Climate change
- and other big issues –
in the psychology classroom

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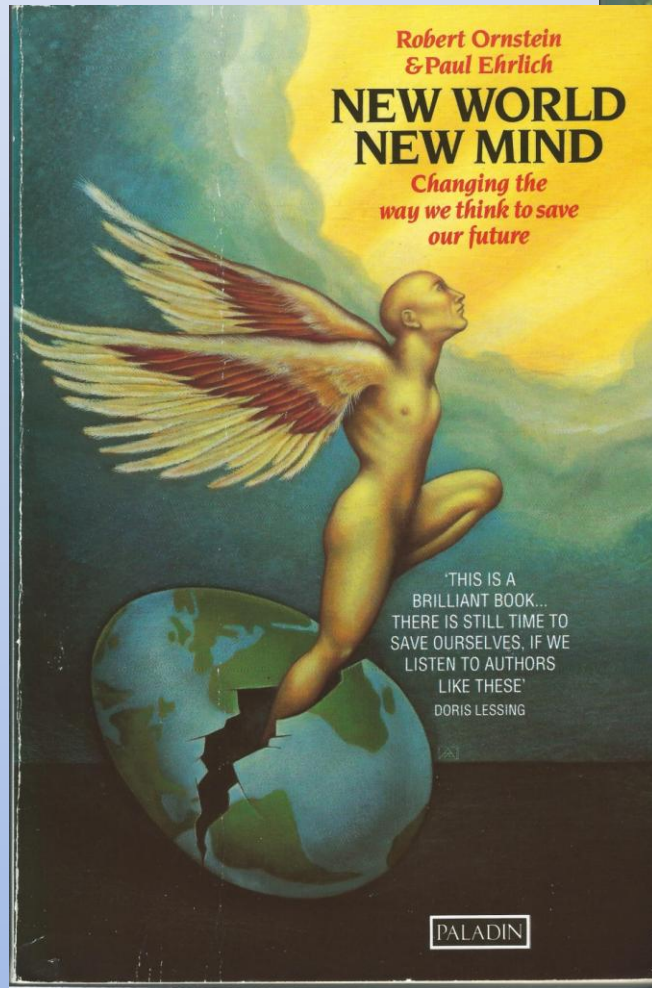
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…..Klimawandel…. ilmastonmuutoksen….. klimaændringer….. klimatförändring
….loftslagsbreytingar….. изменение климата……. le changement climatique…..
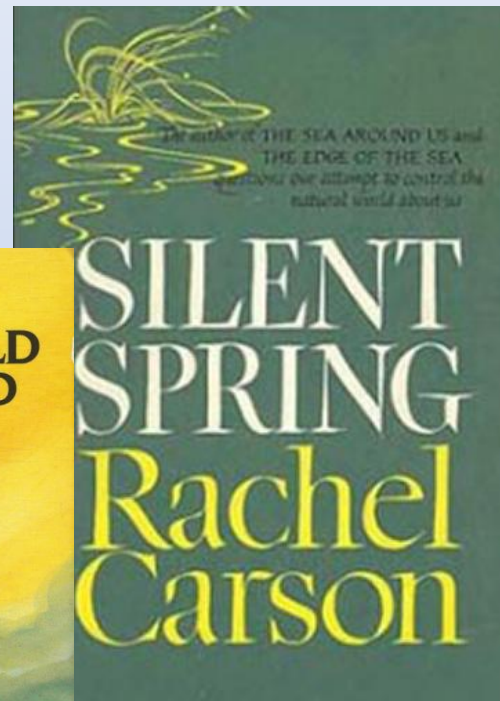..cambio climático….. klimaatverandering ….. zmena klímy…… klimatŝanĝiĝo….

Workshop aims and overview

- should we as psychology teachers aim to equip young people to address the challenges they will face in life?

- …including threats of environmental degradation and climate change?

- can psychology course content be taught via climate change topics?

- what is the relevance of core perspectives of psychology - cognitive, biological, social, developmental, individual differences - to environmental issues?

