

PSYPAG

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Advice on dealing with the media

**The confusion surrounding being
a 'doctor'**

**The non-motor symptoms
of Parkinson's disease**



Also in this issue:

'Our story' iPhone application

Combining creative and academic writing



Editorial

Emily Collins

WELCOME to the 80th edition of the *PsyPAG Quarterly*. The PsyPAG Annual Conference in July was hugely successful and it was great to see so many enthusiastic attendees as well as so much interesting and exciting research being presented. Alongside the conference, PsyPAG also had its Annual General Meeting and I'd like to congratulate those that were elected to committee positions and welcome them to PsyPAG. In particular I'd like to welcome the two new editors who have joined the *Quarterly* Editorial Team, Daniel Zahra and Blaire Morgan. I'd also like to say goodbye to Julie Port and Charlotte McLeod who stepped down at the AGM, and thank them for all their hard work, including their input in the current issue.

This issue begins with John Radford's article, in which he discusses the common debate surrounding whether or not having a PhD makes you a 'real' doctor, or if this title should be reserved for those who practice medicine (who, incidentally, may not have PhDs at all). We then turn to an academic piece by Laura Spencer, reviewing the current literature on the non-motor symptoms associated with Parkinson's disease, which are often overlooked. Jennifer Mayer then provides an insight into both the advantages and disadvantages of being an international postgraduate student in the UK, information that will no doubt be useful to anyone considering undertaking a PhD under these circumstances. This is followed by Puja Joshi, outlining tips and advice for dealing with the media and promoting your research based on a training workshop she attended run by Inside Edge Media Training Company. This wide reaching article covers how to create media interest in your research and how to prepare for and behave in a media interview, none of which are

normally covered in conventional PhD training programmes, despite being potentially very important. Andrew Dunn's article on the size-contrast illusion reports on an informal experiment assessing whether it can be replicated with familiar objects, and Natalia Kucirkova demonstrates how your thesis need not be the only product of your PhD, discussing the use of an iPhone application in her research. This article describes both the theoretical underpinnings of the study in question as well as the practical side of creating the application and how it was used. Similarly, Steven Brown's article on combining creative writing and academic writing shows how fictional journal articles can be used as teaching tools. The issue closes with an interesting look at the regression to the mean phenomenon by Paul Ibbotson who explains precisely what it is, when it occurs and why, as psychologists, we should care.

The Editorial Team would like to thank all the contributors to this issue and hope that you enjoy reading these articles. We also encourage you to get in touch if you'd like to contribute to future issues. We welcome articles that discuss your research, provide reviews of events, books or conferences or offer advice or tips you think other postgraduates would find useful. Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you have any ideas you would like to discuss. We look forward to hearing from you!

Emily Collins

On behalf of the PsyPAG *Quarterly* Editorial Team: Claire Miller, Blaire Morgan and Daniel Zahra.

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Chair's Column

Sarah Wood

I AM WRITING THIS on my way home from PsyPAG's 26th Annual Conference hosted by Bangor University. This was my first conference as PsyPAG Chair and it was a hugely pleasurable experience. The conference aims to give psychology postgraduates a supportive and friendly atmosphere in which they can present their research and receive constructive feedback. I feel that the 2011 conference delivered on this aim and I hope those who attended and presented their work feel so too. A number of delegates spoke to me about the high quality of the presentations across the three days and about how much fun that they had. I can only hope that you enjoyed it as much as me. As with all these things there will be feedback to receive, we look forward to hearing about what you think went well and where we might improve for next year.

The Chair's Column following a conference can often read like an Oscar acceptance speech with the number of people to thank, but it is important that the people who make such an event possible are recognised. A massive thank you must go out to the conference organising team at Bangor, with a special mention to Katherine Burnett and Robin Kramer for all of their hard work. They put a programme together which included great keynotes, a diverse range of presentations plus interesting and varied workshops. Top marks must also be given for the conference dinner and Ceilidh which went down a treat. We were also supported by a large number of sponsors, and I would like to thank in particular the School of Psychology at Bangor for their generous support, as well as all of the British Psychological Societies Branches, Divisions and Sections who gave assistance. This was down, in no small part, to the hard work of the committee members who represent postgraduates on these committees.

While I always return from conferences tired, they also give me a spring in my step and renewed enthusiasm to get my head down and concentrate on my research. This is particularly true of a PsyPAG conference and this year is no different. I think this is because of the supportive environment of PsyPAG which allows people to freely discuss research issues and ideas, and the chance to talk to people who get how you are feeling. As I am sure we have all experienced, sometimes all you need is to talk something through with someone who will listen and understand, a PsyPAG conference allows for that. So if you were unable to attend this year, I would urge you to think about attending next year. For any of you who are on Twitter and were unable to attend you might like to search for the hashtag #PsyPAG2011 to get a flavour of the conference. We have also introduced a slideshare page (www.slideshare.net/event/psypag-2011), where you will be able to see some of the presentations from the conference. For those of you who presented at the conference this is a great way to show off your presentation to wider audience.

As our flagship event, the conference enables us to showcase the very best that PsyPAG has to offer. This year's programme included presentations from two of our award winners; Nicola Barclay, Rising Researcher Award, and Yousef Gavriel Ansara, National Psychology Postgraduate Teaching Award. It gave me great pleasure to announce the award winners at the conference dinner. As well as supporting postgraduates with bursaries for conference attendance and free workshops to develop skills, we also want to recognise the outstanding contributions by postgraduates at all levels and our awards enable us to do this. We also awarded prizes for the best

presentations during the conference. As ever there were some difficult deliberations due to high calibre of presentations that the judges saw. The winner of the best poster presentation was Catherine Lawrence for her poster entitled 'A diary study of the cognitive side effects of chemotherapy for breast cancer: Safety implication during daily tasks'. There were two runners-up prizes for best oral presentation which went to Lee Moore and Jenny Barke. Shanti Shanker's talk entitled 'Time and force... what's the connection?' won the best presentation. Shanti's talk was first, in the first session of the first day, but it was one that stood out for the judges across the three days, a difficult task considering what people might consider to be quite a 'dry' area. Well done to all the winners.

I am always in awe of our conference organisers and the way that they manage to balance organising a large national conference while at the same time continuing to keep on top of their postgraduate studies. As a part-time student (you can see my reflections in an earlier *Quarterly* edition) I understand a little bit about the balancing act which is needed to do this. As a committee we are in discussions about who will be hosting the 2012 conference but are not in a position to announce this at the time of writing. Undoubtedly a decision will have been made before the *Quarterly* hits your departments, so please have a look on our website for details and keep an eye out on the JISCmail list for any announcements. Wherever it is, they have a hard act to follow.

The conference always causes a mixture of emotions for those involved with the committee, as we host our Annual General Meeting (AGM) in which we say farewell and thank you to committee members standing down and welcome enthusiastic new members reading to represent postgraduate views. For those of you are leaving the committee, I would like to thank you for all of your hard work for PsyPAG and psychology postgraduates and to wish you all the best for your future endeavours. Remember to sign up for the alumni! While it is hard to single out people I do want to mention two members of the core committee who stepped down at the AGM, our Vice-Chair, Alana James, and Treasurer, Josie Booth. Without these two the committee would not have been able to function. They have been very supportive of me during my time on the committee and have been committed to working for the best of postgraduates. Alana has managed to make sure that all important business is considered during meetings, and Josie that we get the best value from our money to support postgraduates. Thank you both.

Finally I would like to welcome all of our new committee members to PsyPAG and I hope that you have an enjoyable and productive time on the committee. As always we want to hear from you, the PsyPAG members, if there are any ways in which you think that we can support you better – from offering a workshop on a particular area to a new section on our website you might like to see – just drop one of the committee a line.

Sarah Goldie

PsyPAG Chair

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Not a real doctor

John Radford

Doctor: Nurse, I'm afraid this patient is dead.

Patient: No I'm not!

Nurse: Be quiet. Doctor knows best.

AN ANCIENT JOKE to introduce some serious points. When after years of work, worry, triumphs and disappointments, one is finally hooded by the University Chancellor, or whatever ritual signifies that one is no longer plain Mr, Mrs or Miss (or even Ms), but Doctor, one is entitled to feel gratified. Alas it is usually only a matter of time before being brought down by the remark, 'Of course, you're not a real doctor, are you?' The speaker means, of course, that you are not qualified to practice medicine. It is particularly annoying in that most of those who are 'real', medical, doctors, do not have a doctorate, at least in the UK, but only Bachelor degrees. But they are always addressed as Dr So-and-so, and referred to as Doctor or the Doctor. On the other hand consultants are always called Mr, Mrs, or Miss So-and-so, even though in many cases they do have an MD (which in the UK is a research, not a qualifying degree), or sometimes a PhD. Like so many British customs, it is a muddle. And like many such, it goes back to the Middle Ages. The first universities were essentially training schools for the then three professions, law, medicine and theology (Radford et al., 1997). Students took what we might now call a Foundation Course in transferable skills, the most important being grammar, rhetoric and dialectic. Grammar was Latin, the universal medium of learning, diplomacy and administration. Rhetoric was persuasive communication. Dialectic was logic and reasoning. This produced the Bachelor, who could go on to professional training. At times there was variation in the use of Master, Doctor or Professor to indicate qualification, but the

essence of all three terms was competence, such that it entitled one to teach others, specifically in other universities, the *ius ubique docendi*. 'Doctor' is from Latin *docere*, to teach.

As universities proliferated they followed many different patterns. In England there were only two until the 19th century, and for various reasons they largely lost their function of professional training. Law went to the Inns of Court and Chancery, medicine to the great teaching hospitals and new professional societies, and only theology was left, and that only of the diminishing Church of England. The use of 'doctor' for medical qualification survived, perhaps simply through inertia. Similarly barristers and judges have never given up their formal wigs, when everyone else did so 200 years ago (there is now a revolutionary proposal to abandon them). Other countries retained the old university style. Physicians in the US have MD, *medicinae doctor*, after their name. In France, a physician is *un médecin*, which neatly avoids the confusion, and similarly in other romance languages. Here, on the other hand, some dentists are adopting the style of 'Dr', on the grounds that their training is as long as a medical one.

