

**GRADUATE SEMINAR IN PERSONALITY AND SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY:
Self & Health
Spring 2024**

**SOP 4704 Section 2C18 (#290437) / SOP 6409 Section DFN6 (#29043)
Dr. James A. Shepperd**

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Overview. This course survey the theory and research relevant to self-esteem and identity regulation. The course addresses how people perceive (and misperceive), think about and respond to self-relevant information. Part of this course focuses on specific behaviors and cognitions employed in the pursuit of esteem and identity regulation. To this end we will focus on behaviors such as self-serving attributions, downward social comparison, self-handicapping and selective encoding and retrieval of information. A large part of the course, however, will focus on why we perceive the world in self-serving ways, the conditions that prompt self-serving processes and the end states we may be trying to achieve.

Reading Assignments. All readings will be accessible through the course CANVAS webpage.

Grading. Grading will be based on your performance in 4 areas:

- 1) Weekly Thought Papers – Each week, I will assign a thought paper. The papers should be brief, not exceeding two typed pages. I do not accept late papers. I have assigned 12 papers. You are required to turn in 11. The best 11 will count in your grade.
- 2) Class Participation– This is a small class. Part of the class experience involves sharing your ideas and hearing the ideas expressed by your fellow students. Articulating and defending your ideas is an important part of the learning process. You are expected to participate fully in discussion in every class.
- 3) Discussion Leader– Each of you is responsible for leading class discussion during a class period. You will be graded partly on your organization, partly on your presentation of material and in your ability to lead discussion. The class will evaluate each discussion leader immediately after the discussion. The discussion grade is based partly on this evaluation. I will provide guidance, but you should view this as an opportunity to be creative. Feel free to do demonstrations, organize a debate, show brief videos, assign additional readings, etc. At the very least, you should prepare an outline of how and where you want the discussion to proceed as well as a list of issues or questions you want the class to discuss.
- 4) Term Paper (Graduate students only) – You will be responsible for writing one term paper during the semester. The term paper must be typed, and must represent a theoretical model that you developed to test some topic of interest to you. The paper is due at **5pm, Thursday April 4**. The paper gives you the opportunity to organize within a larger framework and to think about how various factors influence cognitions and behavior in your area of study. I will talk more about the paper requirement during the term.

Category	SOP4704	SOP6409
Weekly Thought Papers	50%	40%
Class Participation	25%	20%
Discussion Leader	25%	20%
Term Paper	0%	20%
TOTAL	100%	100%

Weekly Papers

1. The weekly papers require that you think about what you read and integrate your understanding of the material with a personal example or with other articles you have read for the course. If a question asks you to provide a personal example, state the example briefly—no more than a couple of sentences. Then explain how the example fits the theory. In providing an answer, you should summarize the theory in your own words. Keep in mind that at minimum I am trying to judge whether you truly understand the theory or the point of the article. I also am judging whether you can apply what you read and that you understand the implications of what you read.
2. I grade papers on a 0-3 scale. If you fail to turn in an assigned paper, you get a “0”. A “1” is a weak paper. It generally means that you did not answer the question or that you communicated your ideas poorly. A “2” means an acceptable paper and encompasses a wide range. Most papers will receive a “2”. A “3” is an excellent paper. Do not expect a “3” on a paper. They are rare.
3. Don’t expect to do well in the beginning. Most students do poorly on the first two to three papers but improve during the semester. As the semester proceeds and you acquire a sense of how I grade and what I am looking for in the papers, I will raise the standard of what is expected, requiring that you think more deeply about the issues. That is, a paper that would get a “3” at the beginning of the semester will only get a “2” by the end of the semester.
4. Frequent Errors –I have compiled a list of common writing errors. Commit the list to memory and avoid these errors. Making these errors, particularly after I inform you about them, creates a negative impression.
5. Late papers – Papers are due at the beginning of class. I will not accept late papers regardless of the excuse. If you are having difficulty with your printer and cannot print a hard copy of your paper, you may email a copy of your paper PRIOR TO THE BEGINNING OF CLASS. You may send the paper as an attachment, or directly within an email message.
6. Typed – Type and spell-check your papers.
7. Length – Do not exceed two typed pages. Part of learning how to write is learning to write concisely. You can answer each thought question in two pages. In many instances, keeping the paper to two pages will be difficult. However, it is doable. Read each sentence and decide if it is necessary. Then, read each sentence and decide if you can make the point more concisely. I view unfavorably tricks to increase the number of words per page (e.g., a font smaller than 10 pt, margins less than an inch, more than 27 lines per page).
8. No Cover Page – Please conserve paper; do not include a cover page with your paper.

