Making It Real: Active Learning and Projects in the Social Sciences

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#WPIprojects
A Year After Marriage Ruling, LGBT Rights Struggles Continue

by ASSOCIATED PRESS
A woman and a young girl collect water from a tap. Access to water has proven to be a critical tool in the empowerment of adolescent girls in developing nations, where 1 in 10 people lack access to clean water and sanitation. Photo by: Water.org
"That was an awesome worksheet,"
said no student ever.
I see you did well in school, but what real-world skills do you have?

Tests. I can take tests.
Making Social Science “Real”?

• Active learning promotes a higher level of knowledge acquisition (Miserandino, 1999; Perlman, McCann, & McFadden, 2004; Stolff & Rogers, 2004)

• Research opportunities benefits students and faculty (Davis, 1999)
  – Students gain hands-on experience & increased graduate school admission rates
  – Faculty refresh their skill sets and witness student growth

• Students who participate in studies have greater knowledge and appreciation of the research process (Bowman & Waite, 2003)
Project Based Learning in Social Science

• How might we develop projects that:
  – Make social science real?
  – Engage Students?
  – Encourage Critical Thinking?
  – Enable students to make connections between material and themselves?
  – Promote global and social citizens
Types of Projects

- University wide, Within Major, or Class-based
- Long or Short Term
- Out of Class or In-Class
- “Empirical” or “Less Empirical”
- Self sponsored or Partnered with local or global organizations
- Not limited to juniors or seniors
Long Term Projects
Long Term Projects

• Potential Goals:
  – Encourage critical thinking and theoretical understanding
  – Develop Methodological and Analytic Skills
  – Engage Students to Make Connections Throughout Entire Course
  – “Take Home” to a Course/Minor/Major
  – Develop a relationship with a local or global organization or community
  – Encourage public good/development of “good” citizens
Types of Long Term Projects

• Beyond the Classroom
  – Develop mechanisms in your curriculum (university or major) to engage students in social science research
  – Engage students with your own research
  – Work with a local organization to solve a “problem” they are facing
  – Work with a global organization or community on a question/problem
    • Utilize programs that exist like Semester at Sea
Sexual Objectification, Dehumanization, and Perceived Sexual Availability in the Presence of Alcohol

Abstract
Alcohol consumption and sexual behavior are areas of experimentation, especially for students transitioning into college and adulthood (Crawford & Novak, 2011; LaBrie et al., 2014). This study investigated the relationship between the presence and quantity of alcohol and its effects on perceived sexual objectification, dehumanization, and sexual availability. Participants viewed a social media profile conveying a woman drinking alcohol or water, and were led to believe she had one drink or multiple drinks. Participants completed questionnaires that assessed objectification, dehumanization, and sexual availability. Analysis demonstrated that alcohol increased perceptions of dehumanization and sexual availability.

Method
148 Participants (61 male, 85 female, 2 other)
View profile of woman holding beer or water

Method Continued
Quantity was manipulated through a status update.

Dependent Variables: Participants answered questionnaires that gauged perceived sexual objectification, dehumanization, and sexual availability of the female target.

Results

- Drinking beer led to more dehumanization than drinking water, $F(1, 144)= 18.49$, $p<.001$, $\eta^2_p =.11$, one-tailed.
- Drinking multiple drinks led to more dehumanization than one drink, $F(1, 144)= 3.62$, $p=.003$, $\eta^2_p =.001$, one-tailed.
- No interaction between the two variables, $F(1, 144)= .13$, $p=.72$, $\eta^2_p =.001$.

- Women drinking beer leads to great perceptions of sexual availability than drinking water, $F(1, 144)= 23.32$, $p<.001$, $\eta^2_p =.14$, one-tailed.
- Women who drank more than one drink were perceived as more sexually available, $F(1, 144)= 4.99$, $p=.01$, $\eta^2_p =.03$, one-tailed.
- No significant interaction, $F(1, 144)= .62$, $p=.43$, $\eta^2_p =.008$, two-tailed.

Conclusions
- Beverage type (beer or water) and quantity of drink independently affected whether women were dehumanized and perceived as sexually available.
- Some people reported thinking that the status update with multiple waters was a lie—future research should look into this (mis)perception.
- Future research could investigate whether gender of the target and participant mattered.
- In conclusion, this research indicates that sexual perceptions of women are influenced by the presence and quantity of alcohol.
- Important in context of expectations of relationships in current social climate.