So, in short, with your PhD or professional doctorate you are a real doctor and your GP is almost certainly not, though you are unlikely to convince many people of it. But I want to consider the implications of these real doctorates. It may be a surprise that the first PhD (actually DPhil, Oxon) in Britain was awarded in 1917. Mediaeval universities did award doctorates in philosophy, but the modern version stems from the

reform of German higher education after the Napoleonic Wars. This is usually associated with the name of Wilhelm von Humboldt, although he held office as minister for education for only 16 months, and similar ideas to his were becoming current (Michelsen, 2010; Nybom, 2003). Humboldt conceived of higher education as the free pursuit of knowledge, unified under the aegis of philosophy, and with teaching and research inseparable. It was not concerned with practical training or applied science and technology, for which there should be a separate system. It is unlikely that the ideal Humboldtian university ever actually existed, but here are the roots of the PhD as a higher degree in any faculty. In the UK, research as the criterion of academic excellence emerged only in the latter part of the 19th century, partly due to the demands of industry. It is now the main component in the influential league tables of universities, which have been shown to be inadequate measures of overall merit (Berry, 1999; Stolz, Hendel & Horn, 2010), and in academic promotion, certainly at the level of reader and professor, though post-1992 universities are more likely to recognise teaching equally (Parker, 2008).

The PhD is generally thought of as training in research, but even in this regard it is often inadequate. A student may only acquire those skills that are appropriate to a very specialised topic (Manathunga, Lant & Mellick, 2007). Humboldt would be amazed. There is considerable variation in the quality of supervision. Assessment processes vary between institutions, and award may depend essentially on the opinion of one examiner. Success rates are sometimes very low. In 2010 the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) asked 10 institutions why so few of their PhD students completed within seven years' full-time (40 per cent in one case), or 10 years' part-time (*Times Higher Education*, 5 May, 2011). Even less is the PhD a preparation for an academic career, which will be at least as much concerned with teaching as research, to say

nothing of all the other tasks such as counselling, administration and so on. In the US, where more than 40,000 PhDs are awarded annually, there is considerable criticism based on major surveys (Nerad, 2004). New PhDs are educated and trained too narrowly, they lack general professional skills of co-operation, organisation and management, they are ill prepared to teach, and are ill-informed about non-academic employment. In addition time to completion is often too long, and non-completion rates are high. Many of these points are certainly relevant here.

Doctoral education is diversifying. Usher (2002) mentions, in Australia, not only the traditional PhD by thesis, but professional doctorates, doctorates by publication and PhDs by project. In Psychology in the UK there are professional doctorate programmes in the main areas of applied work. It is relevant that the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) is currently preparing a document, due to appear in the summer of 2011, which 'aims to describe the range of doctoral degrees and to stress the need for equivalence, with all being rooted in original research' (*Times Higher Education*, 10 March 2011). The last point is in my view misguided. One wants to see equivalent status, but not identity of aims or programmes. My own institution offers doctoral degrees in Clinical, Counselling and Educational Psychology. They stress that professional doctorates can emphasise either research or course work, and that these are equivalent. In fact, all include both. The view of the QAA seems to be that all should follow a research model, and that 'the main focus of the candidate's work [should] be their contribution to knowledge, usually through original research, or the original application of existing knowledge or understanding.' (Quality Assurance Agency, <http://ly/hteJ35>). The idea that most doctoral work makes any significant contribution to knowledge seems to me utopian. I go further. In my view, what a PhD should mean, as far as research is concerned, is that the new holder is competent to under-

take independent work. The thesis is one piece of evidence, indeed it is conventionally prefaced with ‘in partial fulfillment of the requirements for...’ or similar phrase. Whether it actually contributes very much is less important; and other sorts of evidence, such as successful course work, publications, or practical experience, should also be part of the assessment, to demonstrate a wide range of knowledge and skills. This applies with even greater force to professional doctorates. In contrast to the MD, these are often qualifying degrees, certainly in Psychology. They should be a guarantee of two things, competence and professionalism. We wish to be assured that the holder has the full range of skills and knowledge required to practise, and that they accept the principles of professional work. These include such things as taking responsibility for acting without direct supervision, and giving priority to the interests of the client (Radford, 2010, and in press). Ability to carry out research is desirable but should not be the main criterion. Ability to understand and apply the work of others is equally or more important.

A fantasy of mine – and likely to remain so – is that there should be a professional Doctorate in Higher Education. This would prepare graduates for an academic career, covering the varied knowledge and skills needed. Ability to do original research is certainly important. The skill of keeping up with and integrating the work of others is

equally so. And so is the related art of teaching effectively. (It has long been said that teachers have to understand those not good at explaining, and explain to those not good at understanding.) It is also essential, in my view, that academics should understand the way in which higher education has developed and why, and what are the pressures that influence present and future. Without that they are at the mercy of every passing fashion and political whim. And then there are the myriad other activities of academic life: committees, internal politics and negotiations; selection of students; counselling; assessment and examinations; ‘administration’ which covers a variety of activities; and so on. All of these can be done better and more efficiently with knowledge and training. Today, and doubtless tomorrow, academics appear to be running as fast as they can to stay in the same place. But there are ways of running more effectively. And, ultimately, of changing the rules.

Perhaps there should be a Campaign for Real Doctors (CaRD), to be at the forefront of such developments. Especially if they are psychologists.

Correspondence

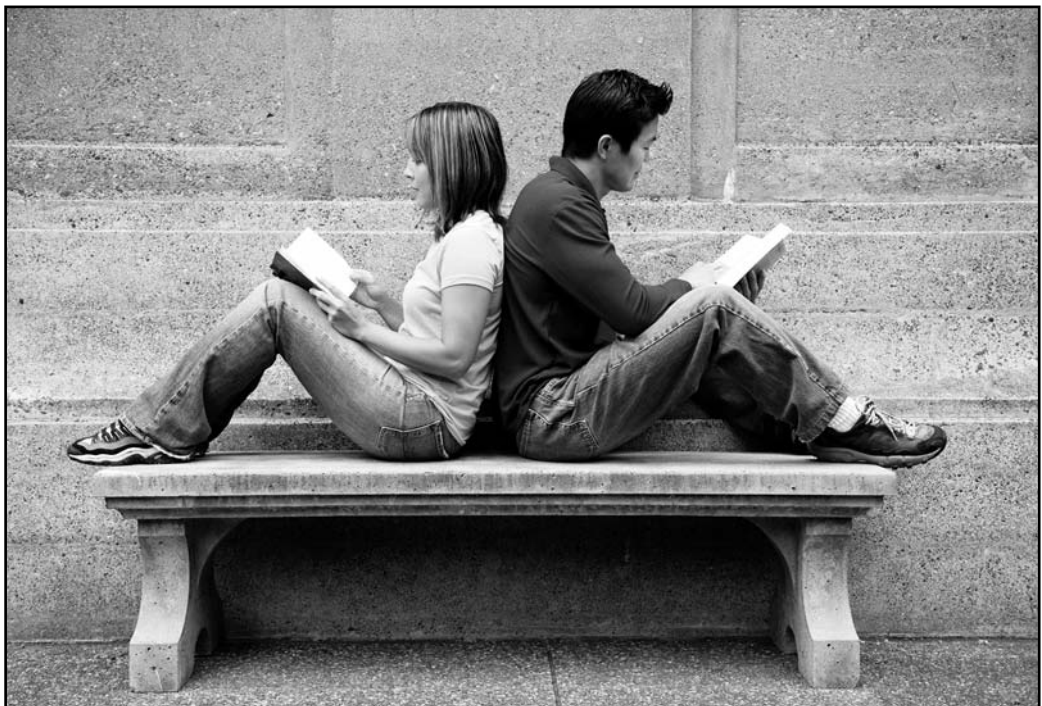
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Parkinson's disease: Not just a motor disorder

Laura Spencer

This review considers the non-motor symptoms associated with Parkinson's disease, and the impact upon daily functioning.

PARKINSON'S DISEASE is a neurodegenerative disorder affecting 128 per 100,000 people (Schrag, Ben-Shlomo & Quinn, 2000). Symptoms include muscular rigidity, slow movement, and tremor, and are thought to arise due to a lack of the neurotransmitter dopamine (Fahn, 2003). Frequently, Parkinson's disease is considered a motor disorder. However, research shows up to 31 per cent of people with Parkinson's disease also have a dementia, accounting for three to four per cent of the dementia population (Aarsland, Zaccai & Brayne, 2005). Amongst Parkinson's patients that do not meet the diagnostic criteria for a dementia, a further 40 per cent demonstrate cognitive impairments in the domains of: visuospatial abilities, memory, executive functions, language and attention (Kim et al., 2009). Most commonly, these impairments appear to be in the domain of executive functions (Caviness et al., 2007; Janvin et al., 2006). So what are 'executive functions', and how do these impairments effect daily functioning for people with Parkinson's disease and their partner?

'This is my life, one and only life I'll get, so live it, as long as you can and just put as much into it as you can...'

(Bramley & Eatough, 2004, p.231, quote from a patient with Parkinson's disease)

Executive functions

Executive functions refer to the ability to mentally shift between tasks, update and monitor information, and inhibit responses

(Miyake et al., 2000). These abilities allow people to identify goals, to select and perform goal-directed behaviour, monitor their behaviour, and adapt it when required (Snyder, Nussbaum & Robins, 2006). For example, giving up smoking would require an individual to identify smoking cessation as a goal, then behaviour consistent with this goal would need to be employed, such as using nicotine patches. Executive functions would allow an individual to monitor, switch, and inhibit behaviour, if and when necessary, in order to achieve a goal. Disruption to executive functions, therefore, results in the inability to perform adaptive behaviour or regulate goals (Royall et al., 2007). As all behaviour is goal-oriented (Carver & Scheier, 1998), disruption to these abilities would have wide implications on functioning.

