SYLLABUS

PSY 558, *Theories of Social Psychology: Health Applications*

Fall, 2008, Mondays, Wednesdays: 2:20-3:40, Psychology B 248

Instructor: Anne Moyer; Office: Psych B 224; Tel: 2-7811; email: anne.moyer@sunysb.edu. Office hours: Mon 4:30-6:30, or by appointment

Course Description and Objectives:

This course provides an overview of the ways in which social psychological theories and perspectives can be used to understand thoughts and behavior relevant to health and illness. We will consider social influence, social comparison, pluralistic ignorance, social support, cognitive dissonance, message framing, and fear communication. The course will also cover links between personality characteristics and health and how the broader social and cultural environment affects health and illness. The readings have been carefully selected to give you an overview of the field of social/health psychology, and expose you to some of the important figures and methodologies.

Required Reading:


Course readings listed in Times New Roman font are from the text, and those listed in Arial font are articles to be downloaded from university library holdings.

Class Format:

Often, I will give an introduction to the theory or topic area; this will be followed by a student presentation of one of the articles, and a discussion of other readings, and homework assignments or reading responses. We will also have scheduled debates on key issues. On selected weeks we will also view a video of a presentation given by an expert in the field (see “virtual guest presentations,” below) or have a live guest presentation.
Evaluation:

Course grades will be based on class attendance and participation, weekly reading response assignments, and on satisfactory completion of a research proposal and review of other course member’s proposals as indicated below:

1. Participation (including presentation of readings) 25%
2. Reading response/homework assignments (10 best) 40%
3. Research proposal (due Nov 26) 25%
4. Reviews of classmates’ research proposals (due Dec 10) 10%

1. Participation: You are expected to attend at least 26 of the 28 class sessions, with points deducted for additional sessions missed or partly attended. It is expected that you come to class having read all material thoroughly, including articles to be presented by a fellow student. It would be a good idea to take notes on each article and bring them along with the articles that we are discussing to class. About every week, a student will introduce an article (indicated in **bold** for each week) from the reading list and will facilitate discussion for that part of the session. This should review some of the main concepts, results, and discussion, and two or three interesting discussion questions. Presentations should be about 10-15 minutes. The student will provide class members with a 2-5 page (double-spaced) summary of the article. This should be in a style similar to a *New York Times*, *Science Times* article or an *APA Monitor* article. Basically, the goal is to provide an interesting, engaging, yet accurate description of the research that skillfully distills the most important take-home message of the research. An award for the best summary will be presented at the end of the course. Another activity is debates on controversial issues in the field. Students will be assigned pro or con positions. Finally, when we view video presentations of experts in the field, you should take notes to facilitate subsequent discussion.

2. Homework and reading response assignments: Each week there will be brief assignments due, either a formal assignment or a reading response. For reading responses, students will choose one article from the reading list, apart from the article to be presented in class, to write a reaction paper on. Reading responses should be 1-2 pages and include: extracting the most important points or take-home message from the article; questions the reading generated or things that you disagreed with, or things that you’d like to raise for general discussion with other members of the seminar; a suggestion for improving the design or interpretation of the research; new terms or words that the reading introduced you to. When you are presenting an article, you are exempt from submitting a reaction paper (or a specified homework) from that week! **Please submit assignments electronically by 12:00 noon, (this way I can read through them before class); bring a hard copy to the class session.**

3. Research proposal: The research proposal allows you to explore a particular topic touched upon in the course in greater depth and to gain experience proposing research. It should be 8-12 pages in length (double-spaced, 12pt font) and written in APA style corresponding to the general format of a research proposal, including: specific aims, background and significance, research design and methods, and literature cited.

4. Review of classmates’ research proposals: Course members will conduct brief, anonymous, written reviews of other course member’s research proposals. During the last class meeting we will conduct a mock review panel meeting that simulates the
procedures used in real review panel meetings. Proposals will be given “priority scores” and “funding decisions” will be made. Although I cannot offer you thousands of dollars to conduct your research, “handsome rewards” will be awarded to the top applicants.

**Other important information:**

You can access class information (syllabus) on-line at: [http://blackboard.sunysb.edu](http://blackboard.sunysb.edu). If you used Blackboard recently your login information (Username and Password) has not changed. If you have never used Stony Brook's Blackboard system, your initial password is your SOLAR ID# and your username is the same as your Stony Brook (sparky) username, which is generally your first initial and the first 7 letters of your last name.

