



Psychology

Newsletter

Happy November!



While the leaves are falling outside, and the sun is only around some-times, everyone in the department is keeping busy in the inside. The first assignments

were handed in, the first marks were handed back... We hope that you have enjoyed the first half of term. If so, why not share what you've like in particular? Or, if there is something that could be improved, why not tell the newsletter team about it? We have now launched the Psychology Newsletter Facebook page and we are looking forward to your comments! Let us know what is important in your life and we'll try to cover it in the next editions.

We've not only launched our own Facebook page, but have also had some new additions to our team! In this edition, you can read pieces from some of our new members. For instance, Mihaela Lucaciu has reviewed Chris Berdik's 'Mind over Mind' for us, while Keishema Kerr has asked Prof. Sheina Orbell about her views on Health Psychology. We also feature pieces by Chelsea Harmsworth (Qualitative Research) and Hallam Rickett who from now on will cover reviewing the Departmental Seminars.

The Design Team of the newsletter has also grown. This edition was designed by Stelliphy Huang and Christie Ng. They are looking forward to hearing what you think and can't wait for more ideas on how to make the newsletter look even nicer!

Enjoy reading the newest edition of the newsletter and happy second-half of term, everyone.

Mind over Mind

Book Review on pg. 2

Famous Celebrities with Psychology Degrees pg. 2

Review of October's first Seminars pg. 5

Ever wondered about Qualitative Research?

report starts on pg. 4

PhD Students pg.5

View on Health Psychology pg. 6

Published PS300 Projects

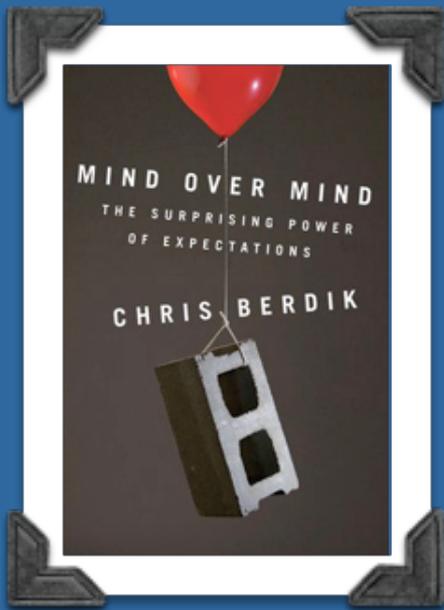
pg. 3

Read about some of the many successful PS300 projects we've had in the past. And get inspired for your own research project!

Chris Berdik's

Mind Over Mind *The Surprising Power of* *Expectations*

Reviewed by Mihaela Lucaci



We take treatments to get healthy when we are sick, we hope to improve our memory

by doing exercises and we expect do to well on the exams because we studied. We plan for the future and we remember from the past. But actually, how much time do we dedicate to the present? Despite that the "here and now" coordinate is very important, it is not permanently in our thoughts. Chris Berdik in his new book "Mind over mind: The surprising power of expectations" talks about imagination, expectations, placebo effect and anticipation in our daily lives.

Divided in 4 parts, the book is a combination of scientific research, history and real examples which are meant to offer the reader an idea about how we draw conclusions and how they affect us. Having a simplistic style, the book is easy to read, giving an understanding of how the brain deals with the placebo effect and the benefic side of expectations.

Although published in the beginning of October 2012, the book has quickly gained the public's interest, being a "brick" in everyone's personal development and an enjoyable book for those who want to have a better understanding of some psychological processes such as expectations.

Just for fun

The Newsletter team wondered which celebrities were also psychology graduates, and found some surprising! Look out for more in each future edition. Also, let us know if you know of someone!

1. The founder of Playboy magazine, Hugh Hefner received a BSc in Psychology from the University of Illinois.



2. Pop singer Gloria Estefan has a BA psychology degree from the University of Miami.



PS300 Projects

by Lisa Phillips

At this time of year some students already have their PS300 projects well underway (I have already heard lots of talk of stimuli and participants), and will have much more work to do before May next year – always keeping in mind that all the hard work will pay off in the end! For some students this is particularly true as their work has been acknowledged in published papers, or for others they were named as co-authors. This month I have been asking PS300 supervisors about those students and their very-successful projects.