So how do cognitive impairments affect daily life?

Cognitive impairments associated with executive dysfunction may co-exist with behavioural problems such as disinhibition, irritability, lack of motivation, emotional flattening, and impulsivity (Lezak, 1995).

In day-to-day life, cognitive impairments may present as forgetfulness, distractibility, and difficulties in organisation and planning in people with Parkinson's disease (Poliakoff & Smith-Spark, 2008).

Cognitive impairments and executive dysfunction are also predictive of instrumental activities of daily living, such as managing finances and preparing a meal (Cahn et al., 1998; Cahn-Weiner, Boyle &

Malloy, 2002). However the literature is inconsistent as to whether more basic activities of daily living, for example, dressing, are associated with cognitive or motor impairments (Koven et al., 2007; Mitchell & Miller, 2008).

'It's hard to get my arms into a dress for instance...it's hard to get it over my head. My arms don't bend...sometimes its impossible...'
(Bramley & Eatough, 2004, p.231, quote from a patient with Parkinson's disease)

Future research needs to address functional outcomes in people with Parkinson's disease as they contribute to quality of life in patients (Rahman et al., 2008; Schrag, Jahanshahi & Quinn, 2000). Furthermore, functional outcomes are associated with distress in caregivers of people with Parkinson's disease (Aarsland et al., 1999).

What are the implications of Parkinson's disease?

Research has also considered the experience of living with Parkinson's disease using qualitative studies. These studies have identified changes in employment and social interactions (Habermann, 2000), and in the role and the abilities of the person with Parkinson's disease (Hodgson, Garcia & Tyndall, 2004).

Spousal caregivers of people with Parkinson's disease report supporting their partner both physically and emotionally (Habermann, 2000), and some spouses described feeling overwhelmed by their role as a caregiver which had affected their own health (Hodgson et al.). Other common themes identified within the literature include striving for independence and normality, despite struggling with the symptoms of Parkinson's disease (Hodgson, Garcia & Tyndall, 2004; Roger & Medved, 2010).

However, previous qualitative studies have tended to focus upon the motor symptoms associated with disease, rather than

considering any effects of cognitive impairments upon daily functioning.

Aims for future research

The understanding that Parkinson's disease is associated with both motor and cognitive impairments is well grounded within the literature. However, little research has explored the relationship between executive dysfunction and the affect upon daily living for people with Parkinson's disease and their caregiver/spouse.

I hope to bridge this gap by identifying which areas of life are affected by Parkinson's disease, the nature of these impairments, and whether they can be attributed to physical, emotional, or cognitive domains. Participants will be recruited as part of a larger study investigating the impact of cognitive impairments in Parkinson's disease. Parkinson's disease patients will have previously undergone neuropsychological assessment to identify those with cognitive impairments but who do not reach the diagnostic criteria for dementia. Data will be collected via semi-structured interviews with the person with Parkinson's disease and their spouse/caregiver. Questions will address cognitive functions, including planning, decision making, problem solving, and memory. For example, 'Have you noticed any changes in how you organise your day and make decisions about your plans?' In addition, changes in social interactions and activity participations will be discussed, as will activities of daily living such as housekeeping, shopping, and medication. For example, 'Have there been any changes in how you manage your finances?'

The interviews will be analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis, and the results will be used in the development of cognitive interventions to address executive dysfunction in people with Parkinson's disease who do not meet the criteria for dementia.

And finally...

There is little doubt that Parkinson's disease is not just a motor disorder. Previous research has clearly identified the presence of cognitive impairments in people with Parkinson's disease (Kim et al., 2009), which are believed to increase the risk of the later development of a dementia (Janvin et al., 2006). With an increasingly ageing population, the need to address these impairments becomes ever present as the prevalence of Parkinson's disease increases with age (Benito-Leon et al., 2003; von Campenhausen et al., 2005). In the absence of a cure for the disease, further psychological research is needed to address the development of cognitive interventions to improve quality of life for people with Parkinson's disease and their caregiver.

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Why have categorical models of psychopathology been criticised by psychologists?

Fleur-Michelle Coiffait

PSYCHOPATHOLOGY refers to the science of understanding ‘mental disorder’ (Widiger & Sankis, 2000). There have been several shifts in conceptual frameworks of psychopathology in recent history that correspond with dominant theories and attitudes of the time (Brüne, 2008). However, assumptions based on frameworks developed over a century ago persist as the basis of categorical systems used today. Such models continue to be the subject of intense debate regarding their theoretical underpinnings, validity, utility, aetiological and treatment implications. Consideration of these issues is particularly pertinent, given the impending publication of updated versions of the two main classification systems: the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM-IV;* American Psychiatric Association, 1994) and the *International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10;* World Health Organisation, 2007). This article will examine criticisms of categorical models of psychopathology from a psychological perspective, arguing that alternative conceptualisations may prove more useful in terms of understanding and ameliorating psychological distress.

In the 19th century, Kraepelin (1899/1990) stated that mental disorders fell into a finite number of categories, each with a unique and discoverable pathophysiology and aetiology. These ideas were later developed by Klerman (1978) in an attempt to realign psychiatry with the field of medicine. The so-called neo-Kraepelinian manifesto identified a number of fundamental propositions, most notably that there was a clear boundary between ‘mental illness’ and

‘mental health’, and that several discrete and discoverable ‘mental illnesses’ exist. At this time, there was a focus on the biological causes and treatment of mental illnesses. Furthermore, diagnosis, classification and research were advocated in order to promote scientific rigour within psychiatry. These propositions were hugely influential in the development of *DSM-III* (APA, 1980) and subsequent editions due to socio-political demand for a more reliable, standardised approach to psychiatric diagnosis (Bentall, 2003). It has been argued that this underlying socio-political agenda influenced the development of current dominant categorical systems to a greater extent than objective, scientific evidence (Follette & Houts, 1996; Bentall, 2003, 2006).

A major criticism levelled at the two main taxonomies concerns their lack of theoretical grounding (Follette & Houts, 1996), as sound theory is deemed fundamental to effective classificatory systems. Collections of symptoms and categories in the absence of robust, evidence-based theory render a categorical system essentially meaningless (Bentall, 2003). Furthermore, the claim of theoretical neutrality in current categorical systems has been questioned. It is argued that they implicitly follow a purely medical model without considering wider factors that influence a person’s mental health, but state otherwise in order to foster accessibility and gain influence (Follette & Houts, 1996). Interpretations of professional authority and jurisdiction may have arisen from the adoption of certain theoretical stances in *DSM* and *ICD*, thus it is postulated that an atheoretical approach was adopted in order to

avoid direct confrontation and instead encourage widespread use of these systems across mental health professions (Follette & Houts, 1996). Indeed, the commercial success of *DSM-III* (APA, 1980) at a time of hardship in the American publishing industry has led several authors (e.g. Bentall, 2003; Follette & Houts, 1996) to question the underlying agenda behind the development of modern *DSMs*. Objectivity and scientific rigour do not appear to have been key priorities (Bentall, 2006).

A diagnostic system must demonstrate reliability and validity in order to be useful in clinical and research contexts (Bentall, 1990). If the same result is achieved at different points in time (test-retest reliability) and the same conclusion is drawn by different individuals (inter-rater agreement), this indicates that whatever is being measured or decided upon is a reliable, identifiable phenomenon. Therefore, a reliable diagnostic tool should allow different clinicians to come to the same, replicable diagnosis. There is also the question of how meaningful these different diagnoses are (construct validity), given that symptoms included in the criteria for schizophrenia, for example, are also associated with other diagnoses (Bentall, 1990, 2003, 2006; Hayes et al., 1996). This is demonstrated by research that has failed to reveal separate symptom clusters for schizophrenia and affective syndromes (Kendell & Gourlay, 1970; Kendell, 1991).

A prerequisite of both reliability and validity is an agreed definition and in an attempt to overcome the issue of reliability, diagnostic entities in recent categorical systems have employed very precisely defined operational criteria. Structured interview schedules to ensure standardised questioning regarding symptoms have also been developed to facilitate inter-clinician agreement. However, Bentall (1990, 2003, 2006) points out that reliability can be demonstrated if criteria are made specific enough, but this does not necessarily make a particular concept valid or meaningful.

Hayes et al. (1996) expand on this issue, explaining that the reliable detection of a set of topographical symptoms does not qualify the assumption that they arose as a result of the same causal process or that they fulfil the same function. Comparable to the inverse problem in Physics, similar topographical presentations can arise from different aetiologies and serve different functions. On the other hand, different topographical presentations may fulfil similar functions and arise from a common aetiology, representing a huge weakness in current categorical diagnostic systems (Hayes et al., 1996).

The utility of a diagnostic system also depends on its predictive validity, as clinicians are concerned with predicting expected outcomes and most importantly, useful treatments (Bentall, 1990). Large-scale population studies demonstrating shared genetic characteristics in schizophrenia and bipolar affective disorder challenge the predictive validity of these diagnoses. First-degree relatives of individuals with a diagnosis of bipolar affective disorder have been found to be at an increased risk of a diagnosis of schizophrenia, and vice versa (Lichtenstein et al., 2009). Furthermore, huge variations in the course and long-term outcomes of individuals with the same diagnosis cast doubt on the utility of these systems (e.g. Bleuler, 1978; Ciompi, 1984; Tsuang, Woolson & Fleming, 1979). Diagnoses should enable identification of effective treatments for particular conditions, given the assumption that all mental disorders represent distinct disease entities with unique aetiologies. Despite guidelines purporting the use of specific pharmacological treatments for specific diagnoses, the effectiveness of different drugs for different diagnoses has received little attention (Bentall, 2003). It is concerning that discoveries of the properties of the main drugs used to treat so-called mental illness have arisen by chance. Mechanisms of action remain speculative, yet the effects on particular symptoms have been taken as evidence of biological mechanisms

(Bentall, 2003). One of the few studies to investigate treatment specificity of different drugs using a double-blind placebo design found that response to treatment was associated with individuals' symptoms, not their diagnoses (Johnstone et al., 1988). Taken together, evidence from long-term outcome and treatment outcome studies seriously questions both the validity and utility of and the assumptions underpinning categorical models of psychopathology.

