



# Newsletter

## Welcome to our November issue!

It is hard to believe but the first term is almost coming to an end. Just a few more weeks and we will all be off on our Christmas break, eating lot's of good food, catching up with family and friends, and trying to relax. But until then, there is still plenty of things to do. For instance, why not participate in some of the exciting research that's going on in the Department? Both PhD, MSc, as well as PS300 students are always looking for volunteers. Not only can you help them by participating, but you can actually learn a lot about experimental psychology by participating in research yourself! Some participant groups are hard to recruit and it is only through word of mouth that we get enough volunteers. MSc by Dissertation student and Psychology Newsletter Group (PNG) member Chelsea Harmsworth can tell you something about that. Which is why it was exciting to see that there was a small media buzz to help her recruit her special population. Read about it on page 2!

Also in this issue: a chance to get to know staff a bit better. We have a double "60-seconds with" and a special "staff hobbies" waiting for you this month. Plus news from the Psychology Society and lot's of other interesting stories. If you think there's something missing, please get in touch and let us know. Or write something yourself!

Finally, special thanks to our graphics team Christie and Stelliphy who kindly designed this issue. Enjoy, everyone.

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# Media Buzz About MSc Research Project

28 Gazette Tuesday November 12, 2013

Your **LIFE** ● FAMILY ● HEALTH ● MONEY ● EDUCATION



## Help uni to find out how alcoholism impacts on the brain

By **JAMES COX**  
james.cox@essex.ac.uk

**A**LCOHOLISM can have a bearing on your life even after you kick the habit.

Researchers at the University of Essex want to dig a little deeper into the effects booze has on you even after quitting, in a unique new study. They want to examine people who have gone dry after a period of being alcohol dependent to see how their ability to read emotions or signals in conversations has been affected.

Anecdotal evidence suggests prolonged alcohol abuse may affect the part of the brain that receives signals from others.

This may lead to problems with communication.

The study, which will take place in the university's multimillion pound Centre for Brain Science, looks to confirm this theory with scientific evidence.

Terry Martin, 60, is a former alcoholic who has come out of the other side and now runs his own alcohol aware charity, alcoHELP. He visits schools across Essex warning children on the implications of binge boozing.

Terry, from Castle Hedingham, battled his addiction to drink for years, and admits he lost it all. His disease broke up his marriage, ruined his career, cost him his home and almost killed him three times.

He managed to ask for help and was admitted to the Priory clinic. Coming up to 14 years clean, Terry agrees that the effects of his addiction are still affecting his life.

"In the early days, I would definitely find it difficult to read and deal with emotions," he says. "Alcoholics drink so they don't have to deal with emotions, so when they quit, they all come flooding back tenfold."

"I also have very bad memory and have to use special techniques to

commit something to my long-term memory.

"Alcoholics in recovery are actually told to step back and consider their reactions to things because of the lasting issues on their emotions."

"For years the effects of alcohol on the brain was ignored, so it's good and important the university is continuing to research it."

"I use brain scan images in my talks to show how alcohol can affect memory and emotions."

University of Essex scientists are looking for dry alcoholics to be volunteers in this pioneering study.

Led by Dr Silke Paulmann, from the department of psychology, and student Chelsea Harmsworth, the study will investigate the impact of alcoholism on emotional speech, in particular how dry alcoholics produce and perceive emotions.

"There is some research out there which suggests that recently detoxified alcoholics have problems recognising emotions from speech, and the face," explains Dr Paulmann. "It has not yet been investigated whether or not these problems persist."

"Difficulties in recognising expression and emotions from speech can have severe impact on the ability to communicate with others, often leading to frustration and possibly isolation for the affected individuals."

Using an EEG, which records brain activity, the scientists will measure how the volunteers process certain emotions from speech.

If anyone is interested in taking part, e-mail Dr Silke Paulmann at paulmann@essex.ac.uk or Chelsea Harmsworth at charms@essex.ac.uk

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The Colchester Gazette recognised the research of our own MSc student Chelsea Harmsworth about the effects of alcoholism on emotional speech perception after an individual has quit drinking. Chelsea is currently looking for volunteers to participate in her two-part study. The principal focus of the project is the impact alcohol abuse has on communicating emotions. In addition to acoustically analysing emotional speech of dry alcoholics, Chelsea will also make use of the EEG

facilities in our Centre for Brain Science to measure brain activity while participants with and without a history of alcohol abuse listen to speech spoken in different emotional tones. In addition to the article in the Gazette, the importance of the work was also acknowledged by Radio BBC Essex who interviewed Chelsea's supervisor Dr. Silke Paulmann on November 13th on the Dave Monk morning show.

# BIG BANG!

The Big Bang Fair comes to the University of Essex and the Psychology Department is part of it! The event will bring together a host of exciting and fascinating activities and demonstrations for hundreds of school students, with a focus on science, maths, engineering and computing.

