



Social Cognition and Attitudes

Instructor Manual

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The purpose of this unit is to help students understand what social psychology is, how researchers study it and understand social phenomena, and the applications of social psychology to students' everyday lives.

In the first module, Social Cognition and Attitudes, the authors explain how humans construct the social world that we live in. That is, our attitudes and judgments are based on how we think about the world. Unfortunately, our cognition is susceptible to heuristic biases and other cognitive distortions, which ultimately influences how we interpret our social world.

Learning Objectives

- Relevant APA Learning Objectives (Version 2.0)
 - Describe key concepts, principles, and overarching themes in psychology (1.1)
 - Develop a working knowledge of psychology's content domains (1.2)
 - Describe applications of psychology (1.3)
 - Engage in innovative and integrative thinking and problem solving (2.3)
 - Build and enhance interpersonal relationships (3.3)
 - Interact effectively with others (4.3)
 - Apply psychological content and skills to career goals (5.1)
 - Exhibit self-efficacy and self-regulation (5.2)

- Enhance teamwork capacity (5.3)
- Content Specific Learning Objectives: Module 1 – Social Cognition and Attitudes
 - Learn how we simplify the vast array of information in the world in a way that allows us to make decisions and navigate our environments efficiently.
 - Understand some of the social factors that influence how we reason.
 - Determine if our reasoning processes are always conscious, and if not, what are some of the effects of automatic/nonconscious cognition.
 - Understand the difference between explicit and implicit attitudes, and the implications they have for behavior.

Abstract

Social cognition is the area of social psychology that examines how people perceive and think about their social world. This module provides an overview of key topics within social cognition and attitudes, including judgmental heuristics, social prediction, affective and motivational influences on judgment, and explicit and implicit attitudes.

Class Design Recommendations

This module of social can be taught in a single class period or less, with the unit as a whole taking 2-3 class periods. Please also refer to the Noba PowerPoint slides that compliment this outline.

- 1st class period (35 min – 50 min):
 - Introduce Social Cognition
 - Social Thinking & Judgment
 - Simplifying our social world
 - Schemas
 - Heuristics (representativeness heuristic and availability heuristic)

- Making Predictions
 - Planning Fallacy
 - Affective Forecasting (impact and durability bias)
- Influence of Motivations, Mood, and Desires on Social Judgment
 - Hot cognition, directional goals, & motivated skepticism
 - Mood-congruent Memory
- Automaticity
- Attitudes & Attitude Measurement
 - Defining & understanding implicit and explicit attitudes
 - Measurement of implicit attitudes
 - IAT
 - Evaluative priming task

Module Outline

Introduction

- Social psychologists study how people make sense of themselves and others to make judgments, form attitudes, and make predictions about the future. This research has also illuminated the many social factors that can influence these judgments and predictions. The goal of this module is to highlight the mental tools we use to navigate and make sense of a complex social world and describe some of the emotional, motivational, and cognitive factors that affect our reasoning.

Simplifying our Social World

- Rather than spending copious amounts of time learning about each individual object that we encounter, we use schemas to simplify information, allowing us to attend to what is important and to make decisions quickly and efficiently. We can hold schemas about almost any entity—individual people (person schemas), ourselves (self-schemas), and recurring events (event schemas or scripts).
- Another way we simplify our social world is by employing heuristics (mental shortcuts that reduce complex problem-solving to more simple rule-based decisions).
 - We use the representative heuristic to judge the likelihood of an object belonging to a category based on the extent to which the object appears similar to one's mental representation of the category
 - We use the availability heuristic to evaluate the frequency or likelihood of an event on the basis of how easily instances of it come to mind.