There are also problems with the Kraepelinian proposition that there is a clear boundary between 'normality' and 'abnormality'. This dichotomy is reflected in the criteria for 'clinically significant dysfunction, disruption or distress' stipulated in the two major categorical classification systems. There is no definition of when these become clinically significant, therefore the issues of reliability and validity arise once more. There is also a more fundamental issue with the dichotomy of presence vs. absence of 'mental disorder', in that definitions of mental illness vary across time and culture. The concept of mental illness is a cultural construct (Bentall, 2003), evidenced by the existence of culturally-bound expressions of psychological distress that are restricted to certain societies. For example, eating disorders are found in Western societies where physical attractiveness and beauty are highly regarded. Comparable conditions are not widely observed in non-Western societies. Furthermore, experiences that would be interpreted as psychotic in Western societies are regarded as normal and benign amongst healers and Shamans in other cultures (Littlewood & Lipsedge, 1989). Although *DSM-IV* (APA, 1994) makes some attempt to address the issue of cultural variations in the expression of mental health and illness, too little attention is devoted to the influence of social norms on the conceptualisation and experience of psychological distress (Bentall, 2003). Indeed, the dominant categorical systems and the field of Western psychiatry itself are culturally bound and fit with Western cultural beliefs about behav-

our and distress. The more unusual a behaviour, the more likely it is that a dispositional explanation will be sought (Ross, 1977). Furthermore, Boyle (1999) raises concerns that the language used to refer to diagnoses (e.g. 'he has schizophrenia') confers an unjustified sense of permanence and solidity.

Following on from the idea of cultural constructs of mental health and illness, a further critique of categorical classification systems is their failure to consider developmental, functional and contextual factors that are inherent in 'mental illness' (Hayes et al., 1996). The lack of sensitive, diagnosis-specific pathophysiological markers for categories of 'mental illness' provides support for that idea that instead of a single, unique biological mechanism, biology is one of many contributing factors that may result in a psychiatric diagnosis. Although notably absent from some psychiatric textbooks and psychopathology research, the role of the environment in the development and maintenance of mental disorders is being increasingly acknowledged (Bentall, 2006). Findings from epidemiological studies indicating that psychosis is more common in the developed world than in non-Western societies (Torrey, 1987; Thakker & Ward, 1998) support the idea that life is more stressful in the industrialised world (Allen, 1997). Environmental factors associated with an increased risk of being diagnosed with schizophrenia include living in an urban area (Pedersen & Mortensen, 2001), migration (Cantor-Graae & Selten, 2005), and use of substances such as cannabis (Arsenault et al., 2004). Although attempts have been made to link these to biological mechanisms (e.g. Selten & Cantor-Graae, 2005) there is strong evidence for the influence of wider factors in conceptualisations of psychopathology.

In a critique of categorical classification systems, Boyle (1999) states that focus should shift towards accounting for people's complaints and experiences rather than a hypothesised disorder, making as few inferences as possible. Social and interpersonal contexts related to the behaviour or experi-

ence should be acknowledged as well as addressing the meaning, content and function of experiences and behaviour (Boyle, 1999). Recognition that people are not passive victims of their behaviour and experiences and that they play an active role even when they are distressing emphasises the idea that they are functional. Study of non-pathological populations is crucial to understanding why certain experiences (e.g. hearing voices) are distressing for some individuals but not for others and consequently why some individuals may seek treatment whereas others do not (Boyle, 1999). This sort of approach would empower individuals to make the decision of whether their experiences are causing them distress and whether they would like to seek help.

Bentall (2003, 2006) suggests abandoning categorical classification systems altogether and adopting a 'complaint-focused' approach to understanding the difficulties individuals seek help for. This involves a radical shift in perspective, moving away from the unhelpful labels imposed on individuals towards a more humane approach to understanding people's problems. Working at the level of complaints means that debates regarding the reliability and validity of mental illnesses become redundant (Bentall, 2006). Psychological research at the level of cognitive processes has provided evidence supporting proposed cognitive mechanisms underlying the development and maintenance of complaints such as delusions and hallucinations (see Bentall, 2006, for a summary). Broadly speaking, certain information processing styles such as the misattribution of sources of speech or attention biases have been associated with these phenomena. Kraepelinian assumptions would suggest that delusions and hallucinations were symptoms indicative of schizophrenia; however, quasi-hallucinatory experiences are in fact common in the general population. Far more people report experiences of hallucinations than the number of people with a diagnosis of schizophrenia (Romme & Escher, 1993). Indeed,

the hearing voices movement originating in Holland has arisen as a result of individuals accepting these experiences as difference as opposed to a sign of disease. There is an emphasis on accepting and understanding the hearing of voices as a meaningful experience which is only identified as problematic if they cause an individual distress.

Similarly, Hayes et al. (1996) emphasise the value in taking a functional analytic approach to understanding psychological complaints. Functional analysis is concerned with describing relationships between events that may ultimately result in psychological distress (Sturmey, 1996). It is proposed that a functional approach could overcome many of the shortcomings of categorical classification systems (Hayes et al., 1996). The neutrality of functional analysis (Bentall, 2003) means that it could accommodate various theoretical and therapeutic perspectives, unlike categorical systems. Hayes et al. (1996) present the idea of a functional diagnostic system based on dimensions of common functional processes as a compelling alternative to current taxonomies. Experiential avoidance refers broadly to the behavioural response of avoiding unwanted thoughts, feelings or experiences and is implicated in a number of presentations of psychological distress, including anxiety, substance misuse and eating disorders, among others. In fact, Hayes et al. (1996) argue that experiential avoidance characterises most forms of psycho-pathology, whether it takes the form of cognitive avoidance (e.g. in obsessive-compulsive disorder), behavioural avoidance (e.g. in phobias) or emotional avoidance (e.g. in substance misuse). Although the majority of therapeutic approaches seek to address experiential avoidance in some form, it is only relatively recently that a new wave of cognitive-behavioural therapies, such as acceptance and commitment therapy (Hayes et al., 1999) and dialectical behaviour therapy (Linehan, 1993, 1994), has begun to explicitly address the acceptance of negative emotions. The functional dimension of experiential avoidance constitutes a spectrum, ranging

from being helpful, to benign, to detrimental. A dimensional approach thus overcomes the unhelpful dichotomy inherent in categorical systems that can lead to judgement and instead focuses on psychopathology as an extreme manifestation of typical behaviour. Not only does this represent a more respectful, humane and meaningful approach to understanding psychological distress but it also allows for different cultural conceptualisations.

A number of limitations associated with categorical systems have been outlined. These include the problematic neo-Kraepelinian assumptions underlying categorical models of psychopathology, whereby observations from physiological disease processes in medicine have been unsuccessfully applied to understanding people's behaviour and experiences. The dichotomous nature of current categorical systems fails to take into account the continuum of human experiences and individual differences in how these are appraised and understood. Evidence for the distinction between different categories remains sparse, despite many decades of research seeking to uncover common biological markers. On the other hand, there is converging evidence of shared characteristics between different diagnostic categories. Symptom-oriented approaches have been more promising in terms of predicting outcome, something that diagnostic categories fail to achieve. Dismissal of developmental, contextual and functional factors is a further criticism

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levelled at categorical diagnostic systems. Alternative frameworks have briefly been described that address each of these issues, involving a different approach to understanding the function and meaning of distress and the complex affective, behavioural, social and cultural factors involved. However, adoption of alternative approaches is time consuming and draws attention to social inequalities linked with distress (Boyle, 1999). The simplicity and dominance of the neo-Kraepelinian categorical models offer a more convenient conceptualisation of psychological distress for many. However, it is hoped that we will move towards a system that better reflects what we know about the multitude of factors that precipitate, perpetuate, maintain and protect against psychological distress.

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On being an international student in the UK

Jennifer Mayer

WHEN people hear you are an international student they usually express interest and a little bit of jealousy. Studying abroad gives students the unique opportunity to collaborate with a wider range of individuals in their field, experience a different academic environment, and develop themselves personally as well as professionally. A PhD in the UK offers quite a different experience from similar programmes in other countries, especially in the US. In the UK, PhD programmes are generally a much shorter length of three years and are primarily heavily research-based rather than a model of taught and research components that is utilised in other countries. Postgraduates also have the opportunity to delve deeply into a niche area of their subject with their thesis focusing on one main theme that is comprised of multiple studies, which students are encouraged to design and develop themselves. However, along with all of the benefits of a UK PhD and the enjoyment of travel, living in a different country, and experiencing another culture, you also face more obstacles during your PhD. than the average home/EU student.

Before most students embark upon their PhD they face the task of applying for funding, whether it be through a teaching bursary, grant, or ESRC studentship. This process is often stressful and frustrating due to submitting a number of applications and level of competition for these opportunities. Unfortunately international students are rarely eligible to enter this race for funding based solely on the fact that they are not citizens of the UK or any other EU country.

Until recently this problem was addressed through the Overseas Research

Students Awards Scheme (ORSAS), which provided funding for the difference between international student fees and home student tuition fees for the entirety of a postgraduate research programme. This scheme attracted overseas students to study in the UK and allowed other funding bodies and institutions to focus their spending on UK and EU students. However, in 2009 the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) discontinued the ORSAS grants due to budgetary constraints. Other funding bodies have yet to amend their application criteria to include international students, and as a result, this group of postgraduates have been left with very few opportunities for studentships.