Emma Pattison (2010/11) was acknowledged for her work with Dr Callan. Emma collected some of the data reported in the paper. Her PS300 project looked at whether ageism, or prejudice against older persons, moderates the effect of a victim's age on perceived injustice and punishment reactions. Participants completed a measure of ageism and then read a scenario about a medical accident that occurred to either a younger person or an older person. Participants perceived the suffering of the older (vs. younger) person as less unfair and recommended less punishment for the person responsible for the accident only if they were higher in ageism.

Lee Prescott's PS300 project was supervised by Dr Matthews and looked at whether people's judgments of time are influenced by incidental values that they have recently encountered. The data that Lee collected formed part of a large series of studies which found little indication that incidental values influence temporal judgments. A paper describing this series of studies has recently been accepted for publication.

John Fitzgibbon's (2007/08) PS300 project with Dr Uskul was published in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* in 2009 and examined how cultural groups respond to health messages. White British participants, who had a stronger promotion focus, were more persuaded by the gain-framed message, whereas East-Asian participants, who had a stronger prevention focus, were more persuaded by the loss-framed message. Health messages

framed to be culturally congruent led participants to have more positive attitudes and stronger intentions to perform the health behaviours.

Dr Cooper has published two papers along with past PS300 students; Ruby Bowes-Mulligan (2008/09) and Pavlina Antoniou's (2009/10) study tried to answer the question "what makes us yawn when we see (or hear) someone else yawning?" They used EEG to measure brain activity when people observe a yawn and found evidence that perhaps the mirror neuron system is involved in this behaviour. Jack Pettifer and Fiona Stolc's (both 2007/08) study tried to answer the question "does the speed of editing in a TV program have an effect on children's attention?" They presented one group of children with a video of a narrator reading a children's story, with very slow edits and presented another group of children with the same narrator and story but this time with fast edits. They found that children's performance on a measure of attentional control differed depending on the video they had watched.

Professor Hanley has also published two papers with past PS300 students on the irrelevant sound effect and the suffix effect in immediate memory. Nikita Shah (2011/12) and Annabel Hayes (2009/10) both provided evidence that is inconsistent with Baddeley's phonological loop model of the irrelevant sound effect. Nikita's experiment was based on Annabel's, but used shorter list lengths. Also, Professor Hanley supervised Rebecka Hunt and Deborah Steed's (both 2011/12) project on "why is it harder to produce abstract than concrete words during speech production?" which is currently in press.

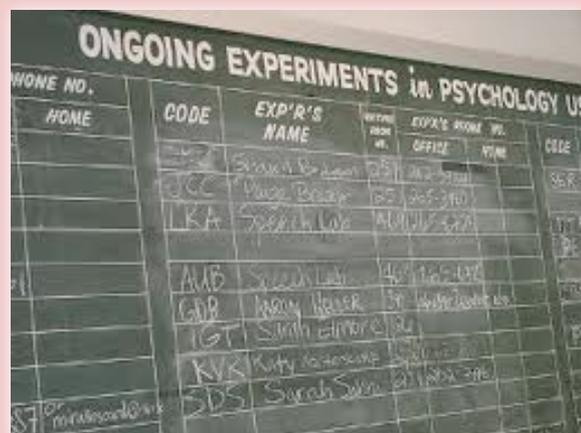


photo: hartichocked (flickr.com)

Qualitative Research in Psychology

by Chelsea
Harmsworth

Research methods in psychology can be separated into two main approaches – qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative research is something we do not tend to study as much at Essex University. For those that are unaware of what qualitative research is, it is research that focuses more on rich descriptive data (often text or speech). Qualitative research differs from that of quantitative in many ways. Qualitative researchers not only seek to find meanings that are attached to the behaviours of participants but they also want to discover how participants perceive particular issues themselves.

Qualitative research focuses more on naturalistic situations rather than artificially made situations that are sometimes used in quantitative research methods. Whilst quantitative research uses hypothetic-deductive methods where a hypothesis is formulated, predictions are made and then experiments are used to either confirm or disconfirm the hypothesis. Qualitative researchers, although sometimes use a hypothetic-deductive method, tend to remain open-minded and try to make little assumptions about the study in advance. Thus qualitative researchers use grounded theory which is where theory is generated from the data. Data collection for qualitative research is often gained through methods such as: observations, interviews and focus groups. Therefore analysis is also different to quantitative in that it focuses far less on statistical procedures and more on analysing data based on themes and patterns emerging. Qualitative research has its advantages in that it can investigate matters that cannot be quantified, for example individual experiences. As it makes few assumptions before the data are collected, it allows for greater scope with hypothesis generation and exploratory research.

