Welcome

Welcome to Discourse, Science, and Publics. We are a research group based in the Department of Psychology at University of Guelph, comprised of undergraduate students, graduate students, post-docs, and faculty. The group meets regularly to discuss ideas and research articles as well as conducting ongoing research. The group is directed by Dr Kieran O’Doherty.

The work of the research group spans a range of interests. The name of the group characterizes the main domains within which research is conducted, though students may choose to work within one of those domains or across them. As a whole, the work of the group is distinctly interdisciplinary and students are encouraged to challenge boundaries and seek new ways of integrating these and other knowledge domains.

**Discourse**

This aspect of the work of the research group focuses broadly on the application of qualitative methods in psychological research. Though there is an emphasis on social constructionist epistemology and discourse analytic methodology, a much wider scope of qualitative research is considered. Awareness of the interdependence of methodology, particular research questions, and broader epistemologies is fostered, and students are required to consider the implications of particular theoretical orientations in developing their own research projects. Although much of the work of the research group focuses on applying qualitative methods to problems in the domains of health, science, and public deliberation (see below), collaborations in all areas of discourse are welcomed.

**Science**

There is growing awareness of the ethical, legal, and social implications of science and social psychologists have an important role to play in this regard. Science occurs within a social context, social factors are integral in its production, and new scientific developments in turn irrevocably change the social relations that govern our lives. Although these considerations are relevant to all forms of science, they are particularly salient in the domain of health and emerging biotechnologies. Developments in such fields as genomics, synthetic biology, and pharmacology are changing the ways in which many
social experiences and interactions take place – knowledge of the social dimensions of emerging science and technology needs to match these developments.

Particular areas of interest include the communication of genetic risk, implications of research participation for children involved in ongoing cohort studies (e.g., cystic fibrosis), and the social and psychological consequences of large scale biological research projects and platforms like human tissue biobanks. In addition to psychological theory, the work of the group draws on such areas as STS (Science and Technology Studies), philosophy of science, and medical sociology.

Publics

There is increasing emphasis on public engagement in many areas of social policy. Research thus focuses on identifying and documenting public perspectives on the one hand, and developing and evaluating mechanisms whereby public can be actively engaged to produce policy input. A particularly promising field is that of deliberative democracy. The research group engages in both theoretical research as well as practical implementation of deliberation exercises.

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