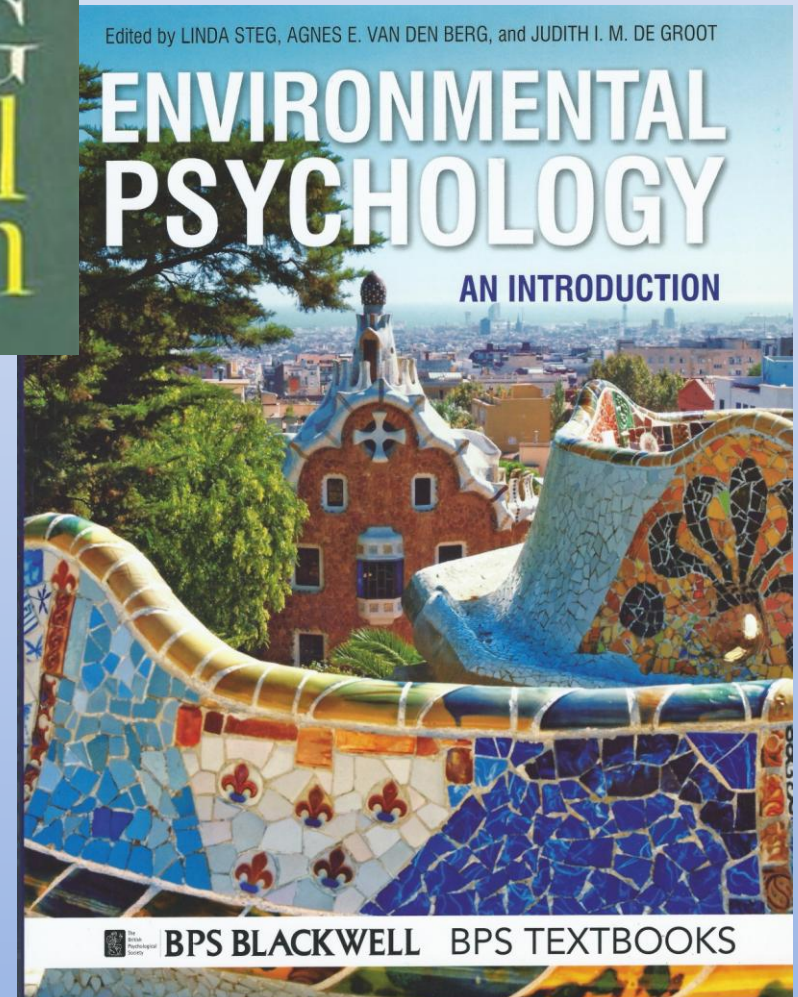- what kind of classroom activities might we use?

Robert Ornstein & Paul Ehrlich
NEW WORLD NEW MIND
Changing the way we think to save our future

'THIS IS A BRILLIANT BOOK... THERE IS STILL TIME TO SAVE OURSELVES, IF WE LISTEN TO AUTHORS LIKE THESE'
DORIS LESSING

PALADIN

1991

The author of THE SEA AROUND US and THE EDGE OF THE SEA questions our attempt to control the natural world about us

SILENT SPRING
Rachel Carson

1962

2012

Edited by LINDA STEG, AGNES E. VAN DEN BERG, and JUDITH I. M. DE GROOT

ENVIRONMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY
AN INTRODUCTION

BPS BLACKWELL   BPS TEXTBOOKS

The context

- global concern about environmental degradation and climate change
- UNFCCC - the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1994)
- Rio 1992, Rio+20 in 2012
- Paris Agreement 2016: commitment to limit global temperature rise this century to 1.5 degrees.
- currently near-universal ratification: 175 / 197 parties

I'M FOR CLIMATE ACTION
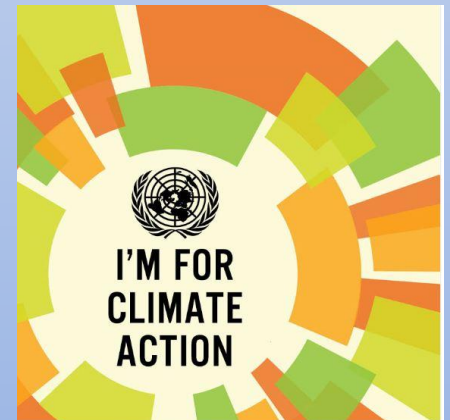
The context

- UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pgNLonYOc9s
- Sustainable Development Goals / teaching SDGs
  - http://www.teachsdgs.org/
- SDG 13 – Climate Action aims to "take urgent action to combat climate change and its impact";
- meanwhile the field of environmental psychology has developed
- psychological science applied to climate change, e.g. Stern 2011

