Social Psychology Unit Summary

Our next unit is “Social Psychology.” We have talked a lot about how both biology and environment shape our behavior and mental processes. One of the biggest influences from our environment is human society. We are social animals. We either directly or indirectly interact with people every day. Each of us is a part of an intricate web of social relations (think “Six Degrees of Separation”). As social animals our psychology is profoundly shaped by the people around us, both near and far.

I am sure many of you have thought that this course seems like it belongs in the science department, not social studies. I have actually have heard that comment more than once. This unit will explain why. For those of you who had me for World History, you heard me say over and over that history is much more than memorizing people, places, and dates. It’s a story that is centered on politics, economics, and culture – the building blocks for human interaction. For those of you who have taken sociology, this is where the courses blend. However, while sociology focuses more on how people act in groups, social psychology focuses more on how interaction with people affects individuals. Specifically, it focuses on four areas: social thinking, social influence, prosocial behavior, and antisocial behavior. Psychology is a great fit for SOCIAL studies because of the society has a significant impact on our behavior and mental processes.

Unit Objectives

The following is a description of learning objectives for the major content areas covered in the AP Psychology Exam during this unit, as well as the approximate percentages of the multiple-choice section devoted to each area. This listing is not intended to be an exhaustive list of topics. All of these topics are likely to appear on the AP exam in some way, shape, or form. Other material we talk about and/or in your reading could also find its way on the unit assessment.

Social Psychology (8-10% of AP exam)

This part of the course focuses on how individuals relate to one another in social situations. Social psychologists study social attitudes, social influence, and other social phenomena.

AP students in psychology should be able to do the following:

- Apply attribution theory to explain motives (e.g. fundamental attribution error, self-serving bias).
- Describe the structure and function of different kinds of group behavior (e.g. deindividuation, group polarization).
- Explain how individuals respond to expectations of others, including groupthink, conformity, and obedience to authority.
- Discuss attitudes and how they change (e.g. central route to persuasion)
- Predict the impact of the presence of others on individual behavior (e.g. bystander effect, social facilitation).
- Describe processes that contribute to differential treatment of group members (e.g. in-group/out-group dynamics, ethnocentrism, prejudice).
- Articulate the impact of social and cultural categories (e.g. gender, race, ethnicity) on self-concept and relations with others.
- Anticipate the impact of behavior on a self-fulfilling prophecy.
- Describe the variables that contribute to altruism, aggression, and attraction.
- Discuss attitude formation and change, including persuasion strategies and cognitive dissonance.
- Identify important figures in social psychology (e.g. Solomon Asch, Leon Festinger, Stanley Milgram, Philip Zimbardo).
Key Terms
You should eventually be able to properly and accurately use the terms at the beginning of Chapter 14 of Barron’s, as well as the terms in bold interspersed throughout the pages assigned in Coon, in written and verbal communication.

Text Readings
- Coon Chapters 16 & 17
- Barron’s Chapter 14

Current Timetable (subject to change)
- Last day of unit planned for Tuesday April 9 (Test & Individual Investigation)