Loughborough University  
Department of Social Sciences

Social Psychology and Communication (17SSB165)

Autumn Semester 2017-2018

Module handbook

Core module: BSc Social Psychology

Option: BSc Psychology and BSc Sport and Exercise Psychology

Lecturer:

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When and where

This module runs in Semester 1. It comprises a weekly lecture and online session:

* lecture: every Monday (weeks 1-11), 2pm–4pm, in lecture room CC012 (James France).
* online session: every Thursday (weeks 1-11), 5pm-6pm;
  + you will access this through Learn from your own computer;
  + you will need a computer and headphones (or speakers);
  + two IT labs are booked for those of you who wish to do this in a lab: U125 (Brockington) and SMB108 (Stewart Mason)

Aims

The aims of this module are for you to:

* Understand fundamental aspects of human communication
* Understand different approaches to communication (these approaches come from social psychology and cognate social sciences)
* Explain fundamental processes, practices, behaviours and problems in everyday interpersonal communication

Overview

This module will introduce you to fundamental aspects of understanding human communication. It will cover some fundamental approaches to thinking about communication within social psychology and other social sciences. This includes approaches that conceive of communication as the transmission of information or contents; approaches that look at communication as a cognitive phenomenon; and others that treat communication as a means by which we accomplish social actions. One aim of the course is to appreciate how different approaches can enable you to explain different aspects of communication; that is, since communication is an intrinsically complex and multifaceted phenomenon, each approach illuminates some aspects of it whilst overlooking other aspects.

This module takes a *social* take on communication. This means that we will explore how people use communication to create and maintain social relationships, to engage in social activities, and to build, maintain and modify the social realities they inhabit—from the ground level of everyday informal interactions and relationships (such as when you are talking to a friend in a cafe), all the way through to more structured institutional roles and structures (such as when you are talking to a doctor within a medical consultation).

We will explore how communication makes social life possible. We will also look at the other side of the communication/society coin: how social relationships and norms shape the ways in which people communicate. In order to do this, we will examine central domains of social life in which communication plays a key role: cooperation, conflict, and sharing experiences.

Topics

The lectures are divided into three blocks, which match the three aims for the module:

* fundamental aspects of human communication and origins of human communication (weeks 1-2)
* approaches to communication: information theories, social cognition, social construction and discursive psychology, conversation analysis (weeks 3-7 including a review session)
* dimensions of communication: cooperation, conflict, and sharing experiences (weeks 8-11 including a review session)

Topic guide

Week 1: 2/10/2017

*Introduction to communication*

In this session we will ask the question: what is communication? We will consider some related conceptual and methodological problems. The second part of the lecture will cover the structure of the course, its aims and methods of assessment.

Week 2: 9/10/2017

*Fundamental aspects of human communication*

The lecture will introduce you to fundamental aspects of human communication, including signal, context, shared intentionality, and social motives for communicating.

Week 3: 16/10/2017

*Information theories*

This is the first out of four sessions dedicated to approaches to the study of communication across psychology and cognate disciplines. We explore a classic approach, which focuses on how humans exchange information with one another. Here, communication is primarily conceived as the exchange of information. We will see that subsequent developments in communication theory have challenged this notion. However, we will also see that recent scientific developments have revived the notion that information exchange is central to the organisation of human communication.

Week 4 lecture: 23/10/2017

*Social cognition*

In this lecture, we consider fundamental contributions of social psychology to understandings of human communication. Social psychology studies how people’s everyday reasoning is guided by cognitive principles, which shape the ways in which they make sense of other’s messages. Understanding these principles has led to devising ways of influencing people’s behaviours, as demonstrated in some classical social psychological experiments.

Week 5 lecture: 30/10/2017

*Social construction and discursive psychology*

Note: this lecture introduces two approaches to communication, which I am linking because they allow us to look at related problems.

Traditional approaches to communication presuppose that the external world (e.g., the objects in our environment) exists objectively and independently of the ways in which we think and communicate about them. In this week’s lecture, we consider an entirely different perspective; namely, that the world is at least partly constituted through the very ways in which we communicate about it. This approach is known as social construction (sometimes referred to as social constructionism). This approach opens up new possibilities for the analysis of crucial aspects communication, including how people produce divergent versions of reality, engage in controversies, and in conflicts over values. We will examine these problems through the lens of another powerful approach to communication: discursive psychology.

Week 6 lecture: 6/11/2017

*Review*

In this lecture, we will review the contents of the module so far and go through the methods of assessment once again. We will also have a self-administered test (not part of the assessment!) which will help you verify your understandings of the module contents so far.

Week 7 lecture: 13/11/2017

*Conversation analysis*

Classic approaches to communication focus on the topic or content of a message; that is, they see people’s utterances as primarily transmitting information. In this week’s lecture, we explore an approach that focuses on *action* as the core function of communicative behaviours. Using this perspective, we can make sense of how people use their language, as well as other modes of communication (e.g., visible conduct such as gaze or gestures) to accomplish practical activities (such as requesting others’ assistance, offering help, or sharing aspects of one’s own experience), as well as to coordinate each other within joint courses of action. This session concludes the part of the course dedicated to approaches to communication.

Week 8 lecture: 20/11/2017

*Social cooperation*

This is the first out of four lectures dedicated to fundamental dimensions of human communication. From here, we start using the approaches introduced in the previous part of the module in order to make sense of communication issues and problems in social life. This week we consider communication as a system designed for social cooperation. This means that communication enables people to understand each other, and to participate in joint courses of actions or projects. We will draw on recent research on some fundamental communicative actions in social life; that is, actions through which people get others to do things for them, and actions through which they offer others assistance.

