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

Irene Petruccelli

Rome, May 6, 2020
Self-Concept: Who Am I?

• A person’s answers to the question, “Who am I?”

• Take time to answer this question...

  • Are your answers more relational (collectivist) or about self (individualist)?
At the Center of Our Worlds: 
Our Sense of Self

• **Schema**
  • Mental templates by which we organize our world

• **Self-schema**
  • Beliefs about self that organize and guide the processing of self-relevant information

**Possible Selves**

• Images of what we dream of or dread becoming in the future
  • Spend more time in the present!  

---

Well-being
Development of the Social Self

• What Determines Our Self-Concept?

  • Roles we play
  • Social identities we form
  • Comparisons we make with others
  • How other people judge us
  • Surrounding culture
Development of the Social Self

• The Roles We Play
  • New roles begin as playacting then become reality
    • As we play them we begin to believe them (*self perception theory*)

• Social Comparisons
  • We compare ourselves with others and consider how we differ... Via Social Comparison theory (Festinger, 1954)
    • We tend to compare upward
      • *Who is your referent group?*
Development of the Social Self

• Success and Failure
  • Our daily experiences cause us to have empowerment or low self-esteem
    • Remember Self-esteem <-> Competence?

• Other People’s Judgments
  • Looking-glass self (Cooley, 1902 – sociologist)
    • How we think others perceive us is a mirror for perceiving ourselves
Self and Culture

• Individualism

  • Concept of giving priority to one’s own goals over group goals and defining one’s identity in terms of personal attributes rather than group identifications

  • Independent self
Self and Culture

• Collectivism

• Giving priority to the goals of one’s group and defining one’s identity accordingly

• Interdependent self

• Asian, African, and Central and South American cultures

• Can you think of groupings other than just national cultures?
Self and Culture

• Culture and Cognition

• Collectivism results in different ways of thinking
  
  • Asians tend to think more in relationships than Americans

  • Americans see choices as expressions of themselves.
    • Which focus more on the focal object/background?
    • Japanese / Americans?
    • What does this tell us?
Self and Culture

• Culture and Self-Esteem

• In collectivist cultures
  • Self-concept is context-specific rather than stable
  • Conflict takes place between groups
  • Persist more when failing

• In individualistic cultures
  • Self-esteem is more personal and less relational
  • Persist more when winning
  • Conflict takes place between individuals
    • Crime
    • Divorce

• In your opinion, which culture is ‘better’?
Self-Knowledge

• Explaining Our Behavior
  • Do we know what affects our mood?

• Predicting Our Behavior

  • Planning fallacy
    • Tendency to underestimate how long it will take to complete a task
    • What are the implications for goal setting?
      • In job or in school?
Self-Knowledge

• Predicting Our Feelings

• Studies of “affective forecasting” reveal people have the greatest difficulty predicting the intensity and the duration of their future emotions
  • *We underestimate the effects of situational cues*
• Impact bias
  • *We overestimate* the enduring impact of emotion-causing events
    • *How much time would you like on a island holiday?*
    • *How long would it take to get over a job loss?*
• Immune neglect
  • Tendency to neglect the *speed* and *strength* of the “psychological immune system” which enables emotional recovery and resilience after bad things happen
Self-Knowledge

• The Wisdom and Illusions of Self-Analysis
  • Mental processes that control our behavior are distinct from those we use to explain our behavior

  • Automatic implicit attitudes regarding someone or something often differ from our consciously controlled, explicit attitudes
    • What’s the difference in the two?
    • How are we strangers to ourselves?
    • Implicit ones change more slowly

  • Self-reports are untrustworthy – no guarantee of their validity
Self-Esteem (motivation power?)

• Our overall self-evaluation or sense of self-worth
  • *What are your “domains” of SE?*  
    Attractive/smart/athletic/rich/loved?....

• Feedback is best when it is true and specific
  • Leads to high “self-efficacy”
  • General praise...”you can do anything you want”
    • Can lead to unrealistic optimism
    • *What were you told in school?*
    • *Competence feedback -> High Self-efficacy*
  • *Which do better?*
  • Those failing were told “feel great about yourself-hold your head high” or “taking control will help”
Self-Esteem Motivation

• Self-esteem maintenance
  • What level is best to have? Hi/med/lo?