Class Participation

1. I base a significant portion of your grade on your participation in class discussion. If you are shy or otherwise are reluctant to participate in class discussion, then this is an unwise class for you to take. If you do not participate in discussion, your grade will suffer.
2. Class participation grades range from 0 to 3. You receive a 0 if you miss class or arrive to class inordinately late. You receive a 3 if you participate fully in discussion, make substantive contributions that indicate that you understood and thought about the assigned readings. Keep in mind that it is obvious to me when you have not done the readings for the class. Not doing the readings will result in a low participation grade. Likewise, arriving to class late will result in a low participation grade.
3. In calculating or determining your grade, I will drop one classroom participation day. In other words, you have one that you can miss because of illness, religious events, or other conflicts. Thus, there is no need to come to me with an excuse for absences from class. However, I will not accept excuses for missing more than one class.

Being a Discussion Leader

1. You are responsible with a partner for leading a class discussion. Leading a discussion is not easy, but it can be very rewarding. It requires being extremely prepared in advance. It is not something people can “wing”.
2. I will meet with you to help you prepare your discussion. However, you must arrive prepared for the meeting. After all, YOU are responsible for preparing the discussion. Thus, I will make suggestions regarding your ideas for your discussion. This means that you need to read the articles, discuss the topic, and prepare an outline of what you plan to cover BEFORE we meet. Coming to our meeting unprepared makes a bad impression and I will cancel the meeting. We should meet no fewer than 2 days (and preferably 7 days) before you are discussion leader.
3. The best way to lead a discussion is to know in advance the topics you want to cover, the responses you want to elicit, and the discussion questions that specifically elicit those responses. You don't need to know the answers to the questions you ask, but you should have thought about the answer. Questions like, “What did you think about the article by Smith and Jones?” are poor discussion questions and tend to elicit blank stares or brief, uninformative responses. Your discussion questions should be brief and stated in your own words.
4. One of the toughest things about being a discussion leader is the pause that follows the question. It can take up to 10 seconds between when you ask a question and receive a response. People must digest what you said, think about it, formulate a response, and then speak. Typically, however, the 10 seconds seems like 2 hours. Be patient. If there is a problem with the question, people will ask you to repeat it or I will ask you to reword what the question.
5. There is a tendency for discussion leaders to dominate the discussion. This is not surprising. As a discussion leader, you probably know the topic better than any other student in the class. You have thought about it more and probably have the answer written down in front of you. Avoid the temptation to dominate discussion. The best discussion leaders pull the answers from others in the class.
6. As noted earlier, this is an opportunity for you to be creative. Feel free to do demonstrations, organize a debate, show brief videos, assign additional readings, develop and administer a questionnaire, etc.
7. Attached is the survey that the class will use to evaluate class discussion leaders.

11 Common Errors in Writing the Weekly Papers

(Many of my grammar and syntax comments come from Strunk & White)

