

Editorial

HELLO AND WELCOME TO THE new and improved 71st edition of the PsyPAG Quarterly! First, I would like to extend a sincere thank you to my fellow editor's, Naomi Andrew, Kyle Brown and Lesley Jacobs, who have all greatly contributed to the current issue. Although each of the four editors take the lead once a year, each edition is undoubtedly a team effort.

We open the current issue with a reply to the recent article published by the Manchester Confidential magazine titled "Dyslexia is a Myth" written by Graham Stringer (MP for Blackley). Next up is an informative article wrote by Rusi Jaspal which discusses conducting qualitative research with British south Asians. The following article talks about the longevity of Lecturer's, this piece wrote by John Radford can be regarded as being wrote by a voice of experience.

We include two informative conference reviews. The first discusses the 4th European Conference on Positive Psychology, held in Croatia. The second discusses the Division of Sport & Exercise Psychology Conference held in London. Benjamin

Gardner writes about rapid, and cost-effective online participant recruitment.

The current issue closes with two light-hearted yet informative papers. The first discusses PhD life in Denmark. Martin Hammershøj Olesen discusses key topics, such as, what is required of PhD students, the expectations of supervisors, and of course the Viva. The second is appropriately entitled 'Surviving a PhD'. Dr Orla McBride, a recently qualified psychology postgraduate gives an overview of the PhD experience with a focus on how to survive the end viva. Undoubtedly, an article of great interest for all postgrads, in particular for those of you who are nearing the end.

Finally, on behalf of the editorial team and myself, we would like to extend a sincere thank you to all past and present contributors.

The deadline for sending articles for inclusion in the September issue is the 8th July.

Cherie Armour

On behalf of the PsyPAG Quarterly Editing Team 2008/09
Naomi Andrew, Cherie Armour, Kyle Brown and Lesley Jacobs

Chair's Column

AS I WRITE THIS I HAVE 174 days left of my PhD. My supervisors are about to contact potential examiners, my chapters are being drafted, data is being analysed and panic is setting in. Although I am on course to finish by my 174 day deadline, a lot of my time recently has been taken up by minor tasks that take considerably longer to achieve than expected. Last week, for example, I spent three days formatting tables and headings! To be honest, this was largely due to a lack of effective planning – throughout my thesis I have been writing sections of each chapter and analysing results, but seemed to do this slightly differently each time I did it. Throughout this menial task, the one thought that kept going through my mind was ‘why hadn’t I decided the layout of my thesis earlier?’. This led to me thinking about all the other things that I did at the start of my PhD journey which saved me considerable amounts of time, as well as all the things that I didn’t do that I wish I had! Upon talking to the PsyPAG committee, this seemed to be a rather common thing, and I have asked a few committee members to share some hints and tips that

people may find useful with regard to writing up.

Learn how to use referencing software (e.g., Endnote, Refman) before you start writing. Although they take quite a bit of time to learn, it will save you a considerable amount of time in the long run.

Attend conferences near the start of the PhD – even if you have no data to present, you could make some valuable contacts that will help you out during your PhD journey. This is especially true of the PsyPAG annual conference; several people that I met here in the first year of my PhD have helped me with various aspects of my research throughout (e.g., finding participants, passing on relevant papers).

Write method sections whilst testing participants – the materials and procedure will be fresh in your mind and this also means that a substantial part of the thesis will be drafted at a relatively early stage of the PhD. The same applies for the results section – don’t just analyse the data and leave it sitting there – it is helpful to write up the full results section as soon as you have finished analysing the data.

Keep a journal or record of all training courses attended, conferences presented at, key achievements, etc. during the PhD. When you start applying for jobs and have to write personal statements, it is useful to have all of this written down, so you don't forget anything. Likewise, update your CV each time you have had a paper published or been to a conference or training course. It is much easier to do this as you go along, than to rack your brain trying to come up with these after three years of PhD achievements!

Take full advantage of all workshops and personal development courses on offer to postgraduates (including the fantastic Postgraduates who Teach workshops http://www.psychology.heacademy.ac.uk/html/postgrads_who_teach.asp). They may not all seem relevant at the time, but some of the skills you can gain through these courses may prove invaluable later on.

Write notes after each supervision meeting – not only will you have a record of everything you need to do and a way of making sure you haven't forgotten anything, but you can also tell if your supervisors have contradicted themselves later on!!

Read one or two articles a week, rather than accumulating a huge pile that you need to work your way through all at once. Although this may seem tiresome, it really is worth it at the end, so be strict with yourself and make sure you get it done!!

Get involved in PsyPAG – being a PsyPAG rep can look great on your CV, you can meet lots of other postgraduates and researchers, and can make a difference to the postgraduate community. Our AGM (where new committee members can be elected) is at our Annual Conference in Cardiff, so it is well worth attending (www.psypag.co.uk.conference/).

Also, one recurring theme that emerged from my discussions with various committee members was that just because something works for one person does not mean it will work for another. Therefore, don't feel bad if you haven't been doing all of the above, and don't feel defeated if something doesn't work for you. Lastly, there is no need to panic if you are in the final stages of the PhD and haven't done the majority of the above – it is never too late to start!

Happy PhD writing!

Laura Crane

PsyPAG Chair

The MP Who Took On a Mythical Beast Called Dyslexia with a Magic Bullet: A Rejoinder

Emma McDonald¹, Lindsey Cooper² and Josephine Booth³

ON THE 13TH JANUARY, 2009 the mass media widely reported an article called “Dyslexia is a Myth” written by Graham Stringer (MP for Blackley), in the Manchester Confidential magazine, in which Mr Stringer expressed his radical opinions about dyslexia. Amongst his many comments he stated that “the education establishment...have invented a brain disorder called dyslexia” and that “to label children as dyslexic because they’re confused by poor teaching methods is wicked”.

It is noteworthy that dyslexia was not invented by the educational establishment, it was first reported in the medical literature. James Hinshelwood (1917) a physician, was one of the first well-known dyslexia (previously known as wordblindness) researchers. In his 1917 book, the first developmental case he cites was published in The British Medical Journal

(1896) by Dr. Morgan, also a physician. In Tim Miles’s book (2006) about his fifty years in dyslexia research he shares his opinion on labelling children ‘dyslexic’; “If one does not give accurate labels, such as ‘dyslexic’, inaccurate ones will take their place, for example, ‘lazy’” (70-71p).

Mr Stringer’s solution or the ‘magic bullet ‘ to the dyslexia ‘epidemic ‘ is to teach synthetic phonics in schools and he goes on to cite the West Dunbartonshire study, which he says “eliminated illiteracy”.

The final report from the West Dunbartonshire study makes no mention about dyslexia; instead it discusses functional illiteracy (MacKay 2007). Mr Stringer’s article suggests he is under the impression dyslexia and illiteracy are equivalent, which is not the case. Referring to these terms as equivalent reflects his

limited understanding of a topic he has chosen to talk very publicly about.

As the first two authors are Ph.D. students with dyslexia, we found Graham Stringer's statements disappointing; we do not feel that we have been confused by poor teaching methods, quite the reverse. We feel that recognition and understanding of dyslexia has played an integral part in helping us progress within our academic careers. Instead of responding to Mr Stringer's statements any further*, we wanted to use this example to raise some of the bigger issues, particularly that psychological and overtly physical disabilities are not treated equally.

This article also aims to demonstrate the challenges and importance of communicating scientific findings to the public and media. News stories, such as Mr Striger's, often have a long-lasting negative effect for people with dyslexia and perpetuate stigma. Inaccurate media reports do influence public opinion and people who are yet to encounter the disability firsthand; this can then have a secondary impact affecting people who have a good understanding of dyslexia.

Lindsey has had first hand experience of how news stories can influence

parent's decisions "if my parents had listened to my primary school teacher when she spotted my dyslexia, instead of blaming her teaching methods, my condition would have been diagnosed 15 years previously. Knowing I had dyslexia at an early age would have drastically improved my support networks, grades, and confidence in some disciplines".

Emma researched dyslexia for her Ph.D. and has met many students like Lindsey, who were not officially diagnosed until late in their academic career; "In my experience many individuals were aware of their literacy deficits and most were aware they were dyslexic. The most common reason that they were not diagnosed until they arrived at University was because their parents either did not recognise, or did not want to accept the condition actually existed and applied to their child. Others said that their parents wanted to protect them from the stigma surrounding the condition by not having a formal diagnosis".

Because dyslexia is a recognised condition, receiving a 'label' can be positive and facilitate learning experiences within the education system. However, when considering employment options, people with

dyslexia might be less keen to disclose the condition as a result of public perceptions of dyslexia. This can be especially true in the recruitment process and it's especially easy to see how this will make candidates nervous in the current climate. Will a dyslexic candidate be considered a potential burden for future employers? Will they be compared less favourably to other applicants, even if their qualifications and experience match? Even though legislation exists to protect people with disabilities, some individuals can't help but feel vulnerable in disclosing these details. This is especially true when news stories like Mr Stringer's, overtly claim that dyslexia is not a real disability, but used by people who are taking advantage of the system to get "financial and educational incentives for being bad at spelling and reading."