• Self-esteem threats occur among friends whose successes can be more threatening than that of strangers (social comparison theory)
  • Referent others
WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY?

It is an interdisciplinary field that studies the *relationship between individuals and their background*.

Environment influences behavior at different levels.

In every moment of our lives, we are in one place or another, interacting with and within that place.
ENVIRONMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

Is an interdisciplinary field focused on the interplay between humans and their surroundings:

• natural environments,
• social settings,
• built environments,
• learning environments,
• and informational environments.

This discipline is both value oriented and problem oriented, prioritizing research aimed at solving complex environmental problems in the pursuit of individual well-being within a larger society.
• **Environmental psychology:**
  • The study of how physical settings affect human behavior and how people change their environment

• **What do Environmental psychologists do?**
Environmental Psychology

• Stressor:
  • a stimulus that affects an organism in a psychologically or physically injurious way
Temperature

• a stressor that affects many behaviors

• Very hot or very cold temperatures can cause behavioral effects

• Extreme Heat
• Extreme Cold
Noise

• Noise is a stressor that can overstimulate people

• Noise often leads to poor work performance and social functioning
Environmental Toxins

- Nearly any airborne substance (man-made or natural) can trigger respiratory problems resulting in diminished work performance and health consequences.

- Airborne toxins can impair motor tasks involving reaction time and affect long-term health.
Crowding

- Number of people around can affect behavior

- **Crowding**: the *perception* that personal space is too limited rather than the size of a space or the number of people around
Personal Space

• Personal space:

• Encroachment causes displeasure and possible withdrawal

• Cultural Differences

• Spatial Zones: Intimate, Personal, Social, and Public
Conservation Psychology

«The scientific study of the reciprocal relationships between humans and the rest of nature, with a particular focus on how to encourage conservation of the natural world»

(Saunders, 2003, p. 138)
Theoretical framework of «full ecology»

- Impact of the environment on people

- Impact of people on the environment

**Mitigation** - reducing greenhouse gas emissions and other efforts to address and decrease the severity of impending natural and human disasters associated with escalating climate change and other environmental threats.

**Adaptation** - often used in the climate science context to refer to structural changes that people and communities may need to make to address the physical impacts of climate change. But adaptation also refers to psychological responses that people make to climate change threats, including how they appraise and understand risks, how they feel about situations, and how they behave and respond to the threats.
Attention Restoration Theory (ART)

Interaction with nature heals mental fatigue and recovers capacity to focus attention

A walk in nature reduced anxiety, rumination, negative affect, maintained positive affect, increased verbal working memory (Bratman et al., 2012)

Walking in urban green space reduced stress, arousal, frustration, and directed attention. Walking in busy commercial district increased engagement, alertness, and directed attention (Aspinal et al., 2013)

A 90 min nature walk decreased neural activity in the subgenual prefrontal cortex, compared to a 90 min urban walk (Bratman et al., 2015)
Attention Restoration Theory

Perceived properties of an Attention-Restoring Experience

- **Being Away**—
  - sense of being removed from the source of the mental fatigue

- **Extent**—
  - sufficient scope to sustain interaction for a period of time without boredom

- **Fascination**—
  - an effortless way of attending with involuntary attention

- **Compatibility**—
  - fit with a person’s inclinations and purposes to prevent use of mental effort

(Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989)
Some other important concepts...

- Place Identity
- Place Attachment
- Environmental Consciousness
- Behaviour Setting

It’s Application

Environmental Psychology has an impact on built setting, infact Architecture uses some concepts and discoveries of Environmental Psychology to understand how manipulate people’s mood and behaviours.
Why is our Environment so important?

- Help people to face stress easily
- It can influence people’s mood
- It encourage people to live longer and work better
- Enhancing building design
- It has an impact on emotional and behavioural growth
- Support people after post-operations and during their recovery
Place attachment (p.a.)