1. Introductory/Overview Paragraphs – Your first paragraph should immediately begin answering the thought question. Please do not include a paragraph (or sentence) restating the question or giving an overview of the field or your answer.
2. Avoid the Passive Voice – The first noun in the sentence should be the subject and the “actor” in your sentence. Ex: “The teacher was tortured by the students’ poor grammar”, should read, “The students tortured their teacher with poor grammar.” The worst examples of the passive voice involve the words be, being and been. Avoid the verb “to be” and its variations when possible. Ex: “Spanking is the punishment that is to be given to participants who arrive late.” Should be, “Participants who arrive late will be spanked.”
3. Person – Write primarily in the third person. Avoid the first person unless you are referring specifically to yourself. Ex: “We place our fingers in our ears and scream loudly when we hear contrasting opinions”, should read, “People place their fingers in their ears and scream loudly when they hear contrasting opinions.” Always avoid the second person.
4. This, That & Those – Avoid using “this” and “that” as nouns; they are adjectives. Ex: “This is the reason the sycophant got the job”, should read, “For this reason, the sycophant got the job.” Better yet, “Because he knew when to say yes, the sycophant got the job.” In the last few years, I have seen a trend toward increasing use of the word “these” as a noun. Avoid this trend.
5. Hyphenate the Self – Most psychology terms that include the self are hyphenated. Thus, self-esteem, self-concept, self-presentation, self-verification, etc., are all hyphenated.
6. “In Order To” – Usually one can rewrite this phrase to say “To...” Ex: “In order to fend off her date’s amorous advances...”, should read, “To fend off her date’s amorous advances...”
7. Which Hunting – The rule of thumb: If you can use “that”, use it. Ex: “He had a face which only a mother could love”, should read, “He had a face that only a mother could love.” The following is a correct use of the word which. “His mother struggled to love his face, which made regular appearances in children’s nightmares.”
8. Since – The words *because* and *since* are not synonyms. *Since* refers to time.
9. Impact – *Impact* is a noun, not a verb. It is fine to say that your dog’s breath has an impact on you. It is not okay to say that your dog’s breath *impacts* you. Better word choices are “affect” and “influence”. Thus, say, “The weather will affect central Florida” rather than “The weather will impact central Florida.”
10. Person, Individual, People – The plural of *person* and *individual* is *people*, not *persons* and not *individuals*.

If you don’t have a copy, I recommend reading *The Elements of Style* by Strunk and White. Originally published in 1959, this book is a “must read” for anyone who wishes to write professionally. To assist you in keeping language errors at bay, I also suggest picking up a copy of *Grammar Girl’s 101 Misused Words You’ll Never Confuse Again* by Mignon Fogarty.

Discussion Leaders: _____

Date: _____

Topic: _____

	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree			
1. The discussion leaders seemed organized and prepared.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. The discussion leaders asked good questions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. The questions challenged my thinking.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. The discussion leaders made me think critically about the topic.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. The discussion helped me understand the topic better.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. I enjoyed the discussion today.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Indicate your overall evaluation of the discussion.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Poor			Excellent			

Please describe what you liked about today's discussion. That is, in what ways did the discussion leaders do a good job? _____

Please describe what you didn't like about today's discussion. That is, what could have been done differently to make this a better discussion? _____

Questions for Weekly Thought Papers

01/18/24 – Health Behavior Theories 1

Social psychology was central in development of health psychology. Yet today, its influence is rather minor. Why does social psychology play a minor role in health psychology research?

01/25/24 – Consistency and Self-Affirmation Theory

How do self-verification theory and self-affirmation theory predict how a person who receives feedback inconsistent with his/her self-view will respond? Use a personal example to illustrate how each theory works. Which approach do you think best represents reality? Explain your answer.

02/01/24 – Motivated Reasoning

A blood test reveals that Tom's PSA (a test for elevated prostate cancer risk) is normal, but that his LDL level is high (indicating elevated risk for stroke and heart disease). Tom accepts the PSA test as meaningful but rejects the LDL results as uninformative. How might the articles you read account for the asymmetry in Tom's response to his health feedback?

02/15/24 – Social Comparison 1

When is social comparison (upward, downward, and lateral) problematic for health and when is it beneficial? How might researchers use social comparison processes to influence health behavior? Illustrate your response with examples.

02/22/24 – Social Comparison 2

Exline & Lobel describe to process called STTUC. Presumably a similar process can occur with interpersonal comparisons. How might it manifest (what would define it and what would it look like) and would the consequences (for the comparer, the focal person, and the target) be the same? Use a personal example to answer the question.

02/29/24 – Meaning Making, Resilience and Happiness

The articles for the week describe various activities or outcomes that can benefit the self in some way. Which of these actions/outcomes can be understood under the rubric of self-affirmation theory and which cannot. If it can be understood via self-affirmation theory, explain how? If it cannot, why not? For each, give a brief description of the basic finding described by the paper before addressing why it does or does not make sense to talk about it within self-affirmation theory.

03/07/24 – Terror Management Theory

How can thoughts about death produce both health costs and health benefits? In your answer be sure to describe terror management theory including when and why people experience terror and explain when thoughts about death produce health benefits and when they produce health costs.