Nevertheless, there are still opportunities for overseas postgraduate students to find funding; they just have to be a little more creative and determined with their funding plan. Some countries (most notably the Commonwealth) have specific grants that will cover all or part of the tuition fees and occasionally the country you are from will offer a couple of (very competitive) grants that may only cover a year of your programme (Fullbright Award, Marshall Scholarships). For those who are able to partially self-fund and/or have decided to take out a student loan, there are several options for alleviating the financial burden. Often universities offer teaching/marking on an hourly basis to postgraduate students, and it is also worthwhile to seek out part-time research assistant posts. These can help cover a small portion of the degree costs and also have the benefit of adding experience to your CV. Furthermore, small research grants, which are generally awarded to supervisors, can often be based on their PhD students'

research. While these grants rarely extend to tuition fees, they can cover additional costs such as equipment, travel, and conferences.

Another major concern for overseas students hoping to remain in the UK after obtaining their doctorate is finding a job. While this is a daunting and stressful task for any PhD student, it is especially so for international students whose ability to remain in the country is often dependent on receiving a work visa. Currently, overseas students holding a postgraduate degree are eligible for a two-year Tier 1 (post-study) visa that enables them to stay in the UK without sponsorship. Alternatively, individuals can apply for indefinite leave to remain as a highly skilled worker under the Tier 1 (General) category. Under the current points-based system, individuals can calculate their eligibility before they apply. While having a PhD, speaking English, and currently residing in the UK grants the majority of the points needed to qualify as a highly skilled worker, in order to obtain enough points, one must also have earned a minimum of £30,000 per year for 12 consecutive months within the 15 months prior to application (www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk). Currently, individuals studying in the UK under a Tier 4 (Student) visa are unable to work more than 20 hours per week, which makes it nearly impossible for them to have a high enough salary to obtain the points necessary to qualify for highly-skilled worker status.

These visa restrictions on international students who wish to remain in the UK on completion of their PhD underscore the importance of successfully finding a lectureship, research post, or post-doctoral research funding almost immediately. This requires a

need to be more proactive in building a CV by joining committees, attending conferences, seeking out additional training, utilising teaching opportunities, and of course publishing papers. While this is true of any PhD student, overseas students are generally unable to study part-time and are on a stricter timeline finding post-degree employment which means they are juggling a larger than normal amount of PhD-related work, activities, and responsibilities. Additionally, immigration rules are currently going through dramatic changes in an attempt to reduce the amount of migration to the UK. Thus, as ever, it is important to keep up-to-date on visa eligibility and remember that the visa options available at the beginning of your programme of study may not still exist when the time comes for you to apply after you have completed your doctorate.

Despite all of the challenges I have faced as an international PhD student, I love studying in the UK. The structure of the PhD has allowed me to specialise in a niche area, design my own experiments, and play an integral role in determining the path my thesis has taken. And while I have had to be more proactive than the average student in seeking out activities for my CV, every conference attended, paper worked on, and committee joined has aided in my development as an academic and researcher, which will prove useful regardless of where my career takes me.

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A guide for promoting your research through the media

Puja Joshi

RECENTLY ATTENDED an excellent training workshop which was delivered by Inside Edge media training company. Two journalists actually held the workshop which gave an insider's perspective on what you can expect from an interview situation. The main goal of the workshop was to leave us with an understanding of how psychologists can work with the media to promote and disseminate their research. During the one-day training we were introduced to many types of interview situations. It also interactive as we were given the opportunity to role play interviews using our own research.

The central message for the training is that maintaining a feeling of control in a media situation is vital. For the purpose of this article I have selected a few tips to share with other psychologists in training in the hope that they will make you more comfortable with the idea of engaging with the media.

Gaining interest in your research

As a psychologist you may feel that your research is suited only to academic audiences and publications. However, a journalist may also be interested in your research or your expertise in the area you are investigating. This could happen for a number of reasons. Budget cuts have affected all industries; in this case journalists have less time and fewer resources to research news stories. Because of this your expert opinion has become much more valuable.

The first hurdle you must cross to gain media interest in your research is to turn your work into a story. This process requires a fine balance between being true to the basic academic structure of your research and then selecting the interesting and bene-

ficial of your work – essentially creating an angle. Your research may be groundbreaking, innovative, novel, consolidating existing research with a new population, be addressing a concern, or shedding light on an under-researched area. You should identify what is exciting about your research will help form your story. News should be interesting and, therefore, a concise and engaging summary of your work allows the journalist to edit the story to their needs.

It is useful to begin your news story by highlighting the benefits of your research. This will immediately make the interviewer, who may not be knowledgeable in your area, aware of the positive impact of your research. This is also a great way to draw in an audience who will perhaps be less concerned about other areas of your research such as your research design or recruitment strategy for example.

Now you have your story an easy way to place yourself on a journalist's radar is to prepare a press release of your work which can be compiled at any stage during your research. If there is a slow news day or a related news story breaks. Your university press officer will be able to assist you on how to prepare a concise press release.

Keeping up-to-date with your area in academic publications is most likely something you are already doing. Extending that awareness to the news is useful because if a news story is receiving attention (locally, nationally, internationally), or, for example, if a politician has made a comment about your area or another piece of related research is causing a stir, then this is an ideal opportunity for you to bring your research into the media light.

If you are new to working with the media then starting out small is a good idea. Local newspapers and local radio could be a very beneficial experience as they may have more time or space to discuss your work. Human interest stories usually take top priority here so if your research involves the community or directly benefits the community then starting here may be good for you. This is also a good option if you have limited time to commit. Remember if your story is being printed using photographs to illustrate your point instantly makes a story more attractive to the eye. Sending photographs with your press release is also advised.

As the lead researcher you have the advantage of knowing your research inside out. A term coined 'taxi rank' journalists was discussed during the day; these are journalists who will take the next news story that comes along. Although this may imply your research is being undervalued, it can actually put you in a position of power as you hold all the facts and can lead the interview.

When approaching journalists you must ensure that if you are searchable online all your contact details and qualifications are up-to-date. Journalists are limited for time so a Google search of your name will be their first port of call for information about you. If they call you on the wrong telephone number you may miss a good opportunity.

Preparing for an interview

It is vital to prepare for an interview. Creating a plan should be treated as a top priority and the key question you should address is: 'What do you want the listener to leave the interview knowing?'

Knowing the answer to this question will form a basis to your whole interview. A great tip I received during the training was if at any point in the interview you become confused or lose your train of thought the best way to recover is to remember your answer to this question and this can help you organise your thoughts into a sensible point.

Keeping your audience's attention can be difficult. One way to draw them in is to make

your research more relevant to them. Doing some background about local topics your work or results impact is one way you can make a connection with your audience.

Some research can be considered controversial and identifying the areas of contention beforehand can mean you are in a more prepared position to address these in a positive manner. This tip can also help with any type of presentation. Remember to keep the confidentiality of your participants in mind when discussing results.

As I mentioned earlier budget cuts and funding are currently hot topics. Audiences will not respond favourably to research that they consider a waste of money. Ways to avoid this are to maintain a level of conviction in your voice during the interview; convincing the audience of the benefits and impact of your work.

During an interview

Psychologists are very used to academic writing so taking some time to practice answering questions about your data out loud is good use of your time. An excellent tip from the workshop was to imagine your listener is an intelligent, educated 14-year-old. They are easily bored, have a low attention span but are very curious, keen on new information and able to connect easily. The point is imagining who you are talking to allows you to feel at ease. On the other hand do not over rehearse as sometimes things will go wrong. Prepare adequately but remember to go remain relaxed on the day otherwise one small change or mishap may send you into an unnecessary panic. If you have a radio interview confirmed it advised to dress smartly. Even most radio centres have webcams and people may be watching online.

Adopt a conversational tone during the interview. The audience will not respond kindly to being lectured so treating the interview as a formal chat is recommended. Add humour if that is part of your natural personality. Make a list before hand of all the jargon terms in your research and think of ways to

Loose change

Andrew K. Dunn

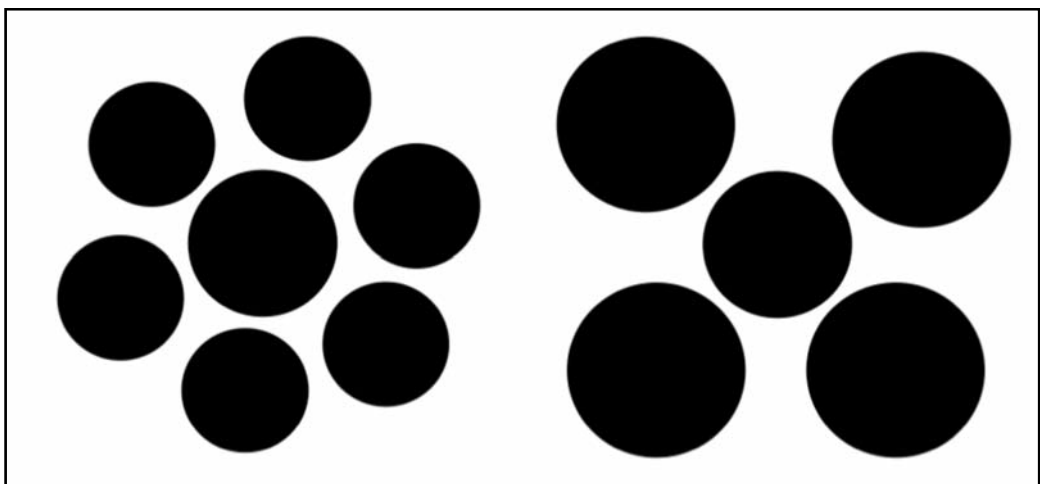
THE SIZE-CONTRAST illusion is a commonly demonstrated visual illusion. Here we report a fun informal experiment, based on a method provided by the late Professor Richard Gregory, that demonstrates that it is a powerful illusion of depth that can be replicated with even highly familiar objects (coins). We also offer some comfort to those who, in these times of financial uncertainty, have had a grant bid rejected.

