SYLLABUS

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

Spring 2014, Tuesdays, Thursdays: 4:00-5:20, Psychology B 248

Instructor: Anne Moyer; Office: Psych B 224; Tel: 632-7811;
email: anne.moyer@stonybook.edu. Office hours: Thurs 12:00-1:00 Psych B, 224;
and Fridays 1:30-3:30 Rm 120 SSO Center or by appointment

Course Description:

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. It covers social influence, social comparison, pluralistic ignorance, social support, cognitive dissonance, message framing, and fear communication. The course also covers 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.

Learning Outcomes:

- Become familiar with the core theories relevant to social and health psychology research and intervention
- Use social psychological theories to design a health behavior change intervention
- Summarize, discuss, and critically analyze scientific journal articles in the field of health psychology
- Debate critical issues in the field of social and health psychology
- Design and critique a research proposal on a topic relevant to social and health psychology

Required Reading:

Available from the campus bookstore or on-line retailers.
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 via links from the Blackboard site for the course.

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 (15 best) 45%
3. Research proposal (due Thurs Apr 24) 20%
4. Reviews of classmates’ research proposals (due Thurs May 8) 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 will 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, from the article and pose 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 to an assigned article. 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 to Blackboard by 12:00 noon on the day they are due, (this way I can read through them before class); bring a copy to the class session to refer to.

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:

To access Blackboard, go to http://blackboard.stonybrook.edu and log in using your NetID and NetID password.

Americans with Disabilities Act:

If you have a physical, psychological, medical or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact Disability Support Services, ECC (Educational Communications Center) Building, room128, (631) 632-6748. They will determine with you what accommodations, if any, are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential.

Academic Integrity:

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. Faculty are required to report any suspected instances of academic dishonesty to the Academic Judiciary. Faculty in the Health Sciences Center (School of Health Technology & Management, Nursing, Social Welfare, Dental Medicine) and School of Medicine are required to follow their school-specific procedures. 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/

Critical Incident Management:
Stony Brook University expects students to respect the rights, privileges, and property of other people. Faculty are required to report to the Office of Judicial Affairs any disruptive behavior that interrupts their ability to teach, compromises the safety of the learning environment, or inhibits students' ability to learn. Faculty in the HSC Schools and the School of Medicine are required to follow their school-specific procedures.

Course Schedule and Readings:

Unit 1: Tues Jan 28: Introduction to the Course and to the Fields of Social and Health Psychology

Unit 2: Thurs Jan 30 and Tues Feb 4: Mental Models of Health and Illness

Readings

THURSDAY (Homework due: Assignment #1: Example of a Common-Sense Model) Reflecting upon the notion of common-sense models of illness, generate and describe a novel example of a health condition, illness, or process with respect to how it might be susceptible to common-sense models or beliefs. Reflect upon how such implicit beliefs or models might be accurate or inaccurate, advantageous or disadvantageous, or both.

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


TUESDAY (Homework due: Assignment #2: Cognitive Theories of Health-Protective Behavior) Refer to Table 3.1 on p. 36 of the text. Choose a concrete health behavior (e.g., obtaining a mammogram, using a condom during sex, flossing one’s teeth regularly). Place it in the context of each of the four theories by identifying each of the principal variables that apply for the particular behavior that you have chosen. State verbally in real terms what each model says would predict engaging in the behavior (e.g., “The Health Belief Model predicts that the likelihood of flossing regularly depends upon one’s beliefs about the probability of developing gingivitis, the severity of gingivitis, how effective flossing is in preventing gingivitis, and how time-consuming, boring, and painful a person finds flossing”). Reflect upon how well
each of the models seem to apply to the behavior you are examining. Is there anything you might want to add to a model of health behavior change?

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

**Unit 3: Thurs Feb 6 and Tues Feb 11: Health Beliefs and Health Behavior**

**Readings**

**THURSDAY (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.”

**TUESDAY: (due Homework Assignment #3: Identifying a Desired Health-Related Behavior Change)** Consider a health-related behavior of your own that you are interested in changing over the course of the semester. Describe your current behavior and the behavior you would like to engage in (e.g., “Currently I floss my teeth about once a month; I would like to be flossing my teeth daily”).

**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.

Unit 4: Thurs Feb 13 and Tues Feb 18: Health Information Processing

Readings

THURSDAY: (due: Reading Response)

Lecture: Health Information Processing (download slides)

- 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?

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

Plan a health behavior change message or intervention to influence the behavior of the class member that you have been assigned. Consider information that you might like to ask of your internee or even questionnaires that you might want to administer to this person. Submit two things, a description of the information you’re soliciting and why, and the actual questions that you’d like to administer to your internee.