In the UK, people with dyslexia are offered protection from discrimination in the form of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (c.50). The Act recognises that dyslexia exists and can continue to affect an individual throughout his or her life. It also provides protection to adult workers with dyslexia by requiring employers to make necessary accommodations, if needed.

Hypothetically speaking, if Mr Stringer made similar or equivalent comments about a physical disability covered by the same act of parliament (e.g. paralysis), there might be a considerably different response. The fact he deems it acceptable to make such comments suggests there is a wider perceptual problem that needs addressing. Is it still the case that mental and psychological disabilities are not treated in the same way as a physical impairment?

As stated earlier, the physiological markers of dyslexia have been investigated for many years with a history of case studies, family genealogy, and post-mortem studies (review in Beaton 2004). Longitudinal studies of twins have been investigating the broader question of whether dyslexia is genetic condition, with at least 50% of variance explained by genetic factors (Olson & Byrne 2005; Olson 2008). Studies such as Pennington and Gilger (1996, cited in Shaywitz, Gruen, & Shaywitz 2007) reported that dyslexia is found in between 23% and 65% of children of dyslexic parents and 40% of siblings of a dyslexic child are also affected. Furthermore, there has been extremely promising research that is trying to

identify and label genetic biomarkers of dyslexia (Paracchini, Scerri, & Monaco 2007). Although this research cannot permit genetic testing for dyslexia, the data is informing Individual Educational Plans for children with a familial risk of dyslexia (Shaywitz, Morris, & Shaywitz 2008). Comments like those of Mr Stringer suggest that until there is a genetic test for dyslexia and it is recognised by the public and media as a biological condition, there will not be parity.

Another issue which emerges from Mr Stringer's article not only relates to dyslexia but also more widely to the way that the scientific method is seen by the media and the public. If conditions are still being debated in literature, there seems to be an assumption that the underlying concept is weak. In the case of Mr Stringer's article he says "it is also pretty damning that according to Professor Julian Elliot there are 28 different definitions of dyslexia", from this he then suggests that dyslexia itself is a myth. There are a number of different definitions of dyslexia (they only differ slightly) but we see this as a positive factor and a reflection of a vibrant research area. As a researcher it is encouraging to find that your field of study is evolving and

the fact the topic is still being researched and debated is a strength rather than a weakness. As Einstein remarked "No amount of experimentation can ever prove me right; a single experiment can prove me wrong." (Calaprice, 2005. p.291). The media appears to portray simple bite size facts that are set in stone, which goes against the very nature of research.

Whilst Mr Stringer reports "There can be no rational reason why this 'brain disorder' is of epidemic proportions in Britain but does not appear in South Korea or Nicaragua", scientific empirical reviews conclude that there is a "consistent pattern in specific dyslexia, which does not depend on any one writing system or geographic location." (Grigorenko, 2001 p. 96). It is clear therefore, that one of the most important messages that psychologists may take from Mr Stringer's article is the need to communicate scientific findings (especially when surrounding contentious issues) in as clear and transparent manner to the public as possible, which does not aim to perpetuate stigma and has the potential to encourage objective thought.

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*The British Dyslexia Association and Dyslexia Action made response's at the time, their responses are on their websites in the news section and have information about dyslexia aimed at a lay audience.

We suggest these sources if you want to find out more about dyslexia and related research:

Book:

Snowling, M. J. (2000). *Dyslexia* (2nd ed.). (2000), xiv, MA, US: Blackwell Publishing.

Journal article:

Vellutino, F. R., Fletcher, J. M., Snowling, M. J., & Scanlon, D. M. (2004). Specific reading disability (dyslexia): what have we learned in the past four decades? *Journal of Child*

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[http://www.manchesterconfident
ial.com/index.asp?Sessionx=lpq
iNw86JD7rIpqiNwF6IHqi&realna
me=Dyslexia_is_a_myth](http://www.manchesterconfidential.com/index.asp?Sessionx=lpqiNw86JD7rIpqiNwF6IHqi&realname=Dyslexia_is_a_myth)

Division of Health Psychology Annual Conference, 9th – 11th September 2009, Aston University

Conference Bursaries Available

The DHP will be sponsoring up to 8 students who wish to attend the DHP conference at Aston University, September 9-11th, 2009. Each bursary will cover registration, accommodation, entrance to the social events, and travel to the DHP Annual Conference.

Applications are welcome from 6th April 2009 until the closing date of 26th June 2009. UK-based candidates with a first degree in psychology who are not yet eligible for Chartered Health Psychologist status (e.g., postgraduate students, research assistants) will be considered. Applicants should be DHP members. Preference will be given to those who have had a paper or poster accepted (or is under review) at the conference – please include your abstract with your application.

It is a condition of acceptance of the award that the recipient should submit a report of some aspect of the

conference to Health Psychology Update by the deadline immediately following the conference.

Applications should be made in the form of a letter addressed to the National Conference Organiser of the DHP (see below) and include:

(i) a detailed statement of why a bursary is needed (e.g., because a postgraduate student is not funded by a research council or their institution); why they think they should be awarded a bursary and how they will benefit from the conference, (ii) a supporting statement from a supervisor or referee, (iii) their abstract and submission status (submitted/accepted)). The committee reserves the right not to make awards should no suitable candidates be found.

Applications should be sent to Dr Caroline Henderson, Division of Health Psychology National Conference Organiser, at cjhend@essex.ac.uk

‘Insider’ or ‘outsider’? Conducting qualitative psychological research with British South Asians

Rusi Jaspal: Department of Psychology, Royal Holloway, University of London.

IN RECENT YEARS SOCIAL psychologists, as well as scholars from a variety of other academic disciplines, have become increasingly interested in identity among Britons of South Asian (BSA) descent, using a plethora of methodological approaches, both quantitative and qualitative (Cinnirella & Hamilton, 2007; Ghuman, 2003; Vadher & Barrett, in press). Although there is now a burgeoning academic literature focusing upon BSA identity, it does not appear to be matched by scholarly enquiry into methodological issues such as the ‘insider’/ ‘outsider’ dynamics as experienced by researchers and participants (for an exception, see Archer, 2001). This is perhaps not entirely surprising given traditional psychology’s focus upon quantitative research, which expects and assumes a degree of ‘objectivity’, whereby the researcher and ‘the researched’ are entirely separate and independent of

one another (Coyle, 2007). However, in qualitative psychological research this is rarely possible. But what can be said about the relationship between the researcher and the participants? What is the importance of the researcher within the broader context of the research?

Being a primarily, though not exclusively, qualitative researcher who identifies as ‘British Asian’, these issues are only too close to home. Having been sensitised to the ‘dangers’ of reflecting my own personal experiences and ‘informed’ views onto those of participants and thereby overwriting them, I had always convinced myself that in my research this was not the case. However, upon reflection, this has been problematic possibly due to the frequent ‘blurring’ of the boundaries between researcher and participant. Through a discussion of some of my recent research on language and identity among British Asians (Jaspal,

2008; Jaspal & Coyle, 2009a, 2009b), which sought to explore qualitatively participants' cognitions towards the languages associated with their ethnic and religious identities, I provide an account of the 'insider'/ 'outsider' dynamics underlying the research process. This article is based upon notes from a research diary in which I reflected upon my interpretations of these dynamics. It explores how aspects of my identity as a male, British Asian social psychologist may have shaped the research process.

Researching 'us'

Although I was mindful of the differences in background between myself and many of the participants, I still felt that I was able to position myself alongside them in a number of ways. Like many of the participants, I had one parent who was from the Indian subcontinent and one who was not and thus I had experienced the same bilingual upbringing which many of them invoked. Furthermore, like many of the interviewees, I was in my early-twenties, which, I felt, would almost certainly be advantageous given that researchers have identified the researcher/participant age gap as a possible methodological shortcoming in research among BSA young people

(Harris, 2006). And most importantly, or so it felt at the time, the most salient commonality between myself and participants was our common ethnicity. I was of South Asian descent and so were they, so it seemed self-evident why I had decided to conduct research on them. In short, these three commonalities seemed to provide optimal conditions for 'discussions' among 'us' rather than detached interviews with 'them'. This, I felt, would certainly generate rich qualitative data allowing a glimpse of participants' social and psychological worlds. Consequently, despite others' implicit warnings that I should be wary of positioning myself alongside participants, I simply saw no compelling reason why I should not.

'Us' or 'the Other'?