References


Long Term Projects

• Class-Based
  – Create a class on Methods/Analyses where the goal is to do a project!
  – Term long “Journal” or “Blog” of connections between theories in class and real world
  – Conduct research (Mini-Experiments, Surveys, Interviews) to test theories in class
    • Does practicing meditation and/or yoga influence attention, cognition, memory, stress, etc.?
  – Develop projects to enhance understanding of a theme in a class
    • Find media clips or advertisements or song lyrics related to a theme or theory in class
PSY 1400: Introduction to Psychological Science
Psychology Journal Assignment

This is a term-long project that is submitted periodically throughout the term.

Purpose: To increase your awareness of psychological phenomena in your every day experiences and to allow you to test different theories. This is not a "Dear Diary"—I do not need to know the sordid details of your life. This assignment also enables you to work on incorporating feedback and working on your writing skills.

Instructions: For the chapters we discuss in class, you will find a connection between the material and the real world. You get to be creative and draw your own connections between the material and the real world. There is no required length for each entry—some will need more space than others. See below for more information on the assignment and the different topics and activities. There are detailed instructions for each "round" on myWPI as well. These additional instructions also give different types of projects you could do for different topics.
PSY 2407: Psychology of Gender
Final Presentation Assignment

Purpose: The purpose of this assignment is to allow you to see the relationship between the Psychology of Gender and the Real World.

For this assignment, you can work alone or in a group. You (and your group) will create a poster that you will present on the last day of class. It is your responsibility to get the poster printed in time for class. For this assignment, you (and your group) must choose one of the following four options:

1) Psychology of Gender in the Music Industry.
2) Psychology of Gender in the Movie/TV/Commercial Industry.
3) Psychology of Gender in the Written Media.
4) Psychology of Gender in the Classroom Activity

1) Psychology of Gender in the Music Industry.
For this project, you will choose one finding or theme that you have learned regarding gender issues and you will create a poster that depicts no fewer than 5 songs that provide evidence for the topic you have chosen. You are allowed (and expected) to bias your selections in favor of providing support for the gender finding that you have chosen. You must include the lyrics you are referring to for each song that you include. You must also include a description of why each of the songs relates to the gender issue that you have chosen. You may use the audio clips during your in-class presentation, if you would like.
Modification Project (Individual Only):

Purpose: To actively engage in a week-long project of self-improvement and self-understanding. This project allows for a hands-on personal experience with topics related to the Self, Attitudes and Behaviors, and Social Judgments and Beliefs.

Instructions: You will identify an area for self-improvement and develop a program to implement this modification. You will need to try this program out for at least 7 days. Then you will analyze your experience in relation to what you have learned about Self, Social Beliefs, and/or Attitudes and Behaviors. Even if the attempt is unsuccessful, you should have plenty to analyze and talk about!

1. Choose and identify a target behavior or attitude that you wish to change. Here are some behaviors students frequently select (from Merrills & Brannigan, 1998, p. 157).

   - Stop Smoking
   - Eating Habits
   - Studying Habits
   - Arguing Less
   - Stop Nail Biting
   - Stop Hair Twirling
   - Looking in the Mirror
   - Time Management
   - Playing Video Games Less
   - Being More Mindful
   - Help Others More
   - Be Less Critical of Others
   - Getting Back Into Something You Enjoy (Art, Music, Playing an Instrument, Yoga, Writing, Etc.)

   - Tackling a Fear
   - Smiling More
   - Exercising Habits
   - Using Profanities Less
   - Socializing More
   - Texting Less During Class
   - Sleeping Habits
   - Using Social Media Less
   - Meditating More
   - Engage in Community Service More
   - Talk to Professors More
   - Be More Accepting of a Particular Group

2. Determine what your goal is: Do you want to change how frequently you engage in the behavior? Do you want to change the duration of the behavior (how long it occurs)? Do you want to do a complete overhaul?
PSY 2406: Cross Cultural Psychology
Meditation/Yoga Project
Due: Monday, November 21st, 2016

There are papers on Canvas relating to Meditation, Yoga, Stress, Health, Emotion, Well-Being, Thinking/Cognition, Attention, etc. Feel free to use any of those resources and resources you find on your own.

Purpose: Mindfulness through meditation and yoga has only relatively recently become popular in the West. However, it has been an integral part of Eastern cultures for centuries. This project will allow us to explore these practices and draw on what we learned from the Zen Buddhist Temple visitor.