Making Predictions about the Social World

- Whenever we face a new decision, we have to predict our future behaviors or feelings in order to choose the best course of action. Research on “thin-slice judgments” has shown that perceivers are able to make surprisingly accurate inferences about a person's emotional state, personality traits, and even their sexual orientation based on just snippets of information. Furthermore, these judgments are predictive of the target's future behaviors. Because we seem to be fairly adept at making predictions about others, one might expect that predictions about the self would also be accurate. Yet, it is not always the case that we hold greater insight into ourselves (e.g., planning fallacy).
- The other important factor that affects our decision-making is our ability to predict how we will feel about certain outcomes. In addition to predicting whether we will feel positively or negatively, we also make predictions about how strongly and for how long we will feel that way (i.e., affective forecasting). We are adept at predicting whether an event or future situation will make us feel positively or negatively, but often incorrectly predict the strength or duration of those emotions (i.e., impact and durability biases).

Hot Cognition: The Influence of Motivations, Mood, and Desires on Social Judgment

- Hot cognition refers to the mental processes that are influenced by desires and feelings,

such as directional goals, motivated skepticism, and need for closure.

- Just as our goals and motivations influence our reasoning, our moods and feelings also shape our thinking process and ultimate decisions, such as in mood-congruent memories.

Automaticity

- A large body of evidence now suggests that many of our behaviors are, in fact, automatic. A behavior or process is considered automatic if it is unintentional, uncontrollable, occurs outside of conscious awareness, or is cognitively efficient. Practice leads to the learning of automatic behaviors, but some automatic processes appear to be innate (e.g., fear responses or the chameleon effect).
- When concepts and behaviors have been repeatedly associated with each other, the concept or behavior can be primed. Stereotypes are our general beliefs about a group of people and, once activated, stereotypes may guide our own judgments outside of conscious awareness. Research in this area suggests that the social context—which constantly bombards us with concepts—may be priming us to form particular judgments and influencing our thoughts and behaviors.

Attitudes and Attitude Measurement

- When we encounter a new object or person, we often form an attitude toward it. In essence, our attitudes are a type of bias that predisposes us to responses that are positive or negative.
 - Traditionally, attitudes have been measured through explicit attitude measures in which participants are directly asked to provide their attitude toward various objects, people, or issues. These explicit measures of attitudes can be used to predict people's actual behavior, but there are limitations to these measures (e.g., individuals are unaware of their true attitude; they might not want to admit their attitude).
 - In order to avoid some of the limitations of explicit measures of attitudes, many researchers use implicit measures of attitudes, which are measures where researchers infer the participant's attitude rather than having the participant explicitly report it (e.g., IAT and evaluative priming task). Implicit measures may reveal biases that participants do not report on explicit measures. As a result, implicit attitude measures are especially useful for examining the pervasiveness and strength of controversial attitudes and stereotypic associations

- Individuals' implicit attitudes are sometimes inconsistent with their explicitly held attitudes.

Conclusion

- Decades of research on social cognition and attitudes has examined many of the “tricks” and “tools” that we use to efficiently process the limitless amounts of social information that we encounter in our lives. These tools are quite useful for organizing the information that we encounter and arriving at quick decisions. Ultimately, our perception of the social world is a subjective experience, and, consequently, our decisions are influenced by our experiences, expectations, emotions, motivations, and current contexts.

Difficult Terms

Availability Heuristic
Chameleon Effect
Directional Goals
Evaluative Priming Task
Explicit Attitude
Impact Bias
Implicit Association Test
Implicit Attitude
Mood-congruent Memory
Motivated Skepticism
Need for Closure
Priming
Representativeness Heuristic
Schema
Social Cognition

Lecture Frameworks

Overview

Social psychology is one of the most rewarding units to teach, as most students have not

thought about or been exposed to many of the important concepts in this unit. Therefore, the potential positive impact of this unit is quite large. However, this material can also be difficult to teach, as a lot of the material addresses delicate or controversial issues (e.g., prejudices, bias, etc.).

