

Social Psychology of Conservation and the
Environment:
Facilitating Sustainability

Dr Jackie Abell
Centre for Agroecology, Water & Resilience
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Social Psychology of Conservation and the Environment: Facilitating Sustainability 2020

Tutor: Dr Jackie Abell; Email: Jackie.Abell2@coventry.ac.uk

Time and Venue:

Delivery: Online

Aims, Learning Outcomes & Transferable Skills

Aims

The aim of this short course is to develop participants' knowledge of how we can apply psychological concepts and theory to facilitate more sustainable human relationships with the natural world. Humans and animals are facing environmental changes such as global warming, flooding, loss of wildlife, air and water pollution. Urgent action is needed to reconnect people with the natural world and facilitate behavioural change for environmental sustainability. Understanding human behaviour is fundamental to do this. Throughout this short course we'll draw on some key psychological topics, theories and concepts which we can apply to facilitate our efforts to live in a more environmentally sustainable world.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this short course, participants should i) have some understanding of the environmental and conservational issues that are prevalent in the modern world, ii) understand some key psychological factors that can drive or hinder conservation and environmentally sustainable behaviours, iii) be able to critically engage with social psychology's role and suitability in addressing some of these issues, iv) understand how social psychology can work alongside other science-related fields, policy-makers and conservation practitioners in promoting sustainable living for human and non-human animals, v) be able to design an intervention based on social psychological knowledge to promote conservation/environmentally friendly behaviour, and vi) be able to bring this knowledge to positively impact upon their daily lives. The course has practical and

theoretical components to it. This course is designed to be enjoyable as well as useful!

Transferable Skills

Throughout this option, you'll have opportunities to acquire and develop transferable skills. These include, applying academic knowledge to the real-world, public presentation, debating current environmental challenges and proposing solutions, designing a conservation/environmental intervention, critical evaluation, time management, IT skills, and facilitating your own and others behaviour to create a more environmentally sustainable world.

Assessment

There is no formal assessment for this course.

Syllabus and Timetable

The course consists of 10 hours of on-line teaching, organized over 5 weeks (2 hours per week), and 5 hours of off-line study. The teaching will incorporate practical and theoretical components of the course. The practical work is based on activities and discussion around key concepts and debates.

Indicative Teaching Timetable

- Week 1: There Are No Environmental Problems – Only Human Ones: A place for social psychology in addressing conservation and environmental issues
- Week 2: (Mis)Perceptions of the Environment, Cognitive Biases and Risk Assessment: We can't see the wood for the trees!
- Week 3: Children and the Natural World: The importance of early connections
- Week 4: Identifying with Nature: Humans have to care before they'll do anything!
- Week 5: Persuasion and Social Influence: Nudging people towards environmental sustainability.

Session Details, Preparation & Readings:

If you want one general book that covers the course as a whole, Clayton & Myers (2009) *Conservation Psychology*, is an excellent source. It has a more recent publication in 2016.

Below are some recommended readings lists to accompany each week. You are not expected to read everything! Pursue those areas you're interested in. I've marked key texts for each session.

*indicates key text

Week 1: There are no environmental problems – only human ones! A place for social psychology in addressing conservation and environmental issues

In this session we'll introduce the course and consider some environmental and conservational problems we're aware of and think about how a better understanding of human behaviour is fundamental to tackling them.

I will ask you to commit to one small change in your behaviour which is more environmentally friendly than your normal behaviour for the duration of the course! Let's see if we can last 5 weeks....

Practical Session: Ecological Footprint

Before we begin telling other people how to live (!), it's useful to assess our own impact upon the environment and identify the barriers that prevent us from adopting more sustainable behaviours.