For help or more information see: [http://www.sinc.sunysb.edu/helpdesk/docs/blackboard/bbstudent.php](http://www.sinc.sunysb.edu/helpdesk/docs/blackboard/bbstudent.php) For problems logging in, go to the helpdesk in the Main Library SINC Site or the Union SINC Site, you can also call: 631-632-9602 or e-mail: helpme@ic.sunysb.edu

If you have a physical, psychological, medical, or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact Disability Support Services at (631) 632-6748 or [http://studentaffairs.stonybrook.edu/dss/](http://studentaffairs.stonybrook.edu/dss/). They will determine with you what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential.

Students who require assistance during emergency evacuation are encouraged to discuss their needs with their professors and Disability Support Services. For procedures and information go to the following website: [http://www.sunysb.edu/ehs/fire/disabilities.shtml](http://www.sunysb.edu/ehs/fire/disabilities.shtml)

Any form of academic dishonesty will be treated as a serious matter. This consists of any act that is designed to obtain fraudulently, either for oneself or for someone else, academic credit, grades, or other recognition that is not properly earned or that adversely affects another’s grade, including, but not limited to, cheating or plagiarizing. Each student must pursue his or her academic goals honestly and be personally accountable for all submitted work. Representing another person's work as your own is always wrong. Any suspected instance of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Academic Judiciary. For more comprehensive information on academic integrity, including categories of academic dishonesty, please refer to the academic judiciary website at [http://www.stonybrook.edu/uaa/academicjudiciary/](http://www.stonybrook.edu/uaa/academicjudiciary/)

**Course Schedule and Readings:**

*Week 1: Wed Sept 3: Introduction to the Course and to the Fields of Social and Health Psychology*
Week 2: Mon Sept 8 and Wed Sept 10: Mental Models of Health and Illness

Readings

Monday (Homework due: Assignment #1: Example of a Common-Sense Model)

Lecture: Mental Models of Health and Illness (download slides)

Wednesday (Homework due: Assignment #2: Cognitive Theories of Health-Protective Behavior)

Student Presentation:
- N.D. Weinstein, Testing Four Competing Theories of Health-protective Behavior.

Week 3: Mon Sept 15 and Wed Sept 17: Health Beliefs and Health Behavior

Readings

Monday (Homework due: Reading response)

Lecture: Health Beliefs and Health Behavior (download slides)

Debate: Pro or con: “There is nothing so practical as a good theory.”

Wednesday: (due Homework Assignment #3: Identifying a Desired Health-Related Behavior Change)

Student Presentation:

**Video Presentation and Discussion**

*Please Talk to Your Kids about AIDS*
Directed by Brian Hennessey, 26 minutes

**Debate:** Pro or con: Discussing sex and AIDS with young children is harmful.

**Week 4: Mon Sept 22 and Wed Sept 24: Health Information Processing**

**Readings**

**Monday: (due: Reading Response)**

**Lecture:** *Health Information Processing* (download slides)

• P.H. Ditto, R.T. Croyle, Understanding the Impact of Risk Factor Test Results: Insights from a Basic Research Program.

• Liberman, S. Chaiken, Defensive Processing of Personally Relevant Health Messages.


**Debate:** Pro or con: Individuals willing to assume the personal risk of engaging in unhealthy practices should be allowed to do so.

**Student Presentation:**

• T.K. MacDonald, G.T. Fong, M.P. Zanna, A.M. Martineau, Alcohol Myopia and Condom Use: Can Alcohol Intoxication Be Associated with More Prudent Behavior?

**Wednesday: (Homework #4 due: Begin to Design a Health Behavior Change Strategy)**

**(Virtual) Guest Presentation and Discussion**

Daniel Kahneman, Ph.D., 2002 Nobel Laureate in Economics, Princeton University
The Marvels and Illusions of Intuitive Thinking
**Week 5: Mon Sept 29: Social Influence and Health and Illness: Social Comparison and Social Norms**

**Readings**

**Monday (Homework Assignment #5 due: Evaluate a Public Health Message or Campaign)**

- F.X. Gibbons, M. Gerrard, Predicting Young Adults' Health Risk Behavior.
- D.A. Prentice, D.T. Miller, Pluralistic Ignorance and Alcohol Use on Campus: Some Consequences of Misperceiving the Social Norm.

**Student Presentation:**

**Debate:** Pro or con: Downward social comparisons are useful and mentally healthy.

***Wed, Oct 1, No Classes, Rosh Hashanah***

**Week 6: Mon Oct 6, Wed Oct 8: Social Support and Health and Illness**

**Readings**

**Monday (Homework Assignment #6 due: Respond to Questions from Your Health Behavior Change Guru)**

**Lecture: Social Support and Health and Illness (download slides)**

- S. Cohen, Psychosocial Models of the Role of Social Support in the Etiology of Physical Disease.

**Wednesday (Homework due: Reading Response)**


**Student Presentation:**


**Debate:** Pro or con: Talking something out can help you cope with it.

Readings

Monday (Homework due: Reading Response)


Debate: Pro or con: Having friends is beneficial to your health.

