Part I PBS Tripos
PBS 1: Introduction to Psychology
2019/20 Course Guide

Course Organiser
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Brief Description of the Course
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 introductory lecture on the history of psychology, and its various sub-disciplines, a series of five broad topics will be explored. Each topic will present research and ideas from different theoretical and methodological viewpoints.

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

Students from other Triposes take the PBS 1 Introduction to Psychology course and it is taught in such a way to allow any student who has never studied Psychology (or Biology) to follow the material.

The Department runs a PBS Tripos Moodle page to support all students taking this paper:

If you are not already enrolled in this site, please contact our librarian, Daniele Campello (library@psychol.cam.ac.uk) or the Teaching Administrator, teaching@psychol.cam.ac.uk

Mode of Assessment
The course is assessed by means of a single three-hour examination, testing your knowledge and understanding of the different psychological approaches to the specific topic areas covered in the course. You will be required to write four 40-minute essays from a choice of questions drawn from each topic area within the course (i.e. an essay on any four of the five topics). However, please note that the marking criteria used in the School of Biology give particular credit to answers that integrate a variety of relevant sources of information. Hence, your answers may draw on relevant material from any part of the course or your own independent reading.

Supervision Arrangements
For many students, arrangements for supervisions will already have been made by their Director of Studies. Where this is not the case, please contact your College DoS or Tutorial Office to make arrangements. Typically, students receive about eight supervisions in total, although each College provides its own guidelines about number and frequency of supervisions for its students. Each supervisor for the paper is normally prepared to provide all the supervisions necessary. Suggested essay titles for supervision are included in this Guide and sometimes on lecture handouts.
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 provided below and an online timetable is available on the PBS Tripos website.

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After the introductory lecture (Week 1, 11th Oct, 2pm, Dr Kate Plaisted-Grant), the course begins with the study of measurable differences between people. On the whole, studying individual differences has been regarded as a somewhat separate enterprise to experimental psychology, which attempts to control for individual differences in its pursuit of general laws of behaviour, mechanisms of the mind and (neuro)cognitive processes common to all. Instead, “differential psychology” has tended to focus on differences between people in traits, classically intelligence (or more accurately IQ) and personality.

The study of these areas has thrown up some fascinating findings and as you might imagine a wealth of data. One of the greatest challenges in the study of individual differences is how to make sense of these data. Any number of explanations seem possible so how can (or should) we constrain our hypotheses in any scientific study of differences between people? Can we rely simply on rigorous methodology, and if so, what methods would be best? And if not, what are the alternative means by which we can decide between this and that interpretation? (Keep these questions in mind as you attend the lectures, and perhaps discuss them in supervisions. You will find that this approach to the material will allow you to develop your skills as a psychologist).

Although the study of individual differences has typically studied traits, every experimental psychologist is only too aware of the individual differences participants bring to their highly controlled experiments. Increasingly, psychology recognises that there is a potential wealth of information in this variability and we start the topic with a lecture on the neuroscience of individual differences before moving onto IQ and Personality. Each of these research areas adopt psychometric and behavioural genetics approaches to the Topic. In the final two lectures on this Topic, you will learn about individual differences in Gender, taking a developmental approach to the Topic. While “sex” is often considered a relatively inflexible trait, the processes involved in gender formation allow for far greater variability and fluidity.

**Individual Differences: The neuroscience of individual differences**

Dr Lee De-Wit  
Week 1. 14th October

**Outline**

The study of individual differences, and the pursuit of more general laws by which human nature functions might seem like completely disparate goals. Even within neuroscience however the study of individual differences can be integrated with experimental approaches that attempt to unearth more general principles. These neural individual differences can help to explain not only why we differ on complex

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1 You may already have noticed that “data” is often used in the singular in conversation, by the media etc, even though it is the plural of “datum”. Perhaps this is because people use “data” as a shorthand for “data set”. Either way, because you will be using the term so frequently in your study of Psychology, it’s worth deciding now whether you will adopt the plural “data” or the singular “data set” in your writing (and we can all agree on using “datum” for a single point in a data set!).
traits like IQ or Personality, but also more basic perceptual processes that shape why we see things differently.

**Recommended Reading**

**Suggested supervision essay titles**
- Are individual differences signal or noise in psychological theory making?

**Individual Differences: IQ and Intelligence Testing**
Dr K Plaisted-Grant
Week 2. 18th and 21st October

**Outline**
The history testing of individual differences in intelligence or IQ is controversial and has thrown up some quite extreme views about the data. These lectures provide a short history of intelligence testing, the definition and measurement of IQ, principles of test construction and reliability and validity of IQ tests. We will also address the concept of the heritability of IQ and procedures for estimating heritability, twin studies and adoption studies, test bias and sex differences in intelligence.

