

KAREN FOLEY: So this session is DD317, advancing social psychology. Stephanie Taylor, Paul Stenner, and David Kaposi, welcome. I'm delighted that you're here to talk to us about this module. And I know that many students are excited about it. But Stephanie, I wonder if we could start with a brief overview just about some of the specifics about the module.

STEPHANIE TAYLOR: Right. Well, this is a module that people will be taking at level three. And we wanted-- this might sound a bit paradoxical, but we wanted to make it a simple module. Because it's likely to be sandwiched for many psychology students between whatever they did at last level two, and between a big dissertation module. And so, we wanted this-- because we knew we were dealing with fairly experienced students, we wanted this to be a straightforward module, which gives people the opportunity to pursue their own interests to a great extent.

So it's got five blocks, it's got five TMAs. It finishes [GASPS] with an exam, but it's a very simple exam. Just two essays in three hours. And we'll give you lots of preparation time. And we wanted to have an exam because we felt it gave people the opportunity to wrap up the content of the module in a really direct and manageable way without another drawn out project.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. And you've got an ICMA popped in the middle as well as a different form of assessment, also.

STEPHANIE TAYLOR: Low weighted, yeah. Yeah.

KAREN FOLEY: So what are the entry requirements and access? You mentioned that this will be something for third level psychology students, and it's included in the BPS recognised BSC social psychology.

STEPHANIE TAYLOR: That's right.

KAREN FOLEY: Who's going to be interested in it, though?

STEPHANIE TAYLOR: Well, and it's also included in the BSC psychology. Who's going to be interested? Well, social psychology is a very well-recognized field in psychology. It's of particular interest to people who want to understand why-- psychological issues, the use of psychology in the social world,

and so on, why that's not just a matter of pathologising individuals in a rather medical way, and going and looking for what's wrong with individuals.

It's for people who understand that we are always, in great part, the product of our context. The kinds of people we are now is very different to the kinds of people we were 100 years ago, or in other cultures in the big sense, of socio-historical periods. And so, it's for people who want to find out how the psychology they've studied goes out into the world, how it impacts on the world, and how it's also, in large part, the product of that world.

So this is about-- to use a term that we adopt a lot, it's about the social individual interface. And we anticipate that most of the students will be from a psychology background. But I think this will also be a module that might interest people with a more sociological background who feel that they would like to come into psychology, perhaps a bit more from an applied area, or as I say from social sociology, or maybe even geography, or another sort of socially-focused area.

KAREN FOLEY: Now, it's a blended approach that you've got. So you've got the textbooks. And there's also the online activities and material.

STEPHANIE Yes. So let me show you the textbook.

TAYLOR:

KAREN FOLEY: Hot off the press.

STEPHANIE Hot of the press. The cover. I don't have the actual book yet. In fact, there are two textbooks.

TAYLOR: It's one large book which is divided into two volumes. And the study sequence will be, as most of the modules are now, it will be centred online. And we used the online environment obviously for reinforcement activities for all those kind of basic things that you need for the kind of calendar which moves you through week by week. But we've also used it as the-- what, the base on which we've put lots of interviews with academics.

Because we wanted to show how people's personal interests and identities cross over into their academic work. So we could begin, for example, by asking a lot of our academic contributors, what's your personal interest in what you do? Why did you start doing it? And then coming from that, how does it go out and impact on the larger world? So that's probably the overview of the materials. Audiovisual material on the online environment, the textbooks.

We've given quite a lot of links outward to other material. And we give people quite of independent study time where we ask them to keep going outwards and looking.

KAREN FOLEY: Lovely. Thank you, Stephanie. I want to talk about some of the ways that this is applied. Because you've mentioned some of the things that have driven the academics around it. And if I could just sort of briefly mention the four blocks, which are the social psychology for contemporary society, new encounters across cultures in a globalised world, contemporary citizenship action and participation, and contemporary social psychological subjects.

STEPHANIE
TAYLOR: Yes. Well basically, we've said it's a changing social psychology for a changing world. The world's changing, people are changing, the study of people needs to be changing. But that's not all one way. Psychology goes outwards and changes the world. The world changes people, but then the changes in the world require that social psychology itself changes.

So we're looking at that dynamic interplay all the way. And some of the contemporary issues that we focus on, they include the kind of-- well, the state of the nation, really. We talk about neoliberalism, we talk about globalisation, we talk about immigration, we talk about multiculturalism. We talk about the identities of people today. So we talk about gender, changing meanings of gender, new femininities, new masculinities. We talk about conflict because unfortunately, it's very difficult to talk about the world today without talking about conflict.

And we talk about an area which might seem less social, which is the kind of area of positive psychology. And Paul will talk about that in a moment. But that's a very good example of this interplay between psychology, social psychology as disciplines, and the world which they kind of appear to start from, but in fact, in a funny feedback way, act on as well.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. Thank you very much, Sophie. That's a really brief outline about the module, the blocks, and some of the key themes. And I wonder if we could pick up on some of that. Because as usual, these sessions never have quite as much time as I would like to talk about some of these issues. David, I wonder if you can tell us about your area of interest, and just sort of give us an example. You wanted to talk a bit about violence and conflict.