The size-contrast illusion is often explained as a depth illusion (cf. misapplied size-constancy scaling – see Gregory, 1963). The basic illusion involves two identically sized circles flanked by either an annulus of smaller circles or an annulus of larger circles (see Figure 1). This arrangement results in a misperception of the true size of the centre (target) discs: the target disc surrounded by the annulus of small circles appears slightly larger than it actually is, whilst the target disc surrounded by the annulus of large circles appears to be slightly smaller. The illusion is

remarkably persuasive and although the illusion works best when making a relative judgement between the pairs, the distortion is easily visible when matching target size for only one of the pairs. It also works, as I am about to show, with highly familiar objects demonstrating both the robustness of the effect and the inaccuracy of perception in the real world. As a consequence it is a neat demonstration piece at dinner parties. Here I will demonstrate a method for doing this that you may want to try yourself (subject to clearance by your ethics board).

The method is based on an impromptu discussion, generously provided by Professor Richard Gregory, at a meal following his talk at Nottingham Trent University (Spring 2004). During the course of the evening I suggested to him that I thought that his explanation of the size-contrast illusion as a depth illusion was unnecessary, proposing instead that that the effect could reasonably be explained by very low level visual filtering (e.g. Morgan, Hole & Glennerster, 1990) or

Figure 1: Basic configuration for the size-contrast illusion.



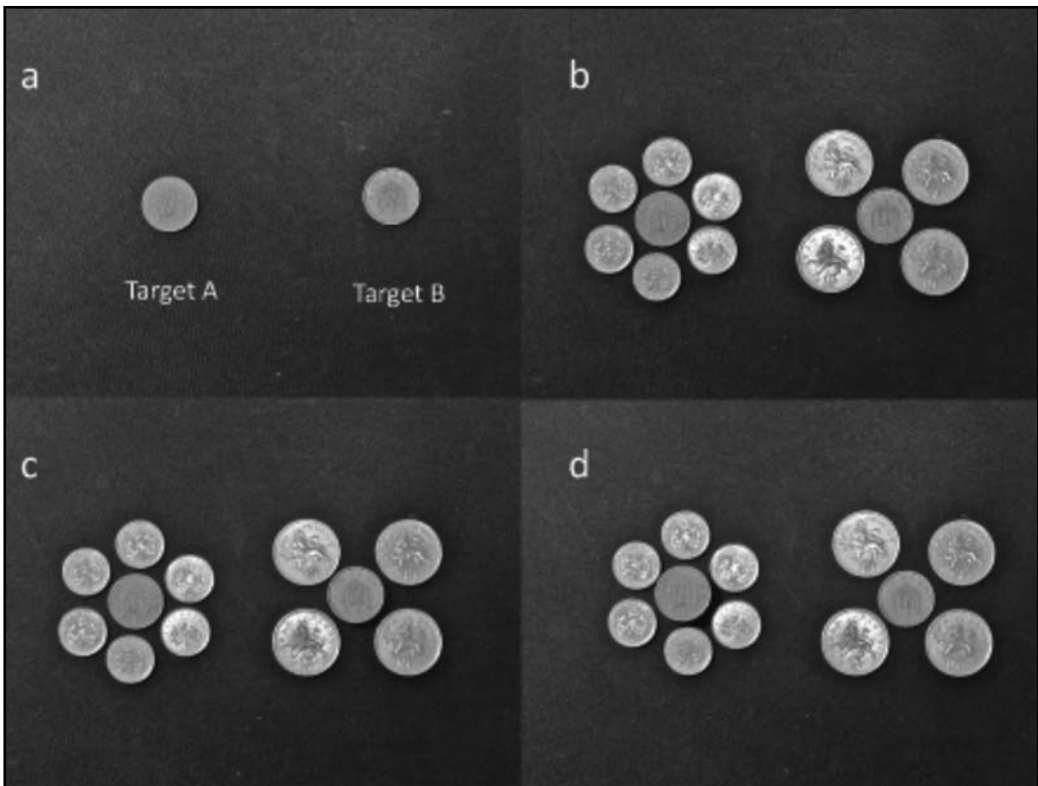
even as an illusion of attention (e.g. Shulman, 1992). Generously acknowledging my observation, Gregory then set about correcting it using a hand full of coins harvested from his own pockets, and from those around us*. His method was as follows.

To generate the illusion first place two 1 pence coins (Target A, Target B – see Figure 2a) approximately 8 cms apart. Next arrange six 5 pence pieces around Target A and four 10 pence pieces around the Target B. You will now observe that Target B appears to be smaller than Target A (Figure 2b). Next begin placing 5 pence pieces beneath Target B. Continue to do this, one coin at a time until the effect is nulled (Figure 2c – there are three 5 pence coins

beneath Target B). You can also try removing the coins from beneath Target B and placing them beneath Target A (Figure 2d). The apparent size difference in A vs. B is quite striking.

Informal data collected with verbal permission ($N=5$) indicated that in the initial set up, four observers thought Target B to be smaller than Target A (having first agreed that the both targets were of the same size: $A=B$). The remaining observer was unsure. However, all participants agreed that targets appeared to be the same size when three 5 pence pieces were inserted beneath Target B (the height of Target B having been raised by approximately 3 mm). When the 5 pence coins were removed all five observers agreed

Figure 2: Illustration of the contrast illusion set-up: (a) Target figures A and B; (b) Targets with annuli; (c) effect nulled (Target B raised); (d) size of Target A enhanced (Target A raised).



*In case you are wondering I kept everyone's change as a souvenir.

the coins appeared to be different sizes. Next, the three 5 pence pieces were placed beneath Target A. In this condition all of the observers agreed that Target A was markedly bigger than Target B.

I draw three conclusions from this. First, the illusion is powerful and easily produced. Moreover the effect is present even with highly familiar objects (coins) in fairly rough and ready demonstrations. In fact the magnitude of the effect is also influenced by the affective properties of the stimulus (if you use cookies the effect is bigger: Ulzen et al., 2008). Second, whilst there are undoubtedly a number of mechanisms at play, misapplied size-constancy scaling provides a reasonably good explanation for the illusion in the real world. Finally, demonstrating and understanding the nature of our perceptual systems can be fun and need not be expensive; a comforting thought next time your grant application fails – unless you are donating the money.

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My story about the 'Our Story' iPhone application

Natalia Kucirkova

IN THIS SHORT ARTICLE, I'm taking a look at the 'Our Story', an iPhone/iPad children's application, which I have been involved in developing with my supervisors and colleagues at the Open University. I co-created 'Our Story' in parallel to my doctoral project, with the aim of allowing parents and children to create and write their own stories in an easy and visually attractive way. The app design was inspired by research on children's early literacy development, in particular shared book reading and the value of personally meaningful stories. The first research area has been my research interest since my undergraduate dissertation, whereas the latter has been developed and refined through my Masters and currently Doctoral study at the Open University. Before going into detail how the app works and what it can accomplish, let me, on the basis of previous research, briefly explain where the main ideas for its development came from.

Shared book reading

It has been suggested that out of all literacy-promoting activities occurring in the home, parent-child shared book reading (SBR) has the greatest potential to impact on children's language development (Senechal & LeFevre, 2002; Bus, 2003). Early childhood researchers refer to shared reading as 'the literacy event par excellence' (Pellegrini, 1991, p.380), as one of the richest and most important activities in the home learning context.

Consequently, SBR has become a vivid research area, with numerous studies identifying and detailing the benefits of SBR for children's development. Parent's role in facilitating knowledge and language acquisi-

tion during SBR has become the focus of most intervention and experimental studies, documenting various reading techniques parents can use to maximise children's learning. In parallel to this research tradition, socio-culturally sensitive models of SBR have been formulated, which emphasise the idiosyncratic nature of each parent-child SBR session and are concerned with documenting the variety of naturally occurring parents' reading styles. Rather than promoting a specific reading strategy, there is an underlying assumption that there is no 'one "best" style of reading to children' (Reese & Cox, 1999, p.27). Environmental influences such as ethnicity, birth order, English as a second language, family dynamics (single parent family, relationships with siblings, etc.) as well as distal environmental variables such as parental IQ or parental income need to be taken into account when introducing or evaluating SBR occurring in children's homes (see van Kleeck, 2006).

This suggests a shift in the rationale for many early learning programmes and casts a question on interventions such as the British Bookstart Project (www.bookstart.co.uk), the first national book-gifting scheme in the world, sending free, pre-selected reading materials to children's homes. While acknowledging the importance of children's exposure to high quality print material, it may be also beneficial to focus on instructing parents in how to use efficiently the literacy resources available in their homes. Research working within the theoretical framework of 'funds of knowledge' (see Gonzalez et al., 2005) addresses this issue and centers around the skills, abilities, practices and ideas parents and children possess. Applying

funds of knowledge paradigm to SBR inspired me and since my undergraduate thesis, I was interested in innovative ways which could capitalise on parents' resources and engage them to spend more time with their children sharing stories. Self-made books which are created and thus based on each individual's bodies of knowledge fit very well with this view.

Personally meaningful self-made books

As a fieldworker assessing the quality of provision in UK pre-school settings, I noticed the occurrence and popularity of the so-called 'experience books', i.e. self-made books by adults for children, based on experiences or activities children recently participated in. In many nurseries I visited, there were various self-made books, of different format and potential use. Some books were very simple, made just with some colour-paper and crayons, some included printed photographs, others had children's drawings. Some books were laminated, others not. Some books captured the children in various activities (like, for example, their first trip to the Zoo), some were introducing them to new words (these books were especially abundant in multilingual classrooms), and some were simply reproducing stories already familiar to children. When I asked pre-school staff about these books, they commented very positively about children's increased independent reading, as well as genuine interest and active participation when sharing them with an adult.

