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; Outdoor Training.
  • **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

• Environmental psychology is the study of transactions between individuals and their physical settings (Gifford, 2007a). In these transactions, individuals change their environments, and their behavior and experiences are changed by their environments.

• 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.
Personal space

• Personal space is the dynamic distance and orientation component of interpersonal relations (Gifford, 2007a).

• It has been studied longer and more than almost any other aspect of environmental psychology (e.g., Sommer, 1959).

• Inferences about others are often drawn on the basis of the interpersonal distance they choose (e.g., Patterson & Sechrest, 1970).

• Many personal and situational influences interact with preferences for particular interpersonal distances. For example, males have larger personal spaces.

• Attraction and cooperation generally lead to smaller interpersonal distance, whereas less positive contexts such as stigma and unequal status lead to larger distances. When the physical setting is less spacious, larger interpersonal distances are selected.

• Cultural differences in interpersonal distance exist (e.g., Hall, 1966), but other factors often alter cultural preferences.
• Residential Environmental Psychology
• The Environmental Psychology of Neighborhoods and Cities
• Educational Environmental Psychology
• Workplace Environmental Psychology
• Natural Environmental Psychology
• The Social Construction of Nature, the Environment, and Environmental Problems
• Environmental Psychology and Architectural Design
Social communication

We have to start with some simple properties of communication that have fundamental interpersonal implications:

1. THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF NOT COMMUNICATING
2. THE CONTENT AND RELATIONSHIP LEVELS OF COMMUNICATION
3. THE PUNCTUATION OF THE SEQUENCE OF EVENTS
4. DIGITAL AND ANALOGIC COMMUNICATION
5. SYMMETRICAL AND COMPLEMENTSARY INTERACTION
Non-Verbal Communication (NVC)

Definition

“All communication other than that involving words and language”

• This is fine but could include everything from animal communication to films. For our purposes we will use a more restricted definition:

“Bodily communication, other than words and language”
Forms

1. Different categories (or types) of NVC

2. The functions (or uses) of NVC
Relationship between NVC, Language & Culture

• When travelling, we do not, on the whole, make the assumption that everyone will understand our first and preferred language

• Most of us accept we must either learn a new language or rely entirely on verbal signals for communication

• We assume we will have no difficulty in decoding non-verbal clues

• We need to be aware of the enormous range and diversity of non-verbal behaviour
NVC, Language & Culture

• Even in the secure territory of your own familiar culture, care is needed in the interpretation of non-verbal clues

• Jumping to conclusions about meanings of non-verbal clues can be dangerous
Categorisation of NVC – Paralanguage

Paralanguage consists of the non-verbal elements that accompany speech. It includes:
- The way we speak (also known as prosodic features)
- Volume, pitch, intonation, speed of delivery, articulation, rhythm
- The sounds we make other than language
- Laughter, crying, yawning, sighing, screeching, coughing
- Filled pauses such as ‘Mmmm’, ‘Ahhh’, ‘Ummm’
- Unfilled pauses
Categorisation of NVC – Physical Appearance

• Clothing, hairstyle, make-up, jewellery, tattoos, piercings, glasses, facial hair, accessories such as bags

• You only have to think of the huge industries associated with the above examples to recognise the cultural significance of physical appearance
Categorisation of NVC – Physical Appearance

• Many societies had (and some still do have) highly regulated codes of dress, often linked to rank and status

• It is the body’s capacity to communicate aspects of an individual’s identity which makes us so aware of our physical appearance
Categorisation of NVC – Physical Appearance

• Self expression in contemporary culture is also limited by requirements to wear uniforms or to observe dress codes
• Not necessarily restricted to schools and public services
• Many corporations and organisations expect employees to communicate a corporate rather than an individual identity
Further Categories of NVC - Activity

- Body movement (kinesics)
- Closeness (proxemics)
- Touching
- Eye movement
- Smells
Body Movement - Kinesics

• Gesture, facial expression, posture, head nodding, orientation
• Emblems – gestures with specific cultural meanings attached
• Illustrators reinforce words of speakers
• Adapters are unconscious gestures to relieve stress or boredom
• Posture is heavily laden with value judgements
Closeness - Proxemics

- Study of how we use space and distance
- Includes seating arrangements, queuing and territoriality
- Ideas of ‘personal space’, ‘invasion of personal space’ and ‘comfort zones’
- Use of objects as ‘markers’ to indicate ownership of space
Touching - Haptics

• Physical contact such as holding, stroking, shaking hands, guiding
• Linked to proxemics
• Touch is very important in our early development
• Many rules and taboos regulating physical contact
Eye Movement

• Eye movement, length and direction of gaze, changes in pupil size
• We are hypersensitive to information imparted by eyes
• Can be argued eyes reveal the truthfulness of what is being said
Smell

• Humans do not have a particularly well-developed sense of smell compared with other species
• Perfumes and deodorants send powerful messages, as can the natural body odours we try to suppress
• A rapidly growing industry has developed around the use of smells
Complex Messages

- Rare for these non-verbal codes to operate in isolation from one another, or separately from language
- We create and perceive messages using signs from a range of verbal and non-verbal codes
- To make this even more complex, these signs and codes do not always pull in the same direction
Communicative Competence

A competent communicator will:

- Recognise and use different verbal and non-verbal styles as they are suited to different social situations
- Recognise the relation between verbal and non-verbal elements in communication
- Compensate for possible misinterpretations in communication with others
The Functions of NVC

• Communicating feelings, emotions and attitudes

• Replacing and regulating language

• Other Functions
Communicating Feelings, Emotions and Attitudes

• NVC has a particularly important role in establishing and maintaining relationships, otherwise known as an **affective function**
• We rely more heavily on NVC in this area of personal communication
• Looks, glances, changes in orientation allow others to know what sort of relationship we want to have
• We use NVC to establish a mutually acceptable level of intimacy
Replacing & Regulating Language

• The role of NVC in inflecting the meaning of a sentence can be explored by ‘performing’ the following sentence in different ways.

Well, I really enjoyed the party last night.
Replacing & Regulating Language

• Paralinguistic features, such as pitch, tone and emphasis
• Throw in other non-verbal cues such as eyebrow lifting or illustrators such as the use of the index and first finger of both hands to indicate inverted commas around a word
• Number of potential meanings rapidly increases
Replacing & Regulating Language

• Non-verbal cues also make a significant contribution of conversation management
• Rules of turn taking allow us to have coherent discussions without constantly talking over the top of each other
• Paralanguage, gaze, eye contact and head movement all play a part
• It’s a set of rules that takes some time to grasp
• Women typically have a more cooperative conversational style whereas men tend to provide less non-verbal feedback
Other Functions

- Many other uses to which we put our non-verbal codes including:
  - Self expression
  - Group membership
  - Persuasion
  - Indicating role
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 worlds

• 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!
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?
    • Can diminish satisfaction
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

  • Western cultures – tend towards self-inflation (cf to Japanese)
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

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

• Culture and Cognition

• Richard Nisbett’s *The Geography of Thought* (2003)

  • Contends that 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
  • Can your roommate predict the longevity of your romantic relationship better than you? (McDonald & Ross, ‘97)

• 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 (Gilbert & Wilson)

• 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? (Crocker & Wolfe)*
    - Attractive/smart/athletic/rich/loved? +++
  - Or is it “bottom up”? (Brown & Dutton?)
    - *What is the baby example?*
- 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”
    - (Forsyth et al., 2007)
Social Psychology

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

Giulio D'Urso & Ugo Pace

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