and properly referenced. Essays in this band of marks will be exciting to read; they should stand out from most of the others. Students may have taken a risk and gone out on a limb to make a point about the topic or to challenge some accepted position, but they must be able to back up their argument with sound resort to evidence or to theoretical sources. The defining feature of essays marked in this band is that they show flair, maturity and confidence.

Marks between 60% and 69%: Merit
Students should have read a diversity of material from the reading list and should show a clear understanding of the issues raised by their reading. All important material on the topic should be covered in the essay, and the essay should be well structured, clearly written and well presented. The essay should show evidence that the student has thought about the topic and has not simply reproduced standard arguments or evidence from major sources. Particularly in marks at the higher end of this band, essays will show confidence in handling complex material. There should be no major omissions in the coverage of the topic, nor should the essay contain any significant errors of understanding or interpretation. The standard of English should be good, and spelling and grammar should be reasonable. At this level of marking, the student should seem at ease in handling empirical data and/or theoretical ideas as appropriate. All sources should be properly cited in a bibliography or in references.

Marks between 50% and 59%: Pass
Essays should show evidence that the student has read the basic material for the topic and has a reasonable understanding of it. There should be a proper bibliography or other referencing system. There may be some signs of weakness, such as confusion about debates and arguments or misinterpretation of some evidence, but overall the grasp of the topic should be sound. The essay should be reasonably well structured and the material should be coherently presented. The student should have avoided heavy reliance on any one source unless this is in the nature of the topic. Essays marked in this band will probably be either reasonably competent but somewhat predictable and lacking in liveliness, or will show signs of an attempt at originality which is nevertheless insufficiently grounded in a thorough appreciation of the material. The standard of English should be reasonably competent, although problems in spelling or grammar may be tolerated provided they do not produce unintelligibility.
Marks below 50%: Fail
They will be substantially below average. Students will probably have done only basic reading and will show little or no appreciation of the debates or the different interpretations which might be drawn from particular evidence. The essay will indicate a very basic understanding of the topic, but will not have gone beyond this, and there may well be signs of confusion. The standard of English may leave something to be desired, but the essay should make sense and should show some sign of structure and organisation. Material should be properly referenced, although there may be few references with quite heavy reliance on just one or two sources.