Participants frequently exhibited their expectation that I, as an Asian man, should be entirely familiar with all aspects of 'British Asian culture', constructed by many individuals as a homogeneous culture. To position oneself as a BSA meant that one was expected to possess a high level of familiarity with the specific customs and speech patterns associated with the ingroup. Thus, having positioned myself in this way, I found myself being

addressed in interviews as an 'insider'. There was, for instance, an overt expectation for me to understand their linguistic idiosyncrasies. These idiosyncrasies included specialist terms associated with their ethnic cultures and, in some cases, words and phrases which they referred to as 'Slang', a variety of English influenced by Jamaican Creole (Harris, 2006; Jaspal, 2008). However, it soon became apparent to me that I was perhaps not as in touch with my ethnic identity as many of the participants expected. Paradoxically, it was my own identity which was increasingly under question since, although I identified as BSA, there were significant linguistic and social differences between me and the participants. Both they and I were becoming acutely aware of this fact.

I was particularly surprised that so many (particularly male) participants chose to address me in 'Slang'. In retrospect, I realised that this was partly due to my initial insistence upon conceptualising and constructing the interviews as 'informal discussions' rather than formal interviews, in which presumably participants would have felt under considerable ideological pressure to converse in Standard English. Participants perhaps assumed that

'Slang' was the most appropriate linguistic code for (informal) interaction with another Asian man (an 'insider'). This seemed to constitute an expression of identification with me. Consequently, I was rather embarrassed to find that much of the vocabulary used was unfamiliar to me and that I was compelled to seek clarification on several occasions. I was in fact a linguistic 'outsider' – a member of the (linguistic) out-group. In this case my position as BSA was under jeopardy, as my naïve questions were often met with surprise and sometimes hostility. How was it, some perhaps wondered, that I, a BSA, did not understand Slang, the dominant linguistic code among BSA young men?

Moreover, despite my initial expectation that my identity as BSA would be most salient in interviews, I found that many participants in fact viewed me primarily as an 'expert researcher' rather than as a BSA (layperson) like them. One participant commented:

"Yeah, you with all your degrees, you're streets ahead of us [...] I'm sure you know the reasons why there's all this [Islamophobia] going on because you're into psychology".

I was viewed by some individuals as possessing skills that I clearly did not possess, namely the ability to unlock the secrets of their psychological worlds and to provide answers to questions with which I myself was grappling. Accordingly, I began to wonder whether participants were omitting relevant details due to their presumption that I, as an 'expert researcher', was already aware of them:

"Racism's around because it's like [...] I don't need to tell you that. You probably know more about it than I do".

This was in fact a severe limitation since it was precisely their theories, meaning-making and cognitions which interested me. This led me to explore ways in which to emphasise my primary interest in the diversity of their personal experiences without jeopardising my credibility as a genuinely interested researcher.

As the research progressed, I began to realise that I had erroneously assumed that participants would accept me as 'us' in a consistent manner. My 'Otherness' was made explicit on an additional level, namely, in terms of more specific inter-ethnic differences. Participants often expressed their curiosity vis-à-vis my own ethnic origins

and most were able to ascertain my Indian heritage from my surname. Possibly since most British Indians are in fact Sikh or Hindu, there was the general assumption among participants that I was either of the two. Participants' knowledge of this seemed to play a role in how they shaped their accounts. Thus, some Muslim participants, for instance, criticised Hindu varieties of their heritage languages, but much of this criticism was offered in a very subtle and tentative manner lest they caused any offence.

"No offence but Sikhs speak Punjabi really badly".

Why would an 'insider' take offence? Clearly, on ethnic (and more specifically, religious) grounds, I was being positioned as a member of the out-group.

'Common ground' with participants.

Undoubtedly, my personal familiarity with the BSA community was, in many ways, positive for the research process. I was mindful of issues that other researchers in this domain have apparently neglected, such as the issues of language proficiency and authenticity. For instance, as a child, I had often wondered why it was that first generation BSA complimented my

command of Punjabi despite my occasional grammatical lapses, but that in India Punjabi-speakers tended to snicker at my 'foreign-sounding' Punjabi. How was it that in one context I was seen as a good speaker by Punjabi-speakers, but in others I was seen as having scant knowledge of the language? This led me to delve into participants' accounts of their linguistic experiences and to explore both their understanding of 'proficiency' and its perceived impact upon identity. I sought to explore what they meant by 'good Punjabi'. This in turn enabled me to explore questions of ethnic and religious authenticity (see Jaspal, 2008; Jaspal & Coyle, 2009a, 2009b).

Furthermore, in contrast to the preceding discussion of my 'Otherness', it is noteworthy that there were some commonalities between me and participants, which undoubtedly allowed common identification on some grounds at least. For instance, some participants were overtly critical of Asian appropriation of 'Slang', which they viewed as belonging to an ethnic outgroup, and found it utterly unfathomable that young BSA men, in particular, would want to adopt such an image. Possibly due to my own previous experiences of exclusion and

isolation from other BSA, which I saw primarily as a consequence of my own rejection of 'Slang', I found myself implicitly agreeing with participants who voiced these opinions. I came to view this level of identification with participants primarily as a shortcoming since my cogent feeling of personal empathy with them may have restricted the data which could potentially have been derived from the interviews. This led me to reflect upon the level of identification which was desirable for qualitative research with a group for whom I could be both 'us' and 'the Other'.

Overview

I have demonstrated several ways in which the research may have been affected by aspects of my identity as male, British Asian, social psychologist, speaker of Standard English etc. These included the expectations that participants had of me, the level of detail in which accounts were offered and the level of identification between researcher and participant. While my 'insider's perspective' may have been advantageous in terms of understanding the participant's psychosocial worlds, conversely it

proved difficult to ensure that this did not negatively affect data generation and obstruct my (partial) access to their cognitions (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

It was particularly difficult to reconcile the opposing positions of 'informed insider' and 'curious researcher' since the former appeared to encourage the assumption that detailed explanation would be superfluous whereas the latter clearly positioned me as an out-group member.

Perhaps qualitative researchers will have to accept that during the various stages of research they may be positioned differently in distinct contexts, depending upon the level of identification or personal involvement. In my research participants seemed to position me as 'insider' in the context of ethnicity, but as 'outsider' in the context of language. Remaining mindful of the various positions which the researcher may occupy, or be viewed by participants as occupying, seems to be an important aspect of conducting qualitative research and perhaps it is time that researchers began to reflect upon this systematically. Conducting qualitative research can be a dynamic learning process in which the researcher and participant continuously

explore and discover aspects of each other's identities with various implications for the 'final product'.

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How Long Do Lecturers Last?

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I DON'T MEAN THE LONGEVITY OF academics; I imagine they fall between the Professional and Managerial groups, with a life expectancy of around 80 for men and 84 for women. Nor do I mean how long they stick at their job. Traditionally it was more or less until they were carried out, but now early retirement may be more attractive, or unavoidable. What I query is the length of time for which all, or some, of the tuition students receive, remains to lasting effect. A rough guess of the amount of tuition received by a student might be 10-15 hours per week, times 25-30 weeks per year, times three years: in the region of 1000+ hours per student. Quite a lot.

Most is directed towards the award of a degree, generally in the early 20s, leaving about forty years of occupation and maybe sixty of life. What bearing, if any, does the tuition have on these? I can't recall any systematic study, and a recent cursory trawl did not throw up any. There are studies of student satisfaction, usually fairly shortly after graduation. García-Aracil (2009) reports on 24,536

students in eleven European countries, who graduated in 1995. The aim was to find what factors students considered most important. For the UK, the most important factor, at 4 on a 1-5 scale, was contact with fellow students; then academic advice in general at 3.6; and lowest, the chance for students to influence university policy (2.5). Previous more general studies, e.g. Johnston (1991), have shown a majority of graduates satisfied with their courses. Of course, having successfully graduated, one would expect them to be. Probably dissatisfaction is greater today, with vastly increased numbers and bureaucracy, and diminished resources. But none of this is about long-term retention. Now here's a PhD for someone. But you might have to wait thirty or forty years for it.

It seems we may have to fall back on anecdote and reminiscence. These are not to be despised, with all the obvious caveats. Memory is notoriously unreliable, accounts are highly selective and so on. The BPS itself has an ongoing Oral History Project, held at the London office, in which psychologists talk about their lives and

careers. I contributed in 2008, and also supplied a written version (available from me by email). I took a degree in 1955, and another in psychology in 1961. What remains today? From the first, I recall most of the lecturers and several fellow-students, some scraps of information, and more importantly some influences. I don't remember what Dr Brown told us about Chaucer, but at this time of year some lines come to my mind 'When that Aprille, with his shoures sote / The droghte of March hath perced to the rote ... Bifel that in that seson on a day / In Southwerk at the Tabard as I lay' (ready to set off for Canterbury, some time in the 14th century); and I can show you where the Tabard Inn stood until 1873. The interest outlasted the lectures. Similarly I have acquired some grasp of history, partly from tuition but much more from the fascination which was fostered, especially by one lecturer, Dr Marjorie James. She also, rather wryly, complained about having to teach Modern European history when she was an English mediaevalist. She added that you should always teach out of your period – 'it's very good for one'. Actually I found her better out of her period, clearer and more succinct but with the same enthusiasm. As a

lecturer in turn I came to feel there was much in this. Lectures are for the benefit of the student, not oneself.