During one pre-school visit, I met with a 5-year-old autistic boy (Thomas) who has been struggling to remember new words and routines followed at the nursery. I will never forget the excitement and engagement I saw in Thomas' face when his key worker brought him a book created especially for him. The book contained some pictures of him and his friends at pre-school, depicted routines they followed each day at the nursery (e.g. snack time, story time, etc.) and some simple words. It was amazing to see that he expressed interest in this book and in

fact, held onto it like it was the only thing that mattered to him that day. I was fascinated by the idea of using self-made books as a vehicle to gradually open up the world for children who lack certain social and language resources and to use personalisation to introduce them to concepts which made little sense before. Thomas' key worker told me she was progressively increasing the complexity of the books, by including little stories and pictures teaching him more advanced social skills and new vocabulary.

I became interested in books made specifically for each child and decided to make personalised stories the focus of my doctoral study. When considering related literature and research efforts, I found that the potential of self-made books to help children develop language, reading, as well as social skills has been only partially acknowledged in the past. Research is emerging about the language gains made by children who are introduced to self-made books (Bernhard et al., 2008), as well as increase of self-esteem by children who are introduced to personalised stories (Demoulin, 2003). A compelling case study was undertaken by Pakulski and Kaderavek (2004), with self-made books used with deaf children. Because of their hearing problems, the children were not interested in SBR before, however, with books written by their parents for them, tailored to children's language level and interests, the children's enthusiasm was awakened and motivation to read initiated. Gradually, the children started helping their parents writing books for them and finally wrote some simple books themselves. Thus, self-made books seem to be an excellent motivational tool to encourage children to read and to instil a love of books.

There are various ways a personalised book can be created. One can simply create a book with resources readily available in most homes – paper, scissors, self-made drawings, etc. – and in fact, there are many self-help books full of ideas on the design and content

of such books (e.g. Johnson & Body, 1998). For the less artistic of us (and possibly more 'technology savvy'), a quicker way of producing books might be by using book-making software. The RealeWriter software is freely available at www.realewriter.com and offers an easy-to-use and efficient way of creating simple picture books. Once you create your own book, you can either print it out or share via email or even put in a RealeLibrary and share with the rest of the world across the internet.

The 'Our Story' app

The widespread use of mobile telephones across socio-economic groups in the UK (there were estimated to be more than 60 million mobile telephones used in the UK in 2010) has resulted in my and my colleagues at the Open University's interest in the use of this technology and its potential to motivate parents to create their own stories via pictures taken by their mobile phones. In collaboration with the Knowledge Media

Institute based at the Open University, we developed an app with which pictures can be easily translated into a self-made storyboard. In comparison to print-based self-made books, this format has the potential for the exchange of stories between carers and children across the world, within seconds and no storage problems. A frequent exchange of stories may gradually lead to the development of e-learning and digital communities which are becoming more and more important in young children's lives (Ohler, 2010).

'Our Story' has a child-friendly and simple user interface and two principle uses: personalised E-cards and personalised digital stories. With the latter, you can put your pictures together in a sequence to make a story, you can add words, sentences or whole paragraphs to accompany your pictures; you can even add sound to the story to make it more attractive. The picture below shows a screen shot of the 'use' page, where users can read their stories.



A child enjoying the 'Our Story' app with her mother.



The E-cards are similar to 'Flashcards' which are pictures and/or words that can be given to children to help them answer a question. The app allows you to include any picture you like and adjust the text width, making your own card.

Conclusion

The development of 'Our Story' was hard work and a long process – it took us more than a year to refine some of the features of the app, trial its earlier versions and provide help pages. It was also necessary to provide accompanying material such as two dedicated websites and a short YouTube video. The app is now freely available on the Apple Store (<http://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/our-story/id436758256?mt=8>) and an 'upgrade' version and an android-compatible version are currently being developed. We have received very positive feedback from schools, parents and children so far, and I hope that many parents and children will use the application to share their own creations. My wish is

that sharing personal stories will become a fundamental principle underpinning many home and school learning activities.

If you are interested in finding out more about the research and possible uses of the app, visit this website:

<http://creet.open.ac.uk/projects/our-story/>

Acknowledgments:

I would like to thank Professor David Messer who is my main doctoral supervisor and who led the app development project. The app would not have its aesthetic appeal without the design work of Paul Hogan from kMi and we are very grateful for his patience and continuous support. I would also like to acknowledge Denise Whitelock, who was my MRes supervisor and part of the 'Our Story' development team.

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On combining creative writing and academic writing: A significant relationship?

Steven Brown

WITH A KEEN interest in creative writing, much of my spare time is spent in front of my laptop. This is also where I spent most of my time as part of my PhD. If only I was athletic. To keep things interesting, I recently set myself the goal of trying to somehow merge my hobby and my academic work.

I started writing fictional journal articles with the aim of amusing both myself and my friends. Why not? In hindsight, I think it was partly a reaction to the frustrations of lengthy waits to obtain ethical clearance to conduct research. I created humorous absurdist pieces with bizarre hypotheses and aims. It has been a lot of fun.

After toying with the idea of building a website presented as a journal, and emailing subscribers with these articles (something I have not entirely abandoned), I decided that there was more scope with them than just entertainment. I sought to mould the articles into teaching tools where undergraduates could learn about different methodologies and statistical procedures whilst having fun, engaging with the materials and indeed with each other. I was successfully making time for my creative writing, merging it with my academic work, but in a much more efficient and productive way.

When exploring where to go with the idea, I approached PsyPAG who suggested contacting Postgraduates Who Teach (PGwT) with whom I was familiar having attended their 2010 annual Scottish conference at the University of Strathclyde. I always make time for these events, because I find (and I don't think I'm alone here) that post-graduate study can be a fairly solo act.

It's invaluable exchanging advice with peers and a welcome change of routine. The 2010 conference included presentations on good practices for good research and how to prepare lecture and teaching materials, where I was mesmerised to learn of some of the weird, wacky and wonderful ways that undergraduates had been introduced to psychological research.

Secure in the knowledge that I was not the only person who believed learning and fun could co-exist, I approached PGwT who were keen to indulge my ambitious proposal, inviting me to present at their 2011 annual Scottish conference at Stirling University. It was a daunting concept, going from being an attendee one year to a presenter the next. I was particularly worried about the volume of people who would be there, easily the largest audience I would have presented to so far in my academic career. It was, however, a great opportunity.

The concept was well received, where I feel the final selection of faux articles was a wise move, anticipating a largely female audience. These concerned whether other peoples' chips taste better, the average age of peak musicianship and birth trends (ask yourself how many people you know with birthdays in September and October). Far from the funniest, they ticked the boxes in terms of being memorable and covering a significant amount of the learning outcomes in Glasgow Caledonian University's Introductory Psychology module; such as demonstrating knowledge of the basics of the experimental method and using specific terminology. I had to discard many of my initial articles, which were intended for an

internet audience – where you have much more breathing space to be controversial.

The articles were purposefully embedded with flaws such as stating the wrong design, weak rationales and language errors including tone and bias. In doing so, the materials not only allow for undergraduates to do a compare and contrast with legitimate peer-reviewed articles, but allow for post-graduates to brush up on their marking skills by identifying these flaws. I think the idea has legs, I just don't know where to run with them.

Other than giving a presentation at the event, there was no real difference between being a presenter this year and being an attendee last year, as after all, I was presenting to my peers. It was relaxed and open; a perfect breeding ground for generating good ideas and discussions. It was a place where my idea was welcome, where I received the warm encouragement to feel confident about my idea.

I love these events, and value the social side of postgraduate study. Presenting in Stirling was one of the many extra-curricular activities I purposefully involved myself with in year one of my PhD. I feel it's important to go over and above the demands of a PhD to show initiative and gain unique rewards, carving an experience that is utterly personalised. A PhD is much more than a qualification and a contribution to a body of knowledge, it's an experience. You aren't likely to get another chance to do it all over again.

I managed to take an interest of mine that previously belonged exclusively outside of academia and refined it enough to successfully incorporate it into a teaching and learning concept, something I am proud of. I would encourage anyone else with similar goals to go for it. There is nothing to lose. Sticking to one way of doing things just because it works is a bad idea. Try alternatives. There might just be a better way of doing things.

Striking a good balance between the principal demands of a PhD and getting involved with extra-curricular activities is a real challenge, and one which I believe I have successfully managed thanks to effective time management. I have shelved the faux article idea for now (as I am still unsure of where it best belongs), instead focussing on doing what I set out to do with my PhD: empirical research. While this is, I fully agree, the most important part of a PhD, the case study above demonstrates there are other fun applications to being creative with ideas and that most importantly, supportive bodies exist to help you develop them.

What you can achieve is limited only by your imagination, so think big!

Please contact Steven at steven.brown@gcu.ac.uk if you would be interested in subscribing to a future mailing list emailed monthly with faux articles to be used for undergraduate teaching tools, post-graduate assessment revision tools or just for fun.

What have Kenny Dalglish, speed cameras and the Israeli air force got in common?

