Psychology Now: Contemporary Approaches to Understanding Behaviour

1st Year: C8846
15 Credits
Spring Term 2015-16

Module Convenor: Dr. David A. Leavens

NOTE: Most of the questions you need answers to about this module are in this document. Please read it fully and carefully before your first lecture.

NOTE: This document concerns the structure and content of the module. If you have questions about procedures, please consult the Department of Psychology Administration Office in Pev1 2A13 or via psyoff@sussex.ac.uk.
Module Structure, Aims and Objectives

This module introduces you to a wide range of research themes in contemporary psychology. Internationally recognised researchers will help you learn about work at the cutting edge of this dynamically changing discipline, covering topics such as the psychology of gender differences, the effects of drugs on our thinking and behaviour, the mechanisms involved in hypnosis, and the role of psychology in environmental issues. You will evaluate diverse approaches to understanding human behaviour, from comparative perspectives that help us revisit assumptions about the human-animal divide, through to social psychological explanations of why we interact with other people in the ways that we do. This module does not require any prior knowledge of psychology -- all are welcome.

Module Learning Outcomes.

By the end of the module, a successful student should be able to:

1. Succinctly summarise published research in psychology,
2. Describe core theoretical and methodological concepts in the topics covered,
3. Apply existing knowledge to new problems.

Module Contact Information

Convenor: David A. Leavens, PhD
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Teaching and Learning

- **Lectures** There will be two lectures per week.

  To avoid disruption to the majority, please try to arrive at least 5 minutes before the start time of the lecture.

  It is **CRUCIAL** for you to understand that formal assessment on this module will be based on material covered in the lectures, seminars and your 'essential reading' for each week. It is also important for you to understand that lectures will **NOT** attempt to ‘cover’ all such material. That is, lectures are not intended to provide an alternative to you learning the material in your essential reading. Any attempt to rely solely on learning material presented in lectures will severely restrict your ability to produce excellent essays. Lectures are intended to fulfil functions other than repeating or précising material covered in the essential readings.

  Lectures on this module are intended to perform several functions. First, they will provide another ‘channel’ of communication, allowing you to hear as well as read about (selected) material relevant to the module.
A second function of the lectures is to allow you to review material you have learned so far. If you have already done the essential reading associated with the lecture, ask yourself how well the lecturer has covered that material.

A third function of the lectures is to illustrate the nature of a critical approach to students. The lecturer will sometimes simply explain material. At other times, however, the lecturer will criticise the material in some way. University education is about learning how to constructively criticise as well as simply absorb information. Evaluate your lecturer’s criticisms. Are they simply personal prejudices (e.g., “I don’t like this”) and, if so, are they presented as such? Or are reasons given for criticisms made (e.g., “I don’t like this because…”)?

You should note that all the study skills advice in existence suggests that straightforward ‘absorption’ of material (i.e., reading, listening, rote-learning and memorising) should take up about 20% of learning time. The other 80% should come from ‘interrogating’ that information (e.g., looking for links, attempting to summarise and synthesise, looking for strengths and weaknesses and possible improvements, applying to different areas, etc.).

Seminars. This elective has no scheduled seminars.

- **Independent study** The difference between studying at university and study you may have done previously is that at university the emphasis is on you finding out things for yourself. Just as fitness clubs attempt to foster and facilitate (but cannot impose) fitness, universities attempt to foster and facilitate (but cannot impose) academic excellence. Results will (and can only) come as a direct result of you making appropriate use of the facilities at your disposal. Lectures, seminars and the like are there to support and guide your independent learning – they are not there to “pass information from tutors’ heads to students’ notebooks without passing through the brains of either.” Not everything you will need or want to know will be covered in the lectures, seminars or essential readings. You need to become familiar with the material you are guided towards, but you also need to learn to ‘manipulate’ that material: apply it to new domains, compare and contrast across topics, synthesise it, evaluate it, consider its relevance to issues of interest to you, supplement it, etc. This can only be done by being interested and working hard because you want to. An exclusive focus on passing exams can undermine that motivation and will make you perform less well as a result; this module does not have an examination mode of assessment, in part, because we want you to feel free to explore the areas you find most interesting. Thus, study because you want to learn and stop when you have answers to your own satisfaction for the questions you care about. Finally, note that independent study is study you engage in outside of formal contact hours with faculty – it does not have to be solitary.

- **Office Hours** Your module convenor will hold two office hours each week. Please see the Psychology Department notice board for when and where this will be held. Students may use these office hours (without appointment when demand does not exceed supply) to discuss or ask about anything module-related.