Week 9 lecture: 27/11/2017

*Interpersonal conflict*

In this lecture, we explore how people engage in, manage, and exit episodes of conflict. We will consider contributions from the study of social cognition as well as from studies of interpersonal interactions.

Week 10 lecture: 4/12/2017

*Sharing experiences*

A fundamental function of communication is sharing with other people aspects of our experience, including our thoughts, emotions, and so on. This is essential in everyday life where, across different levels of intimacy and social distance, people use communication to establish, consolidate and maintain interpersonal relationships, as well as in professional and institutional settings where the ability to listen to others and to act accordingly can make a difference between a successful and a disastrous interaction.

Week 11 lecture: 11/12/2017

*Final review*

Assessment

The assessment for this module is based on a portfolio. All the information will be made available in the first lecture (week 1) and then posted on Learn.

Online sessions

Online sessions happen every week on Thursday (5-6pm). They are linked with the portfolio, which means that you will be able to start building materials for the portfolio during the online session. All you need to know about the online session will be explained in the first lecture (week 1) and then posted on Learn.

Lecture notes and readings

Lecture notes are made available on Learn after each lecture. A note-taking, printable version of the lecture slides will be available for you to download before the lecture. Lecture notes do not substitute readings. There will be a mandatory reading for each week of the course, and this will be essential for your independent study. There are additional recommended readings which you can use to explore the module topics further. Thanks to the library staff, most readings are available for direct download from the Reading List on the module’s page (left-hand side of the module page; see Figure below).



Course schedule

Course schedule (minor changes will be possible)

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Week** | **Self-study** | **Lecture** | **Online session** | **Homework** |
| **Block 1: fundamental aspects of communication (weeks 1-2)** | | | | |
| Week 1 2/10/2017 | - | Introduction to communication | Practical online session on fundamental aspects of communication | Complete diary entry  Do reading for Week 2 |
| Week 2 9/10/2017 | CLARK, Herbert H. Chapter 1 "Language use" In: CLARK, Herbert H. 1996. *Using language*. Cambridge University Press. | Origins of human communication | Practical online session on fundamental aspects of communication | Complete diary entry  Do reading for Week 3 |
| **Block 2: approaches to communication (weeks 3-7)** | | | | |
| Week 3 16/10/2017 | BATESON, G. Cybernetic explanation (Chapter 6.1) In: BATESON, Gregory. 1987. *Steps to an ecology of mind: collected essays in anthropology, psychiatry, evolution, and epistemology*. Aronson. pp. 405-415 | Information theories | Practical online session on how to apply concepts from information theories | Complete diary entry  Do reading for Week 4 |
| Week 4 23/10/2017 | Chapters: “Social judgment theory”, and “Elaboration likelihood model”,  In GRIFFIN, Em, SPARKS, Glenn Grayson., LEDBETTER, Andrew M. *A first look at communication* *theory*. McGraw-Hill. | Social Cognition | Practical online session on how to apply concepts from social cognition | Complete diary entry  Do reading for Week 5 |
| Week 5 30/10/2017 | WATZLAWICK, Paul. Self-fulfilling prophecies In: WATZLAWICK, Paul. 1984. The Invented Reality: How Do We Know What We Believe We Know?. W. W. Norton. pp. 95-116  EDWARDS, D., 2006-02-01. Discourse, cognition and social practices: the rich surface of language and social interaction. Discourse Studies, 8(1), 41-49." | Social construction and discursive psychology | Practical online session on how to apply concepts from social construction and discursive psychology | Complete diary entry |
| Week 6 6/11/2017 | - | Review lecture | Review online session | Do reading for Week 7 |
| Week 7 13/11/2017 | POMERANTZ, FEHR. Conversation Analysis: An Approach to the Analysis of Social Interaction (Chapter 9) In: DIJK, Teun Adrianus van. 2011. Discourse studies: a multidisciplinary introduction. 2nd. SAGE. pp. 165-190 | Conversation analysis | Practical online session on how to apply concepts from conversation analysis | Complete diary entry  Do reading for Week 8 |
| **Block 3: dimensions of communication (weeks 7-10 + review on week 11)** | | | | |
| Week 8  20/11/2017 | TOMASELLO, M. Human cooperative communication (chapter 3) In: TOMASELLO, M. 2008. Origins of human communication. MIT Press. pp. 57-108 | Social cooperation | Practical online session on how to make sense of cooperative communication | Complete diary entry  Do reading for Week 9 |
| Week 9 27/11/2017 | MCKINLAY, Andrew, MCVITTIE, Chris. Dispute and aggression In: MCKINLAY, Andrew, MCVITTIE, Chris. 2008. Social psychology and discourse. Wiley-Blackwell | Interpersonal conflict | Practical online session on how to make sense of conflicts | Complete diary entry  Do reading for Week 10 |
| Week 10 4/12/2017 | TOMASELLO, M. The Grammatical Dimension In: TOMASELLO, M. 2008. Origins of human communication. MIT Press.  Note: Focus on section 6.3 "The Grammar of Sharing and Narrative" | Sharing experiences | Practical online session on how to make sense of sharing communication | Complete diary entry |
| Week 11  11/12/2017 | - | Review |  |  |