First Class Period

- Discussion/Warm-Up
 - You can start out this section by having students discuss their *schemas* for different scenarios (e.g., restaurant, first date, concert, library, etc.). Most students have an implicit understanding of schemas, so this is a nice starting point for helping them to understand that while schemas are useful, they are also prone to error (e.g., if people have different schemas for how to behave on a first date, the date might not go very well).
 - Now that you have introduced the fallibility of schemas, you can talk about specific errors that are made, such as an over reliance heuristics (e.g., you could talk about availability and representativeness heuristics).
 - Once students understand ways in which our thinking is flawed, you can dig a little deeper and talk about the predictions we make about ourselves and others (you could talk about the fundamental attribution error, planning fallacy, and affective forecasting), as well as how our motivations, moods, and desires influence our social thinking and judgments (you could talk about hot cognition, directional goals, motivated skepticism, etc.).
- Lecture – Refer to slides for the following:
 - To talk about ways of *simplifying our social world*. Here, you can talk formally about schemas and *heuristics* (which you informally introduced in the warm-up section). Explain what these “shortcuts” are and how we use them. Then explain why these shortcuts can become problematic for us.
 - To talk about the process of making predictions. For students, this will be very relevant (they know about the planning fallacy all too well). So you can quickly go over this and use their roles as students to make the concepts salient for them.
 - To introduce the concept of “hot cognition.” Here, you can define and explain hot cognition, as well as using the examples from the slides (e.g., shopping while hungry) to illustrate the concepts for students.
 - To talk about Automaticity. You can begin this section with a super quick demo – holding

out a pen or paper nearby a student (you probably want to pick a more outgoing student). More than likely, the student will reach for the object. You can then ask the student, why did you reach out for the object? The student will likely say because you were handing it to me. Then, you can point out that you were just holding the pen and did not say, "Here you go" or "Can you hold this?"

- Once you've done this super quick demo, you can define and explain automaticity. Use can use the chameleon effect, priming, and stereotypes to demonstrate the concept.
- Activity: Priming
 - You can illustrate the priming effect by allowing students to view a list of words associated with sleep. This is similar to the Deese-Roediger-McDermot Effect activity completed in the memory unit.
 - See the PowerPoint slides for materials and directions.
- Activity: Are you prejudiced?
 - This demonstration is designed to help students understand that often times we don't recognize our own prejudices, and that just because prejudices are not overt, does not mean that they do not exist.
 - See Activities/Demonstrations (below) for directions.
- Lecture – Refer to slides for the following:
 - To talk about the effects of attitudes. The difference between explicit and implicit attitudes is arguably one of the most important concepts for students to learn. Why? Because many students mistakenly believe that because they don't have explicit negative attitudes toward a group (race, gender, age, etc.), they don't have any prejudices. Unfortunately, research has shown time and time again that even without overt attitudes, implicit attitudes still have an effect on behavior. To demonstrate this, you could talk about a recent study (Milkman, Akinola, & Chugh, 2014), where 6,500 professors were contacted by fictional prospective students seeking to discuss research opportunities prior to applying to a doctoral program. Names of students were randomly assigned to signal gender and race (Caucasian, Black, Hispanic, Indian, Chinese), but messages were otherwise identical. They found that faculty ignored requests from women and minorities at a higher rate than requests from Caucasian males, particularly

in higher-paying disciplines and private institutions. The point is that the VAST majority of those professors were unlikely to have explicit negative attitudes towards minorities and women, yet their implicit attitudes made them more likely to ignore the requests of women and minorities.

- You could also talk about a similar study (Moss-Racusin, Dovidio, Brescoll, Graham, & Handelsman, 2012), wherein science faculty from research-intensive universities rated the application materials of a student—who was randomly assigned either a male or female name—for a laboratory manager position. Faculty participants rated the male applicant as significantly more competent and hireable than the (identical) female applicant. These participants also selected a higher starting salary and offered more career mentoring to the male applicant. That is, faculty did not refuse to hire female applicants because of their gender, rather, their implicit biases led to different conclusions about the (identical) applicants.
- These two studies are very effective at making three points: First, that just because we don't have explicit attitudes does not mean we are immune from prejudicial behavior; Second, that more often than not, we don't even *realize* our behaviors are biased; and third, that prejudice still exists (e.g., many people falsely believe that racism is no longer a problem and that in fact, "reverse racism" is much more common; see "Whites See Racism as a Zero-sum Game that They Are Now Losing" by Norton & Sommers, 2011, for a brief look into perceptions of "reverse racism").