BEFORE class, take the ecological footprint quiz at:

<http://footprint.wwf.org.uk/>

Questions for group discussion:

- 1 How does your individual footprint compare with the average footprint for a UK citizen (4.89 global hectares) and with someone living in India (0.91)?
- 2 What would the impact be if everyone in the world had the same lifestyle (economically, environmentally, socially, politically)? How would it affect your access to education, employment and recreation?
- 3 Does reducing your footprint mean reducing your quality of life? Why? Why not? Are there ways of reducing your footprint without reducing your quality of life?
- 4 Identify one specific behaviour you do that has a negative impact on the environment (e.g. driving short distances, choosing food that comes in unrecyclable packaging, etc.). Choose something that would be a challenge for you to change but doable. Tell other people what it is that you're going to do. For the duration of this option try to change this behaviour by acting in a more pro-environmentally friendly way (e.g. taking the bus, walking, recycling, taking old clothes to the charity shop, etc.). Keep a diary and record each time you do the behaviour and how you feel about it. Do you come across any barriers to carrying out the behaviour? What are the short-term and long-term pros and cons of carrying out this behaviour? How do other people view your new behaviour? Are they supportive or derogatory? How does this affect you doing the behaviour? This diary will not be assessed but will serve as an important tool for discussion at the end of this course.

For ideas on sustainable living, check out:

<http://www.sustainablestuff.co.uk/>

For a quick explanation of the concept of ecological footprint see:

<http://bullfrogfilms.com/catalog/efoot.html>

Readings:

- Beattie, G. (2010) *Why Aren't We Saving the Planet? A Psychologists' Perspective*. London: Routledge
- *Clayton, S., and Myers, G. (2009) *Conservation Psychology: The How and Why of Saving Nature*. Oxford: Blackwells
- Clayton, S., & Brook, A. (2005) Can psychology help save the world? A model for conservation psychology. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, 5, 1-15
- *Gardner, G.T., and Stern, P.C. (2002) *Environmental Problems and Human Behavior (2nd edition)*. Boston: Pearson Custom Publishing
- *Gifford, R. (2005). Applying social psychology to the environment. In F. W. Schneider, J. A. Gruman, & L. M. Coutts (Eds.), *Applied Social Psychology: Understanding and Addressing Social and Practical Problems* (pp. 307-330). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- McKenzie-Mohr, D., & Smith, W. (2000) *Fostering Sustainable Behavior: An Introduction to Community-Based Social Marketing*. Gabriola Island BC: New Society Publishers.
- *Myers, D., Abell, J., Kolstad, A., and Sani, F. (2010) *Social Psychology*. London:

McGraw-Hill (chapter 15) – new edition coming out September 2020.

*Saunders, C.D. (2003) The emerging field of conservation psychology. *Human Ecology Review*, 10(2), 137-149

P.S. If you fancy reading a prize-winning fictional book about environmental sustainability, try Daniel Quinn's 1992 novel 'Ishmael: An Adventure of the Mind and Spirit' (p.p.s. Ishmael is a silverback lowland gorilla!!).

Daily Grist:

If you like your up-to-date information about environmental issues with a good dollop of humour check out this newsletter from time to time:

<http://www.grist.org/>

Week 2: (Mis)perceptions of the environment, cognitive biases and risk assessment: We can't see the wood for the trees!

This session examines how cognitive biases and heuristics that shape human perception and judgment, impact upon the way we 'see' (or don't see) and respond (or don't respond) to environmental issues, and what we can do to resolve this.

Practical Session: Designing a Cognitive Map

We'll produce a cognitive map of an area of Coventry (University) that we consider to be ecologically degraded. This will become our focus for 'greening' up this area based on behavioural change.

Readings:

Alhakami, A. S. & Slovic, P. (1994). A psychological study of the inverse relationship between perceived risk and perceived benefit. *Risk Analysis*, 14, 1085-1096.

Baron, J. (2006). Thinking about global warming. *Climatic Change*, 77, 137-150.

Bekoff, M., Allen, C., & Burghardt, G. M. (Eds.) (2002). *The Cognitive Animal: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives on Animal Cognition*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Benoît, M., & Norton, M. I., (2003). Perceptions of a fluid consensus: Uniqueness bias, false consensus, false polarization, and pluralistic ignorance in a water conservation crisis. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 29, 559-567.

Finucane, M. L., Alhakami, A. S., Slovic, P. & Johnson, S. M. (2000). The affect heuristic in judgments of risks and benefits. *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*, 13, 1-17.