From my psychology degree similarly I retain some bits and pieces, plus general impressions and influences. I have given some account elsewhere (Radford, in press). There were examples (I feel) of how to teach, and how not to. More important were those lecturers who seemed to get to the principles and basic issues, rather than just the latest experiments, important though those can be. I would still recommend students to look at some of R S Peters' writing (Peters 1953). C A Mace, who was head of the Birkbeck department and memorably did the same sort of thing, published little. And perhaps even more influential were eminent visitors. I was fortunate to hear among others Wolfgang Köhler, the pioneer of Gestalt psychology, Cyril Burt, historically important though his later career came under a cloud, and Edwin Boring who had been a student of E B Titchener, himself a student of Wilhelm Wundt and so a link with the very first psychological laboratory at Leipzig in 1879. I was introduced, briefly, to Frederick Bartlett, probably the most influential of all British psychologists.

All these were born in the 1880s. From a little later were A R Luria, H J Eysenck, Niko Tinbergen, Karl Popper, A H Maslow, B F Skinner, and others. The importance was, as it were, not so much what they said as the fact that they were saying it. Psychology came across to me as new, exciting and fundamentally important. And I still see it that way.

Many biographies tell of the influence of universities, perhaps most of all Oxford and Cambridge. The tutorial system, now under threat, is ideally suited to shape ideas and attitudes, for better or worse. A professor of philosophy told me how, entering Oxford with a First from elsewhere, he read his first essay to his tutor. After a few minutes the tutor asked: 'Is there much more of this?' He replied, 'Well, there's another nine pages'. The tutor said: 'How very industrious'. The future professor never forgot or forgave.

To allow myself one more personal point, a former student, now a distinguished professor, generously dedicated his first book to me with the words 'John Radford, who showed me psychology'. At the time I thought this an odd phrase. But on reflection, I feel that is what I did try to do. Of course I

and colleagues worked to get students through their exams, and to convey what we felt to be important and cutting-edge psychology. There are many studies of what makes a good university teacher in that sense, though no simple recipe. But as the late Anthony Gale and I have both pointed out, what is current does also become out of date, in psychology sometimes even before a graduate starts professional work. What lasts, one hopes, is something of what our discipline is about and for, how it connects with other sorts of knowledge, how it relates to broader issues of humans as social and biological beings, as well as the fundamental principles of how we go about seeking understanding (Radford, 2008).

In a book I wrote with David Rose back in 1989, I quoted Bertrand Russell's autobiography:

As an undergraduate, I was persuaded that the Dons were a wholly unnecessary part of the university. I derived no benefits from lectures, and I made a vow to myself that when in due course I became a lecturer, I would not suppose that lecturing did any good. I have kept this vow.

This is discouraging, but Russell also says that he gained from his

teachers an abiding sense of intellectual honesty. That alone would make them worthwhile. He also recounts the intense excitement he found in membership of the Apostles, that small and semi-secret Cambridge association of the best minds. And to return to psychology, Donald Broadbent tells that he learned from Frederick Bartlett: ... a number of broad strategies of scientific method ... First and foremost empiricism, a respect for concrete observation and a casual disregard for arid formalization. Next, lack of personal involvement in ideas, and the importance of weighing other people's according to the value of the idea itself and not the status of the source. Thirdly, flexibility and the cheerful willingness to admit past errors. Lastly constant awareness of the complexity of psychological mechanisms. These lessons were passed on by infection; and they were valuable ones (Crampton, 1978).

Those fortunate enough to have known Donald personally will remember also his own conviction of the moral superiority of this sort of psychology over prejudice, precedent, politics and other customary approaches to human problems; and his never-failing willingness to share his time and

expertise. These too were valuable lessons.

This may seem old-fashioned. But I don't think the basics of education have changed since Cheiron the wise centaur. And in this month's Psychologist, a correspondent argues that advertising jobs with the Atomic Energy Authority goes against 'the fundamental principles of psychology'. Are there such principles, and if so what are they? It may sound preachy, but I do think, at the risk of repetition, that there should be more to a university education than qualifications, important though these are. What that more is, I think anyone engaged in teaching needs to think out for themselves. And consider what they really want students to retain. I have hinted at my attempt, and I expand on it in the Oral History text. A good lecturer, carefully used, can last a lifetime. So over to you.

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Conference Reviews

4th European Conference on Positive Psychology, July 1-4 2008, Opatija, Croatia

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POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY IS currently experiencing a substantial increase in popular interest. The 4th European Conference on Positive Psychology, in Opatija, Croatia, from July 1-4, 2008, highlighted the diversity of research in this field. Positive Psychology is concerned with the experience of positive emotions, psychological health, productivity, happiness and positive traits. It is not difficult to appreciate the variety of viewpoints and potential research topics within such a field. Still, the positive psychology community is (at least for the time being), a relatively small group and for anyone even with the most cursory background in the field, there were plenty of recognizable names and faces in attendance.

It is little exaggeration to call Ed Diener one of the most widely

published and cited authors in psychology at the moment. Diener, a pioneer of research regarding well-being, focused on well-being at the societal level during his invited address. Though a speaker of his stature could have been content to rest on his laurels and focus on his well known past work, there was plenty of new information to be garnered from his speech. It is inspiring to hear from a researcher that is so devoted to his chosen field, and continues to push its boundaries. Additional keynote speakers, however, were not to be dwarfed by such a distinguished guest, and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Todd Kashdan and Randy Larsen (among others), left even a casual follower of positive psychology feeling somewhat star-struck.

It is difficult to pin down the main themes of such a diverse

conference, but several stood out. A primary focus of any relatively novel domain is to develop reliable and complementary measurement tools. This has been a source of some contention in the field (highlighted at one point during Todd Kashdan's address when he delivered some firm advice about which measurement tool NOT to use). Such an important and controversial topic was bound to be a focal point at the conference, and indeed it was. Not only was it discussed in a number of oral and poster presentations, but also featured in round table discussions, workshops and notably, symposium titled, "How Well is Well-Being Being Measured". This symposium included discussion of cross-cultural measures of well-being, the utility and applicability of specific measurement tools (including Psychological Well-Being, Positive Mental Health, Interest and Engagement, and Ecological Momentary Assessment methods), as well as a discussion regarding how various instruments can be used complementarily. Though, as mentioned, measurement issues can be contentious, it was illuminating to see that various measurement methods are not necessarily mutually exclusive

and can be used in conjunction with one another. Other well-represented topics included self-determination theory, flow research, job-related well-being and cross-cultural positive psychology. However, to name a few broad focal topics risks missing the point. The conference highlighted the variety of research being undertaken in positive psychology and the diversity and potential for future research was truly eye opening.

It was heartening to note that British positive psychology was well represented in Opatija. In addition to oral presentations and symposiums led by British researchers such as Felicia Huppert, Ilona Boniwell and Alex Linley, a symposium on the subject of the practical applicability of positive psychology used applications in Scotland as examples of the many ways in which positive psychology can be used in practice. The symposium focused on the Centre for Confidence and Well-Being, an organization that was established in 2005 with the aim of stimulating confidence and optimism, as a means of improving health in general and stimulating productivity and thriving in Scotland. A number of interventions and theoretical applications were detailed, with the

main message being that positive psychology need not be restrained to the ivory tower. While positive psychology had its genesis in the U.S., the conference suggested that European researchers are also productively contributing to the field.

For a conference regarding the brighter side of human functioning, it is difficult to think of a more suitable setting than Opatija. This coastal town had more than its fair share of swimming spots, mountains, beaches, parks, bars and restaurants. It is a credit to the dedication of the conference attendees that the sessions were so well attended. Indeed, it is easier to contemplate the positive aspects of psychology in such an uplifting locale.

With the increasing popularity of positive psychology, it is realistic to suppose that future positive psychology conferences will have as much to offer than the 2008 incarnation. The next European conference on the topic will be held in Denmark in the summer of 2010.

This makes an appropriate location as Denmark is often dubbed the happiest country in the world. Positive psychology is a broad topic, with implications for a vast number of research fields, both within and out with psychology.

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Division of Sport & Exercise Psychology

Inaugural Conference 2008, 11th – 12th

December 2008, London.

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ON THE 11TH AND 12TH OF December 2008, 30 Tabernacle Street, London, the home of the British Psychological Society, was the venue for the Inaugural Conference of the Division of Sport & Exercise Psychology (DSEP). The conference had a significant number of delegates (144) in the area of academic sport and exercise psychology; practising sport and health psychologists and students in the area of sport & exercise psychology.