**Recommended Reading**

**Suggested supervision essay titles**
- How would you design a new IQ test, and why?

**Individual Differences: Personality**
Dr David Stilwell
Week 3. 25th and 28th 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 is 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**
Third Edition: Theory and Research. New York: Guilford Press. [Chapters: 1, 2, 5, 6, 8-14]


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: Gender

Dr Debra Spencer
Week 4. 1st and 4th November

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?
Topic 2 - Constructing Social Reality

This topic tackles what seems at face value to be the simplest of psychological tasks – perceiving and understanding others’ intentions, desires and actions. However, we only need to consider how often misunderstandings (minor and major) occur during social interaction, misjudgements in predicting what people will do and misconceptions of others’ actions to realise that our concept of the social world is a construction from many inputs and influences. Nonetheless, there are data obtained through techniques from experimental psychology and neuroscience, that are consistent with the view that there are some very simple and direct neurocognitive mechanisms for social perception.

It may be that evolution has furnished the immature brain with specialised innate mechanisms dedicated to social perception which serve to scaffold more complex constructions of the social world. If so, how far do these persist into adulthood, or is their job only important during the first few hours and weeks of life? Are there other specialised mechanisms which underpin more complex processes of social construction and are these also innate? To answer these questions requires a developmental approach to the Topic, which provides data on perceptual and cognitive capacities at different ages. These data can help to constrain our theories and hypotheses about the nature and origin of the processes and mechanisms underpinning the construction of social reality. The study of development has also demonstrated the critical role played by interpersonal experiences and cultural influences.

The final set of lectures in this topic will touch upon a fundamental distinction that we subjectively experience in any social interaction – that between me and you, or the self and other. The distinction allows for the construction of hypotheses about the content of others’ minds, and the realisation that one can influence the content of another’s thoughts, beliefs and desires. Without the distinction between self and other, it seems implausible that any approximate model of the social world would even be possible. Which makes it all the more surprising that errors of self-other attribution are quite common. We shall be looking at why this should be, including cognitive biases that can lead to such errors. Much of the more recent work on self-other cognition has taken a cognitive and social neuroscience approach, using techniques such as fMRI and EEG.

Constructing Social Reality: Perception of faces
Dr John Mollon
Week 5. 8th and 11th 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**


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?

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**Constructing Social Reality: Social & Cognitive Development in Infancy**

Dr Susan Imrie

Weeks 6 and 7. 15th, 18th, and 21st November.

**Outline**

Infancy is a period characterised by rapid change, growth and development, but which factors shape and influence this process? What skills do infants bring to social interactions? How do parents influence infant play, cognition and social development? This lecture series will examine social and cognitive development during infancy, with a focus on infants’ capacities and limitations in early social interactions, the influence of parents on infant development, and the formation of attachment relationships and their relation to later social and cognitive outcomes.

**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 are three factors that might affect the quality of interactions between parents and infants?
- Does attachment quality depend on the mother?
- When examining attachment, is it necessary to consider temperament?

**Constructing Social Reality: Social Cognition**

Dr Kate Plaisted-Grant

Weeks 7 and 8. 25th and 29th November, 2th December.

**Outline**

Social cognition is an exciting area within psychology that explores how people judge, process, and retrieve information about other people and themselves. As we shall see, a clear distinction between self and other is not always readily available, and in some cases can lead to people making very different inferences about the same information. In these lectures, we will examine proposed neurocognitive mechanisms of self-other cognition and memory, accuracy and biases in human social perception, self-other agency and free will. We shall also consider the role of culture in representations of the self.

**Some overview readings:**


Emotion and reason have often been characterised as two separate and independent forces that drive our actions. This notion has a long history in Western Philosophy, starting with Plato and Aristotle, who regarded emotions as unreliable and even undesirable drivers of action that should be suppressed in favour of intellectual reason. This dissociation of emotion and reason and the inferiority of emotion as a reliable guide to action has influenced cultural attitudes such as the conception of women in the 19th century as untrustworthy of the vote because of their natural susceptibility to emotional influences, although they were also considered intellectually inferior as well (see the IQ lectures!!). The following is an extract from a letter by Queen Victoria, taken from the V&A Museum website:

"The Queen is most anxious to enlist every one who can speak or write to join in checking this mad, wicked folly of "Woman's Rights", with all its attendant horrors, on which her poor feeble sex is bent, forgetting every sense of womanly feeling and propriety... It is a subject which makes the Queen so furious that she cannot contain herself. (Queen Victoria, letter 29 May 1870)"

And an iconic figure in 20th century who epitomises the popular distinction between emotion and reason is of course Star Wars' Spock, whose Vulcan half (pure logic and reason) struggles with his human half (unruly emotion and passion).