Activities & Demonstrations

Schemas: In-Class Demonstration

This in-class mini-writing is designed to help students understand what schemas are and how they influence our behaviors and expectations of other people's behavior.

- Time: Less than 5-10 minutes
- Materials: Students need pen and paper
- Directions:

- Students select 2-3 prompts (see ideas for prompts, below) and write about their schemas for each prompt. Specifically, what are their behaviors in the scenario? How do they expect others to behave? You might also discuss with them what happens when other people violate our schemas of what we consider “normal” (e.g., a male that refuses to pay for anything on a first date).
- Prompt Ideas
 - First date
 - Studying in the library
 - New roommate
 - Meeting a new business acquaintance
 - Talking with a cashier at the grocery store
 - Working out at the gym
- Each of these scenarios has certain “rules” (e.g., most people would balk if the cashier at the grocery store asked if they have had sex lately – that’s an intensely personal question and completely violates our norms/schemas about acceptable topics for small talk). The goal is to get students to start thinking about the schemas that influence our behaviors and expectation of behaviors.

Are you Prejudiced? In-Class Demonstration

This demonstration is designed to help students understand that often times we don’t recognize our own prejudices, and that just because prejudices are not overt, does not mean that they do not exist.

- Time: Less than 5 minutes
- Materials: Slides.
- Directions:
 - This demonstration should be done BEFORE you talk about implicit and explicit attitudes.
 - This activity starts by asking students a basic question: Are you prejudiced? As you can guess, most students will report no, they are not prejudiced.
 - After getting a baseline feel for their self-reported prejudice, ask students to imagine

the following scenario: Close your eyes for a second and imagine that I assigned a group project for this class. But instead of picking your own group members, I assigned them to. Go ahead and open your eyes and I will show you your partners.

- Show students each of their fictional group members – give them just a few seconds to react to each partner, but don't say anything.
- After you have shown them all the pictures, ask them to reflect on their reactions to their different hypothetical group members. More often than not, they have preconceived notions about what their different partners are like. The picture that the students have the strongest reaction to is the picture of the older, non-traditional student; some students inevitably chuckle or make other derisive noises.
- Next, engage the students in class discussion about their reactions (or you could do a written reflection). Consider questions such as: Did you react the same to all your group members? Why or why not? Did you have any preferences of who you would want in your group? Where did those preferences come from?
- Finally, ask students the same question you started with: Are you prejudiced? By now, most students realize that they have at least some implicit biases and are able to answer the question more accurately.
- Tip: talking about prejudice is hard enough, but realizing that they might have implicit prejudices or stereotypes can be difficult (i.e., feelings of guilt). It's really helpful to remind students that your goal isn't to make them feel guilty. Your goal is to help them understand the way these psychological principles function. Plus, one of the most effective ways to move away from our biases is to acknowledge them (because we can't meaningfully change what we don't understand).

Additional Activities

Watson, D. L. (2008). The fundamental attribution error. In L. r. Benjamin (Ed.), *Favorite activities for the teaching of psychology* (pp. 248-251). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.

This activity is a simple, straightforward, and telling demonstration of the "irrational" basis of person perception. You must reproduce handouts, but no prior knowledge of psychology is necessary. This in-class activity is best for classes of 20 or more and involves all students in

the class. It requires about 15 to 20 minutes to complete.

Outside Resources

Video: Daniel Gilbert discussing affective forecasting.

http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xebnl3_dan-gilbert-on-what-affective-forec_people#.UQlwDx3WLm4

Video: Focus on heuristics.

<http://study.com/academy/lesson/heuristics.html>

Web: BBC Horizon documentary How to Make Better Decisions that discusses many module topics (Part 1).