I am currently a 3rd year PhD student at the University of Hull. In my PhD I am investigating gender and personality differences in coping with stress in sport. In this article, I will discuss my experience of presenting at the DSEP Inaugural conference on the 11th of December, and what I learnt from it. I hope my reflection will help other postgraduate students in future events.

I saw the advertisement of the conference on the BPS website and thought that this would be a good opportunity to present my work and network with likeminded academics. In addition, the conference had some good keynote speakers and relevant symposia which would allow me to become aware of the latest developments in sport and exercise psychology. Following a brief meeting with my supervisor we decided to submit an abstract of one of my studies particularly investigating moderator variables influencing mental toughness in sport. My abstract was accepted as an oral presentation and I presented my work in one of the sessions in the first morning of the conference. Although I knew this was likely to be a strong topic of interest in the area of sport psychology, I would never have guessed the popularity of it, judging by the number of attendees in the session. To my pleasant surprise the session

was well attended, despite the fact that it started at 9.30 in the morning. Despite being well prepared and having practiced my talk to colleagues previously, I felt some trepidation prior to presenting. Having researched stress and coping for the last 2 years, I used some effective coping strategies (deep breathing and self-talk). In particular, I told myself that this was just a unique opportunity to present my work to a knowledgeable audience and I should look at it as a challenge instead of a threat.

After presenting my work I had a couple of questions from the audience. Following this I analysed and evaluated my performance in my mind. I have to admit that I would not include this experience as the most relaxing one in my life. However, it was without a doubt a big challenge and I felt extremely proud and happy with myself for being able to do it. Overall, I recognize that this experience was very constructive, and provided me with invaluable feedback from a knowledgeable audience. Furthermore, it also provided me with an opportunity to enhance my presentation skills and confidence, which will be a big help when doing my PhD viva in the near future.

I have to admit that after finishing my talk I felt much more relaxed, and I was able to enjoy the rest of the conference in a more peaceful state of mind. In that sense going first was actually a good thing. The conference covered different topics and the quality of the work presented was very good. I particularly liked the talks of the keynote speakers, Professor Dave Collins entitled 'Strange bedfellows; Why sport and exercise psychology' and Professor Bonnie G Berger, entitled 'Multiple roles of exercise in quality of life'. These talks were quite inspiring, engaging and thought provoking. I also had the opportunity to network not only with the academic community and practitioners, but also with other postgraduate students. Another distinct strength of this conference was the postgraduate members' symposium, in which postgraduate students presented their work. I found these presentations very engaging, informative and interesting, in the sense that they allowed me to know others students work, and furthermore it was a good opportunity to

interact with them, get to know them better and share experiences.

In summary, I would like to thank PsyPAG for supporting me in this unique experience. It provided me with a great opportunity to develop myself by enhancing my presentation skills,

obtaining invaluable feedback about my work, and receive valuable insights from experienced researchers and practitioners. Furthermore, I would like to congratulate the division on the organization and quality of the conference.

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Getting the snowball rolling: incentivised recruitment to web-based studies

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NB. This is an extended version of an article to be published in *The Psychologist* (B Gardner, in press)

THE GROWTH OF THE INTERNET has led many researchers to turn their backs on pen-and-paper data collection methods, and instead collect data online. The potential advantages of internet-mediated research (IMR) over non-internet methods are well-documented (K Gardner, 2007; Hewson, 2003): online studies may be more accessible to and require less effort from participants, and large quantities of data can be obtained quickly with little cost or effort incurred by the researcher. IMR can thus be particularly appealing for postgraduates with limited funds and/or tight project deadlines.

Successful recruitment to IMR studies, of course, depends

on successful advertisement of the study to potential participants. This can present significant challenges to the postgraduate researcher: advertising the study on popular and publicly

accessible websites or in local media can be costly, recruiting from online e-mailing lists can bias a sample towards white middle-class university-based participants (K Gardner, 2007), and sending emails beyond these lists can offend unknown recipients (Hewson, 2003). Many postgraduate researchers seek to recruit by using the 'snowballing' technique, which involves circulating details of the study to friends, family and colleagues, and requesting that recipients pass this information on to others. This low-cost strategy may however fail because the researcher's pleas may be unpersuasive to those who receive the information second-hand and have no personal or professional connection with the researcher.

During my DPhil, I recruited to IMR studies using financial incentives to sustain the 'snowball' effect. This involved emailing study details (link to study, inclusion criteria, incentives for participants, etc) to friends, colleagues,

and participant pool mailing lists, and offering a £25 cash prize to the person who recruited most other people to the study by forwarding this email. An item inserted at the close of the study questionnaire required that participants give the email address of the person who alerted them to the research, and the best 'recruiters' were identified using a frequency check after data collection was complete.

There are several reasons why this technique should be effective. Recruiters are typically friends, family or colleagues of the participant, and so those who receive the email from recruiters face a social incentive to participate to assist the recruiter in winning the prize. This should motivate participants over and above any incentives for participation directly offered by the researcher. Moreover, the recruiter should be motivated to circulate details of the study as widely as possible.

My experiences suggest that this 'incentivised snowballing' technique can promote rapid, cost-effective recruitment to IMR studies. One of my DPhil studies involved recruiting car drivers in Brighton and Hove to complete a brief questionnaire (B Gardner & Abraham, in press).

Participants were offered the chance to win one of three £50 cash prizes. A paper version mailed with a prepaid reply envelope to 1200 local drivers attracted only 85 responses over a 4-month period. Using incentivised snowballing to recruit to an online version of the questionnaire however attracted 105 participants in 21 days, and the best recruiter received £25 for enrolling just seven participants.

Recently, incentivised snowballing was used to recruit non-diabetic adults with no eating disorder history to a study of cognitions and healthy eating behaviour. The questionnaire involved a 64-item web-based questionnaire at baseline and 9 follow-up items sent by email one week later (B Gardner & Abraham, under review). Participants were entered into a £25 prize draw, and a separate £25 cash prize was offered to the person who recruited most of the participants that completed both questionnaires. Two researchers emailed study details to friends, family and colleagues. 94 baseline participants were recruited in the first week alone, and a total of 266 baseline participants (202 of whom also completed the second questionnaire) were recruited over 40 days. This included 17 days on which data

collection slowed to three or less baseline responses – we consequently re-sent the recruitment email to original recipients on three occasions, and re-contacted leading recruiters directly (see Table 1), which stimulated renewed recruiter activity. The leading recruiter enlisted 16 of the participants that completed the second questionnaire. Thus, data collection for this study cost just £50.

Incentivised snowballing is intended to exploit the potential for online social networks to yield convenience samples. The technique would be unsuitable for use where participant selection biases are likely to be important, because growing membership of web-based networks makes it difficult to anticipate biases arising from sampling exclusively from these groupings. There are also potential ethical considerations concerning emailing unsolicited study advertisements (Hewson, 2003), but these can be minimised by requesting that study details are forwarded only to known others. Unethical recruiter activity (e.g. sending spam email) should be explicitly discouraged in a code of recruiter practice attached to the email, though the researcher retains responsibility for recruiter behaviour

and should provide contact details to accommodate any complaints about unscrupulous recruiters. Potential pros and cons (see Table 2) should be considered carefully when deciding whether it is appropriate to use incentivised snowballing.

To my knowledge incentivised snowballing is a new technique, and one which my experiences suggest can be effective for recruiting to IMR studies at little cost and with little effort. In this respect, the technique can be particularly useful for postgraduate research. While I have used incentivised snowballing exclusively via regular email, the technique can easily be used with social networking interfaces such as Facebook. The technique is compatible with and complementary to existing IMR recruitment methods (see K Gardner, 2007), and so offers a useful addition to the IMR researcher's toolkit.

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Neurodegenerative diseases in Latin American countries: a view from the III International Conference on Hereditary Ataxias.

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STILL UNDER THE EFFECTS OF Ike and Gustav, two of the worst hurricanes hitting Cuba in the last 50 years (Cuba: Hurricane Season 2008, 2009), a group of young scientists from the Caribbean island organized the III International Conference on Hereditary Ataxias (1-8 October 2008). The conference hosted researchers from Austria, Canada, Colombia, Germany, Guatemala, India, Italy, Mexico, Portugal, Spain, and UK. The themes discussed covered areas such as Biotechnology, Bioinformatics, Genetics, Epidemiology, Neurology, Metabolism, Neuroimaging, Pharmacology, Neurophysiology, Neuropathology, and Cognition.

One striking feature of the meeting was that as the researchers fostered their understanding of Neurodegenerative Diseases and

Hereditary Ataxias, patients and carers were trained by the experts in parallel workshops on the management of the clinical outcomes of these disabling disorders.