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 13
Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*

Theoretical concepts & research from the psychology literature

- Values and beliefs (eg Ding et al, 2011)

- Connectedness to nature (eg Gatersleben, 2008)

- Social norms and subjective norms (eg Ham et al, 2015)

- Social dilemmas, eg 'tragedy of the commons' (Hardin, 1968)

- Barriers to action, eg 'dragons of inaction' (Gifford, 2011); 'just world' beliefs (eg Feinberg, 2011)

- Paul Stern (2011): Contributions of psychology to limiting climate change. *American Psychologist* 66:4

Activity 1:
psychological concepts & climate change

Scenarios

Draw a line to link each scenario to any relevant concepts/processes

1. Jenny is very worried about global warming and signs many petitions to reduce the use of fossil fuels, encourage public transport etc. She also loves to travel and in the last few years she's flown to Sydney, Buenos Aires, Vancouver and Beijing, although she is aware of the effects air travel has on climate change.
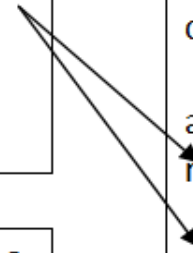
2. John loves animals and watched a TV programme about the natural world, which pointed out the effects of a warming climate on the ice floes in the Arctic region and hence the danger for polar bears living there. "That's just

Psychological concepts / processes

attitudes / attitude change /persuasion

attitudes-behaviour relationship

cognitive dissonance

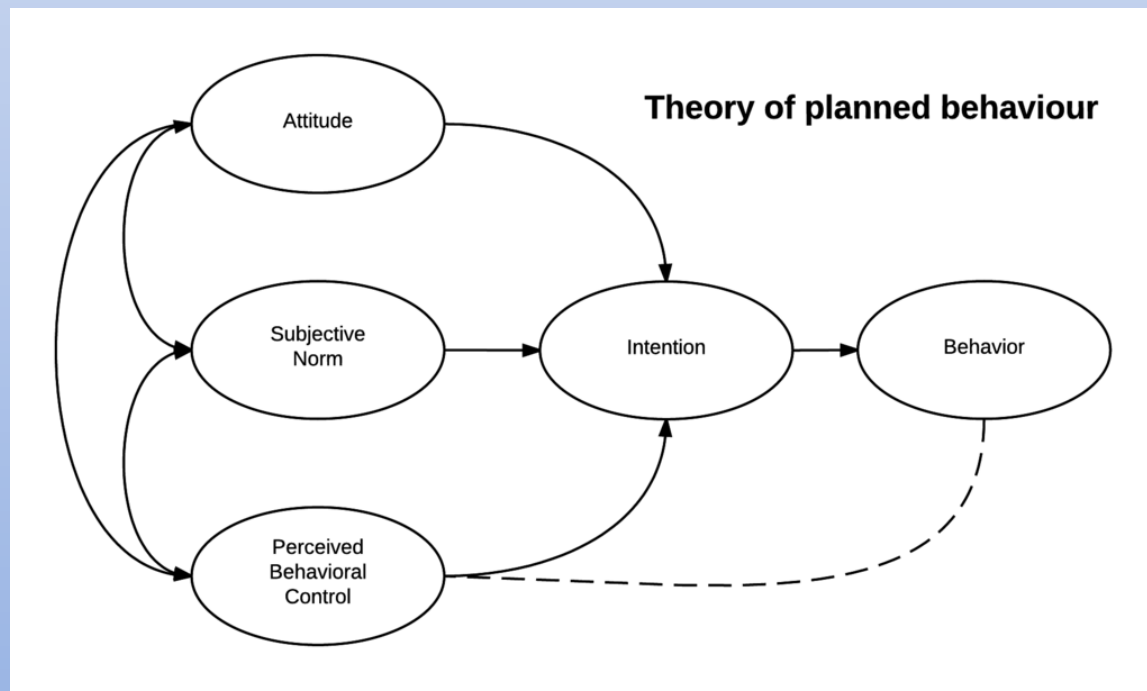# Activity 2: ideas for students' practical research tasks

- we shall demonstrate an experimental research task which you could use with students – we hope you are willing participants!

