New directions in research on well-being: psychological process in everyday contexts

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Introduction to the course and presentation.

New directions in research on well-being: main areas of interest.

- **Architectural and environmental psychology**: Full Ecology; Conservation Psychology; Mitigation & Adaptation; Restorativeness; Place attachment and natural environmental risk.
- **Social psychology of development and social development** (well-being in a school context, peer education, etc.).
- **Community psychology** applied to prevention and areas of intervention.
- **Prosocial and antisocial behavior** (genesis, dynamics, prevention, assessment and interventions).
- **New directions in research on well-being in social and forensic contexts**: bullying, deviance, Intimate Partner Violence, parental alienation, etc.
- **Sexual health** (an introduction to Sexology, Child sexual abuse, Sexual addiction, Hypersexual behavior, Using smartphone app to promote sexual health, etc.).
Mental health: a state of well-being

Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.

The positive dimension of mental health is stressed in WHO's definition of health as contained in its constitution:

"Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."  

(WHO, 2014)
Environmental psychology is the study of transactions between individuals and their physical settings (Gifford, 2007).

In these transactions, individuals change their environments, and their behavior and experiences are changed by their environments.
Environmental psychology

It includes theory, research, and practice aimed at making the built environment more humane and improving human relations with the natural environment.

Considering the enormous investment society makes in the physical environment (including buildings, parks, streets, the atmosphere, and water) and the huge cost of misusing nature and natural resources, environmental psychology is a key component of both human and environmental welfare.
Environmental psychologists work at three levels of analysis:

• fundamental psychological processes like perception of the environment, spatial cognition, and personality as they filter and structure human experience and behavior,

• the management of social space: personal space, territoriality, crowding, and privacy, and the physical setting aspects of complex everyday behaviors, such as working, learning, living in a residence and community,

• human interactions with nature and the role of psychology in climate change.
Goals and principles:

Most psychologists examine the relations between environmental stimuli and human responses in one way or another.

However, what sets environmental psychology apart is its commitment to research and practice that subscribe to these goals and principles:

1. Improve the built environment and stewardship of natural resources,
2. Study everyday settings (or close simulations of them),
3. Consider person and setting as a holistic entity,
4. Recognize that individuals actively cope with and shape environments; they do not passively respond to environmental forces,
5. Work in conjunction with other disciplines.
Theoretical Bases:

• *Stimulation theories* conceptualize the physical environment as a crucial source of sensory information

• *Control theories* emphasize the importance of an individual’s real, perceived, or desired control over stimulation

• *Ecological psychology* asserts the importance of behavior settings, naturally occurring small-scale social-physical units consisting of regular patterns of person–environment behavior

• *Integral approaches* such as interactionism, transactionalism, and organismic theory attempt to describe the full, complex interrelationship of persons and setting

• *Operant approaches* downplay abstract principles, instead adopting a direct problem-solving approach that employs behavior modification techniques

• *Environment-centered* theories such as the spiritual–instrumental model and ecopsychology raise the issue of the environment’s own welfare and its ability to support our own well-being

• *Social psychology-based* theories explain which factors affect proenvironmental behaviour and how they can be encouraged
• **Architectural Psychology** is the study of interactions and interrelationships between humans (both individually and collectively) and their physical environment.

• The principles of Architectural Psychology provide a means to examine the effects of the built environment on the cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains of human experience.
Restorative environment

• A restorative environment is one that “promotes (and not merely permits) restoration” (Hartig, 2004, p. 273) of individuals’ resources, be they biological, psychological or social, required for successful adaptation to current circumstances.

• One prominent theory, attention restoration theory (ART; R. Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; S. Kaplan, 1995) links the perceived restorativeness of environments specifically to the restoration of attention resources, but also incorporates stress reductions as a potential pathway to restoration (S. Kaplan, 1995).
Nature has both awesome power to disrupt lives or to act as a restorative agent.

People have always believed that nature is restorative.

The various ways in which it is restorative include facilitating cognitive freedom, ecosystem connectedness, escape, challenge, growth, guidance, a renewed social life, and health (Gifford, 2007).

Being in nature (e.g., Sullivan, Kuo, & DePooter, 2004), and even merely viewing nature (e.g., Ulrich, 1984), have restorative effects.

The two main mechanisms by which nature restores us are through refreshing attentional capacity (Kaplan, 1995) and improving mood.
• The importance of acknowledging and incorporating the natural environment in planning and design is particularly salient in the context of health, well-being, and restoration benefit, with an extensive evidence base spanning three decades and myriad institutional and urban applications and settings (Hartig & Staats, 2003; Maller, Townsend, Prior, Brown, & St. Leger, 2006).