Why is Cuba interested in Hereditary Ataxias?

In the 1970's and 80's, Cuban scientists described a disease known as Spinocerebellar Atrophy, the main clinical outcome of which is ataxia (Orozco et al., 1989; Valles, Estrada, & Basterrechea, 1978). A form of Ataxia commonly found in Holguín, a province located in North-East Cuba, is characterized clinically by impairment in movement control with emphasis on gait, speech, limb coordination, and eye movements (Orozco et al., 1989; Orozco, Nodarse, Cordovés, & Auburger, 1990). An important characteristic of the disease is its early

onset, with some cases presenting as early as age 10. Due to the early onset and loss of movement control, sufferers become unable to perform a wide range of everyday life activities. The prevalence of the disease in Holguín was found to be 41.3 per 100,000 (Valles et al., 1978), suggestive of a familial cluster of Ataxia in this region which is the largest of Spinocerebellar Ataxia Type-II (SCA-II) described to date (Velásquez et al., 2001). Therefore, it is easy to understand why Holguín was chosen as the venue to discuss advances on SCA-II and related disorders.

What is the picture on Neurodegenerative Diseases in Latin America?

A suggested mechanism to explain the high prevalence of SCA-II in Holguín is a *founder effect* (Orozco et al., 1989). The founder effect is described as a dramatic decrease in genetic diversity caused by the formation of clusters of individuals who remain isolated (Templeton, 1979). Orozco et al. (1989) suggested that an alternative explanation for the SCA-II of Holguín might be an interaction between a mutant gene and unidentified environmental factors. However, Cuba is not the only Latin

American country where genetic clusters of neurodegenerative diseases have been observed. Two further examples are Huntington's disease (HD) in Venezuela (see Wexler et al., 2004; also see Okun & Thommim, 2004 for a revision of the early studies) and Alzheimer's disease (AD) in Colombia (Lopera et al., 1997) which are the largest clusters of familial HD and AD reported to date. The III International Conference on Hereditary Ataxias celebrated in Holguín, offered a suitable scenario wherein different aspects of these neurodegenerative diseases may be considered for discussion.

Aware of the impact that the study of these clusters would have on the understanding of the mechanisms underlying the development of neurodegenerative diseases, in 2003 a group of scientists from different countries launched the ALFA Euro-Caribbean Network (Red Eurocaribeña de Neurociencias, 2009). The ALFA Network was aimed at supporting the advanced integral preparation of researchers and academics working on social, clinical, and biological aspects of neurodegenerative diseases. The ALFA Network was a project funded by the European Union, and it gathered efforts from higher education institutions of

three European countries (Prof. Sergio Della Sala's team from the University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom, Dr Francisco Wandosell's team from the Autonomous University of Madrid, Spain, and Dr Muriel Darnaudéry's team from the University of Lille 1, France) and three Latin American countries (Dr Francisco Lopera's Neuroscience Group from the University of Antioquia, Colombia, Dr Mitchell Valdés's team from the Cuban Neuroscience Centre, and Dr Gladys E. Maestre's team from the University of Zulia, Venezuela).

What can the study of familial forms of neurodegenerative diseases offer to neuroscience?

The neurodegenerative diseases mentioned above are familial variants of diseases which are also known to have sporadic forms. Two important differences between sporadic and familial forms of these diseases are (a) the pattern of inheritance and (b) their prevalence.

The familial forms of neurodegenerative diseases found in Cuba, Colombia and Venezuela, follow specific patterns of familial transmission (Mendelian inheritance), whereas, the sporadic forms of these disease do not

follow such patterns. For example, for the familial AD found in Colombia, the pattern is autosomic dominant, that is at least 50% of offspring will inherit the genetic defect (i.e. will be carriers). It is worth noticing that 100% of the carriers will develop AD. Figure 1 illustrates how the genetic defect responsible for the development of familial AD found in Colombia spreads across 8 generations.

As to the second difference, the sporadic forms of neurodegenerative diseases show a much higher prevalence than familial variants. For example, in the case of AD, familial forms show a prevalence of around 0.1% whereas in people aged 85 years or older living in the western world the prevalence of sporadic AD is between 24% and 33% (Blennow, de Leon, & Zetterberg, 2006). Why would it be worth investigating familial variants? I would like to answer this question by briefly introducing the work I presented at the III International Conference on Hereditary Ataxias held in Holguín, Cuba.

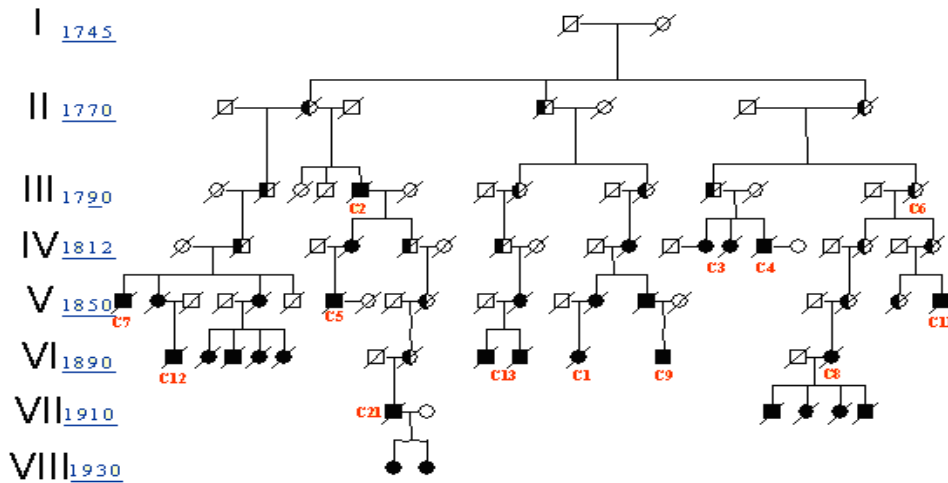


Figure 1. Genealogical tree of 13 families (C1 – C13) with E280A associated AD. Filled items refer to carriers of the mutation. The diagonal line crossing the items means death. Roman numbers are generations and the Arabic numbers are years (see Lopera et al., 1997 for other family trees and a more thorough description of this disorder).

My presentation was entitled “Memory binding deficits as an early neurocognitive marker of Alzheimer’s disease: evidence from an early onset variant due to the mutation E280A of the Presenilin-1 gene”. It is known that memory is the earliest function affected by AD. However, it is still unknown whether all memory systems are evenly impacted by the disease in its early stages. We have recently found that this does not seem to be the case and that short-term memory (STM) for objects defined by bound features (e.g., common objects with colours) seems to be impacted in AD to a greater extent than other forms of non-associative

memory (Parra et al., 2009). However, it remains unexplored whether this memory impairment can predict familial AD. To this aim, we devised a novel task which assesses STM for single and bound information (i.e., shapes, colours, or coloured shapes) and assessed with it individuals recruited from the Colombian kindred. We assessed asymptomatic carriers of the genetic defect E280A, patients in the very early stages of AD, and healthy (non-carrier) relatives, who did not have gene defects. We compared performance on the novel task with performance in a large neuropsychological battery. We found

that whereas carriers performed the traditional neuropsychological tasks without difficulties, they performed significantly more poorly than healthy relatives, but not than AD patients, only in the novel STM task (Parra et al., *submitted*). This suggests that STM binding functions could signal the beginning of E280A associated familial AD more effectively than other tasks currently used in the assessment of AD. Hence, STM binding may help to detect AD earlier than other cognitive functions.

This represents a step forward in the early detection of AD which is one of the cardinal strategies for the management and treatment of the disease. However, one question that arises from this study is: Could this type of finding in familial variants of neurodegenerative diseases be used to make decisions in sporadic forms? We do not yet have a clear understanding of the extent to which findings in familial variants of neurodegenerative disorders could be used to interpret sporadic forms (Godbolt et al., 2005; Ray, Ashall, & Goate, 1998). However, they are valuable insights which prompt actions to investigate similar issues in sporadic variants.

Conclusions

My experience in the III International Conference on Hereditary Ataxias, could be summarized by three points. First, I learned that interdisciplinary exchanges via international collaborations are valuable strategies to create fruitful avenues through which biological and social issues underpinning problems affecting large populations could be investigated. Second, familial variants of neurodegenerative diseases offer promising models to plan sound research aimed at devising new methods for detecting these diseases early and acting effectively upon their consequences. Third, neuroscience has much to gain from developing countries.

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WE ARE ADDITIONALLY HOLDING A POSTGRADUATE WORKSHOP ON THE 14TH AND 15TH SEPTEMBER 2009, ALSO AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD. FURTHER DETAILS CAN BE FOUND ON THE ABOVE WEBSITE.

