Part I PBS Tripos
PBS 1: Introduction to Psychology
2015/16 Paper Guide

Course Organisers
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Brief Description of the Paper
This course aims to introduce a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of psychology. Through studying this course, students will develop their understanding of how the different approaches address specific topics within psychology. Topics are selected such that students without prior training in psychology will not be disadvantaged. After a brief introduction to the history of psychology, and its various sub-disciplines, a series of five broad topics will be explored. Each topic will be covered over three weeks, with research and ideas from different theoretical viewpoints being discussed and compared.

Teaching is via lectures and personal study, backed up by supervisions.

Schedule
All lectures last for one hour and take place on Mondays at 11am and Fridays at 2pm, in Mill Lane Lecture Room 1. Specific lecture information is available below and an online timetable is available on the PBS Tripos website. Two classes will be panel discussions giving an overview of the term’s material; the first will be held at the end of Michaelmas term, and the second at the end of Lent term.

Mode of Assessment
The course is assessed by means of a single three hour examination, testing candidate’s knowledge and understanding of the different psychological approaches to the specific topic areas covered in the course. You will be required to write three 40-minute essays from a choice of questions drawn from each specific topic area within the course (i.e. an essay on any three of the five topics). In addition, you will be required to write a single one hour essay from a selection of broader questions designed to test your ability to integrate knowledge across topic areas.

Supervision Arrangements
For many students, arrangements for supervisions will already have been made by their Director of Studies, but where this is not the case, arrangements will be made by Dr Amy Milton.

It is normal to have a total of six to eight supervisions, including revision supervisions in Easter term, which leaves some room for choice of topics within the course. Each supervisor for the paper is normally prepared to provide all the supervisions
necessary. Suggested essay titles for supervision are included with each set of readings in the list below.

Introduction – Dr Amy Milton
Week 1. 9th October.

Individual Differences
Gender – Professor Melissa Hines
Weeks 1-2. 12th and 16th of October.

Outline
Girls and boys, as well as men and women, are largely similar psychologically and behaviourally, but there are some areas of average difference. These lectures will discuss the nature of these differences, as well as their sizes and the factors that might contribute to them. Although public discussion of gender often focuses on nature versus nurture, psychological research suggests that nature and nurture work together to shape gendered behaviour. A major focus of the lectures will be on children’s play behaviour, which shows large gender differences, and in regard to which a range of factors, including gonadal hormones during prenatal and neonatal development, reinforcement by parents and peers, and self-socialization, have been studied and found to contribute. Thus, numerous factors combine to explain not only why males and females show some average differences in behaviour, but also why some of us are more gender-typical than others.

Recommended Reading
General overviews:

Additional references:

Suggested supervision essay titles
• Why do some children show more gender-typical behaviour than others?
• Are sex differences in children’s play behaviour inevitable?

Individual Differences – Dr Kate Ellis-Davies
Weeks 2-3. 19th and 23rd of October.

Outline
Researchers seeking to understand individual differences have consistently implicated temperament and attachment as candidate variables of interest. Temperament may be considered an effective conceptual tool, with which we may describe and understand early emerging variation in cognition, behaviour, and affect. In the following 2 lectures we will begin with an introduction to the foundations of personality, temperament. We will discuss the proposed basis of temperament, as well as the concept of the Active Child influencing their environment. Next we will discuss the development of attachment, its importance, measurement, and relation to temperament and individual differences. Finally we will discuss the role of early experience, focusing on parenting, in the emergence and impact of individual difference through an evaluation of current positions surrounding the roles of nature and nurture.

Recommended Reading

Suggested supervision essay titles
• When examining attachment, we must also discuss temperament. Discuss.
• Attachment quality depends upon the mother. Discuss.
Discuss whether the debate of nature-nurture in socio-emotional development is over.
Discuss why all children may not be equally affected by the same form of parenting.
Issues of measurement in socio-emotional development have been resolved. Discuss.

**Personality – Dr Jason Rentfrow**

Weeks 3-4. 26th and 30th of October.

**Outline**

Individual differences in personality are perhaps one of the most fascinating yet frustrating topics studied in psychology. Fascinating because of its richness and complexity, frustrating because there’s little consensus about what personality is exactly. These lectures review some of the dominant theoretical perspectives about personality and the ways in which it is typically assessed.

**Recommended Reading**

Books:

Articles:


**Suggested supervision essay titles**

- What are the limitations of current conceptualizations of personality and how serious are they?
- What are three mechanisms responsible for behavioural manifestations of personality? Give examples to illustrate how the mechanisms work.

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**Perceiving People**

*Perception of faces - Professor John Mollo*

Weeks 4-5. 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 6\textsuperscript{th} of November.