Among the activities to encourage young people to study the subjects will be demonstrations of crowd control, coral reef research and climate change, and, sponsored by our Department, how our brains function. The event aims to raise the profile of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and tries to promote the vital role that the sector plays in the UK's future economic growth and prosperity. It takes place on December 16th from 10am until 3pm and children aged 13 to 14 years old from East London, Suffolk, and Essex will be attending the event.

# STAFF HOBBIES

by Chelsea Harmworth

*We thought it would be interesting to find out a bit more about what lecturers do outside work and what hobbies they have:*



Dr Philip Cozzolino

Dr Philip Cozzolino said: 'My main hobby these days is writing and performing music. Original singer/songwriter type stuff. I've played all around Colchester (The Bull, The Hole In The Wall, etc.), and in Ipswich, Chelmsford, and Wivenhoe. I've even had some of my songs played on UK radio stations (and their internet streams), and one of my songs is on a CD being released to raise money for The Woodland Trust.'



Dr Silvia Rigato

I don't really do much in my spare time because there's not much spare time in my life at the moment! I've got a 1 and a half year-old daughter (Gaia) and I'm with her all the time when I'm not working. I obviously love spending my time with her, she's a lovely and very active little girl who never stops running around. However I used to have and enjoy some 'me-time' before having her. My hobby and passion is yoga; I have been doing yoga since I was 15, when I was 20 I started a training course for teachers and I started teaching yoga when I was 23. This was when I was still living in Italy. I continued to do that also when I moved to London, but when Gaia arrived my life got busier! I am trying now to find again some 'me-yoga-time', and who knows, maybe one day I'll be back to teach that too!



Professor Sheina Orbell

Too much time in academia is spent sitting still at a computer so getting out and active is important to me. For many years I played lacrosse; at school, University and County level and subsequently in a ladies team after I left University. I think this experience with team sport left me with a love of outdoor exercise and of exercising with other people in a group. It took me a while to figure out how to keep these things in my life after I had to hang up my boots. The gym never seemed right. The answer for me is a bootcamp several times a week (outdoor circuit training in effect) where there is lots of banter and laughter, and rambling at the weekends (usually about 10 mile walks with a pub stop). The Ramblers lead guided walks using the public footpaths across fields and farms and woodland areas which serves to keep the paths open and accessible. I also get to see what is being grown in our fields. My other loves are sailing, particularly in warm sunny climes, and trail biking with my hard tail Marin bike. Much as I enjoy walking and cycling, I am not a natural long distance runner by any stretch of the imagination, but usually attempt the charity santa fun run in Castle park.'



Dr Vincenzo Romei

I enjoy cooking a lot, making all sorts of home made pasta, pizza, cakes. I also love gardening, and growing plants, trees, vine, especially if they come after a while with fruits and vegetables. One of the big passions is the life on the countryside. Walking or bicycling in the countryside is just great at anytime of the year, each season coming with a different distinctive smell, colour and atmosphere and plenty of things you could do. It's great to go with my family and friends and discover the wildlife and the beauty of the nature with my children. Very inspiring. The other big passion is the sea and whatever you can do with it. I was born in Lecce, a very nice town in the southern part of Italy surrounded by the mediterranean sea and I used to spend most of my spare time on the seaside. Still being by the sea is one of my MUST. There are plenty of other things that I love: reading a good book (I love reading Montalbano by Camilleri), to play the guitar or sculpt. I used to make a lot of sculptures in the past. Unfortunately I have not so much time left for all these things. Finally there is one other big passion: my job! Doing research is one of the most challenging and rewarding things I have ever done in my life. It's great when you have plenty of fascinating questions no one has answered yet and try to find the answer yourself. It requires big efforts but feeds creativity in a way that you'll never have enough!

# 60 SECONDS INTERVIEW

Psychology Frontrunner Keishema Kerr got to know **Philip Cozzolino and Geoff Ward** in 60 seconds and she shares their

**What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word Psychology?**

P: *Marking.*

G: *I'm genuinely interested, sometimes inspired, and often impressed by the work of psychologists across such a breadth of different topics.*

**Would you rather be invisible or be able to read minds? (in hindsight this was probably a silly question to ask a Psychology academic)**

P: *Read minds.*

G: *Although sometimes useful, I think it would be a bit of a curse to be able to read minds. I'm not sure we have the cognitive control to prevent us from automatically thinking some pretty injudicious thoughts. Having said that, I'm not sure that I would really want to be invisible, either.*

**What is the most embarrassing song on your iPod?**

P: *Music is a pretty important part of my life, so I don't consider any of the songs on my devices embarrassing.*

G: *It is probably the theme tune to the 1970s TV show, "The Diddy Men" (a creation of the comedian Ken Dodd). Unfortunately, my children enjoy the squeaky "Alvin and the Chipmunks" - like voices, so it gets a regular airing in the car, much to our embarrassment as we stop at red lights... (Seriously, Youtube it!)*