Instructions: Students will practice meditation and/or yoga over several weeks time. Along with practicing meditation and/or yoga, students will need to empirically investigate the influence (if any) their practice is having on them. Students will pick the dependent variable (the item you are measuring) and record their data. The students can choose how frequently they want to record their measures—once a day, before and after practice, Morning, afternoon, evening, etc. You are also welcome to explore different types of yoga classes (there are many forms) or visit different meditation centers. Note: It is expected that you will use research (theories, articles, studies) to support your research question, hypotheses, what you find, etc.

Dependent Variables: It can measure something related to Health (stress, physical health, illness, sleep, etc), Cognition (clarity of thoughts, attentiveness, memory, cognitive performance, etc.), or Emotions/Mood/Wellbeing. You can measure one factor or several. You should have some evidence or rationale for why you want to measure this (supporting research will help).
Short Term Projects
Short Term Projects

• Potential Goals:
  – Begin development of methodological and basic analytic skills
  – Allows students to directly test theories they are learning about
  – Enables students to make self-relevant connections as the project is something they do or happens to them.
  – Develops critical thinking skills because you can do these projects throughout the course
Short Term Projects

• Class-Based
  – Practice Developing Research Questions and Methodologies
    • Naturalistic Observations
    • Short Surveys
    • Interviews
    • Mini-Experiment
  – Field Studies to Test out Theories Quickly
    • Test Theories on Helping Behavior around campus
    • Engage in random acts of kindness and monitor mood
  – Develop Public Service Announcements, Videos, Pamphlets, Etc.
Purpose: The purpose of this activity is to introduce and engage you in the methodology that social psychologists use. For this activity, you will pick a real world question that you are interested in and you will conduct a study on this topic. You can use one of three methods: Observation, Survey, or Experiment. It also allows you to meet someone in class and work collaboratively.

Overall Instructions:

1) Develop a research question and hypothesis that you want to explore that is relevant to social psychology.

2) Pick one of three methods to study this question: Observation, Survey, Experiment. (See below for the details of the different methods).

3) Analyze your results, provide tables and figures when appropriate.

4) Write it up! Assume your reader does NOT know anything about social psychology OR the different methods. In a short summary:

   a. Discuss your research question and hypothesis for the reader.

   b. Discuss the method you used, why you chose this method, how you implemented the method, how many participants you had, etc.

   c. Discuss your findings—what did you find? Does it match your predictions or not?

   d. Conclude—what did you learn about your topic? What did you learn about the method you used? Do you have any thoughts on how to conduct research on this topic in the future?

5) Be sure to cite and reference appropriately!
Purpose: To engage in prosocial behavior and investigate its effects on you.

Instructions: For at least 7 days, you will need to perform random acts of kindness or some form of helping behavior. You will monitor your mood, stress, sleeping patterns, etc. during this time. You will then analyze your results in relation to the theories on helping. There are lots.

1) You get to choose what you are going to do. It can be big or small. But it has to be helpful in some way to someone or something. And it has to be something you do not normally do or do infrequently.

Possible ideas (in no order):
   a) Help the environment in some way—recycle, walk vs. drive, take the stairs vs. the elevator, take shorter showers, reuse a water bottle vs. buying new ones.
   b) Hold doors for people
   c) Help people who are struggling—if they drop something, are carrying something, etc.
   d) Perform random acts of kindness—give out stickers, tip (monetary) people, compliment people, encourage people, etc.
   e) Donate—pick an organization(s) and donate—whether your time, money, clothes (goodwill) etc.
   f) Volunteer—find a cause/organization and volunteer throughout the week(s)
   g) Tutor—any age, any subject

2) For at least one week, you need to engage in the helping behavior/random act of kindness at least one time EVERY DAY. More days and more times a day are Fine!

3) Log your activities and your feelings before and after engaging in them. You can do this once a day or multiple times a day—it depends on what you want to learn.
Social Norm Break Activity

Purpose: Test social norms in your own life by breaking a social norm and then writing about your experience as it relates (or fails to relate) to the issues of social norms and social influence. After you break the norm, you might want to consider telling the other person/people that you are doing an assignment for social psychology (and that you're not usually so weird!)

1) Choose a Norm to Break. You must get approval from Dr. Skorinko BEFORE you do actually break a norm. You may not do anything illegal, immoral, unethical, etc. for this assignment. Talk to your Professor if you want to brainstorm.