Definition

• The cognitive emotional bond that individuals develop towards places is known as **place attachment**

• House in which we live or have lived is the most important environment of our experience

• Our ties to place are also cognitive. Memories make a place meaningful.
Three dimensions of place attachment

- Personal level
- Psychological level
- Place dimension
Theory of attachment

• This bond, between people and places is due to human relationships in general and it’s directly connected to feelings and the general theory of attachment.
Well-being and Human needs

- Self-growth processes
- Entertainment
- Provide practical benefits

- Attachment to place as fundamental need
Highlights

Place attachment vs place identity
We do identify in the place we are in

Place elasticity:
Weaker place attachment
Place-congruent continuity and settlement identity

Place Dependence:
Functional attachment
Ability of a place to satisfy needs and goals
Topophilia

Development:
Developmental needs
Personality differences
Grater among residents with children, later in life, place ties also assist with social support
Neighborhood attachment (NA)

- Neighborhood as safe place
- Habits

The aspects that define place attachment are:
- place identity
- place dependence
- place belongingness
- rootedness
- sense of place
- sense of community
Social identity theory (1) and social status (2)

1. Tendency of being strongly attached and identified with our place of birth
   - Identity gains definition through one’s social groups
   - Place attachment tends to vary according to neighborhoods and environmental qualities

2. Income, occupation, level of education &
   - New born families
Childhood in place attachment

- High mobility during childhood – greater desire of stability in adulthood
- Prolonged association between individuals and places – attachment
- Consciousness of attachment to places
- Seeking of security and confort
People with little or no attachment and ownership

- People with **little or no attachment**, such as tourists
  - Non-attachment it is said to offer a preferable state of flexibility

- People with **partial sense of place** (e.g. seasonal visitors)
  - **Personal sense of place** (e.g. long term visitors)

Those who own their place tend to be more attached, although the direction of this relation is unclear.
Moving away in five steps

Stage 1 - becoming aware of the proposals for place change, and learning about the types of changes that are slated to occur.

Stage 2 - involves interpreting the meaning of the change, and considering how it will impact oneself and one’s place.

Stage 3 - is evaluating the outcomes of the change, determining whether these will be predominantly negative or positive.

Stage 4 - is coping, when individuals consider various coping strategies, such as denial or resistance to the change.

Stage 5 - is the action phase, when individuals implement the strategy that was previously considered (place attachment in coffee shops).
Coping…

- P.A often comprises a part of individual and collective identities. Fried (1963) observed that when forced relocation people experience grief, similar to a situation where they lose an important social relationship.

Adaptation includes intra-individual parameters (such as affective responses to places) and extra-individual ones (e.g., proximity and exposure, social comparison, and collective efficacy).

In terms of collective coping strategies, people may turn to their social and institutional networks as well as the creation of grass-roots organizations. Another environmental condition to bear in mind is the climate change.
• Experiments in Louisiana and Canada showed that the more the environment was proved as dangerous the more would be people’s concern about the environment.

• Other studies report that the higher was the P.A. the lower would be resident’s risk perception in a dangerous area.

• P.A. is as well an important *motivating factor* that persuade people to go back to post-disaster areas.

• Two studies report a lack of relationship between P.A. and either risk perception or coping but both agreed that one’s own identity plays a central role.
Place attachment and flood preparedness

- A study based in **India**
- People were forced to remove from their houses (*genealogical, economic and religious*).
- Higher genealogical and economic p.a. – more prepared for floods
- Religious p.a. did not discriminate in flood preparedness
How to measure p.a. resources and findings

- Place attachment is usually investigated through quantitative self-reports or qualitative approaches.
- Both methods have their strengths and weaknesses.
- Experimental methodologies where participants are randomly assigned to various conditions in order to help environmental psychology in general escape the trap of the mono-method bias.
Conclusions and future resources

Future studies will need to focus on:
• health implications
• psychopathological manifestations of long-term proximity-seeking to risky places of attachment.
Longitudinal studies and work with migrant groups may provide a better understanding of how place attachment might still be mentally active even long after people have relocated.

The study about flood preparedness showed place attachment influences behavioral components.

Focusing on the complexities of attachment to places help us saving people.