



Psychology

Newsletter

Happy New Year!

Welcome to the first psychology department newsletter of 2015! While we hope everyone has had a lovely festive break, we hope you haven't over indulged. This issue will include a piece on the new years resolutions we all say we will commit to, but never stick to! How we can better manage ourselves to achieve the goals we set.

Alongside this we have some inside scoop on the Big Bang Event, which ran just after the end of term. From students and teaching staff! There are other pieces included following another media buzz around a PhD student, and a slightly different 60 second interview!

We are always looking to recruit new volunteers at the newsletter team, so if you would like to write for us or make a contribution be sure to send an email to bkotec@essex.ac.uk

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Big Bang Event!

On Tuesday the 16th of December the University of Essex held the Big Bang event which celebrates STEM subjects – Science, technology, engineering and Math's. Students from schools in surrounding areas were invited to see the display of opportunities offered by the University.

This year the event was very exciting as the Prince of Wales joined the event! There was lots happening and we have two accounts from Psychology department staff and students who helped out.

Dr Nick Cooper wrote a little bit about what he was involved with in the event. "As part of the Big Bang, Steffan Kennett, Helge Gillmeister and myself were pleased to be able to take schools from Southend, Chelmsford & Holbrook on tours of the Centre for Brain Science. The idea was to show them the breadth of research being carried out both in the CBS and in the Department as a whole. We covered things from using EEG to measure brain responses to images of bodies (and how this might differ in people with Anorexia), through using eye tracking to monitor attention, to using TMS to disrupt cortical activity. We also tried to emphasize what a wide-ranging and interesting subject Psychology actually is. I was particularly pleased to hear one guy say as he left the lab - "That's it, I'm definitely choosing Psychology as an option." Let's hope he gets to come and join us at Essex in a few years time!"



This is student Katie Groves' account, who was involved in the EEG demonstrations. "On 16th December 2014, I worked alongside Dr. Paulmann and Nina Wolinski at the Big Bang event hosted by the University. This diverse fair brought together a host of activities and demonstrations with a focus on science, computing, engineering and maths with aim to encourage teenagers to opt to study these subjects after their GCSE's."

For us, this meant showing some extremely excited secondary school students their brainwaves! We used the nexus equipment so only connected one scalp electrode and some eye electrodes, which proved to be more than enough to get their imaginations running wild. They debated whether murderers would show different patterns of brain activity, they discussed how the use of alpha waves might help athletes to train and some of the girls wondered whether their brainwaves would change when they thought about their crush; all very important scientific questions! It was very refreshing to see young people engaging with the science behind psychology and it was good to see their understanding of 'pop' psychology challenged. Moreover, in a society where 63% of young women surveyed by the NUS would rather be glamour models than nurses, teachers or doctors, and reality TV encourages young people to aspire to a 'quick fix' of fame, events like these are increasingly important! And of course, who could forget, Prince Charles was in attendance. Despite our best efforts we did not get him into our hot seat (next time!) but it was fantastic to see him take a genuine interest in what the students had to say. All in all, it was a very fast paced, exciting day.



Katie Groves, Nina
Wolinsky and the
High Sheriff of Essex
Nicholas
Charrington
Second picture is
with MP Bernard
Jenkins

60 SECOND INTERVIEW

Jo Page

All time favourite book?

Don't have one. I'm not a big reader.

If you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be and why?

If I could, I would travel around the world following the F1 season and get to see some amazing places.

When you were growing up what did you want to become in life?

A teacher I think. I usually had my toys lined up pretending it was a classroom and generally being bossy.

If you could meet any celebrity who would it be?

Professor Brian Cox

What is your favourite type of food?

I love moules mariniere

Favourite tv show?

At the moment it is The Knick. I cannot wait for the next series!



New Year's Resolutions : How effective are they?

By Veronica Savva

Ask yourself this question: "Will this matter a year from now"? Richard Carlson, an American psychotherapist and writer, in his runaway bestseller book *'Don't Sweat the Small Stuff... and it's all Small Stuff'* (1997), showed millions of people how not to let the small things in life get the best of them. You can learn to put things into perspective by making small daily changes, including advice such as to choose your battles wisely, peace with imperfection, and remind yourself that your happiness depends on your own choices. You, as your mind and body owner and leader, should **be conscious of the significance of things, people and thoughts that constitute your own life**. The New Year, 2015, has just begun and it is time to seek fine-tuning lists of resolutions by prioritizing your needs and goals in a thoughtful and manageable way.

One way to grow your willpower is to **turn wished-for behaviours into habits**. How long does it take to form a new habit though? This is a really difficult task as a single missed day may have a long-term impact on the effective habit formation, and repeated omissions may also lead to outstanding adverse effect on the automation that had been reached even for a short time. Phillippa Lally at UCL's Health Behaviour Unit asked 96 participants to keep a daily diary and it was found that the average time it took for a new healthy habit to attain peak automation was 66 days. Before you reach success in any field of your life, you will come across different situations that may destruct and let you down. The tip is to accept failing and keep trying with no loss of enthusiasm.

Furthermore, **the inner voice plays a crucial role in self-control** (Tullet & Inzlicht, 2010). On a classic self-control task, participants' continence was compromised when their inner voice was kept busy by repeating a certain word so that it could not be used to aid self-control. In fact, when we tell ourselves to "keep running" during a race, or when we count to ten during an argument or a stressful time, we help ourselves to conquer our impulses on behalf of set goals, such as to lose weight and to maintain a relationship. In difficult situations people have to initially think of things logically, and then emotionally, in order to come up with the right solution. But what can be defined as right and wrong? There is no definite answer to this question. Possibly, the right and best solutions for anybody who faces a big dilemma may be what could lead to your happiness and a better future, without exposing others to physical harm or emotional ataxia in conjunction with reasoning by thinking of the past.