**Books and Reading**

- Due to the changing and varied content of this module, no single text can provide a thorough overview. However, for students desiring an excellent, topically broad introduction to psychology, the following text is recommended, although any introductory textbook will be helpful for non-psychology students (look for these around shelfmarks BF 121 and QZ 120, for example):

CORE (REQUIRED) AND RECOMMENDED ADDITIONAL READINGS BY WEEK:

WEEK 1 (TUES.): INTRODUCTION TO MODULE (DR. LEAVENS)

**Required reading:** Module Handbook

WEEK 1 (THURS.): (OPTIONAL) WRITING SURGERY (DR. LEAVENS)

See Study Direct for Recommended Readings

WEEK 2 (TUES.): ENVIRONMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY (DR. SPARKS)

Introduction: This part of the module addresses some core contemporary issues in Environmental Psychology. Emphasis will be placed on a consideration of how psychology can help us understand (and perhaps influence) environment-related behaviour and on what psychology might contribute to the promotion of sustainability.

**Lecture 1: People and planet: what’s at stake?**

**Required reading**


**Additional reading**


WEEK 2 (THURS.): ENVIRONMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY (DR. SPARKS)

**Lecture 2: The psychology of environmental attitudes**

**Required reading**

Additional reading


**WEEK 3 (TUES.): ENVIRONMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY (DR. SPARKS)**

**Lecture 3: Understanding inertia and other barriers to action**

**Required reading**


**Additional reading**


WWF (2008). *Weathercocks and Signposts: The environmental movement at the crossroads*. Available at wwf.org.uk/strategiesforchange

**WEEK 3 (THURS.): ENVIRONMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY (DR. SPARKS)**

**Lecture 4: Promoting pro-environmental behaviour**

**Required reading**


**Additional reading**


**WEEK 4 (TUES.): COMPARATIVE SOCIAL COGNITION (DR. PROOPS)**

This series of lectures explores recent developments in our understanding of the social intelligence of mammals and birds.

**Lecture 1: Historical perspectives and modern approaches**

In this first lecture, the field of comparative social cognition is introduced. Traditional claims of unique human socio-cognitive abilities are examined and modern methodologies and research focus introduced.

**Required reading**


**Suggested Reading**


*Dip in to papers concerning modern methodology if interested:*


**WEEK 4 (THURS.): COMPARATIVE SOCIAL COGNITION (DR. PROOPS)**

**Lecture 2: Social information and knowledge acquisition.**

Leading a complex social life is likely to require correspondingly complex social cognition. This lecture explores the knowledge animals have been shown to possess about their social partners and rivals.
Required Reading


Suggested Reading


WEEK 5 (TUES.): COMPARATIVE SOCIAL COGNITION (DR. PROOPS)

Lecture 3: The role of experience in social cognition.

For many long-lived social species, early life is typified by an extended period of learning and dependency on older, wiser social partners. This lecture explores the how social intelligence is shaped by experience.

Required reading


Suggested Reading


WEEK 5 (THURS.): COMPARATIVE SOCIAL COGNITION (DR. PROOPS)

Lecture 4: Complex cognition: understanding the minds and emotions of others.

The ability to attribute mental states to others, to act fairly and to cooperate are some of the “higher level” social abilities that have traditionally been thought unique to humans. This final lecture revisits the notion of the human-animal divide in light of recent research investigating complex social skills.

Required reading


Suggested Reading


WEEK 6 (TUES.): HYPNOSIS (PROFESSOR DIENES)

All articles are available electronically on Study Direct. These are original research articles: Do not worry if aspects of them are difficult, like the results sections. Take what you can from the articles and, if you are on a psychology degree, you will eventually be able to evaluate results sections properly.


Overview of hypnosis:

Are hypnotized subjects lying?