(Virtual) Guest Presentation and Discussion

Daniel Kahneman, Ph.D., 2002 Nobel Laureate in Economics, Princeton University
The Marvels and Illusions of Intuitive Thinking

Unit 5: Thurs Feb 20: Social Influence and Health and Illness: Social Comparison and Social Norms
Readings

THURSDAY (Homework Assignment #5 due: Evaluate a Public Health Message or Campaign or App) Identify a public health message (e.g., “Just say No”) or campaign (e.g., Breast Cancer Awareness Month) that you encounter in your daily life (i.e., on a billboard, on TV, in pamphlets, etc) or app. Evaluate its content and form from both a theoretical and a subjective point of view. What aspects do you commend? What aspects would you change?

- 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.

Unit 6: Tues Feb 25 and Thurs Feb 27: Social Support and Health and Illness

Readings

TUESDAY (Homework Assignment #6 due: Respond to Questions from Your Health Behavior Change Guru) Respond to the 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.

THURSDAY (Homework due: Reading Response)

Student Presentation:

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

**Unit 7: Tues Mar 4 and Thurs Mar 6: Social Relationships and Health and Illness**

**Readings**

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


**Student Presentation:**


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

**THURSDAY (No homework due!)

(Virtual) Guest Presenter and Discussion

John Caccioppo, The University of Chicago
Social Isolation and Health

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

**Unit 8: Tues Mar 11 and Thurs Mar 13: Changing Behavior**
Readings

TUESDAY (Homework #7 due: Finding an Example of a Theoretically-based Health Behavior Change Intervention) Find an example of a theoretically-based health behavior change intervention in the literature. Describe the intervention and how it mapped on to the theoretical perspective it was based upon. What influence do you think the theoretical model had on the effectiveness (or the lack of effectiveness) of the intervention?


THURSDAY (No homework due!)

Student Presentation:


**SPRING RECESS**

Unit 9: Tues Mar 25 and Thurs Mar 27: Personality, Individual Variables, and Health

Readings

TUESDAY (Homework due: Reading response)

(Real) Guest Presentation and Discussion

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


**THURSDAY (Homework #8 due: Plan your Final Health Behavior Change Strategy)**
With the information you have received from your partner, plan and describe your final health behavior change message or intervention. Submit two copies, one that describes your rationale, your theoretical justifications, and the intervention itself. Submit a second copy of the message or intervention itself, for your partner.

**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 Presenters and Discussion**
Miguel Munoz-Laboy, Brian M. Rivers, Scott Rhodes, Terrence Afer-Anderson
Men’s Health Disparities: A Complex Conundrum (64 minutes)

**Unit 10: Tues Apr 1 and Thurs Apr 3: Thoughts, Mind and Health**

**Readings**

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

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

**Student presentation:**


(Virtual) Guest Presenter

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

Unit 11: Tues Apr 8 and Thurs Apr 10: Feelings about the Self and Health

Readings

TUESDAY (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.

THURSDAY (due Reading response)

Student Presentation


Unit 12: Tues Apr 15 and Thurs Apr 17: The Social Environment and Health

Readings

TUESDAY (Homework due: Reading response)
• Deary, I. J., Weiss, A., & Batty, D. G. (2010). Intelligence and personality as predictors of illness and death: How researchers in differential psychology and chronic disease epidemiology are collaborating to understand and address health inequalities. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 11*, 53-79.

**Student Presentation**


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

**THURSDAY (Homework #9 due Evaluate the Effectiveness of Your Health Behavior Change Guru’s Behavior Change Strategy)** Evaluate the effectiveness of your partner’s health behavioral change strategy, both from a theoretical and a personal perspective.

**(Virtual) Guest Presenter and Discussion**
Amartya Sen, Ph.D.
Conflicting Principles in Health Education

**Unit 13: Tues Apr 22 and DATE/TIME TO BE DETERMINED Hot Topics in Health Psychology Research: Genetics and Neuroscience and Racial and Socioeconomic Inequalities**

**TUESDAY (No homework due!)**

**Video Presentation and Discussion**

Unnatural Causes

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

**THURSDAY (Research Proposals due)**

**(Real) Guest Presentation and Discussion (DATE/TIME TO BE DETERMINED)**

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


**Unit 14: Tues Apr 29 and Thurs May 1: The Grant Review Process and The Material and Sociocultural Environment and Health Risk Factors and Health**

**Tuesday (No homework due!)**

- NIH Review Scoring System and Procedure

**Video Presentations**

*NIH Tips for Applicants* (5 minutes)

*Inside the NIH Peer Review Revealed* (15 minutes)

**Thursday (Homework due: Reading response)**


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

**(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

**Unit 15: Tues May 6 and Thurs May 8**

**Tuesday (no Homework due!)**

**Documentary Presentation**

*A Place at the Table* (84 minutes)
Thursday (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.