**Outline**

Crucial to our social interaction is our ability to identify and remember faces; and crucial to our understanding of the emotional states of others is our ability to recognize facial expressions. Have special brain mechanisms evolved for these purposes? Are some people innately better at face recognition than others? The topic of face perception will be used to illustrate several of the techniques that are used by experimental psychologists to study perception in general.

**Recommended Reading**

Bruce, V. and Young, A. (2012) Face Perception, Psychology Press


Wilmer, J. B. et al. (2010) Human face recognition ability is specific and highly heritable. *Proceedings of the National Academy USA*, 107, 5238-5241


**Suggested supervision essay titles**

- Do we have dedicated brain mechanisms for the recognition of faces?
- What is the evidence that individual differences in the ability to recognise faces are heritable?
**What is known of the processes underlying the recognition of faces? Are they different from those underlying the recognition of other objects?**

**Interpersonal Perception – Dr Jason Rentfrow**
Weeks 5-6. 9th and 13th of November.

**Outline**

How do individuals form impressions of others and are those impressions? This question is at the heart of research on interpersonal perception and will be the focus of this lecture series. In particular, we will explore the processes through which individuals form impressions of others and the factors that influence impression formation.

**Recommended Reading**

Books:

Articles:


Suggested supervision essay titles
- Describe using illustrative examples three parameters that shape our impressions of others’ personalities.
- Is it important that we have accurate impressions of others’ personalities?

*Perceiving People: Developmental Questions – Dr Kate Ellis-Davies*

Weeks 6-7, 16th and 20th of November.

Outline – Lecture 1

Compared with young members of other primates, human infants are much less competent physically, but they have surprising perceptual and sensorial skills. Thus we begin with an introduction to state of the art findings about the characteristic capacities and limitations of human infants.

Recommended Reading


Suggested supervision essay titles

- In what ways do babies seem equipped to master the world they encounter after birth and how do their experiences promote their further development?
- What developmental processes might explain changes over the first year of life in infant perceptual skills?
- William James once described the newborn world as one of ‘booming, buzzing confusion.’ How might a constructivist respond?

Outline – Lecture 2

In the previous lecture, perception was examined as a paramount development for infants’ social interactions and how experience shapes the development of perception. In this lecture we will examine how atypical perception in the visual and
auditory domains affect social interactions. We will discuss whether the cause of the perceptual deficit is relevant when predicting outcomes, and the role social partners play in buffering or exacerbating challenges brought on by perceptual deficits.

**Recommended Reading**


**Suggested supervision essay titles**

- Perceptual impairment will always inhibit social interaction. Discuss.
- Discuss a way in which perceptual impairments have been linked with atypical communicative development.
- How may deprivation be explained as one of the causes of perceptual impairment?

**Mind & Body**

**Health Psychology – Dr Jason Rentfrow**

Weeks 7-8. 23rd and 27th November.

**Outline**

Do our thoughts and feelings affect our physical health? Can ‘the right state of mind’ serve as a buffer against illness or disease? The relative new area of health psychology combines theory and research from different areas of psychology to explore the ways in which social, psychological, and biological processes interact to affect physical health. These lectures will provide a broad overview of this research area.

**Recommended Reading**

Books:

Articles:


Suggested supervision essay titles

- Why don’t zebras get ulcers?
- How does psychological stress affect physical health?

Overview of Michaelmas term material – Dr Ellis-Davies et al.
Week 8. 30th November.

Embodied Cognition - Dr Simone Schnall

Weeks 1-2. 15th, 18th and 22nd of January.

Outline

Psychologists are increasingly interested in embodiment based on the assumption that thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are grounded in bodily interaction with the environment. These lectures will examine how the notion of embodied cognition has become influential in cognitive and social psychology. We will explore the extent to which embodied approaches enrich traditional theories. Because embodiment has emerged as a “hot topic” especially in social psychology, one goal is to critically examine whether the growing enthusiasm is justified, and whether embodied and grounded approaches might pave the way for a paradigm shift in how the mind is understood.

Overview Reading


Further Reading


Suggested supervision essay titles
- Why are metaphors considered of central importance in embodied approaches?
- What is embodied cognition and how has it been applied in social psychology?

Emotions

Emotions - Dr Laura Vuillier

Weeks 2-3. 25th and 29th of January, 1st of February.

Outline

Emotions imbue virtually every aspect of human life, often guiding our behaviours and thoughts. Yet what precisely an emotion is still produces multiple answers from researchers and lay people. In these lectures, we will examine multiple perspectives on emotions, including (a) universality of emotional expression, (b) prototype perspective on emotion, and (c) core appraisal model of emotions. We will also examine in which ways emotions (and emotional expression) are universal and culturally variable. Finally, we will discuss the study of morality, focusing on the transition from a Kantian perspective (one grounded in reason being the major driving force behind morality) to a Humean perspective (one predicated on the centrality of emotions in guiding morality).

