Mini-Research Project For Social Psychology

For this class, you are required to conduct an actual study in which you gather data, analyze it, and report it in the form of a paper. The paper should be written like an APA journal article.

As you actively read the textbook and listen in class, many possible topics for your study will come to mind. For instance, when we learn about the social self, perhaps you may become interested in designing a survey to test for self-serving bias within a group of ARC students. When we study gender differences you may become interested in creating some type of observation or test to determine the existence of a specific difference between males and females. When we discuss the “beauty-is-good stereotype” you may want to design a study to actually test just how much people are judged by their appearance. There are a huge number of possibilities. The key to your success in this project will be to become actively, intellectually involved in the topics we study in the class and then develop a specific hypothesis that you can test in a fairly simple way. Once you do this there will be some investment of time to actually perform the study, collect the data, and write it all up, but using information from the book and class to develop a vision of what you want to test and how you will go about it will be most important.

Your study does not have to be complicated, but it should be well constructed. You are welcome to work with other students (no more than two others, for a total of three) on the actual study. Students can even collaborate on the literature review and any ideas or concepts related to the study and its write-up. However, each student is to turn in their own paper reflecting their own words and writing style.

Every project must be reviewed with me prior to beginning the actual study. In addition, you are encouraged to consult with me at any point of the study and your write-up.

The entire project is worth 80 points and your grade will depend on how well you do on a combination of the elements indicated below.

**Relevant topic**
The topic of your research should be related to social psychology in some way. You will not necessarily be rewarded more points if your topic is “more” related to social psychology than someone else’s, but you will lose points if your topic is generally not related to social psychology. Since I am asking everyone to obtain my approval for all topics, this component of the paper should not create problems for most students. However, it is possible that I would approve a topic, but in your handling of it (specifically, the way you write it up and analyze it in your literature review and discussion) you move away from a true social psychology topic. If this happens, you will lose points.
Research design
Even though you must collect new data in your study, you do not need to do an experiment for this project. If you did do an experiment, you would not necessarily get more points than someone who did not do an experiment. I expect that most of you will do some kind of survey or simple observation. Most important in this component of the paper is that you have a “clean,” well-constructed design. Your design should not have obvious flaws that could have been avoided had you been aware of them. If you do a survey, it should be constructed well. Some “flaws” that occur as a function of your limited time, means, and expertise will be tolerated. For instance, getting a large number of subjects may be difficult for many students.

You don’t have to come up with an original design for your study. You can simply attempt to replicate a study that you have heard about in class or read about in the book. If you do this, carefully following the design of the original study, you will probably eliminate most flaws that would occur if you came up with a design of your own.

Journal format
Your write-up of your study should be in a format that is similar to an APA scientific research journal. I will provide you with an example. The format includes five sections: introduction, methods, results, discussion, and references. The introduction section is where you include your literature review and the general idea of your study. This is also where you indicate your hypothesis. The methods section is where you describe your subjects, the measurement scales you used, and your procedures. These should be described in enough detail so that another person reading your paper would have enough information to replicate your study. The results section is where you give a statistical summary of your findings that are pertinent to your hypothesis or any other information generated from your study. Most often, a table of some sort should be used to present your data. The discussion section is where you analyze the implications of your results (often referring back to the points you made in your introduction and reinterpreting them on the basis of your own research results), discuss any problems with your study, and make suggestions for future research. Finally, the references section is where you list the sources you cited in your literature review. The format for your references should be similar to the one used in your textbook or any of the journal articles you choose for your paper. You should make sure that every reference you used is cited in your text in some way, and in turn, every citation is listed in your reference section.

All survey instruments, rating scales, questions, etc., along with all raw data sheets must be turned in along with your paper. They should be attached to the back of your paper.

Literature review
You should obtain some background information on the topic of your study. That information should be summarized (cited) and integrated in your introduction section as a way of introducing your own research idea and hypothesis. An obvious source for information on your topic is our textbook. You may cite the textbook itself as a source if the information you use comes from the author’s statements. In addition, you may cite
studies that are described in the textbook. In these cases you would find the citation for
the studies in the textbook and use those citations in your paper. Technically, scientists
don’t cite references that they haven’t actually seen with their own eyes. Since the
primary purpose of this paper is not necessarily library research, I will let you use
references that you haven’t actually read yourself. You may also use information that I
mentioned in class (ask me for specific sources), or that you gather from the Internet (the
psychology journals on the ARC online library are a good source). If you are aware of a
source and would like more information but you can’t obtain the complete text of the
source, I can usually get it for you if you give me a couple of weeks. Once again, since
the primary purpose of this paper is not necessarily to do library research, I am
only requiring 3 sources. However, you may use more than three sources.

Depth of discussion
In your discussion section you will have the opportunity to analyze your results, discuss
flaws of the study, examine the implications of your results, suggest future research
studies, and generally show that you have given your study some deep thought. The
more creative and analytical your discussion, the better your paper will be.

Readability
I should be able to understand your sentences and the thought behind them without too
much difficulty. Make sure to proofread your paper carefully for spelling and grammar
mistakes, but also for flow.

As I have indicated before, I don’t want any students to fail this assignment. I am willing
to help you at all steps along the way, but you must seek my help to gain it. The earlier
you do it in the semester, the more likely I will be able to give you the help you need.