Stage Hypnosis:

**Hypnosis and antisocial acts:**

**WEEK 6 (THURS.): HYPNOSIS (PROFESSOR DIENES)**

**Lecture 2: Hypnosis as an altered state.**

**Overview**

**Effect of hypnotic inductions**

**Subjective markers of an altered state**

**WEEK 7 (TUES.): HYPNOSIS (PROFESSOR DIENES)**

**Lecture 3: Hypnosis in an historical and clinical context**

**Historical background:**
Perry, C.  [http://www.fmsfonline.org/hypnosis.html#watmheoh](http://www.fmsfonline.org/hypnosis.html#watmheoh)
Hypnotic analgesia

Hypnosis and therapy

**WEEK 7 (THURS.): HYPNOSIS (PROFESSOR DIENES)**

**Lecture 4: Hypnosis and memory; hypnotisability**

*Can memory be hypnotically enhanced?*

*Implanting pseudo-memories*

*Age regression*

*Hypnotisability*
http://www.hypnosisandsuggestion.org/measurement.html

******--EASTER BREAK, 19 MARCH – 3 APRIL--******

**WEEK 8 (TUES.) DRUGS (DR. MORGAN)**

**Lecture 1: Principles of psychopharmacology**

The topic of this section of the module is the neuropharmacology of recreational drugs, with particular focus on cannabis, heroin, cocaine, and MDMA (ecstasy).

**Required reading (for all four lectures)**

(Please note that the library is well-stocked with other relevant textbooks, such as Toates, F. M. (2007). Biological psychology: An integrative approach, 2nd ed. Harlow: Pearson Prentice-Hall, as well as earlier editions)

For specific drugs, the U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) provides informative and up-to-date information on many recreational drugs (located at: http://www.nida.nih.gov/). Specific web pages are listed below—for each drug, first look for the NIDA Infocasts. If you want more in-depth information, look for the research reports.

Cannabis: http://www.nida.nih.gov/DrugPages/Marijuana.html

WEEK 8 (THURS.): DRUGS (DR. MORGAN)

Lecture 2: Psychostimulants

WEEK 9 (TUES.): DRUGS (DR. MORGAN)

Lecture 3: The opiates

WEEK 9 (THURS.): DRUGS (DR. MORGAN)

Lecture 4: Marijuana

WEEK 10 (TUES.): GENDER DIFFERENCES (PROFESSOR CLIFTON)

Lecture 1: Biological Perspectives on Gender

This lecture will look at sex and gender differences from a biological perspective.

Required reading - the relevant chapter from one of the textbooks listed here (earlier editions of these books will be fine).

Additional reading - you can pick and choose according to your interests.


Archer, J. (2009). Does sexual selection explain human sex differences in aggression? *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 32*(3-4), 249–66– discussion 266–311. I have included this long article as one example of the way in debate occurs in the scientific literature. John Archer, who early in his career taught at Sussex, has written a ‘target’ article on sex differences in human aggression and their potential causes. He favours an explanation in terms of sexual selection, pitting this against sole role theory. A wide variety of responses to the target article are published along side it, some agreeing, others strongly disagreeing. Archer then has a chance to respond towards the end of the complete article. You might be interested to dip into the different responses rather than to attempt reading it all!

**WEEK 10 (THURS.): GENDER DIFFERENCES (DR. LONG)**

Lecture 2: Developmental perspectives on gender differences

This lecture will introduce you to two theoretical accounts of the processes by which gender develops in childhood. The two textbooks (Brannon, Durkin) listed below cover these theories comprehensively, but any developmental psychology textbook will provide a basic introduction.


**WEEK 11 (TUES.): GENDER DIFFERENCES (DR. LONG)**

Lecture 3: Sex, gender and the meaning of difference

In this lecture we will explore the meaning of gender differences from a number of perspectives, including the argument that the genders are more similar than different. We will also consider potential sources of bias in the process of researching gender differences.
WEEK 11 (THURS.): GENDER DIFFERENCES (DR. LONG)

Lecture 4: Considering the role social influences on specific gender differences

In the final lecture of this section we will look in detail at competing explanations of gender differences in cognitive and mathematical abilities and will consider the various explanations for the underrepresentation of women in science and technology careers.


WEEK 12: READING/REVISION WEEK—NO CLASS MEETINGS.

Please note that additional recommended readings may be posted on Study Direct, for all weeks, so remember to check Study Direct regularly.

You will need to go beyond these readings in preparing for your essays. Use it as a starting point to orient yourself to particular fields of interest, and then pursue other material which appears to you to be relevant.
Assessment

Formal assessment for *Contemporary Issues in Psychology* comprises two short coursework essays, comprising 1,500 words each. Each of these essays is weighted 50.00% over the entire module. **Both essays are e-submission assessments.**

Please access Sussex Direct for submission deadlines: [https://direct.sussex.ac.uk](https://direct.sussex.ac.uk)

**The set essay titles will be posted on Study Direct.** Essay titles for the Spring term will cover material from Weeks 1-5 of the Spring Term (two topical areas) and Weeks 6-12 (three topical areas).