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ul-FqOfX-t8>

Web: Implicit Attitudes Test.

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>

Evidence-Based Teaching

Graham, S. M. (2006). Understanding the applicability of social psychology: The benefits of a semiweekly journal assignment. *Teaching of Psychology*, 33(1), 54-55.

This article describes a journal assignment for an introductory social psychology course. The semiweekly assignment was to apply a recent course topic to one's life, to another person's life, or to current world events. The educational goals of this assignment were to (a) help students understand the applicability of social psychology to everyday life, (b) facilitate course discussion, and (c) recognize and correct student misconceptions of course material. Students rated these assignments as useful, recommended including them in future sections of the class, indicated that they became easier over the course of the semester, and performed better on them as the semester progressed.

Suggestions from the Society for Teaching's Introductory Psychology Primer

Afful, S.E. (2013). Social. In S.E. Afful, J. J. Good, J. Keeley, S. Leder, & J. J. Stiegler-Balfour (Eds.). Introductory Psychology teaching primer: A guide for new teachers of Psych 101. Retrieved from the Society for the Teaching of Psychology web site: <http://teachpsych.org/ebooks/intro2013/index.php>

Cognitive Dissonance

- To demonstrate Cognitive Dissonance (a topic students often struggle with), ask students a series of questions on social issues such as global warming, world hunger, etc.
 - Rate your agreement with these statements from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree): No one in this country should go to bed hungry.
 - Then ask if the students engage in any specific behavior regarding these issues (e.g., Do you personally do anything to help those who are hungry (e.g. donate money/food, work in soup kitchen)?).
 - Then ask by show of hands how many students had strong attitudinal statements but responded NO on the second set of questions. Discussion follows about how that makes us feel when attitudes and behaviors are inconsistent and what we can do about it which leads into dissonance theory. This activity is quick (10 minutes) but provides relevant application for students.

Links to ToPIX Materials

Activities, demonstrations, handouts, etc.:

<http://topix.teachpsych.org/w/page/19981041/Social%20in%20the%20Classroom>

Current events/ news:

<http://topix.teachpsych.org/w/page/23142325/Social%20in%20the%20News>

Video/audio:

<http://topix.teachpsych.org/w/page/19981040/Social%20Video>

Teaching Topics

Teaching The Most Important Course

http://nobaproject.com/documents/1_Teaching_The_Most_Important_Course.pdf

Content Coverage

http://nobaproject.com/documents/2_Content_Coverage.pdf

Motivating Students

http://nobaproject.com/documents/3_Motivating_Students_Tips.pdf

Engaging Large Classes

http://nobaproject.com/documents/4_Engaging_Large_Classes.pdf

Assessment Learning

http://nobaproject.com/documents/5_Assessment_Learning.pdf

Teaching Biological Psychology

http://nobaproject.com/documents/6_Teaching_Bio_Psych.pdf

PowerPoint Presentation

This module has an associated PowerPoint presentation. Download it at http://nobaproject.com//images/shared/supplement_editions/000/000/137/Social%20Cognition%20and%20Attitudes.ppt?1416603143.

About Noba

The Diener Education Fund (DEF) is a non-profit organization founded with the mission of re-inventing higher education to serve the changing needs of students and professors. The initial focus of the DEF is on making information, especially of the type found in textbooks, widely available to people of all backgrounds. This mission is embodied in the Noba project.

Noba is an open and free online platform that provides high-quality, flexibly structured textbooks and educational materials. The goals of Noba are three-fold:

- To reduce financial burden on students by providing access to free educational content
- To provide instructors with a platform to customize educational content to better suit their curriculum
- To present material written by a collection of experts and authorities in the field

The Diener Education Fund is co-founded by Drs. Ed and Carol Diener. Ed is the Joseph Smiley Distinguished Professor of Psychology (Emeritus) at the University of Illinois. Carol Diener is the former director of the Mental Health Worker and the Juvenile Justice Programs at the University of Illinois. Both Ed and Carol are award- winning university teachers.

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