DAVID KAPOSI: Yes. So Steph mentioned that conflict is an important social issue for us. Now, funnily enough, around two and a half decades ago with the collapse of communism fall of the Berlin Wall, there was an idea that actually there's not going to be much conflict in the future. There is this prevailing liberal order, and we people in the world will, at some point in the future-- near

future, perhaps, negotiate in a reasonable, rational manner whatever differences they have.

Now looking back, it sounds, of course, very naive. Because it is quite clear after these two and a half decades that conflict is here to stay. There are intractable international conflicts, like the Israeli-Palestinian issue, which is one we pick up in the book, actually. There are reemerging conflicts, say the one between Russia and Ukraine. And there are conflicts which I don't think anyone really foresaw, which is Brexit. But also, the emergence of the far right, Donald Trump, these kind of issues.

Now why does conflict seem to be so persistent? And violent conflict in particular? There can be many explanations to this question. But one way to think about it, which comes from the tradition of psychology, which is my personal interest, is to think of people as essentially conflicted from inside, conflicted beings. So rather than being surprised that conflict is with us, to start thinking of it in terms of how we are conflicted inside, and how we deal with all these internal conflicts.

And to think about society or conflict with reference-- not exquisite reference, but partly with reference to individual personal conflicts. This would be some sort of psychoanalytic approach to social psychology. And this will form one block in this module-- the final, the fifth book where we think about these issues from a psychoanalytic point of view.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. So dealing with some quite big issues there. Paul, you've written chapter 12 of the book, which is called *Happy Subjects and Humaneering, A Contemporary Subject*. So that's an interesting title.

PAUL STENNER: Yes, well the block title is *A Contemporary Subject*. And we were interested in this idea that the way in which people are, our experiences, our psychologies are not universal. They change from historical moment to historical moment. And so, this idea, the title *A Contemporary Subject* has got a dual meaning. I'll talk about the second meaning in a minute, but the first meaning of a contemporary subject is just that the topic of happiness, which I focus on in this chapter, is of the now, it's of the moment. It's something that's contemporary.

And it's contemporary in a couple of senses. You might say that people have forever been interested in their own happiness. And I'm sure that's probably true. There's a sense of which it's some-- there's something timeless about it. But there's two recent developments that make it contemporary. One is a development of a new approach to psychology, a new school of psychology over the last 10 or 15 years that Steph briefly mentioned, which is positive

psychology. And positive psychology sort of tells the story of itself as being a radical departure from previous types of psychology.

So it points out that in its classic incarnation, psychology always focuses on the negative. It's about delinquency, it's about a deviance, it's about psychopathology, it's about children who wet the bed or who can't write. It's about negative things. So have a problem, call in a psychologist. And positive psychologists take the view that it's much better to focus on the positive aspects of what they call human flourishing. So they've put happinesses right of the centre of the agenda of psychology.

And at the same time, and during the same period, governments, corporations throughout the world have become interested in happiness, in collecting data about the happiness of their populations, or the happiness of their work force, and using that data to make decisions about their policies, or about their strategies. So happiness has become part of the way in which we're governed today. And this goes hand-in-hand with the development of this approach to psychology. So we find that an interesting thing to focus on. And the-

KAREN FOLEY: The other area you talk about is human subjectivity.

PAUL STENNER: Yes.

KAREN FOLEY: So this is an interesting idea.

PAUL STENNER: Yes. This is, I suppose, the second meaning of a contemporary subject. This idea that we explore in the module, which is, I think, a very exciting idea, that human subjectivity-- by which we mean our own experiences of ourselves from our first person perspective, our thoughts, our feelings, our internal life, that our subjectivity is something that changes in different historical moments, in different social settings. It's as if we're-- we used to think of human beings as complete, and you would describe them objectively as psychologists.

Whereas now, we start to think of the human being as sort of incomplete, and completed by the social context, to some extent. And what's also interesting, and what we explore, is the idea that psychology as a discipline doesn't just describe what people are, it also provides ways of thinking about what we might become. It influences the way in which we act, the way in which we think about ourselves.

KAREN FOLEY: So is this what you mean by-- you mentioned the word humaneering earlier.

PAUL STENNER: Yeah, human-- it's a strange--

KAREN FOLEY: Is this a term you've invented? [LAUGHS]

PAUL STENNER: We didn't coin it. It comes actually from a social psychology textbook, mid-twentieth century from the States. But the word grabbed me and my colleagues so much that we decided we would use it. Because it's a pun, of course, on engineering. And just as in the physical sciences you would get knowledge about the physical world that you would then apply via engineering, the idea of social psychology conventionally, traditionally out of itself is a humaneering discipline.

You come up with objective scientific knowledge in the laboratory, and then you apply that to change people's conduct and way of thinking and way of feeling in order to, in some way, improve or enhance that conduct. But of course, this raises some kinds of ethical issues about who says what it is that people should be like? Who gives us the ideal that we're aspiring to in our humaneering activity? And in some ways, nowadays social psychology is being used in some ways that are quite problematic.