Recommended Reading


**Suggested supervision essay titles**

- What do social psychologists believe are the basic properties of emotions? How does empirical data support and contradict this perspective?
- How are emotions both universal and culturally-variable?
- Is reason or emotion the master of moral reasoning?

**Close Relationships - Dr Laura Vuillier**

Weeks 4-5. 5th, 8th, and 12th of February.

**Outline**

Relationships can result in some of the highest highs and lowest lows within our lives. Thus, it is clear that successful navigation of relationships (especially within romantic relationships) is critically important for achieving greater well-being. The divorce rates in most Western countries make it equally clear that many people struggle in promoting and sustaining healthy romantic relationships. We will review literature on (a) practices that promote greater happiness within relationships, (b) practices that can lead to relationship conflict and ultimately to relationships dissolving, and (c) the role that sex plays in relationship health. We will also examine relationships from a highly macro-level, focusing on friendships created on Facebook around the world, and the forces that appear to promote people friending one another.

**Recommended Reading**


Suggested supervision essay titles

- What are the four horsemen of the apocalypse (in romantic relationships)? What behaviours can people engage in instead to promote happiness within their relationships?
- Sacrifices are an important aspect of close relationships. Who are the people who reap the most benefits from sacrificing? How do differences in motivation to make a particular sacrifice influence the ultimate outcome of the sacrifice?
- What gender differences are real and are fake when it comes to sex?
- What shapes our levels of sexual desire and satisfaction?

Choice and Disorders of Choice

*Free Will and Neuroscience of Decision Making – Dr Jennifer Murray*

Weeks 5-6. 15th, 19th, 22nd of February.

Outline

In these three lectures I will introduce the cognitive neuroscience of volition and decision making. We will begin with a brief introduction to the philosophy of ‘free will’ followed by the entrance of neuroscience into the debate with the classic study by Libet et al. demonstrating that neural activity precedes the conscious recognition of intention to act and then the recent work by Soon et al. showing similar findings when the decision is abstract rather than motor. We will then explore one of the most famous cases in human neuropsychology, Phineas Gage, and consider whether the lesion syndrome associated with Mr. Gage is best considered a failure of impulse control, or an ability to use emotional signals to guide decision making. We will then consider the impact of social influences on decision making. The Ultimatum Game is an economic bargaining game where players incur personal costs to punish unfair offers. In the ‘Risky Shift’, adolescent subjects behave more riskily when performing a task under observation by their peers, compared to alone. In each case, we will dissect some of the psychological factors that underlie these effects on choice.

Recommended Reading


Suggested supervision essay titles
• To what extent is the lesion syndrome seen in Phineas Gage best considered as a disruption of decision making?
• How do social factors influence human decision-making?
• How is the impulse to act managed in the brain?

Addiction as a Disorder of Choice – Dr Jennifer Murray
Week 7. 26th and 29th of February.

Outline
These two lectures will explore choice and decision making using the biological basis of drug addiction as a framework for discussion. We will examine the decision to take drugs and consider the loss of perceived volition as diagnostic criteria for drug dependence. The biological impact of exogenously altering brain function in humans and animal models is then considered at two distinct levels: predisposing factors for initiation and the altered neural circuitry and aberrant learning that contribute to maintenance. Finally, the medical, personal, and societal implications for consideration of addiction as a loss of free will are to be briefly considered.

Recommended Reading
use versus familial risk of stimulant dependence. *Biological Psychiatry* 74:137-144.


**Suggested supervision essay titles**

- Some addicts do quit, so have they really lost control?
- Do the benefits of medicalization of addiction outweigh the costs?
- What is meant by ‘addiction is a chronic, relapsing brain disease’?

**Social and Political Aspects of Choice in Psychology - Dr Juliet Foster**

Week 8. 4th of March.

**Outline**

This lecture will consider some of the ways in which social psychology has contributed to our understanding of the concept of choice. Are there some powerful situations in which we do not have a choice? Some of the most well-known experiments within psychology have concluded just this. We will critically consider some of the arguments made by theorists such as Milgram and Zimbardo, but will also examine some more recent explanations of these studies that call their conclusions into question. Many of these arguments centre on alternative explanations based on notions of identity, and in some cases on social constructionism.

This begins to touch on some of the wider ideological issues surrounding choice. Two examples of circumstances in which choice is deliberately limited or even removed will be considered, one covert (the use of ‘nudge’ within society) and one overt (the Mental Health Act).

**Recommended Reading**

Choice and Situations:


Some more recent re-interpretations:


Choice Architecture/Nudge:

**Choice and Mental Health:**

**Suggested supervision essay titles**
- Evaluate the claims made by some psychologists that certain situations are so powerful that we have limited choice about how to behave within them.
- When and why might our choices be limited in health-related areas?

**Overview of Lent term material – Dr Schnall et al.**
Week 8. 7th March.