03/21/24 – Acceptance & Self-esteem

Imagine a person who experiences an increase in self-esteem after winning a prestigious award. Briefly describe Terror Management Theory and Social Inclusion Theory and explain how each theory accounts for the change in self-esteem. In your answer, be sure to explain the function of self-esteem according to these two theories. Which theory is more convincing to you and why?

03/28/24 – Optimism, and Health

Dispositional optimism seems clearly related to positive health outcomes, whereas the relationship between unrealistic optimism and health is less clear. Why do these two types of optimism not have the same consequences for health?

04/04/24 – Preparing & Waiting for Bad News

Several research traditions document that people distort how they think about themselves and their world, and more importantly, that those distortions change over time. How do people distort the past, present and future. Why do these distortions occur? What might moderate such distortions? Where do you think people distort most: In the past present or future? Justify your answer.

04/11/24 – Avoiding Information

Is there anything you would rather not know about your parents? What is it and why do you not want this information? Does your example illustrate information avoidance (i.e., is it driven by one of the three motives described in the Sweeny et al. paper)? Under what circumstances would you want to know this information about your parents?

04/18/24 – Psychological Approaches to Gun Violence

Imagined you were tasked with developing approaches to reduce the gun divide in the United States. Based on these articles you read for this week, what would you recommend?

SCHEDULE	
Jan 11	First meeting – Introductions, Rules and Expectations
Jan 18	Health Behavior Theories 1
	Klein, W. P., Shepperd, J. A., Rothman, A. J., Suls, J. & Croyle, R. (2015). Realizing the promise of social psychology in improving public health. <i>Personality and Social Psychology Review</i> , 19, 77-92. doi: 10.1177/1088868314539852
Jan 25	Consistency and Self-Affirmation Theory
	de la Ronde, C., & Swann Jr., W. B. (1993). Caught in the crossfire: Positivity and self-verification strivings among people with low self-esteem. In R. F. Baumeister, (Ed). <i>Self-esteem: The puzzle of low self-regard</i> , pp. 147-165. New York, Plenum Press.
	Stone, J., & Focella, E. (2011). Hypocrisy, dissonance and the self-regulation processes that improve health. <i>Self & Identity</i> , 10, 295-303.
	Cohen, G. L., & Sherman, D. K. (2014). The psychology of change: Self-affirmation and social intervention. <i>Annual Review of Psychology</i> , 65, 333-371.
Feb 01	Motivated Reasoning
	Kunda, Z. (1990). The case of motivated reasoning. <i>Psychological Bulletin</i> , 108, 480-498.
	Shepperd, J. A., Malone, W., & Sweeny, K. (2008). Exploring Causes of the Self-serving Bias, <i>Social and Personality Psychology Compass</i> , 2, 895–908.
Feb 08	***NO CLASS: SPSP***
Feb 15	Social Comparison 1
	Suls, J. (2003). Contributions of social comparison to physical illness and well-being. In J. Suls & K. A. Wallston (Ed.) <i>Social Psychological Foundations of Health and Illness</i> (pp. 226-255). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
	Collins, R. L. (1996). For better or worse: The impact of upward social comparison on self-evaluations. <i>Psychological Bulletin</i> , 119, 51-69.
Feb 22	Social Comparison 2
	Exline, J. J., & Lobel, M. (1999). The perils of outperformance: Sensitivity about being the target of a threatening upward comparison. <i>Psychological Bulletin</i> , 125, 307-337.
	Shepperd, J. A., Hunleth, J., Maki, J., Prabhakaran, S., Pogge, G., Webster, G. D., & Waters, E. A. (2023). Interpersonal comparison among caregivers of children with asthma. <i>Psychology & Health</i> . https://doi.org/10.1080/08870446.2022.2125514
Feb 29	Meaning Making, Resilience and Happiness: Thoughts Matter!
	Lyubomirsky, S., & Layous, K. (2013). How do simple positive activities increase well-being? <i>Current Directions in Psychological Science</i> , 22(1), 57–62.
	Seery, M. D. (2011). Resilience: A silver lining to experiencing adverse life events? <i>Current Directions in Psychological Science</i> , 20(6), 390–394.
	Kross, E. & Ayduk, O. (2011). Making meaning out of negative experiences by self-distancing. <i>Current Directions in Psychological Science</i> , 20(3), 187-191.