• These restoration benefits and indeed more fundamental psychological needs and processes have also been more widely acknowledged and embraced in clinical and counselling practice.
Social group exercise

- Circle time
- Self presentation

Restoration involves individuals' physical, psychological, and social resources, which have diminished over the years in the process of meeting the demands of everyday life. Psychological restoration can be provided by specific environments, in particular by natural environments. Studies report a restorative effect of nature on human beings, specifically in terms of the psychological recovery from attention fatigue and restored mental resources that were previously spent in activities that require attention. Two field studies in two Italian primary schools tested the hypothesized positive effect of recess time spent in a natural (vs. built) environment on pupils' cognitive performance and their perceived restorativeness, using standardized tests. In Study 1, children's psychological restoration was assessed by measuring sustained and selective attention, working memory, and impulse control, before and after the morning recess time. Team standardized playtime was conducted in a natural (vs. built) environment, and the perceived restorativeness was measured after each recess time. Results showed a greater increase in sustained and selective attention, concentration, and perceived restorativeness from the morning to the afternoon natural environment condition. In Study 2, the positive effect of free play recess time in a natural (vs. built) environment was assessed during the afternoon school time on sustained and selective attention and perceived restorativeness. Results showed an increase in sustained and selective attention after the natural environment condition (vs. built) and a decrease after the built environment break. Higher scores in perceived restorativeness were registered after the natural (vs. built) environment condition. Team standardized playtime and individual free play recess in a natural environment (vs. built) supports pupils' attention restoration during both morning and afternoon school times, as well as their perceived restorativeness of the recess environment. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed in terms of nature's role both for the school (ground design or redesign) and for the organization of the school's activities.
Moral Disengagement Strategies in Sex Offenders

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Sexual abuse is a heterogeneous phenomenon. The literature on sexual offenders considers risk factors in the individual and familial history as well as precursors such as cognitive distortions, defence mechanisms and moral disengagement (MD) mechanisms. This study investigates the MD in sex offenders and non-sex offenders in a sample of 362 males comprising a control group of 268 non-offenders, a group of 42 detained sex offenders and a group of 52 detained non-sex offenders. Participants were administered a semi-structured interview and the Moral Disengagement Scale (MDS). The results show a significant difference between the jailed participants (non-sex offenders and sex offenders) and controls; offenders were found to generally display overall higher levels of MD. Among the jailed participants, sex offenders seem to make more use of MD mechanisms than non-sex offenders.

Keywords: harmful conduct; moral disengagement; sex offender.

Risk Factors Related to Cognitive Distortions Toward Women and Moral Disengagement: A Study on Sex Offenders

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Abstract

Violence against women is a heterogeneous phenomenon worldwide. In order to better understand this phenomenon, it is also necessary to study the offenders against women. Therefore, the present study investigates, in the light of risk factors, the individual and social characteristics (related to adolescence), the moral disengagement strategies and cognitive distortions of 120 sex offenders detained in Italian jails. We administered the semi-structured interview for data collection regarding family, social and medical histories and the manner in which the deviant act was carried out, the Moral Disengagement Scale, and the Vindictive Rape Attitude Questionnaire to investigate the presence of cognitive distortions toward women. Results show important risk factors in the genesis of moral disengagement strategies in the offenders: the use of substances and being institutionalized in their past. In addition, through a multiple regression model, we noticed how education levels represent a negative predictor of cognitive distortions towards women and the attribution of blame to a positive predictor. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Keywords Sex offenders · Moral disengagement · Cognitive distortions · Risk factors · Substance abuse · Institutionalization · Adolescence
Sexual health in your hands: How the smartphone apps can improve your sexual wellbeing?

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Summary In recent years, the numbers of smartphone users has surged across the world and downloads of smartphone apps have grown significantly, with smartphone usage increased to 73% among American adolescents since 2013. The main goal of this article is to present a review of the literature focusing the use of smartphone applications to improve sexual health. Using a smartphone application to provide sexual health information, especially to younger populations, might aid in increasing awareness of sexual risk behaviors before sexual debut. Providing accurate, comprehensive, and up-to-date sexual health education materials through smartphones vs websites might improve their sexual health outcomes. However, there are few smartphone applications related to sexual and reproductive health that are available to users. Research has shown that 80% of Internet users in the United States search online for health information, and that young people are gathering health information using mobile devices with increasing frequency, including sexual health information. However, while new technologies, including smartphone apps, are used to facilitate health information seeking, health-related apps are infrequently downloaded and rarely used. This suggests that, to promote sexual health through smartphone apps, researchers could partner with app developers in order to integrate sexual health promotion interventions in popular sex-related or dating apps. However, it is evident that these apps provide novel opportunities to engage at-risk populations in sexual health
Homophobic bullying among adolescents: The role of insecure-dismissing attachment and peer support

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