So you might be aware in the recent US elections, for example, but also in the referendum around Brexit. A lot of social psychology knowledge was used to influence the way in which people voted. Quite explicitly designed to manipulate people's voting habits. And this used data, for example, gathered from Facebook, using the fact that lots of people are on Facebook to get lots of data about personality types, and to correlate that with online behaviour-- the kinds of things people like, for example.

And in this way, social psychological knowledge was used, in a very tailored way, to influence people who were perceived to be on the cusp, not quite knowing exactly what they were going to vote. And a lot of this was sponsored by one side rather than the other. So this, I think, illustrates that, some of the controversy play in this mission of trying to humaneer people. Who says in which direction people should be taken?

KAREN FOLEY: Awesome. Very current issues, and very, very topical ones. Stephanie, I wonder if we could end by talking about the blog. Because the psychology team do a blog. And we've been spending a bit of time talking throughout today about how students can subscribe to these blogs as a way of both engaging with the academic community, and having really nice, current, bite-sized bits of information.

Now your blog-- and we'll show you the link for this. And you can also get that link on the resources page of the website. Your latest edition was about Theresa May eating chips. And you were talking here about performing identity, a very interesting piece.

STEPHANIE

Yes. I mean, we're having fun with the blog because we want to show how social psychology comes out and applies to the world that we're living in now. The next post actually will be on voting. But I had fun writing about Theresa May eating chips in the street. And the point is that this does actually indicate a couple of the big topics of the module. One is identity, and the other is this idea, as you say, of performing identities.

TAYLOR:

In other words, it's not-- identity is not all about who we are, as if we're fixed like a flavour of the month, but about also what we do. And to perform an identity successfully-- I'm distracted because there seem to be messages coming in.

KAREN FOLEY:

Yeah, we do. We've got some messages. Can we answer some questions? Sophie.

SOPHIE:

We just had a really good question in from Steve. He's asking, would positive psychologists agree with some other psychologists, such as Daniel Nettle? He suggests that happiness may be unachievable, and the best we can strive for is mild contentment.

STEPHANIE

Well, we've taken-- another of our big words is critique. And we have taken a very critical view to social psychology, to positive psychology. But Paul, do you want to answer that?

TAYLOR:

PAUL STENNER:

Yeah. I mean, I think actually that's probably a good one for David.

[LAUGHTER]

I'm passing it on. Because famously, Freud remarked about taking psychoanalysis to the States when he went.

DAVID KAPOS:

So his very cheerful statement. Freud had this very cheerful statement that what we can achieve in therapy-- I mean, this is years and years and years of therapy, to substitute historical misery with common unhappiness. So that was his cheerful vision of society. That's how much we can achieve, to be-- just have this common unhappiness.

KAREN FOLEY:

Oh, great. Well, we'll look forward to that, then.

[LAUGHTER]

So Stephanie, this blog is something that students can engage with. And do take a look at that. And again, very interesting. And I guess this would really appeal to a lot of students who, early days, are very interested in identity and this idea about performing identity. And this is a chance to explore that in a lot more detail, looking at a lot more of the ways that that could be applied.

STEPHANIE

TAYLOR:

Well, we look at it in relation to, as I say, identity not as purely individual, but this social individual interface. And the way that social expectations shape and limit how we can perform certain identities. I mean, the classic point is, how difficult is it for a woman to perform a senior authoritative political role, given that there are few attached ideas about that? The kind of blueprint for how to do it well it's not really very well-established.

We touch on that briefly. But we talk with more seriousness than Theresa May eating chips. We talk about gender, about the expectations which are currently attached to gender. And these have changed-- womanness, manness carry different expectations now. And there may be difficulties for some people in performing certain identities. We have a wonderful interview with Rosalind Gill where she talks about the constraints that are on young women today in a post-feminist environment.

Interesting idea that our social world is one in which we all know, or think we know, what feminism is, what feminist ideas are. So how does that come back and impact on our gender identities? And we look also-- my own particular interest in a somewhat different area, which is worker identities. Being a good worker. And in fact, many of our ideas about work and working and a working life actually date back a bit to a sort of arrangement which was never everybody's arrangement.

And is now really relatively few people where workers contained within the workplace, fixed working hours, and home is a completely different place, possibly with a different person in charge of it. And we consider, OK, how has being a good worker changed? We've got concepts like being entrepreneurial now. And how does this idea, this expectation about being a good worker, how does it come back in the form of-- well, what Paul's talked about, humaneering? The kind of ways that we discipline ourselves, we teach ourselves to be different, to be maybe more entrepreneurial.

And this is part of what we call subjectification, the making of subjectivity.

KAREN FOLEY:

Stephanie, there's so much in there. And that's all we've got time for. But you've given us a

wonderful flavour about some of the issues and topics and ways of doing things in the module. So David, Paul, and Stephanie, thank you very much for joining me today. You can find out more about the module by looking at the resources page on the website, and also study at the OU. We'll be back in a few minutes--

STEPHANIE Don't forget the blog.

TAYLOR:

KAREN FOLEY: Oh yes, and the blog of course as well. We'll be back in a few minutes. We're just to show you the start of one of the videos from A344, and then we will be back in our next session in a couple of minutes. See you soon.