*Gardner, G. T., & Stern, P. C. (2002). "Human reactions to environmental hazards:

- Perceptual and cognitive processes." In *Environmental Problems and Human Behavior*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Johnson, D., & Levin, S. (2009). The tragedy of cognition: psychological biases and environmental inaction. *Current Science*, 1593-1603.
- *Kaplan, S., & Kaplan, R. (1982) *Cognition and Environment: Functioning in an Uncertain World*. New York: Praeger.
- Kitchin, R. M. (1994). Cognitive maps: What are they and why study them? *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 14, 1-19.
- Nickerson, R. S. (2003). *Psychology and environmental change*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Tanner, C., & Jungbluth, N. (2003). Evidence for the coincidence effect in environmental judgments: Why isn't it easy to correctly identify environmentally friendly food products? *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied*, 9, 3-11.
- Tversky, A., & Kahneman, D. (1973). Availability: A heuristic for judging frequency and probability. *Cognitive Psychology*, 5, 207-232.
- Tversky, A., & Kahneman, D. (1974). Judgment under uncertainty: *Heuristics and biases*. *Science*, 185, 1124-113.

Week 3: Children and the natural world: The importance of early connections

This session examines the development of children's relationships (positive and negative) with nature. It focuses on the importance of early interactions with animals as well as experiences with the natural world, but also considers what facilitates and hinders these processes in the modern world.

YouTube has lots of examples, but here's one video offering advice to encourage children to engage in environmentally responsible behaviour:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwLfoYCj4jQ>

Practical Session: Early Connections with Nature

Consider:

- 1) What experiences with the natural world did you have as a child? (e.g. pets, trips to the zoo, family hiking trips, camping, etc.)
- 2) When you reflect back on these, are these happy memories?
- 3) What were your favourite places to play as a child?
- 4) What do you think encourages modern-day children to experience the natural world (think of modern-day toys, books, organized trips, subjects at school, etc.)
- 5) What might hinder modern-day children from having these relationships, or having a positive experience?
- 6) How important do you think it is for children's development to have experiences with the natural world?

- 7) How influential do you think these experiences in childhood are for adult attitudes and behaviour towards the environment?
- 8) If you were to advise a government agency on how to encourage/enhance children's experiences with the natural world, what would you suggest?

Readings:

- Evans, G. (2006). Child development and the physical environment. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 57, 423-451.
- Ewert, A., Place, G., & Sibthorp, J. (2005). Early-life outdoor experiences and an individual's environmental attitudes. *Leisure Sciences*, 27, 225– 239.
- Kahn, P. H., Jr. (1997). Developmental psychology and the biophilia hypothesis: Children's affiliation with nature. *Developmental Review*, 17, 1-61.
- Kahn, P.H., Jr & Kellert, S.R. (2002) *Children and Nature: Psychological, Sociocultural and Evolutionary Investigations*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press
- *Kahn, P. H., Jr., & Kellert, S. R. (Eds.) (2002). *Children and Nature: Psychological, Sociocultural and Evolutionary Investigations*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Kellert, S. R. & Wilson, E. O. (Eds.) (1993). *The Biophilia Hypothesis*. Washington, DC: Island Press/Shearwater Books.
- *Louv, R. (2005). *Last child in the woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books.
- *Melson, G. F. (2003). Child development and the human-companion animal bond. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 47, 31-39.
- Myers, Jr., O.E., Saunders, C., & Garrett, E. (2004). What do children think animals need? Developmental trends. *Environmental Education Research*, 10(4): 545-562.
- *Myers, O. E. (1998). *Children and Animals: Social Development and our Connection to Other Species*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Simmons, D. A. (1994). Urban children's preferences for nature: Lessons for environmental education. *Children's Environments*, 11, 194-203.
- Sobel, D. (2002). *Children's Special Places: Exploring the Role of Forts, Dens, and Bush Houses in Middle Childhood*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press.
- Wells, N. M., & Evans, G. W. (2003). Nearby nature: A buffer of life stress among rural children. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 35(3), 311-330.

Week 4: Identifying with Nature: Humans need to care before they'll do anything!

This class will consider how our sense of identity shapes our attitudes and interactions with non-human animals, nature, and our willingness to engage in conservation and environmentally friendly behaviour. We will also consider how we can reconnect people to the natural world to foster concern for it.

Practical Session: Measuring environmental attitudes. Further details will be provided in class.