A Naive International Report:

PhD Life in Denmark

Martin Hammershøj Olesen, Department of Psychology, Aarhus University

REMEMBER DENMARK?
In Denmark criticism is truly appreciated. One defining characteristic of this Scandinavian Nation must be the outspoken critical tone of almost any public debate. Perhaps you remember the satiric cartoons of a certain prophet that upset parts of the Arabic world to extreme points of outrage. Even though most Danes do not think that Muslims are terrorists, they do worry about the Media censoring critical messages about Islam; such as “when terrorists bomb in the name of Allah, they have not only taken the free world united as hostage, they have certainly taken Islam and all decent Muslims as hostages”. This was the critical message, depicted by the drawings; hence, the bomb placed inside the turban of a bearded gentleman, signifying that such acts are a danger to all involved. Although this example might seem tangential to the purpose of this article, my point is that unique

criticism traditions in Denmark play an important role in shaping the PhD experience.

What is life in Denmark really like?

Peaceful, comfortable, and almost boring, at least seen through the eyes of one PhD student, who is nearly half way through his four-year program. I have enjoyed the blessings of the social-democratic welfare state that I grew up in. Without realizing it my peers and I went to public school followed by high school. Later, some of us entered the government funded university system for further education. We never paid tuition fees and we even received government support while studying, which was not substantial but was enough. Looking back though, it strikes me, that the primary lesson in my Danish life has been to think critically and speak out. Thus, it has been background knowledge and discussion from first grade.

So, who cares if the majority of Danes live their almost boring lives in

peace and comfort? So what if there are no life-threatening worries here. I am not talking about the immediate threats of war, evil regimes, hunger, or natural disasters anyway. In fact, Denmark is not quite the perfect Scandinavian Nation. We have notable problems with integrating social and ethnic minorities; norm deviation is often frowned upon. Further, the quality of our “free and equal” healthcare-system is questionable; and the tax-pressure is absurd... just to name a few. Nonetheless, you can take the following as a naive international report on PhD life in Denmark. Naive, since being a Dane will bias my words.

In the comic strip by Jorge Cham (www.phd.comics.com/comics), I was surprised to learn that in the western world of academia, it seems that professors are extremely powerful in terms of hiring PhD students and Post Doctoral students to conduct research. Apparently professors pick and choose among applicants based on their qualifications such as grades, experience, and finally an interview to match the applicant with an already existing project. The reason this surprised me was that I was enrolled by the faculty after a PhD committee at my

department (none of whom were my supervising professors) had sent the Dean a list of priorities among eligible applicants. In other words, in Denmark it is up to the Dean and a PhD panel to decide who will receive a scholarship.

Another reason I was surprised by the comic, was that my written application (a rough sketch for a research project, which I thought would contribute to my area of psychology) played a significant role in why I was selected. In contrast to what the comic portrayed about PhD enrolment in other countries, it is common in Denmark, that grades and experience are only part of the applicant evaluation. In fact, the primary challenge in writing a good application is producing a great idea for a research project while providing a convincing background literature. In addition, you must assure that your project is realistic in terms of time, network, and resources. If you are sceptical towards this approach to administering scholarships, I hope that you will at least find it amusing, that my ideas pertaining to international academia are based on a comic strip. If you think the approach and the comic is great and/or you are just interested to learn more... read on!

Historical background.

Conducting psychological research in Denmark is caught up between old-school academic traditions, which are opposed to intervening political ambitions. Traditionally, a PhD thesis would have been formatted as a monograph in Danish, and thus consist of theoretical background and discussion. The emphasis was often on the production of a book, with which philosophical arguments could be conveyed to the public. You may be surprised to hear that empirical investigation was in no demand. Success as a PhD student required long hours and lots of tedious work, without help from anyone. Today many PhD students write from three to six empirical articles for their thesis. Some even manage to get published in internationally recognized journals. Thus, the emphasis is now on the quality of methods and results to please reviewers and editors instead of the general public. Success as a PhD student requires conducting a well thought out plan (hard work), collaboration with other researchers, and lots of supervision.

As a specific example I have two very different supervisors. One originates from old school academia. He has among other texts written

theoretical papers on the applicability of Self-psychology in educational settings and other practical fields. As a consequence his publications, which are mixed between books and articles, are not only read by colleagues but also by teachers and undergraduate students at teaching and nursing college. The other is oriented towards research and publication standards in international cognitive and personality psychology. She has among other texts written empirical journal and review articles on rumination, reflection, and autobiographical memory. As a consequence her publications are mostly read by colleagues. Notably, I have learned equally from them. One is typically saying: "Keep it real – what is the psychological meaning of your project?"; the other is typically saying: "Think about your publication – what should be your contribution?"

Requirements I -The formal stuff.

PhD students in Denmark are enrolled for a period of three or four years (the four-year program stretches your last year as a graduate student into two years; you're paid less in that period, but you're in). The salary is fine, approximately 3660 Euro (£3430) a month for post graduate PhD students, all included and before the 50% tax. But

there are supplementary requirements. One requirement is that we teach. Usually teaching amounts to an undergraduate seminar related to your field of investigation. Undergraduate seminars last a semester of fourteen weeks with one three-hour session a week. Furthermore, PhD students often give a lecture once or twice a year, and are required to assist in marking exam-papers from undergraduate and graduate students. Another requirement is that PhD students attend post graduate courses equivalent of 30 ECTS points. Courses are offered by several research schools in Denmark, e.g.

(www.psy.au.dk/en/forskning/danish-research-school-of-psychology), a number of which are specific to psychology and related areas. Additionally, PhD students are required to visit a research institution, preferably abroad that conducts research within their area of expertise. As a rule of thumb this stay is advised to be at least three months. Luckily, it is funded by the university.

Requirements II – Exam defence in a public gallery.

As I might have mentioned before, Danes truly appreciate criticism. Thus, the biggest requirement for a

Danish PhD student, is the viva exam. The viva has a ceremonial status in Denmark. As such the defence marks the ending of the thesis evaluation that has been conducted by a defence panel. The defence panel consists of three international experts. Thus, the university funds travelling and accommodation expenses for panel members. The defence is usually two hours long and is held in a public gallery. In the first hour the PhD student is required to give a lecture, upon which members of the panel ask critical questions in the next hour. Traditions prescribe that the panel must draw forth weaknesses of the thesis. Hence, Danish PhD students usually prepare for months. It can be rough, but once you've reached the point of defending a thesis, you're almost certain to be awarded a PhD degree, while waving to your mom.

Epilogue

Looking beyond the inputs of humorous comics and satiric drawings I sincerely hope that this naive report has inspired you to learn even more about PhD life in Denmark. Perhaps you or someone you know would like to visit the Department of Psychology at Aarhus University or write an application to The Graduate School of

Social Sciences? Competition is tough, but don't let that hold you back.

You may contact Secretary Mette Schulz (mettes@psy.au.dk) or PhD Coordinator Peter Krøjgaard (peter@psy.au.dk). Also the Faculty of Social Sciences

webpage(www.samfundsvidenskab.au.dk/en/research) is worth a visit.

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Psychology Postgraduate Affairs Group (PsyPAG) Annual Conference 2009

PsyPAG is proud to announce the 24th annual conference will be held at the School of Psychology, Cardiff University on the 29th to 31st of July 2009. The conference is a place for all psychology postgraduates to present and discuss their work; from Masters and first year PhD students, who might want to present the theoretical underpinnings of their work and its future directions, to final year PhD students, who are on the verge of their viva and want to present their work one final time before their examination. This conference aims to bring postgraduate psychologists together in a supportive environment where

they can cultivate their skills through networking, exchange of ideas and presentation of their research in either poster or oral presentation format. Events such as this are essential in providing postgraduates with the experiences needed to excel without the normal pressures surrounding academic conferences.

As well as poster presentations and themed symposiums, proceedings will include skills workshops and highly prestigious keynote speakers, not to mention the social activities such as the conference dinner, free wine reception and more!

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Surviving a PhD and the viva voce: A positive experience!

Dr. Orla McBride, University of Ulster, Northern Ireland.

I BEGAN MY PHD IN SEPTEMBER 2005 at the University of Ulster Magee Campus (UUM) in Co. Derry, Northern Ireland. I had previously completed a four-year BSc (Hons) degree in Applied Psychology at the University of Ulster Jordanstown Campus (UUJ) in Co. Antrim. Fortunately, I was awarded a doctoral studentship from the University to conduct my research project.

