Applying Psychological Concepts to Understand Real World Issues
Through Creating a Collective Class Blog

SPSSI 2020 Teaching Resources Award Materials
Ying (Joy) Tang, Ph.D., Youngstown State University

1. Description of the activity, assignment, or exercise

Social Psychology is a field that generates much insight about our social world. It can be a very interesting and useful discipline to study as students may come away with tools and ideas that will help deepen their understanding of themselves and the social world. Most social psychology courses spend a significant amount of time on theory and concepts, as they rightfully do. However, to highlight the significance and relevance of such course content, students should be given the opportunity to bridge abstractions to the real world.

To this end, in this assignment, students create a collective class blog in which they apply the theories and concepts they learn in class to the analyses of real world issues/events. I have used this assignment in Social Psychology, but I believe the format is applicable in other courses containing abstract concepts that bear immediate relevance to the real world, such as Psychology of Intimate Relationships, Psychology of Women/Gender, Personality, and I/O Psychology.

Throughout the semester, each student is asked to submit five posts on the collective blog. In order to make sure all topics are covered and that the blog covers a range of concepts and issues, the professor administers the topic assignments at the beginning of the semester by having students select five chapters that are of the most interest to them. Each blog post should cover one unique chapter from the assignment.

Students have two options for the content of each blog post. They could present the description of an event, a cultural artifact, a phenomenon, a personal story, etc., with links to the relevant news page, song, or video, before applying concepts from an assigned chapter to analyze or discuss the aforementioned event or phenomenon.

In the second option, students could choose to reflect on social psychology as presented in pop culture. If they encounter a piece of writing on social psychology that targets a lay audience, they could summarize the reporting, while going back to the literature to find the original research source. They should then discuss possible discrepancies and similarities between the original and the secondary sources. Students should post two thoughtful questions at the end of the blog post regardless of the option they choose.

Students are also required to comment and respond to at least 3 other blog posts throughout the semester.

2. The purpose of the resource (e.g., foster critical thinking, enhance presentation skills, improve writing skills)

The main purpose of the resource is to facilitate the full cycle of learning social psychology through a theoretical-applied feedback loop. Students are given the opportunity to intentionally apply abstract concepts to the understanding of real world events that may intuitively appeal to their personal interests, be it entertainment or politics or sports. Or they critically examine how social psychological research is constructed in the public discourse outside of the academic world. In turn, students’ existing interests are enhanced and expanded through the newly acquired lens of social psychological theories.
Second, this assignment fosters students’ critical thinking in research. In option 2, by reviewing the original source of research, students need to acquire and practice basic research literary. Through the evaluation of secondary sources of research presented in popular media, they have to first understand the methodology and conclusions in the original source, and then be able to evaluate the degree to which the rigor and integrity of the original research is maintained in its reporting. Furthermore, this exercise helps students improve writing and reading skills. They have to synthesize and integrate information before effectively formulating analyses and arguments.

An additional benefit of this assignment is that there is a finished product that could easily be circulated to benefit psychology students outside of a particular class, and/or to inform and educate the general public about the relevance of social psychological science to the understanding of everyday issues. It can easily be tailored or scaled up and down for various courses. This is also an assignment that offers pedagogical flexibility that could be incorporated into both traditional, online, or hybrid classes.

3. The resource itself (e.g., In-class teaching exercise, paper/project assignment, online assignment or exercise, service learning component of course, activities involving the integration of technology in the classroom, such as use of iPads)

Blog Posts and Comments

Students will be required to post 5 blog posts on our collective course blog Everyday Social Psychology throughout the semester (by XXX). Each blog post should correspond to one unique chapter that was assigned to you at the beginning of the semester. Once we complete a given chapter, students who are assigned that chapter should complete the blog post by the following weekend. The blog posts could follow one of two formats:

**Option 1**: 1) Descriptions of a current event, a cultural artifact, a phenomenon, a personal story, etc., with links to the news page, song, video (if applicable), etc.; 2) Discussions – You need to use up to three concepts from your chosen chapter to critically analyze or discuss the aforementioned event or phenomenon, particularly pointing out social psychological dynamics that may be at play. You should describe the definition of these concepts and theories in your own words and be very specific about how they manifest or could be used to understand your chosen event/phenomenon; 3) Raise two thoughtful questions that are worth further probing.

**Option 2**: Social psychological research is often reported in pop culture (e.g., [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/02/weekinreview/02parkerpope.html?_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/02/weekinreview/02parkerpope.html?_r=0)). 1) Summarize the findings stated in the pop culture piece; 2) Retrieve one of the original articles and discuss its methods and findings; 3) Discuss possible discrepancies/similarities between the news report and the original studies; and 4) Pose two questions.

Each blog post should be in the length of 500-800 words. Each post will be evaluated based on its creativity, thoughtfulness, originality, and precision. HAVE FUN with it! Peruse the blog often, and read and comment on other people’s posts enthusiastically. You are required to provide at least three 200-word+ responses to your classmates’ posts by the end of the semester. The technical instructions for how to create an account and post on the collective blog are provided in an additional document.

* Previously, I built the blog on WordPress.com.