Information on the following can be found at the links below:

- submitting your work
- missing a deadline
- late penalties
- EC – Exceptional Circumstances (formerly known as MEC-mitigating evidence)
- Exams
- Help with managing your studies and competing your work
- Assessment Criteria

[http://www.sussex.ac.uk/psychology/internal/students/examinationsandassessment](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/psychology/internal/students/examinationsandassessment)

[http://www.sussex.ac.uk/psychology/internal/students/examinationsandassessment/assessmentmarkingcriteria](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/psychology/internal/students/examinationsandassessment/assessmentmarkingcriteria)

In line with University regulations, every effort will be made to ensure that each essay is returned with feedback within 15 term-time weekdays of the relevant submission deadline.

**Very Important Note:** Appropriately completing and submitting formally assessed work is your responsibility. If you are in any doubt about the rules concerning submissions check with the departmental office.

**Examination**

Please note that there are no assessed examinations for this module.

**Student Evaluation**

All modules at Sussex are fully audited. You will be asked to complete an anonymous student evaluation form near the end of each term, allowing you to comment on and criticise all aspects of the module. You may also comment on the module at any time and you may do this directly or via some intermediary (e.g., a student representative). Feedback received in this way will be collated and shown to all tutors and module convenors for the module. It will also be reported to all relevant psychology teaching group meetings. Reactions and responses to such student feedback will be reported back to students via student representatives (who attend departmental meetings). We want the module be as good as it possibly can be so all and any feedback is gratefully received.
Lecture Overview

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<tr>
<th>Week 1: Introduction/Reading Surgery 2 &amp; 4 February</th>
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<tr>
<td>First lecture: Introduction to module (Dr. Leavens)</td>
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<td>Second lecture (Optional): Surgery on essays &amp; written communication (Dr. Leavens)</td>
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<th>Week 2: Environmental Psychology 9 &amp; 11 February</th>
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<td>First lecture: People and planet: what’s at stake? (Dr. Sparks)</td>
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<td>Second lecture: The psychology of environmental attitudes (Dr. Sparks)</td>
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<th>Week 3: Environmental Psychology 16 &amp; 18 February</th>
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<td>Third lecture: Understanding inertia and other barriers to action (Dr. Sparks)</td>
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<td>Fourth lecture: Promoting pro-environmental behaviour (Dr. Sparks)</td>
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<th>Week 4: Comparative Social Cognition 25 &amp; 27 February</th>
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<tr>
<td>First lecture: Historical perspectives and modern approaches (Dr. Proops)</td>
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<td>Second lecture: Social information and knowledge acquisition (Dr. Proops)</td>
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<th>Week 5: Comparative Social Cognition 1 &amp; 3 March</th>
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<td>Third lecture: The role of experience in social cognition (Dr. Proops)</td>
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<td>Fourth lecture: Complex cognition: understanding the minds and emotions of others (Dr. Proops)</td>
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<th>Week 6: Hypnosis 8 &amp; 10 March</th>
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<td>First lecture: Hypnosis: Basic facts (Prof. Dienes)</td>
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<td>Second lecture: Hypnosis as an altered state (Prof. Dienes)</td>
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<th>Week 7: Hypnosis 15 &amp; 17 March</th>
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<tr>
<td>Third lecture: Hypnosis in an historical and clinical context (Prof. Dienes)</td>
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<td>Fourth lecture: Hypnosis and memory; hypnotisability (Prof. Dienes)</td>
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EASTER BREAK

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<th>Week 8: Drugs 5 &amp; 7 April</th>
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<tr>
<td>First lecture: Introduction/Cocaine (Dr. Morgan)</td>
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<td>Second lecture: Ecstasy (Dr. Morgan)</td>
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<th>Week 9: Drugs 12 &amp; 14 April</th>
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<td>Third lecture: Heroin (Dr. Morgan)</td>
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<td>Fourth lecture: Cannabis (Dr. Morgan)</td>
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<th>Week 10: Gender Differences 19 &amp; 21 April</th>
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<tr>
<td>First lecture: Biological bases of sex differences (Prof. Clifton)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second lecture: Developmental perspectives on gender differences (Dr. Long)</td>
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<th>Week 11: Gender Differences 26 &amp; 28 April</th>
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<tr>
<td>Third lecture: Sex, gender and the meaning of difference (Dr. Long)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fourth lecture: Considering the role of ‘nurture’ in specific gender differences (or similarities) (Dr. Long)</td>
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| Week 12: NO CLASS: Reading Week |