Readings:

- *Clayton, S. & Optow, S. (2003) *Identity and the Natural Environment: The Psychological Significance of Nature*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press
- *Clayton, S., & Myers, G. (2009) *Conservation Psychology: Understanding and Promoting Human Care for Nature*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell
- Fraser, J., Clayton, S., Sickler, J., & Taylor, A. (2009) Belonging at the zoo: Retired volunteers, conservation activism and collective identity. *Aging & Society*, 29, 351-368
- Gunnthorsdottir, A. (2001) Physical attractiveness of an animal species as a decision factor for its preservation. *Anthrozoös*, 14, 204-216
- Horton, D. (2004) Green distinctions: The performance of identity among environmental activists. *Sociological Review*, 52, 63-77
- Kollmuss, A. & Agyeman, J. (2002). Mind the gap: Why do people act environmentally and what are the barriers to pro-environmental behaviour? *Environmental Education Research*, 239-260.
- Light, A. (2000). What is an ecological identity? *Environmental Politics*, 9(4), 59-82.
- Neumann, S.L. (2010) Animal welfare volunteers: Who are they and why do they do what they do? *Anthrozoös*, 23(4), 351-364
- Staats, H. (2003). Understanding pro-environmental attitudes and behavior: An analysis and review of research based on the theory of planned behavior. In M. Bonnes, T. Lee, & M. Bonaiuto (Eds.), *Psychological Theories for Environmental Issues*. Wiltshire, UK: Antony Rowe.
- Thøgersen, J. (2004). A cognitive dissonance interpretation of consistencies and inconsistencies in environmentally responsible behavior. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 24, 93-103.
- *Tisdell, C., Wilson, C., & Nantha, H.S. (2005) Association of public support for survival of wildlife species with their likeability. *Anthrozoös*, 18(2), 160-174
- *Vining, J. (2003) The connection to other animals and caring for nature. *Human Ecology Review*, 10(2), 87-99

Week 5: Persuasion and Social Influence: Nudging people towards environmental sustainability.

Can we 'nudge' people to adopt more environmentally friendly behaviours? In this session we'll apply social psychological knowledge of persuasion and social influence for behavioural change. We'll also consider the promotion and marketing of environmental campaigns, products, and a more environmentally sustainable life.

Practical Session: Analysis of conservation/pro-environmental campaigns (including "greenwashing").

Prior to the class, find an advert, campaign, website devoted to selling an environmentally friendly product (e.g. electric car, washing up liquid, baby products,

green housing, etc.). Be prepared to discuss how effective you think it is. Think about what persuasive techniques are being used to make this product appear attractive (e.g. the use of an emotional 'green' message content, facts and figures, etc.). Bear in mind the concept of "greenwashing" – i.e. the process in which a product is presented to be greener than it actually is. Any evidence of this?

You might find the following article interesting and useful:

<https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2016/aug/20/greenwashing-environmentalism-lies-companies>

Readings:

- Cialdini, R. B. (2003). Crafting normative messages to protect the environment. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 12, 105-109.
- Cialdini, R. B., Reno, R. R., & Kallgren, C. A. (1990). A focus theory of normative conduct: Recycling the concept of norms to reduce littering in public places. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 58, 1015-1026.
- Lehner, M., Mont, O., & Heiskanen, E. (2016). Nudging—A promising tool for sustainable consumption behaviour?. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 134, 166-177.
- Linder, N., Lindahl, T., & Borgström, S. (2018). Using behavioural insights to promote food waste recycling in urban households—Evidence from a longitudinal field experiment. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, 352.
- *McKenzie-Mohr, D. (2000). Fostering sustainable behavior through community-based social marketing. *American Psychologist*, 55, 531-537.
- Nielsen, A. S. E., Sand, H., Sørensen, P., Knutsson, M., Martinsson, P., Persson, E., & Wollbrant, C. (2017). *Nudging and Pro-Environmental Behaviour*. Nordisk Ministerråd.
- Thieme, A., Comber, R., Miebach, J., Weeden, J., Kraemer, N., Lawson, S., & Olivier, P. (2012). " We've bin watching you" designing for reflection and social persuasion to promote sustainable lifestyles. In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 2337-2346). Available at: <https://dl.acm.org/doi/pdf/10.1145/2207676.2208394>