Another advantage is that it gains in-depth rich data which allows for complex individual experiences to be investigated. However, it does not come without criticism or disadvantages. It can be harder to examine the reliability and validity of qualitative

research. Also, it is harder to generalise results to a population. Data collection and analysis is usually more time consuming and costly than quantitative research.

Putting all this aside, let us look at an interesting study conducted by Dr Tim Rakow and colleagues using qualitative analysis. The study is titled: 'A qualitative investigation of selecting surrogate decision makers'. After being presented with a hypothetical scenario about their future loss of mental capacity, 30 undergraduate students were then asked to fill out questions regarding their choice of surrogate (the person who will make decisions on their behalf). These data were analysed qualitatively using thematic content analysis. The objective of this study was to discover what people want in a surrogate decision maker who they have selected themselves, and to test the assumption from empirical studies that people want their chosen surrogate to make only a 'substituted judgement', i.e. judge what the patient would want if they were mentally competent.

It was found that most participants chose someone caring and competent, giving interesting reasons for their choice of surrogate. Surprisingly, few discussed their chosen surrogate knowing their preferences and making a substituted judgement. Some respondents also referred to the social role of their chosen surrogate or social dynamics of their situation which influenced their choices, as well as identifying characteristics such as honesty and loyalty. It was concluded that many people will not select a surrogate to decide about medical treatments on their behalf solely on the basis that they expect their surrogate to make a substituted judgement.

I asked Dr Rakow what his feelings about qualitative research were, and he responded by saying: "From my perspective qualitative research can be particularly useful for generating hypotheses. It can be useful for quantitative researchers like myself to collaborate with qualitative researchers as it lead you to re-examine aspects of what you do that you may otherwise simply take for granted."

Introducing Our New PhD Students!

by Natalie Kwok

As the new academic year carries out, our first year students are finding their comfort in university but at the corner of every department there's a group of PhD students that's not as well known. This year the department welcomes seven new PhD students; Monica Berntsen, Cathleen Cortis, Silviya Doneva, An Le, Jen Lewis, Amanda Marshall and Mark Wheeler. From southeast of Europe to northwest of London, the PhD students all come from a different background but choose Essex for the friendly department and good reputation in research. Starting a PhD can be a daunting task with the amount of dedication and work that goes into the three years of the course. However, our new PhD students are not fazed by the work load but rather motivated to carry out their course. When asked, what they look forward to the most? They all replied, they want to know and contribute more to their fields and some with the aspiration to enter the academia world.

For more information please visit www.essex.ac.uk/psychology/department/people.html

Review of the first Departmental Seminar

by Hallam Rickett

October saw the beginning of the Psychology department's weekly seminars. The first seminar led by Dr Alice Jones (Goldsmith) addressed the subject of callous-unemotional children. Her presentation covered what psychopathic traits look like in children, the cognitive-affective profiles in callous-unemotional subjects and ideas and evidence for intervention techniques for parents and schools.

Jones demonstrated why antisocial behaviour is costly to society: she outlined financial implications and addressed issues concerning the well-being of victims. She listed the reasons why both the NHS and the Government "Respect" agenda focus on the prevention of antisocial behaviour.

According to citations in the presentation, key callous-unemotional traits include lack of guilt, absence of emotional empathy and shallow affect. Some psychologists suggest that understanding callous-unemotional traits may have the potential to explain the causes of a variety of severe and aggressive antisocial behavioural patterns. Studies have also compared children with cognitive problems and callous-unemotional

traits with children that suffer from cognitive problems alone. Former tend to show more severe behavioural problems, are more likely to have long-term difficulties and are more genetically vulnerable to behavioural problems. Jones also presented data that suggests that these children have problems when processing fear and sadness from visual (e.g. facial expressions) and vocal (e.g. tone of voice) stimuli. This seems to fit with the idea that psychopathy involves an empathy deficit. In Jones's own study on cognitive empathy, she compared children with callous-unemotional traits and those without. No difference between reaction expectations relating to themselves or others were reported. However, when asked how much they would care, in relation to themselves and others, children with callous-unemotional traits score significantly lower. This might suggest that they have emotion processing and affective empathy deficits.