By facing the reality, controlling stress and anger, thinking before behaving, and having conscious volition, life is much better and smooth.

What is more, anxiety is a big obstacle in people's lives and success. Anxiety is a common and normal experience that can be managed successfully. Unfortunately, anxiety can become abnormal if it interferes with one's day-to-day activities. Worrying can be only helpful when it spurs you to take action and solve a problem and the brain can be trained to stay calm and look at life from a more positive perspective. Running over the problem in our head extorts us from our emotions and leads to the beginning of getting something accomplished. Nevertheless, problem solving is a completely different thing that involves the evaluations of the situation and coming across solid steps in order to cope and deal with it. To identify the true sources of stress, look closely at your habits, attitude, and excuses. The best stress management strategy is to **pare down a to-do list**; analyze your schedule, responsibilities, and daily tasks, distinguish between the "shoulds" and "musts" and eliminate the less necessary tasks. More importantly, do not let your list increase without ticking any of your scheduled tasks, as the more there are, the more the anxiety and less the performance.

Finally, by setting goals and by beginning to reach them today, everything seems simpler. Motivation refers to the internal and external factors that stimulate desire and energy in people to be continually interested and committed to something. In fact, for most people, going back to school or to work, after a long period of relaxation and leisure, is extremely boring. Striving for success, however, is demanding; without work you will not survive and you will not feel serviceable; without studying you will not get good marks and you might not pass the year or graduate, thus lacking the sense of hard-working; by overdosing, let say, food, alcohol, or smoke, you might get depressed and develop a sense of impotence. Everything begins from how the mind operates which extremely affects the human immune system; **in order to be both physically and mentally healthy, people should combine their thoughts and actions in a logical manner that will lead to self-approval and contentment.**

Last but not least, the pursuit of happiness is not a far off dream and can be achieved even by the little things in life; **actively express your thankfulness, actively pursue your goals, give without expecting reciprocity, and smile to strangers as it does not cost anything at all.**



MEDIA BUZZ MEDIA BUZZ

PhD student Katie Groves, 26, is currently conducting her research which examines how we perceive the human body and whether this process is different for people with body image disturbance, including people who suffer from an eating disorder.

Katie was asked to give a brief overview of her research and her findings so far;

She says: "The idea is that, in most people, the brain has a very specific reaction after viewing an image of the human form, which occurs after just milliseconds. The study is not complete yet but preliminary findings show there may be differences in the way the human form is perceived by people with anorexia and bulimia in comparison to those who don't. In other words, there seems to be a difference in the way the brain reacts to the human form depending on whether someone has experienced anorexia or bulimia."

Today's society has very high expectations on how we should look, and what is perceived as "beautiful". Most of us have heard

by Amy CL Brownsword

about the popular song "All about that bass", by Meghan Trainor. Katie was asked by the media to comment on whether she thought the song had the potential to stop young people from developing eating disorders; "I felt very strongly that the song does not really have a positive message but an inverted version of the existing message the media portray; instead of telling girls they 'should' be skinny, Meghan Trainor is telling them they 'should' be curvaceous. Personally, I think any new message should encourage people to recognise that everyone comes in different shapes and sizes, so stop comparing yourself to unrealistic ideals and work on being a healthy size and weight for your own body shape. Health should be the message! Not being curvaceous so you are appealing to boys or being skinny so you can be on the catwalk."

However, the media was not looking for quite the answer Katie gave them. Therefore, her opinions were not published. **We were lucky to get in touch with her, and ask her a couple of questions about her degree, and why she chose this area;**

"I chose this direction because my supervisor gave me a very interesting paper on the subject. It caught my attention, as coming from a dancing background I had seen several girls suffering with an eating disorder, one was hospitalised. It interested me how although under the same pressures to be thin, not everyone developed a problem but it was nothing more than a thought. It was only when Dr. Gillmeister opened my eyes to how it could be studied scientifically, I thought it might be something I could do".

MEDIA BUZZ MEDIA BUZZ

Do you have any ideas on what you want to do after your degree?

"I'm not really sure, I'm just trying to focus on my research at the moment and take all opportunities that arise so I can keep my options open. I will more than likely stay in academia though".

As mentioned, today's society puts heavy pressure on young people's (in particular) body image, what is your opinion on how the media presents it?

"This is a difficult question to answer in just a few sentences, especially as it is not my area. It is a question for a thesis in itself! But personally, I think the influence the media has depends on the person who is receiving the message because people are affected in different ways - young or old. Seeing skeletal bodies on a catwalk might be a picture of perfection to one person, but to another the curvaceous females or muscular males you see on the cover of FHM/Mens Health might be the ideal. This all depends on the person's individual motivations and aspirations. I do however, feel uneasy about articles

encouraging weight loss/gain in a short period of time whilst using a celebrity as an example of an ideal body shape. I think this does encourage a tendency to strive for unrealistic ideals in those who are inclined to do so. As far as body image being portrayed in a positive or negative way - again this depends on the individual. When discussing the Meghan Trainor song with friends and family this was at its most evident! The more curvaceous of my friends understood that the message was positive for size 12+ individuals and perhaps not as nice for those who are naturally thinner, but they were happy for thinner girls to be feeling the inadequacy they had felt for years. This type of pitting one body size against another I feel is wrong and the media does have a responsibility here, especially with regards to younger females who are more at risk of developing body image issues. Having said that, there are plenty of websites and social media sites portraying 'strong as the new sexy' and if the public want to they can engage with this instead. In my opinion, we should be educating youngsters about acceptance of ones self and others, rather than encouraging self-destructive competitive attitudes between body sizes. It is so easy to blame the media but we have a responsibility to ourselves with regards to what we are exposed to. After all, the media only publish what sells!"