- we also have a list of more ideas – these can be used either as classroom activities or as student research projects.

- please send us your own ideas too!

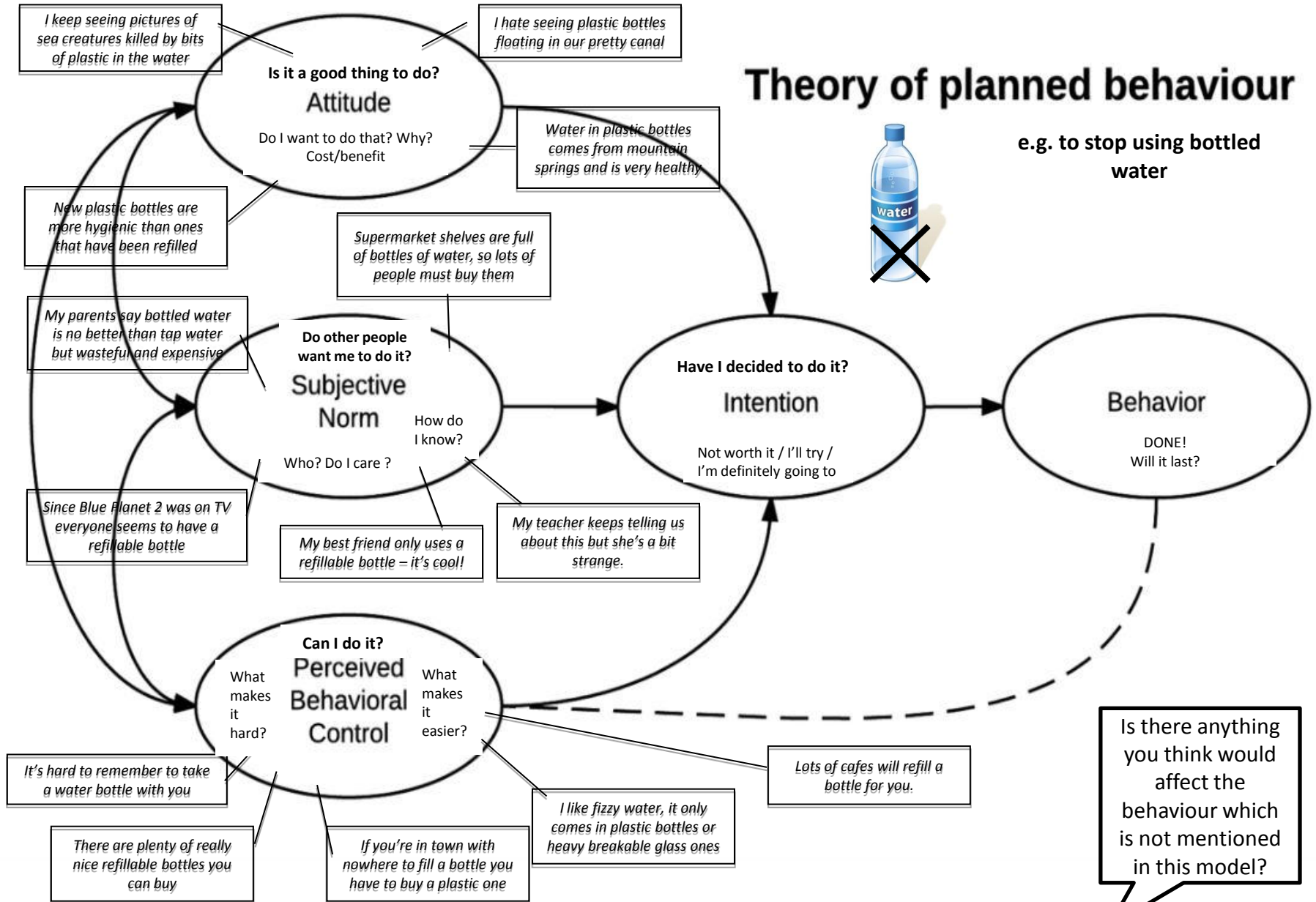# Activity 3: applying psychological theory to climate change

Can we teach psychological theory in relation to climate change and environmental concerns?