The research project that I applied to at UUM was entitled 'Behavioural epidemiology and mental health'. I chose to apply for this project because I had a strong interest in addiction and alcohol-related problems. The project entailed conducting secondary data analysis of the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions (NESARC; Grant et al., 2003). This large U.S. survey assessed all aspects of alcohol use, including symptoms of problematic alcohol use. Having reviewed the literature, I realised that the majority of

epidemiologic research focused on exploring the prevalence and correlates of DSM-IV alcohol use disorders (AUD), which were highly-debilitating psychiatric disorders. I became fascinated, however, with a small body of empirical research which investigated the mental health and well-being associated with experiencing sub-threshold AUD - the so-called 'diagnostic orphans' (Kaczynski-Pollock & Martin, 1999). Diagnostic orphans experience alcohol-related problems but fail to meet the diagnostic criteria for an AUD. Existing research revealed that diagnostic orphans were likely to be highly prevalent in the general population and that this group of individuals may also experience reduced health-related quality of life associated with their alcohol-related problems. Using data from the NESARC, I used a variety of statistical techniques to explore the general well-being of these individuals.

When I reflect on my time as a PhD student, I can recall a three-year period that was filled with many different events and emotions. As Charles Dickens said, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times". Anyone who has completed a PhD will often recall what a difficult experience it can be. Many people seem to struggle with the transition from being on a taught undergraduate or postgraduate course to life as an independent research student. Others students often report how isolated they feel during the PhD experience. I, like many others, found my PhD to be a long and difficult experience. However, now that it is all over and I have had several months to reflect on the last three years, a number of memorable experiences come to mind.

One of the best experiences that I had as a PhD student was a one-month placement to the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC) attached to the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia. I went to NDARC in September 2007. Many of the researchers at NDARC were leading experts in the field of addiction, with copious experience in the global epidemiology of AUD. I emailed staff members at NDARC, told them about

my PhD research and asked them would it be possible to gain some research experience over there. They were very happy to let me come over to Australia and provided me with a fulfilling and enlightening research experience.

Additionally, I travelled to Washington D.C. in 2008 to attend, and present my research at, the annual conference of the Research Society on Alcoholism. This five-day conference provided me with an opportunity to listen to international addiction experts talk about their research and learn about new developments in the field of alcoholism. Both this conference and my Australian research placement were partially funded by my doctoral studentship and the Northern Ireland Research and Development Office.

Notwithstanding these two experiences, I think the most unforgettable experience of my entire PhD was the viva voce. Like many other PhD students, I started thinking (and worrying!) about the viva many long months before it actually took place. The first time I realised what a daunting experience it could be was when I attended a comprehensive workshop at UUM in May 2007, delivered by Dr. Gordon Marnoch, a

Reader in Public Policy at UUU. During this workshop, I became familiar with the entire process of the viva voce, from submitting an 'intention to submit' form to the research office three months prior to the submission date, to learning how to help my supervisors choose an external examiner, what actually happens on the day of the viva voce, and finally to what outcomes are likely following the examination. The majority of this information was really useful as I entered my final year and I began thinking about submitting my thesis and preparing for the viva.

Several months before the viva, I had a discussion with my supervisors about choosing an external examiner for the viva. We decided that Prof. Jim Anthony from the Department of Epidemiology at Michigan State University (MSU) in the USA would be an appropriate and knowledgeable examiner. Prof. Anthony had copious experience in the areas of psychopathology, psychiatric epidemiology, and biostatistics. It was decided that the purpose of Prof. Anthony's visit to UUM would be two-fold: (i) to act as my external examiner, and (ii) to give a talk to students and staff members of the School of

Psychology on the rubrics of epidemiology.

At around the same time, I was busy preparing my thesis for submission to the research office. One thing that I found really helpful was to have final drafts of the chapters of my thesis checked by a professional proof-reader. I cannot recommend this highly enough – it really is money well-spent! I was determined to stick to the deadline that was assigned to me by the University's Research Office. I read an interesting article which gave me some comfort in that I was not alone by feeling bewildered at the epic task of trying to get my thesis completed (<http://phdthesis.wordpress.com/2008/04/24/approaching-the-end/>).

Subsequently, I constructed a comprehensive 'timetable to submission deadline' approximately ten weeks prior to the deadline. I think this was useful in helping me to get the thesis submitted on time.

After I submitted my PhD to the Research Office, I had just over six weeks until the viva. I took a break from the thesis for the first three weeks after submission. I felt exhausted and needed time to let the information that I had written in the thesis to sink in! Subsequently, I had three weeks to

prepare for the viva. Like many others before me, I felt very anxious about the examination. I had read several articles online about how to defend a thesis. The most common pieces of advice I came across were: (i) read the entire thesis at least twice prior to the examination, and (ii) prepare a short oral presentation to summarise your research to recite at the beginning of the viva but do not rehearse answers to any other answers that you anticipate an examiner might ask. In addition, I also found several lists of questions on the internet that could be asked during a viva. I often found, however, that the questions on these lists were very generic and focused on industrial research, rather than research of a psychological nature. In light of this, I felt that the best possible way that I could prepare for the viva was to read my thesis thoroughly once. This process, however, took approximately two weeks. The aim of this task was to ensure that I understood, and could expand upon when questioned, everything I had written over the last three years. I used 'post-it' stickers to identify areas of interest within the thesis where I envisaged the external examiner might want to explore further.

In the days leading up to the viva, I rehearsed my short presentation and read over notes that I had handwritten in my thesis. On the day before the viva, my examiner was presenting at UUM and I went along to listen to him. I introduced myself to him at the end of his presentation. I think that I was lucky to become acquainted with him before the examination. Later that day, I went out for lunch and tried to relax as much as possible. I spent one hour that evening going through the thesis to ensure that I had covered everything I needed to. I went to bed early that night, although I found it difficult to relax.

I woke early on the morning of the viva and, to my surprise, I wasn't as nervous as I had anticipated. My examination was after lunch on a Friday afternoon. That morning I did not read my thesis, and travelled to the University a few hours before the examination. Before the viva, I sat in a quiet place in the University to gather my thoughts. At this time, I felt very nervous. I made my way to the examination room and sat outside whilst my supervisors, the examiners (one internal, one external), and the chairperson had a meeting. The examination began on time. When my

supervisor called me into the room, I felt like my feet were stuck to the ground and my legs felt like jelly. I thought I was going to faint! I made it into the examination room, however, and before long, the chairperson had commenced the examination. Initially, I was asked to explain why I had an interest in my research area. This was quite easy to answer and I used some information that I had rehearsed for my short presentation. When I had finished talking, Prof. Anthony commenced his line of questioning. I thought that he would take each chapter of my thesis in turn and ask me specific questions relating to different pages etc but I quickly realised that this was not the case. Instead, he wanted me to take him through each chapter of my thesis systematically and to explain the aims, what method had I used to explore each aim, and the major findings. I felt a little overwhelmed at his request, however, once I started to talk, I felt my nervous settle down and I could respond to his question. As I talked, he interjected at various points for clarification and further exploration. The examination continued along these lines for approximately one hour. Subsequently, the internal examiner asked me several questions and Prof.

Anthony intervened a number of times to request additional information. I felt that I was answering the questions sufficiently. The viva felt quite long even though it only lasted one hour and forty minutes. I have since been told that my viva was a short one!

After the examiners had finished with their questions, I was asked to leave the room for approximately twenty minutes. I waited anxiously outside to be called back in. When I re-entered the room, the chairperson informed me that the examiners were satisfied to award me the degree of PhD without any changes being required to the thesis. Everyone started to congratulate me and shake my hand but I was in utter disbelief! Gradually it began to sink in what they were telling me – that was it, the PhD was over. Suddenly a great relief washed over me and I left the examination room feeling on top of the world. I spent that weekend celebrating with my friends and family and submitted two bound copies of my thesis to the Research Office the following week.

Since the viva, I have been awarded a post-doctoral research fellowship from the Australian Government's Department of

Education, Employment and Workplace Relations to return to NDARC for a short period. These annual research awards are open to students in the final stages of their PhD. Prof. Anthony has also offered me a post-doctoral research fellowship at MSU and I will commence this position in 2009. I thoroughly enjoyed my PhD experience. It gave me an opportunity to travel to wonderful places and meet many interesting people. This experience has not only enriched me as a person but will hopefully enhance the content of my future research endeavours as well.

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Dates for the Diary

From	To	Event	Contact
4 th June 2009 (London)	4 th June 2009	Improving mental health in the workplace: mental health at work (Division of Occupational Psychology)	learningaliving@bps.org.uk
19 th June 2009 (Leeds)	19 th June 2009	Paediatric Psychology Network Conference	conferences@bps.org.uk
23 rd June 2009 (Lancashire)	25 th June 2009	Division of Forensic Psychology Annual Conference	www.uclan.ac.uk/dfpconference2009
26 th June 2009 (Sheffield)	27 th June 2009	North East of England Branch Annual Conference.	conferences@bps.org.uk
9 th July 2009 (Exeter)	11 th July 2009	The Association for the Teaching of Psychology Annual Conference 2009	http://www.atpconference.org.uk/
29 th July 2009 (Cardiff)	31 st July 2009	PsyPAG Annual Conference 2009	http://www.psythag.co.uk/conference/

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