PSYC3303 Lecture notes

Lecture 1: Psychology in Action

- To understand how psychological theories, methods and research findings can be applied to everyday and important human problems;
- To understand how psychological theories, methods and research findings have in the past been applied to real-world problems and identify the obstacles to such application;
- To be able to identify the consequences of failing to take account of human behaviour in devising policy interventions;
- To develop a deeper understanding of how scientific investigation can assist in resolving theoretical debates;
- To demonstrate communication skills for translating psychological theory into practical application for both lay and professional audiences; and
- To demonstrate an enhanced capacity for collaboration in problem focused "think tanks" to devise solutions to real-life problems.

Think Tank Reports

- Groups of 5
- Each group will select a problem area and develop policy recommendations in a form suitable for presentation to a government, non-government or business organisation;
- Individual report on policy recommendations
- May the 2nd

Participation

First tutorial (week 2)

- select a problem (your choice)- area of need in a community
- identify a relevant psychological construct- eg anxiety, stereotype they are inferences derived from things that are observed
- be prepared to speak about your selection, including at least one reference- eg underachievement of indigenous children > stereotype threat

Weeks 3- 10:

- Identify a psychological construct relevant to the listed problem for that week; eg identity or threats to identity
- be prepared to speak about your selection, including at least one reference

Assessment

- Group presentation 15%
- Individual report 35%
- Exam: 4 essays 35%
- Attendance 15% (5 for constructs and 10 for general)

Lewin's Field Theory

Behaviour = f(People, Environment):

Behaviour is a function of the person and the environment**.**

Psychology's Subjects: The Weirdest People in the World

- Psychology often isn't at the heart of good policy
- Failure to look at person and environment get a very distorted picture
- Some constructs are not invariant (differences in views across cultures)
- Very good at internal but bad at external validity

Taxonomy of Behavioural Interventions

Regulation

- **Eliminate choice**: Prohibiting goods or services e.g. banning certain drugs
- **Restrict choice** (powerful in changing human behaviour): Restricting the options available to people e.g. banning smoking in public places

Fiscal measures
- Disincentives: Fiscal policies to make behaviour more expensive e.g. taxation on cigarettes or congestion charges in cities
- Incentives: Fiscal policies to make behaviours more financially beneficial e.g. tax breaks or rebates for purchase of solar hot water

Non-regulatory and Non-fiscal Measures

1. **Incentives and disincentives**: policies which reward or penalise certain behaviour e.g. time off work for blood donation or working to get rid of fire
2. **Persuasion:** persuading individuals using argument e.g. alcohol reduction mass media campaigns that it can lead to cancer.
3. **Provision of information:** if you tell people what is the case they may be more aware e.g. in leaflets showing CO2 emission from use of various appliances. The reason people don't behave well is that they don't know.
4. **Changes to physical environment:** e.g. traffic calming; building design, putting junk food at back of shops
5. **Changes to the default policy:** e.g. requiring people to opt out rather than opt in, such as in organ donation or purchase of renewable energy. You have to go looking for the other option
6. **Use of Social Norms and Salience:** Providing information about what others are doing e.g. energy use compared to neighbours. Trying to get people to see what others do eg about describing what they do.

Economics & Fiscal Measures: 5 Myths
1) Individuals have stable and consistent preferences;
2) Individuals know their preferences and they pursue known preferences with volition;
3) Individuals make decisions based on all of the evidence available to them;
4) Free markets solve economic problems;
5) Credible empirical evidence consists of outcome data, not of mechanism data.

Framing
- Students given money described as 'rebate' or 'bonus'
- Possibly explained by tax?

EG- Tax-offset study
- Proposal to increate cost of products believed to contribute to global warming
- Proposal described as carbon tax or carbon offset

Tyranny of choice?
More information produces:
- Worse choices and lower satisfaction
- Some info is superfluous & distracting
- It may exceed cognitive limitations
- Lacks meaning

Examples
- Literacy
    - Intervention: distributing teaching in short sessions through the day

Huge impact on performance on disadvantaged children
Learn at 2x normal rate
- Health

Repeated exposure to a statement even if wrong increases its acceptance as fact- increases familiarity and fluency of processing. Eg flu vaccine
- Share trading

Those who trade more earn less
Possible explanation: Overconfidence may explain high trading levels and the resulting poor performance.

- Climate change (consumption VS conservation)
    - Judgement of risks
    - Formation of environmental attitudes
    - Most effective methods of persuasive communication
    - Effective techniques for producing behaviour change
    - Barriers to change
- Northern Territory Intervention
    - Concepts: prejudice, stereotyping (stereotype threat), self-fulfilling prophecies, powerlessness (locus of control & self-efficacy) and learned helplessness
    - School attendance little changed; child malnutrition up; crime, alcohol, substance abuse & drug related incidents, domestic violence, sexual assault, child sex abuse, assaults are up; attempted suicide/self harm and mental illness increased markedly.

Intervention: reducing racial achievement gap
Can differences in performance be attributed to resources or opportunities, social identity, cognitive burden, situational threats, benefits self-affirmation or effects on working memory?

Stereotype lift

- Alleviating psychological threat can improve intellectual achievement;
- Importance of situational threats linked to group identity.

Lecture 2-
Part 1: Examining the policy process

- Policy not just government
- Policies at all levels
- Mutual incomprehension between policy makers and academics

Public policy: public issues defined as **problems** and the courses of action (or inaction) that arise to address these problems.

- Stems from the identification of a **problem by a group of people** and whom wish to warrant some form of action
- The nature of the action should be collective rather than individual
- Sometimes the problem is identified by the availability of a solution

Study of public policy

- What governments do, why they do it and what difference it makes.
- The public and its problems
- "all aspects of what is involved in providing policy direction for the work of the public sector. These include the ideas which inform policy conception, the **talk and work** which goes into providing the formulation of policy directions, and all the talk, work and collaboration which goes into translating these directions into practice." (Yeatman, 1998, p 9)
    - Rarely is a single group, it is a collaboration

Policy process

1. Policy: both bottom up and top down.
2. Many different types of policy decisions:
    - Specific issues (decision making about day-to-day activities) e.g. road traffic rules;
    - Strategic issues (large-scale decisions between broad policy choices) e.g. defence policy;
    - Somewhere in between e.g. health insurance. Affect individuals directly but requires bigger picture

- Most problems are bottom up raised by community concern
- Bottom up. Eg disabled funding- families and communities > politicians
- Top down. Eg policy maker comes from experts guidance

Policymaking