Jones also showed that traditional parenting techniques for children with conduct problems do not tend to be effective for those with callous-unemotional traits and finished by presenting some techniques which might help reduce aggression and externalising problems.

I would encourage anyone who does not already attend the weekly seminars at Tuesday 4pm to come along. The talks are engaging, informative, and will interest you regardless of your level of study.

Health Psychology

An interview with Prof. Sheina Orbell

by Keishema Kerr

Like many first year psychology students, I'm still unsure of the specific branch of psychology I want to pursue a career in. However, the expanding field of health psychology has sparked my interest as it focuses on promoting health as well as the prevention and treatment of disease and illness. So I had a word with Sheina Orbell (picture right) who is the Head of the Department.



What is your personal definition of health psychology?

Oh dear do I have to have a definition? The scientific study of psychological processes of health promotion and illness prevention; the treatment of illness; improvement of the health care system and formulation of health policy. Or more simply, understanding psychological influences on how people stay healthy, why they become ill, and how they respond when they do get ill.

What do you think are the main common misconceptions of health related psychological research?

Health related psychological research should not be confused with abnormal or clinical psychology, which concerns psychological disorders. You will find excellent health related psychological research published in a range of top mainstream journals including *Health Psychology*, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *Psychological Bulletin* etc.

Do you think Health Psychology will ever become as well known as Clinical Psychology?

Judging by the number of text books called 'Health Psychology' and the number of MSc courses run in the UK, I think it is pretty well known! It is true that to date there are only about 500 fully qualified practicing Doctors of Health Psychology (DHealthPsy) in the UK and one of the missions of the new President of the Division of Health Psychology is to promote employment opportunities in the field by working with employers. Many members of the public will have come into contact with health psychologists without knowing it. For example, they may have met a smoking cessation advisor, or seen a health psychologist when they have been diagnosed with a serious illness such as cancer.

Would you recommend health and social psychology to anyone interested to research and

Of course I would! It is a field of research in which social psychological theories can be tested and modified and mechanisms investigated. Also, the research process often brings you into contact with the biological and medical sciences and there is a sense of integrating psychology with other scientific disciplines. There are a lot of research jobs in health service settings for Psychology graduates. My one bit of advice would be to make sure you get a really good training in psychological research first, before starting to work in a medical school or similar environment. There really is more to designing a good questionnaire than just making up some questions!

Do you have any advice for any first years that are still unsure about their future career in psychology?

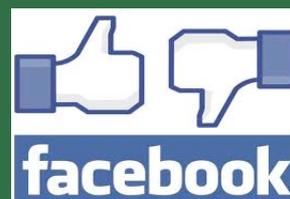
Students who are thinking of a career as a practicing psychologist should, as first step, consult the British Psychological Society website (www.bps.org.uk/dhp) The BPS website also has lists of accredited BSc, MSc and Doctoral courses. If a course does not appear on these lists, it will not be accredited and will not qualify you to practice. If you decide you wish to pursue a career as a practicing psychologist, look at these pages early on and make sure you understand the routes available and the steps you need in order to get a place on an accredited course.

Many fields require you to have some relevant work experience, whether voluntary or paid. Many kinds of work will help, from volunteering with NiteLine, to working in a care home in the summer. A one year research degree, such as our MSc by Dissertation is another good route. It is also important to remember that there are many jobs that will use your psychological skills and knowledge without you becoming a qualified psychologist. My advice to someone who is unsure which way to go is to use your friends and family and opportunities at University to try to meet a person who is doing the job you are thinking about. Ask them about the lifestyle in the job, the hours they work, the money they earn, how repetitive or novel each day is. Trust your instincts. If you like people who do the job you want to do, you will probably like the job. After all, you will spend more time in your future life with the people you work with, than you will with your prospective partner or children.

Interested in joining the Psychology Newsletter Group or in becoming a Social Media Student Ambassador?

We are always looking for motivated students who are interested in writing for the newsletter. We are also still looking for students who would enjoy helping us with our social media (e.g. facebook/twitter). Interested? Get in touch with Dr. Silke Paulmann to find out more.

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