Student Presentation:


Wednesday

(Virtual) Guest Presenter and Discussion

Linda J. Waite, Ph.D., University of Chicago
The Impact of Social Institutions on Health: The Case for Marriage

Debate: Pro or con: being married is beneficial to health.

Week 8: Mon Oct 20, Wed Oct 22: Changing Behavior

Readings

Monday (Homework #7 due: Finding an Example of a Theoretically-based Health Behavior Change Intervention)


Wednesday
Student Presentation:

**Week 9: Mon Oct 27, Wed Oct 29: Personality, Individual Variables, and Health**

Readings

Monday (Homework due: Reading response)

(Real) Guest Presentation and Discussion

Marci Lobel, Ph.D.
Stress, Coping, and their Impact on Pregnancy


Wednesday (Homework #8 due: Plan your Final Health Behavior Change Strategy)

Student Presentation:

- H.S. Freidman, S. Booth-Kewley, The 'Disease-prone Personality'.

- T.W. Smith, Hostility and Health: Current Status of a Psychosomatic Hypothesis.

(Virtual) Guest Presenter and Discussion

Karen A. Matthews, PhD, University of Pittsburgh
Gender Differences in Heart Disease: Let Me Count the Ways

**Week 10: Mon Nov 3, Wed Nov 5: Thoughts, Mind and Health**

Readings
Monday (Homework due: Reading Response)

- J.W. Pennebaker, Writing about Emotional Experiences as a Therapeutic Process.

Student presentation:


Wednesday

(Virtual) Guest Presenter

Bruce S. McEwen, Ph.D., Rockefeller University
From Molecules to Mind: Stress, Individual Differences and the Social Environment

**Week 11: Mon Nov 10, Wed Nov 12: Feelings about the Self and Health**

Readings

Monday (due Reading response)


**Debate:** Pro or con: How people think and reason are more potent than structural factors (such as access to health insurance, taxes on alcohol and tobacco, and opportunities for physical activity) in determining their health related behaviors.
Wednesday (due Reading response)

Student Presentation


Week 12: Mon, Nov 17, Wed Nov 19: The Social Environment and Health

Readings

Monday (Homework due: Reading response)


Student Presentation


Debate: Pro or con: The factors affecting individuals’ health may be beyond the reach of behavioral or social scientists.

Wednesday (Homework #9 due Evaluate the Effectiveness of Your Health Behavior Change Guru’s Behavior Change Strategy)

(Virtual) Guest Presenter and Discussion

Amartya Sen, Ph.D.
Conflicting Principles in Health Education
**Week 13: Mon Nov 24, Wed Nov 26 Hot Topics in Health Psychology Research: Genetics and Neuroscience and Racial and Socioeconomic Inequalities**

**Monday (No homework due!)**

**(Real) Guest Presentation and Discussion**

Turhan Canli, Ph.D.
Gene by Environment Interactions in Stress and Illness


**Wednesday (Research Proposals due)**

**Video Presentation and Discussion**

*Unnatural Causes*

PBS 7-part documentary (we'll watch excerpts)

**Week 14: Mon Dec 1, Wed Dec 3: The Grant Review Process and The Material and Sociocultural Environment and Health Risk Factors and Health**

**Monday (No homework due!)**

- T. Muldoon, altered and disguised R01 application “Cyclooxygenase-2 inhibitors and colon cancer prevention”

- Altered and disguised R01 summary statement following scientific review

(Please skim and bring the above documents and bring to class to accompany viewing the video “Inside the NIH Grant Review Process.” This mock proposal will be discussed in the video.)

**Video Presentation**

*Inside the NIH Grant Review Process* (39-minutes)
Wednesday (Homework due: Reading response)


(Virtual) Guest Presenter and Discussion

Nicholas A. Christakis, MD, PhD, MPH, Harvard Medical School
Person-to-Person Spread of Health Behaviors in a Large Social Network
Or (by students’ choice)
Dr. John B. McKinlay of the New England Research Institute
Looking for Causes in All the Wrong Places: Upstream Social Determinants of Downstream Health Disparities

**Week 15: Mon Dec 8, Wed Dec 10**

Monday (no Homework due!)

Documentary Presentation

*Supersize Me*
Producer / Director / Guinea Pig | Morgan Spurlock and The Con (96 minutes)

**Debate:** Pro or con: Raising taxes to reduce unhealthy behavior is a sound idea.

Wednesday (due: Review of classmate’s research proposal)

Mock review session: Panel discussion of reviews of class members’ grant proposals and “funding” decisions, and presentation of “handsome rewards” to top applicants. The PSY 558 Journalistic Award will also be presented for the best article summary.