Paul Ibbotson

IN THE LATE 1960s, a psychology graduate was talking to pilot instructors in the Israeli air force about the best way to train their new recruits. Keen to pass on what he had learnt at university, he told them that rewarding someone for doing well was more effective in improving performance than punishing them when they made a mistake screwed up. One of the more experienced pilots thought differently. 'On many occasions I have praised flight cadets for clean execution of some aerobatic manoeuvre, and in general when they try it again, they do worse. On the other hand, I have often screamed at cadets for bad execution, and in general they do better the next time. So please don't tell us that reinforcement works and punishment does not, because the opposite is the case.' However, knowing that a few of the flights were exceptionally good, a few were exceptionally bad and the majority were somewhere in between, the psychologist in question realised he was looking at a case of *regression to the mean* (RTTM). He reasoned that regardless of the instructors' feedback, extreme performance is more likely to be followed by more mediocre performance – there are just many more ways to be average than to be exceptional. That psychology graduate was Daniel Kahneman and he would later go on to win a Nobel Prize for his work on decision making theory – the Nobel committee couldn't quite bring themselves to give the award to a *psychologist* so instead they gave it to him for behavioural economics despite the fact he never took an economics class. The idea behind RTTM is that a measurement far away from the average will tend to be followed by something closer to average; the further away from the average the first

score is the stronger the pull back to the average second score will be. And the effects are everywhere.

This year Kenny Dalglish replaced Roy Hodgson as manager of Liverpool Football Club after their worst start to a season in 82 years. Not long after the appointment the team seemed revitalised, the results went in their favour and they climbed back up the table. However, Kenny Dalglish, like most football managers, arrived when things couldn't get much worse. Speed cameras are more likely to appear at blackspots with the highest number of accidents. In both cases it becomes increasingly improbable to sustain something exceptional over the long run than it is to drift back to the average. In the case of speed cameras, without taking RTTM into account the beneficial effects may have been overstated. The risk, therefore, is that we credit things that are put in place under extreme circumstances with more causal power than they deserve.

Why should a psychologist care about this statistical quirk? Because we are often interested in establishing some cause and effect about human behaviour, for example, 'people feel less depressed because they received therapy x'. The logic that underpins this reasoning is crucial – get it wrong and time and money is needlessly wasted. If a psychologist were to pick a sample of the most depressed people as scored on some pre-test measure then apply an intervention and find at post-test they have improved, without a randomly assigned control group it's difficult to know how much this change is due to the intervention and how much is due to RTTM. Notice that the effect works equally well in the reverse direction; scores that are lowest on the second test will tend to

have been more average on the first. So although individual measurements regress to the mean, no sample will be any closer to the mean than any other sample. In this example there is some random variance in the sample because usually measurements aren't a perfect reflection of what they are measuring; in reality a person's depression score is made of their true score plus some error. Good experimental design and statistics don't remove error but give us a way to quantify it. It is the error portion of the measurement that RTTM operates on and, therefore, the more random variance there is the stronger the effect will be. In the unlikely case of a perfect measurement, people cannot rely on the invisible hand of RTTM to lift their scores second time round. Of course, knowing that you are in the bottom 10 per cent might change things. Perhaps this makes people more depressed than they were and it works against RRTM to keep post-scores low, so what people do between tests obviously matters too. Complicating matters further is that people are actually pulled to all points in the data (there's nothing special about the mean) by varying degrees. For example, our sample might contain two sub-groups, psychologists who are depressed and mathematicians who are even more depressed than psychologists. A mathematician post-test score will regress up towards the mean of depressed people but be pulled down towards the mean of mathematicians. In clinical examples of this kind it might be unethical to have an untreated control group, in which case a statistical procedure called *shrinkage* can be applied to estimate RTTM's effect.

Despite being a widely applicable concept, it has the potential to be misused. Sir Francis Galton's over-enthusiasm for RTTM used in conjunction with social Darwinism led him to some very embarrassing conclusions about race and eugenics. RTTM is not to be confused either with the law of large numbers, which states that when a large number of measurements are made, the sample's average will be close to the true average of all of the individual's scores – including those that were not measured. Where the distributions are asymmetric, multimodal or the data has strong subgroup effects, RTTM should also be applied with caution.

Given the right conditions RTTM is a mathematically inevitability and a useful phenomena to know about. With good experimental design and analysis the effects of RTTM can be quantified and causal relationships can be inferred with more confidence. Whether looking at speed cameras, pilots, football managers or depression, an understanding of the underlying statistical processes can lead to smarter conclusions about the data.

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Dates for your diary

Event	Date	Where	Website
Psychobiology Annual Scientific Meeting	5–7 September 2011	Low Wood Hotel, Windermere	www.bps.org.uk/events/psychobiology-annual-scientific-meeting-2011
Cognitive Section Annual Conference	6–8 September 2011	Keele University	cognitive-section.bps.org.uk/
Social Psychology Section Annual Conference	6–8 September 2011	Fitzwilliam College, University of Cambridge	www.bps.org.uk/events/social-psychology-section-annual-conference-2011
Developmental Section Annual Conference	7–9 September 2011	Northumbria University	sites.google.com/site/developmental2011/
Division of Health Psychology Annual Conference	14–16 September 2011	University of Southampton	dhp-conference.bps.org.uk/dhp-conference_home.cfm
Faculty for Children and Young People Annual Conference	22–23 September 2011	Holiday Inn, Leicester	www.bps.org.uk/events/faculty-children-young-people-annual-conference-2011
North East of England Branch Fourth Annual Conference	21 October 2011	Park Inn Hotel, York	www.bps.org.uk/events/north-east-england-branch-fourth-annual-conference
Psychology of Education Section Annual Conference	18–20 November 2011	Preston Marriott Hotel	www.bps.org.uk/events/psychology-education-section-annual-conference-2011
Division of Clinical Psychology Annual Conference	1–2 December 2011	Holiday Inn, Birmingham City Centre	www.dcpconference.co.uk/
Division of Occupational Psychology Annual Conference	11–13 January 2012	Crowne Plaza, Chester	dop-conference.bps.org.uk/
BPS Annual Conference	18–20 April 2012	The Grand Connaught Rooms, London	annual-conference.bps.org.uk/
Qualitative Methods in Psychology Section Conference	18–20 April 2012	The Grand Connaught Rooms, London	www.bps.org.uk/events/qualitative-methods-psychology-section-conference-2012

PsyPAG Committee 2010/2011

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Developmental Psychology Section	Natalia Kucirkova n.kucirkova@open.ac.uk	Co-opted
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Position	Currently held by	Due for re-election
Branch Representatives		
North East of England Branch	Tom Merrill tommym777@hotmail.com	2013
North West of England Branch	Alyson Blanchard alysonblanchard@btinternet.com	2013
Northern Ireland Branch	Paul Wilson pwilson23@qub.ac.uk	2012
Scottish Branch	Jillian Hobson jillian.hobson@strath.ac.uk	2012
South West of England Branch	Chantelle Bailey chantelle2.bailey@uwe.ac.uk	2012
Welsh Branch	Rhian Worth rhian.worth@hotmail.co.uk	2013
Wessex Branch	Christopher Rossiter cr00107@surrey.ac.uk	2013
West Midlands Branch	Samantha Rogers Sxr822@bham.ac.uk	2013
London and Home Counties Branch	Fran Knight f.knight@gold.ac.uk	2013
Board Representatives		
Membership and Professional Training Board	Position under review	
Publications and Communications Board	Chantelle Bailey chantelle2.bailey@uwe.ac.uk	2012
Ethics	Kirsten Bartlett k.e.bartlett@shu.ac.uk	2012
Research Board (Chair)	Sarah Wood sarah.wood@unn.ac.uk	2012
Other Committees		
Conference Standing Committee	Lauren Kita LKita@bournemouth.ac.uk	2013
International Representative	Rebecca Monk rlmonk@uclan.ac.uk	2013
Teaching and Learning Representative	Alison Davidson pspc1d@bangor.ac.uk	2013
National Postgraduate Committee	Position under review	
Undergraduate Liaison Officer	Stephen McGlynn stephen.mcglynn@new.ox.ac.uk	2013



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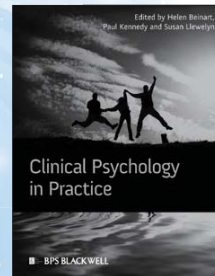
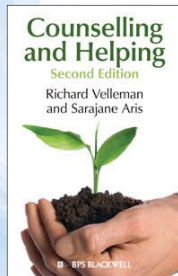
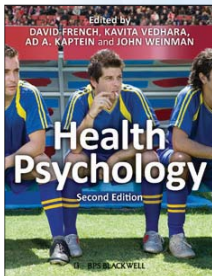
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About PsyPAG

PsyPAG is a national organisation for all psychology postgraduates based at UK Institutions. Funded by the Research Board of the British Psychological Society, PsyPAG is run on a voluntary basis by postgraduates for postgraduates.

Its aims are to provide support for postgraduate students in the UK, to act as a vehicle for communication between postgraduates, and to represent postgraduates within the British Psychological Society. It also fulfills the vital role of bringing together postgraduates from around the country.

- PsyPAG has no official membership scheme; anyone involved in postgraduate study in psychology at a UK Institution is automatically a member.
- PsyPAG runs an annual workshop and conference and also produces a quarterly journal, which is delivered free of charge to all postgraduate psychology departments in the UK.
- PsyPAG is run by an elected committee, which any postgraduate student can be voted on to. Elections are held at the PsyPAG Annual Conference each year.
- The committee includes representatives for each Sub-Division within the British Psychological Society, their role being to represent postgraduate interests and problems within that division or the British Psychological Society generally. We also liaise with the Student Members Group of the British Psychological Society to raise awareness of postgraduate issues in the undergraduate community.
- Committee members also include Practitioners-in-Training who are represented by PsyPAG.

Mailing List

PsyPAG maintains a JISCmail list open to ALL psychology postgraduate students. To join, visit www.psypag.co.uk and scroll down on the main page to find the link, or direct: www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?subed1=psych-postgrads&a=1.

This list is a fantastic resource for support and advice regarding your research, statistical advice or postgraduate issues.

Social Networking

You can also follow PsyPAG on Twitter (<http://twitter.com/PsyPAG>) and add us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/?ref=home#%21/pages/psypag/130589426953875?ref=ts.

Again, this information is provided at www.psypag.co.uk.

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