Part I PBS Tripos
PBS 1: Introduction to Psychology
2016/17 Paper Guide

Course Organiser
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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. A revision class will be
held in the Easter Term, in Week 1 on Monday at 11am.

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, and where this is not the case, please notify Dr Jason
Rentfrow.

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 Jason Rentfrow**  
Week 1. 7th October.

**Individual Differences**

**Gender – Prof Melissa Hines**  
Weeks 1-2. 10th and 14th October.

**Outline**

Although girls and boys, as well as men and women, are largely similar psychologically and behaviourally, 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 cause them. A major focus 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.

**Recommended Reading**

General overview:  

Additional reading:  

**Suggested supervision essay titles**

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

**Personality – Dr Jason Rentfrow**

Weeks 2-3. 17th and 21st 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.

**Individual Differences – Dr Kate Ellis-Davies**

Weeks 3-4. 24th and 28th October.

**Outline**

Following on from preceding lectures on personality, in the following 2 lectures we will begin with an introduction to the foundations of personality, temperament. 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.

Perceiving People

*Perception of faces - Dr John Mollon*

Weeks 4-5. 31st October and 4th 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 recognise 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. 7th and 11th 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**

Lecture One – Week 6, 14\textsuperscript{th} November.

**Outline**

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?

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

Lecture Two – Week 7, 18\textsuperscript{th} November.

**Outline**

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. 21st and 25th 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 Jason Rentfrow

Weeks 8. 28th November.

Lent term

Choice and Disorders of Choice

Neuroscience of Decision Making – Dr Paul Bays

Week 1. 20th and 23rd of January.

Outline

Understanding how we make decisions is a central goal of cognitive psychology and neuroscience, whether as simple as deciding to scratch an itch or as complex as choosing a second-hand car. In the first of two lectures we will explore the neuroscience of simple decisions and voluntary actions, including an examination of the compatibility of free will with deterministic brain mechanisms. The second lecture will address rationality: how can complex decisions be made optimally based on imperfect information, and to what extent do humans follow these rational rules?

Readings


Wolpert DM, & Ghahramani Z. (2005). Bayes rule in perception, action and
One of the most important decisions we make in life is political – who should we vote for? For decades psychology has been helping us to understand how we make political decisions, and has revealed (perhaps surprising) individual differences associated with the decision to identify with one political party or another. Experimental research has also revealed a range of potential biases that complicate, or perhaps even undermine the democratic process, from the influence of the perceived competence of the face of different candidates, to the order of candidates on the ballot paper.

This series of lectures will question whether we make rational political decisions. Perhaps more critically it will explore whether reason (or emotions or morality) should dominate our political decisions, and whether the dichotomy between reason and emotion is a false one. In particular it will explore the individual differences that might cause people to emphasize different moral values in voting one way or another, and the way in which those differences might have been shaped by evolution or culture.

In recent years, there has also been an increasing recognition that policy makers can make the most of (perhaps exploit…) the biases and heuristics (and morals and emotions) in human reasoning to ‘nudge’ people into making ‘desirable’ decisions. This recognition has manifested in the UK in the development of the Behaviour Insight Team, and the fact that one will now find a ‘behavioural scientist’ in almost every department in Whitehall. This series will end by considering whether policy makers can use psychological theories and research methods to nudge our decisions ‘for good’.

**Overview Reading**


**Further Reading**


*Suggested supervision essay titles*

- Are political decisions essentially moral decisions?
- Are emotions information in political decision making?
- Can psychological research enable policy makers to ‘nudge for good’?
- Do our psychological biases undermine or enable the democratic process?

**Judgements, Decisions, and Preferences – Dr Jason Rentfrow**

Week 4. 10th of February.

**Outline**

This lecture applies some of the previous material on judgement and decision making to preferences, in particular preferences for music. The material covered will highlight the various factors that influence the styles of music individuals seek out.

**Overview Reading**


**Embodied Cognition - Dr Simone Schnall**

Weeks 4-5. 13th, 17th and 20th of February.

**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 Simone Schnall**

Weeks 5-6. 24th and 27th of February and 3rd of March.

Outline

What is an emotion? Psychological researchers have pondered this question ever since William James asked it in the title of his article published in 1884. The current lectures will review contemporary research addressing a number of issues within the broad themes of affect, emotion and mood. In particular, we will examine multiple perspectives on emotions, including the universality of emotion, prototype approaches, and appraisal theories of emotions. We will also explore the relationship between cognition and emotion, and the extent to which cognitions are a prerequisite for emotional experiences, and on the flip side, the extent to which emotions influence cognitive processes. Overall, the lectures will illustrate that although emotional experiences sometimes seem to disturb everyday functioning, recent research has demonstrated that many emotions have adaptive consequences.

Overview Readings:

Further Readings:

Suggested supervision essay titles:

1) Is it true that “Preferences need no inferences”?
2) Are emotions universal?
3) Does affect help or hinder with regard to cognitive processing?

**Close Relationships - Dr Alex Kogan**

Weeks 6-7. 6th, 10th, and 13th March.

**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 behaviors 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?

**Afterward – Dr Jason Rentfrow**

Week 8. 17th March.

**Revision Session – Rentfrow et al.**

Week 1. 27th April.