

2021



MINDS UNDERGROUND™ PSYCHOLOGY SUMMER SCHOOL



Overview

Our Virtual Summer Series aim to widen your knowledge over the summer period, under the expert guidance of our team of Oxbridge graduates, giving you the opportunity to acquire or develop skills and expertise relevant to your subject interests, in preparation for future university entrance, including personal statement writing and potential interviews.

What to Expect

Each class is hosted by a specialist in the field, with an emphasis placed on deepening subject knowledge and inspiring you in your independent preparation. Come armed with questions, notebooks, a readiness to engage in critical discussion and ensure you keep a file with notes on each session to refer back to when it comes to applications.

Logistical Details

All classes will take place over Microsoft Teams. Teams invites and links will be sent out prior to the Summer School commencing.

Mentors will set some pre-reading/ research prior to sessions, and optional tasks between classes. Post-session reading lists will be issued for you to engage in further independent exploration where applicable.

Dates: Classes will be held every Wednesday, 5.30-6.30pm UK time over a 12-week period: Wednesday 23rd June - Wednesday 8th September



2021 Summer School

Our Hosts

Chloe will be hosting the first six sessions of the Summer School, with Leora following for the final six.



Chloe

Chloe received a First Class Degree in Experimental Psychology from Oxford and in her Psychology Masters at King's College London in clinical forensic Psychology, which came with a placement in a medium secure unit. Chloe currently works as an assistant psychologist and supports students applying to university for Psychology, including Oxbridge admissions.



Leora

Leora completed her undergraduate degree in Psychology at the University of Oxford, earning multiple awards for the best performance in exams across all three years and the best undergraduate research project/thesis. She went on to receive a rare Oxford Medical Sciences Scholarship to continue work as a DPhil student, and now teaches parts of Oxford's undergraduate Psychology course, alongside experience working as a private tutor for university application support too.



The Agenda



Group Preferences

'A good theory of intergroup bias helps to identify not only its causes, but also what can be done to reduce it'.

Intergroup bias occurs when two separate groups are biased towards the ingroup as opposed to the outgroup. This class will consider how field and lab experiments can help us explore different theories of intergroup conflict, such as realistic group conflict theory and social identity theory.



The Banality of Evil

Rather than being malicious and evil, some of Hitler's soldiers maintained that they were 'just following orders'. How 'normal' is evil? Can anyone be induced to be evil? Considering the Stanford prison experiment, this class will explore how situational factors and group dynamics can create a recipe for evil.



Research Methods

Psychological research is essential for furthering understanding. But what even is a 'study', a 'control group' or a 'confounding variable'? This class will explain the basics of psychological research, and how 'meta-analyses', which combine results of many studies, can be used to explore overall effects. It will also explore the difficulties in drawing conclusions, for example when considering correlation vs causation and confounding variables.



Theory of Mind

When we understand the intentions of others and how their internal experience or mental states can be different to our own, we are said to have 'theory of mind'. For example, if a chocolate bar is moved while someone is out of the room, we understand that the person might look for the chocolate bar in the original location. In some conditions, for example autism spectrum condition, theory of mind develops differently. This class will investigate how theory of mind develops in both neurotypical children and children with autism spectrum condition.



The Agenda



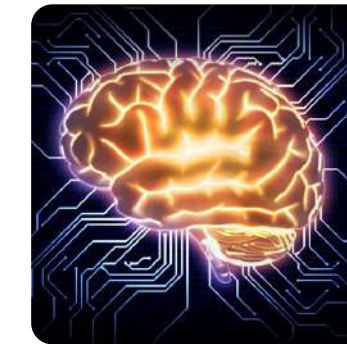
Language & Thought

The language that we speak can influence the way that we think. There are differences across language, such that the specific language we speak influences our thought processes. However, there are also differences within languages, such that the way a given language is used can also influence thought processes. This class will evaluate the relationship between language and thought.



Understanding Psychological Disorders

Psychological disorders are often understood in the context of being either mentally 'well' or 'unwell'. This categorical understanding may be flawed. Psychological disorders, such as depression and psychosis, may be better understood on a more dimensional continuum. This class will explore how the NHS operates within a predominantly medical model, considering the pros and cons of this.



Cognitive Explanations and Treatments for Anxiety Disorders

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy is considered a 'gold standard' treatment for multiple psychological disorders, but how was it developed? Focussing on anxiety disorders, this class will consider how researchers developed psychological models of panic disorder or social anxiety disorder, how these models were tested in experimental studies, and how therapies were developed to specifically target the maintaining factors specified in the model. We will also learn about randomised controlled trials (which evaluate whether a treatment works), and mediation analyses (which help determine why a treatment works).



The Agenda



What Does a Brain Do? Turning Ideas on Their Head

Intuitively, we think that the brain pays attention to certain aspects of reality, takes this as input, directly perceives it, and performs operations on it. According to an increasingly influential neuroscientific theory, however, the brain is constantly constructing its own reality. Considering visual illusions and cases of biased perception, we will consider how perhaps we do not see what is really there, but rather what we expect to see. We will also consider more broadly what this theory means for the concepts of attention, learning, conceptual knowledge and memory, compared to traditional ideas.



Big Questions & Bad Research

In this class, we will consider some of the broad questions in psychology relating to innateness and domain-specificity, and whether they can be properly tested. First, we will think about what it is that a social brain needs to do. Then, we can consider the questions of whether social abilities are specialised or rely on general processing, and whether they dependent on experience. Looking at examples such as face perception, we will see how previous experiments have drawn erroneous conclusions due to lack of adequate controls, and we will consider more generally how to properly formulate and test hypotheses.



Mirror Neurons: How Special Are They?

Drawing on ideas from the previous class, we will delve more deeply into the example of imitation, where conclusions about specificity and innateness may have been too hastily made. More than two decades ago, Italian scientists stumbled by chance upon a cell in monkey brains that were active both when a monkey performed an action and when that monkey watched another monkey perform the same action: “mirror neurons”. Since then, mirror neurons have been the subject of multiple fantastical claims, with scientists claiming that they explain how we understand people's goals and intentions, empathise with their feelings, and even how these abilities go wrong in conditions like autism. We will examine how much of this is actually true, and whether mirror neurons are as special as people claim.

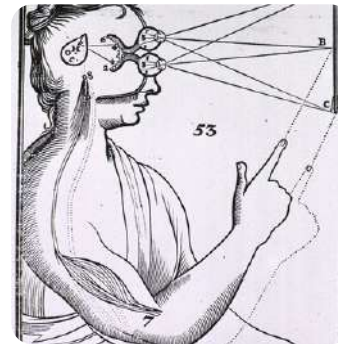


The Agenda



Empathy: What Is It, & Can It Be Measured?

Moving from actions to thoughts and feelings, we will consider how different psychological processes can be related, and how we should distinguish between them. We all have an understanding of what empathy is, but do we know how to define it so that it can be studied? And can it be measured? Numerous neuroimaging studies show that the same areas in the brain activate when seeing another in pain as when in pain oneself, but is this enough to know that the person is empathising? We will also look to conditions like Autism Spectrum Disorder, psychopathy and alexithymia (where people have difficulty identifying and describing their feelings) to distinguish between empathy and related processes.



Interoception: A Sixth Sense?

Interoception is the perception of internal bodily states, like hunger or pain, and some people are better at it than others. Do differences in this ability underlie mental health conditions? What about perception of others' emotions? Or even our sense of self? Drawing on knowledge of predictive processing from previous lessons, we will think about how interoception may be related to emotion, considering the idea that emotions are concepts constructed by the brain to make sense of things.




Any questions? Get in touch!



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