It is the job of Psychology to establish whether there is any basis to this common conception of a distinction between the two. At the very least, Psychology needs to establish what counts as an emotion or a process of reasoning. One clear difficulty with the conceptions of the two outlined above is that they are remarkably centred on Western Philosophy (and western religion). In the lectures on Emotion, you will be introduced to a cross-cultural approach to understanding the nature of emotions as well as current approaches from experimental and social psychology. The lectures will demonstrated that the relationship between emotion and reason is highly complicated. The final lectures on reasoning will present recent studies of emotion and reasoning using approaches from cognitive neuroscience.

**Emotion and Reason - Emotion**

Dr Simone Schnall
Weeks 1 and 2. 17th, 20th and 24th of January.

**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

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2 http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/g/gender-ideology-and-separate-spheres-19th-century/.
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:**
- Is it true that “Preferences need no inferences”?
- Are emotions universal?
- Does affect help or hinder with regard to cognitive processing?

**Emotion and Reason - Neuroscience of Decision Making**
Dr Deborah Talmi
Weeks 2 and 3. 27\textsuperscript{th} and 31\textsuperscript{st} 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 these lectures we will first explore the neuroscience of simple decisions. We will examine the neural pathways underlying reward and decision-making, and what goes wrong when these areas are damaged. Finally, we will address rationality: how can complex decisions be made optimally based on imperfect information, and to what extent do humans follow these rational rules?

**Recommended Reading**

**Suggested supervision essay titles**
- What can neuroscience experiments tell us about free will?
- What have we learned from lesion studies about the role of prefrontal cortex in decision making?
Topic 4 - Real-World Decision-Making

William James famously had a pragmatic view of knowledge, which, in the simplest of terms, states that knowledge should not just be true, it should also be useful. In the century that has passed since William James contributed to the founding of psychology as an academic discipline, research has revealed a huge amount about the human mind, from the way in which we perceive faces, to the way emotions influence decisions, to the way we are biased to reason about groups. Whilst these (often lab based) findings are undoubtedly fascinating, one could question how useful they are in helping us to understand real world decision making. These lectures will explore how research from psychology (and many of the topics covered in PBS1) might help us to understand a critical area of real world decision making: political decision making.

Real-World Decision Making – Politics

Dr Lee de-Wit
Weeks 3, 4, and 5, 3rd, 7th, 10th, and 14th and 17th February.

Outline

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) 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. It will also explore how findings theories and tasks from cognitive science can help us to understand how people form their political beliefs.

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 social psychology explain why politics can be so polarizing?
- Can psychological research enable policy makers to ‘nudge for good’?
Topic 5 – Mind and Body

The question of the relationship between mind and body, or psychological states and bodily states is pervasive throughout psychology. You have already encountered this question in the context of emotions and reasoning. No psychologist today would dispute the fact that mental states, cognitive processes, thoughts and intuitions reside in the brain. But it is not easy to understand how a pattern of neural firing is the same thing as the content of a thought, such as “I believe it is 2020”. A good illustration of the conundrum (how can mental entities be physical and vice versa?) is the placebo effect, where the belief that “taking X will make me better” results in faster recovery from illness, despite X containing no nutritional or medicinal properties. In the lectures on Health Psychology, the influence of the mind on the physical health of the body is examined and demonstrates the need to consider multiple factors in understanding whether and how mental states can protect against disease. The study of abnormal psychology demonstrates that a clear relationship holds between mental experience and neural substrate: increasingly sophisticated techniques in neural measurement have begun to reveal significant differences in neurotransmitter systems, connectivity networks and neural region activation in disorders of mental health. But how far can neurocognitive theories and findings account for the nature of mental experiences of a psychiatric disorder? This is a question you could discuss in supervisions in the context of the final four lectures on Mental Health.

Mind and Body - Health Psychology

TBA
Week 6. 21st and 24th February (Friday/Monday).

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:

Suggested supervision essay titles
• Why don’t zebras get ulcers?
• How does psychological stress affect physical health?

Mind and Body – Mental Health

Dr Kate Plaisted-Grant
Weeks 7 & 8. 28th February, 2nd, 6th and 9th March
These lectures on mental health will introduce you to some of the major psychiatric diagnostic categories, the mental experiences of those given these diagnoses and the genetic, neural and psychological theories that try to explain the emergence of each disorder. We will also examine the most common major pharmacological and psychological therapies and evaluate their efficacy. Finally, we will consider the origins of the categorical model of mental disorders and its limitations and review recent proposals that abnormal psychological states should be regarded as varying traits, on a continuum across the population. This proposal has some interesting implications for research in this area.

Reading for these lectures will be provided in the lecture handouts.

- How should research of abnormal psychology approach the issue of symptom heterogeneity seen in psychological disorders?
- Is schizophrenia best thought of as a syndrome?
- Why do some people develop anxiety disorder?