Example: **Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) - in the domain of social cognition – can be applied to pro-environmental behaviours:**

Theory of planned behaviour

e.g. to stop using bottled water

I keep seeing pictures of sea creatures killed by bits of plastic in the water

I hate seeing plastic bottles floating in our pretty canal

Is it a good thing to do?

Attitude

Do I want to do that? Why? Cost/benefit

Water in plastic bottles comes from mountain springs and is very healthy

New plastic bottles are more hygienic than ones that have been refilled

Supermarket shelves are full of bottles of water, so lots of people must buy them

My parents say bottled water is no better than tap water but wasteful and expensive

Do other people want me to do it?

Subjective Norm

How do I know?

Who? Do I care ?

Have I decided to do it?

Intention

Not worth it / I'll try / I'm definitely going to

Behavior

DONE!
Will it last?

Since Blue Planet 2 was on TV everyone seems to have a refillable bottle

My best friend only uses a refillable bottle – it's cool!

My teacher keeps telling us about this but she's a bit strange.

Can I do it?

Perceived Behavioral Control

What makes it hard?

What makes it easier?

It's hard to remember to take a water bottle with you

There are plenty of really nice refillable bottles you can buy

If you're in town with nowhere to fill a bottle you have to buy a plastic one

I like fizzy water, it only comes in plastic bottles or heavy breakable glass ones

Lots of cafes will refill a bottle for you.

Is there anything you think would affect the behaviour which is not mentioned in this model?

An example of social / subjective norms being used as part of a college anti-smoking campaign

Activity 3: applying psychological theory to climate change (cont'd)

You can try applying other psychological theories in a similar way (theories shown as diagrams are very suitable!), e.g:

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) - a developmental / community perspective: what are the influences on an individual's attitudes and behaviour towards climate change, in the microsystem, mesosystem etc?
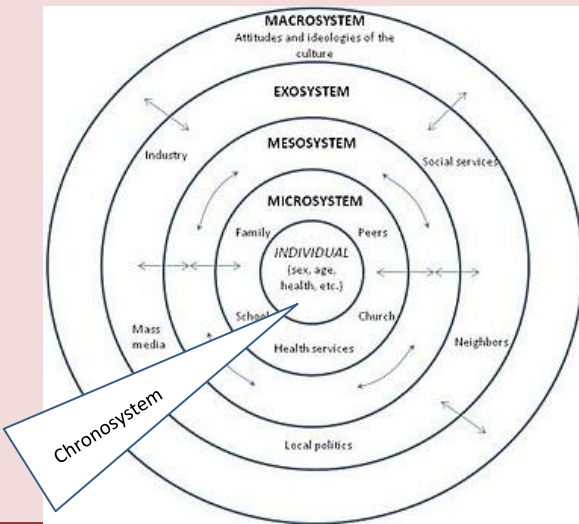
Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1954) – a humanistic / motivation perspective: how are we motivated to care for our environment?

Questions for discussion

We think that climate change / environmental issues can be used to teach many different areas of psychology – **what do you think**?

- our activities focus mainly on *individual* action, but environmental issues must also be addressed by governments; could this be the basis of a cross-disciplinary project, to include not just psychology but also philosophy, politics, citizenship…?

- should the big global issues affecting young people – such as climate change - be the starting point for designing the psychology curriculum, rather than the traditional core areas?

- is it our role, as psychology teachers, to try to change people's behaviour?

- are there ethical concerns in discussing environmental concerns in psychology lessons? is it a sensitive issue, which we should avoid, for fear of causing student distress?

Finally….

If you teach, or have taught, psychological aspects of climate change / environmental issues - please tell us about it.

Tell us your views!

Our email addresses are on the handout and the delegate list.

Thanks for taking part in our workshop!

Useful web pages

- http://unfccc.int/paris_agreement/items/9485.php
- https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics/climatechange
- http://www.teachsdgs.org/
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pgNLonYOc9s
- http://ipcc.ch/organization/organization.shtml
- http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http:/www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/sternreview_index.htm

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- Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory diagram: Hchokr at English Wikipedia (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0)], via Wikimedia Commons
- Hierarchy of Needs diagram: Maslow, A. (1954) *Motivation and Personality*. New York: Harper
- Anti-smoking project, West Lothian College, Scotland : http://www.west-lothian.ac.uk/