	Fredrickson, B., & Joiner, T. (2018). Reflections on positive emotions and upward spirals. <i>Perspectives on Psychological Science</i> , 13, 194-199. DOI: 10.1177/1745691617692106
	Pennebaker, J. W. (2003). The social, linguistic, and health consequences of emotional disclosure. In J. Suls & K. A. Wallston (Ed.) <i>Social Psychological Foundations of Health and Illness</i> (pp. 288-313). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
Mar 07	Terror Management Theory
	Pyszczynski, T., Greenberg, J., Solomon, S., Arndt, J., & Schimel, J. (2004). Why do people need self-esteem? A theoretical and empirical review. <i>Psychological Bulletin</i> , 130, 435-468.
	Goldenberg, J. L., & Arndt, J. (2008). The implications of death for health: A terror management health model for behavioral health promotion. <i>Psychological Review</i> , 115, 1032-1053.
Mar 14	***NO CLASS: Spring Break***
Mar 21	Acceptance & Self-Esteem
	Leary, M. R. (1999). Making sense of self-esteem. <i>Current Directions in Psychological Science</i> , 8, 32-35.
	Leary, M. R. (2004). The function of self-esteem in terror management theory and sociometer theory: Comment on Pyszczynski et al., (2004). <i>Psychological Bulletin</i> , 130, 478-482.
	Smart Richman, L., & Leary, M. R. (2009). Reactions to discrimination, stigmatization, ostracism, and other forms of interpersonal rejection: A multimotive model. <i>Psychological Review</i> , 116, 365-383.
	Williams, K. D., & Nida, S. A. (2011). Ostracism: Consequences and coping. <i>Current Directions in Psychological Science</i> , 20, 71-75.
Mar 28	Optimism, and Unrealistic Optimism
	Shepperd, J. A., Klein, W. M. P., Waters, E. A., & Weinstein, N. D. (2013). Taking stock of unrealistic optimism. <i>Perspectives in Psychological Science</i> , 8, 395-411. doi: 10.1177/1745691613485247.
	Carver, C. S., & Scheier, M. F. (2014). Dispositional optimism. <i>Trends in Cognitive Sciences</i> , 18, 293-299. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2014.02.003
Apr 04	Preparing & Waiting for Bad News
	Carroll, P. J., Sweeny, K., & Shepperd, J. A. (2006). Forsaking optimism. <i>Review of General Psychology</i> , 10, 56-73. doi: 10.1037/1089-2680.10.1.56
	Maglio, S. J., Trope, Y., & Liberman, N. (2013). The common currency of psychological distance. <i>Current Directions in Psychological Science</i> , 22, 278-282. DOI: 10.1177/0963721413480172
	Sweeny, K. (2018). On the experience of awaiting uncertain news. <i>Current Directions in Psychological Science</i> , 27, 281-285. doi/10.1177/0963721417754197
Apr 11	Avoiding Information

	Sweeny, K., Melnyk, D., Malone, W., & Shepperd, J. A. (2010). Information avoidance: Who, what, when & why. <i>Review of General Psychology, 14</i> , 340-353. doi: 10.1037/a0021288
	Hertwig, R., & Engel, C. (2016). Homo Ignorans: Deliberately choosing not to know. <i>Perspectives in Psychological Science, 11</i> , 359-372. doi: 10.1177/1745691616635594
	Foust, J. L., & Taber, J. M. (2023). Information avoidance: Past perspectives and future directions. <i>Perspectives on Psychological Science, 0</i> (0). https://doi.org/10.1177/17456916231197668
Apr 18	Psychological Approaches to Gun Violence
	Shepperd, J. A., Losee, J., Pogge, G. C., Lipsey, N. P., Redford, L., & Crandall, M. (2018). The anticipated consequences of legalizing guns on college campuses. <i>Journal of Threat Assessment and Management, 5</i> (1), 21-34. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/tam0000097
	Buttrick, N. (2020). Protective Gun Ownership as a Coping Mechanism. <i>Perspectives on Psychological Science, 15</i> (4), 835-855. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691619898847
	Losee, J., Lipsey, N. P., Pogge, G. C., & Shepperd, J. A. (2021). Understanding the political divide in gun policy support. The need for safety and beliefs about guns. In M. Crandall, S. Bonne, J. Bronson, & W. Kessel (Eds.) <i>Why We Are Losing the War on Gun Violence</i> , pp. 89-106. New York: Springer.