Examples from past years fall into several categories and include (you may choose one of these or come up with your own idea):

Respect: Give Hi-5s to professors vs. students (who are all strangers) instead of shaking hands; act as a student's servant and wait on him/her in class; address a professor by her/his first name rather than as "Professor".

Personal property: Putting creamer in a customer's coffee without asking; ask strangers if you can put your wash in with their wash (including some lacy underwear)

Gender Roles: Reading playboy/penthouse in public (a female did this); read Martha Stewart Living in public (a male did this); catcall to guys (a girl did this). Males can paint their nails, wear women's clothes, or women's accessories (e.g., bows, headbands, etc.), become verbally intimate with strangers vs. friends, or attend a predominantly female club or fitness group (e.g., Zumba, yoga). Females can wear ties, dominate conversations, or attend a predominantly male club or fitness groups (e.g., jiu jitsu; free weight section of gym).

Food/Beverage Norms: Eat with hands and see if you get conformers; ask a stranger to get you a refill; ask people if you can have a bite of their meal (at restaurants) either as a waitress or as a customer.
Purpose: The purpose of this assignment is to get you thinking about the implications of gender in relationships or the workplace. This assignment is also intended to allow you the opportunity to connect relationships, workplace, power, and/or leadership issues with the real-world.

Instructions: You may choose any of the options below to complete this assignment. You may work with a partner if you’d like. You can submit one assignment with all ids on it.

Options:

1) **Salaries:** Survey/Interview 5-10 women and 5-10 men to decide how much they would think they should be paid for a summer job as a research intern. You can choose the field that the internship is in (e.g., psychology, biomedical engineering, etc.). What are your data? What does this tell you about how men and women view salaries and how much they should be paid? Note: more participants is always better!

2) **Division of Household Labor:** Survey 5-10 women and 5-10 men about their expectations for dividing domestic chores when they enter into a committed relationship (or how they current divide domestic chores if they are already in a committed relationship). Who do they expect will do cooking, cleaning, child rearing, car repair, house repair, and yard maintenance? Do they think their division will be equitable? What was the division of labor like where they grew up? Have they known people who did not divide tasks along
Statistics and Methods in the Real World Assignment
PSY 3500

The purpose of this assignment is to increase your awareness of statistics and research methods in the real world. It is also intended to allow you to apply what you learn both from the textbook (Davis & Smith) and the supplemental text (Huff). You will find that such phenomena are pervasive in your everyday experience. In this assignment, you are welcome to use your own creativity so long as you keep make direct links between the topics we are learning and your example.

This assignment will be due 3 times throughout the term, and each time the assignment will have a different focus (or theme).

Stats in the Real World Assignment # 1: General
DUE: Monday, August 8th
For this assignment, I want you to start finding statistics and research methods in the real world. You can find anything that is relevant—whether it is a finding you think is interesting, a new innovative methodology, a methodology you don't trust, an ethical issue in conducting studies, or even a scene from a movie, a comic, a lyric that deals with statistics or research methods, material from another class, or even a personal experience if it relates. In this assignment, I want you to clarify why you chose the piece you did, and if it deals with a method be sure to tell me very clearly what method was used and why you think it was appropriate or not.

Stats in the Real World Assignment # 2: Correlations
DUE: Thursday, September 10th
For this assignment, you need to find an example of a correlational design in the real world. It can come from a news article, a psychology journal, a comic, music, a movie—you just have to be able to explain it in terms of correlational design. Be sure to make it clear why it relates to correlational design/analysis. Analyze your example in terms of what you've learned about correlational design/analysis (this analysis can be positive or negative or both). For instance, you can tell me why you believe the finding or not—in terms of the benefits and limitations of a correlational design. Feel free to include the Huff book in your analysis as well.
GAY, BI OR STRAIGHT?

ASK NOT ABOUT HIS GIRLFRIEND
BUT ABOUT HIS PARTNER

[CHALLENGE HETERONORMATIVITY FOR THE RIGHTS OF OTHERS]
Childhood Ends When Violence Begins

Make The Family Safe Again - End Domestic Violence
Walk A Mile In His Shoes...
Challenge Gender Roles
Short Term Projects

• In Class Projects/Active Learning
  – Make projects synonymous with every day classroom experience
  – Test theories in class actively
    • Conduct mini-experiments in class or around campus during class time
    • Develop a survey in class and have them answer it
Activity

Half Class Close Eyes
Copy These Words

1) BAT

2) LEMON

3) CINERAMA

...now close your eyes
Copy These Words

1) WHIRL

2) SLAPSTICK

3) CINERAMA
Unscramble the three words to create three new words.
Some got:

1) BAT (TAB)
2) LEMON (MELON)
3) CINERAMA (AMERICAN)

Some got:

1) WHIRL
2) SLAPSTICK
3) CINERAMA (AMERICAN)
Sensation/Perception Project

• Take at least 4 pieces of candy
  – Eat 1 Piece with eyes OPEN and nose OPEN
  – Eat 1 Piece with your eyes CLOSED and nose OPEN
  – Eat 1 Piece with your eyes OPEN and nose CLOSED
  – Eat 1 Piece with your eyes CLOSED and nose CLOSED

• What did you taste in each condition?
Sensory Interaction: The Role of Smell in “Taste”

The Importance of Smell to Perceived Taste

Many foods are much less easy to identify when they cannot be smelled.

The graph shows the percent correct identification of various substances with and without smell. The substances include water, vinegar, whiskey, wine, coffee, chocolate, and garlic. The graph indicates that smell significantly enhances the ability to identify these substances.
Yummy Data Demo

• Need:
  – Piece of Paper
  – Pack of M&M’s or Skittles
# Yummy Data Demo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M&amp;M’s</th>
<th>Blue</th>
<th>Brown</th>
<th>Green</th>
<th>Orange</th>
<th>Red</th>
<th>Yellow</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SKITTLES</td>
<td>Purple</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predicted %</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observed Frequency</th>
<th></th>
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</table>
## Yummy Data Demo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M&amp;M’s/ SKITTLES</th>
<th>Blue</th>
<th>Brown</th>
<th>Green</th>
<th>Orange</th>
<th>Red</th>
<th>Yellow</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actual %</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Observed Frequency</td>
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Projects in Social Science

Your Turn
Develop Your Own Project

• Develop a project that you could take home with you
  – Can be curriculum or course based
  – Can be long-term or short-term
  – Can be in or out of class

• Identify the goals it achieves

• Identify any weaknesses or cons
  – E.g., takes time to grade
Reflect

• How easy was this task?
• How hard was this task?
• How easy might it be to implement?
• Did you learn something about projects you hadn’t thought about before?
In Sum...
Conclusion

• Think broadly about what defines a “project”
• Find ways in the classroom and the curriculum to engage students and allow time for reflection
• Find fun ways to engage students to see connections between social science and their sense of self and the real world
  – (we learn more when we connect to ourselves!)
How Effective Are These Types of Projects?

• Very!
• Empirical research shows learning benefits
• Students report:
  – Engagement
  – Critical thinking
  – Better understanding of social science
I feel that the journal project was an important part of this class, in helping my understanding of the different and varying topics we covered in class. It helped me to learn some real everyday life examples of social psychology. It not only helped me to learn what social psychology is all about, but helped improve my observation skills, some research skills, and even the ability to set up my own studies and experiments to be able to infer on people’s behaviors. Learning how to conduct such studies and experiments was very helpful and taught me a lot about the process by which researchers put information together and gather statistics.
Looking back at these 6 or so weeks I think I learned a lot. I didn’t just understand the concepts better but I also practiced my critical thinking ability. Over the course of this assignment I’ve learned about the importance of carefully documenting all procedures and actions that are related to experiments. At first I thought that social science wouldn’t require such things but I was wrong. In the people watching activity I realized how important it was to record carefully what things I saw. This is because every little action could mean something a bit different from what I was initially thinking.
When I first chose to take this course the only expectations I had for the class was reading a lot about past experiments and studies performed years ago some a bunch of guys that are probably dead by now. I also expected to write a few papers about the boring studies that had be conducted years and years ago that would draw some sort of similarity to human behavior in social environments. But to my surprise, this course has been the entire opposite of that. While we did learn about human behavior in social situations, it was done in a totally different way than I expected. We did learn about past experiments but not from a boring book, and the studies were all performed by us. While books and papers may be a great way to preserve knowledge, they are not the most effective way to transmit it. Taking the same concepts and theories learned in class or from the reading and having us perform actual experiments in our day-to-day life was a great way to get me interested in the subject. It also made it much easier to relate to the material because now we are no longer just reading the results from a book but were actually experiencing them for our self. In general, this course helped me think more critically.
If you do devote the time to a research project, you will find yourself doing graduate level research and high-level statistics, without even realizing the gravity of the material before you actually are at graduate school realizing you are ahead of the game.