**Would you rather be 3 inches taller or 3 inches shorter?**

P: *Taller*

G: *Probably taller, I guess, but I've not thought too much about this.*

**What is in your bag/ on your desk that you can't live without?**

G: *Nothing. It's just stuff.*

P: *My cafetière for coffee, I always used to drink tea, but in the last 10 years, coffee has definitely been the hot drink of choice. Why stop at one cup at a time? It's pretty common for me to have two cups on the go at the same time...*

**If you had to give up one of your senses what would it be and why?**

P: *Smell. There are some odours I could do without sensing.*

G: *Probably smell..but I'd really miss the smell of good bread, coffee and the delicious Eastern spices*

**What is your deal holiday destination?**

P: *Anywhere there's family.*

G: *At this stage of my life, I've realised that on holiday, I'm most happy if the children are happy. So somewhere where there are beaches, swimming pools, and things to see like historic buildings.*

**Would you rather go without TV or fast food the rest of your life?**

P: *Easy. Fast food.*

G: *I think it would be hardest to give up TV; mainly for the sport and some comedy.*

**If you had a time machine, would you go back to the past or to the future?**

P: *The past. So much to do over... Plus, I'd know all the outcomes of NFL Super Bowls. I don't gamble, but with that information I could make a fortune.*

G: *I am probably more likely to re-read a book I've read before, than I am to turn to the end of the book that I am currently reading. I suspect that I would feel more comfortable re-experiencing past events (knowing how they turn out).*

# Using technology to understand and enhance human memory:

## An interview with Professor Geoff Ward

by Chelsea Harmsworth

### 'Who did you receive the grant from?'

The grant was from the European Commission.

### 'How much was the grant for?'

The total grant is worth just under 2 million euros (1,999,814 euros) of which 389,602 euros will be spent at Essex. The project is in collaboration with computer scientists at the University of Lancaster, University of Stuttgart, Germany, and the Università della Svizzera italiana, Lugano, Switzerland.



### 'How long will the project run for?'

The project will run for 36 months.

### 'Could you tell me a bit more about the project?'

The grant aims to understand and improve human recall through the use of technology. We are all probably aware of ever-improving technology available via smart phones, satnavs, electronic diaries, and social media, that record aspects of our day. Technology increasingly captures many aspects of our daily lives, such as our location via GPS, the levels of activity via fitness apps, or the activities of our family and friends through social media. Technology may also store our planned daily activities via electronic diaries, and provides rich aide-memoires for the day via the photos taken, and the record of texts, calls and e-mails sent and received. Currently, some individuals who embrace "life-logging" or certain sports routinely capture photos or video from their daily activities.'

### **What are the goals of the study?**

'One goal of the grant is to embrace these developments to create a system for enhancing memory. Suppose for a moment that through advances in such technology, you could have a very rich set of cues to remind you of the activities of each day. Suppose also that you had the power to display information to yourself (via say the screen or audio outputs of your smartphone, or other wearable device, such as Google glasses). What aspects of your life could be improved by the use of such technology? You might wish to use the data to help plan and inform your intended activities (like Satnavs and clock alarms aid navigation and time-keeping). That is, we may wish to second-guess which information might be most relevant to present to users to help augment their memory (reminders of what they want to do, where they want to go, information about their environment or who they are likely to meet, etc). We might also want to review aspects of the day, either for information or for pleasure. The grant concerns developing ways of integrating different sources of data, developing effective ways of presenting currently relevant information to users, and developing personal preferences / settings for controlling these activities.'

### **'How will you investigate this?'**

One aspect of the work at Essex focusses on applying memory theory in the real world. Advances in memory theory have typically occurred in the laboratory setting, where the stimuli presented are well known. However, these experiments usually last seconds, minutes or at most a couple of hours. It is possible that portable devices that allow the display of stimuli and that capture rich aspects of one's activities can be used to test and assess memory, such that theories can be tested over far wider timescales than can be typically studied in the laboratory.'

'A second aspect concerns applying a memory theory called retrieval-induced forgetting. This predicts that if you review some memories from your day, you should recalled them better than unreviewed memories. More surprisingly, it also suggests that reviewing subsets of memories make actually make it harder to access related events that were not reviewed. Such a theory might explain why one's memories for distant past events such as childhood holidays might seem over time to more and more closely resemble the photos that were taken. The photos were reviewed and have become more accessible; the memories without photos become increasingly inhibited. What the project aims to do, is to see whether the theory applies to real life memories, and quantify any forgetting that may take place.'

Professor Ward is looking for a postdoctoral research officer to work with himself on this project for more information please visit: <http://www.jobs.ac.uk/job/AHO281/post-doctoral-research-officer/>

## 5 Psychological disorders you never knew existed

### 1. ABOULOMANIA

This causes occasional onset of crippling indecision, which often renders sufferers unable to socially function. These decisions can be anything seemingly simple as choosing what to put on their toast.

### 2. BOANTHROPY

Psychological disorder in which sufferers believe they are a bovine, which is a cow, bison, buffalo or ox. Despite it being extremely rare the most typical sufferers are male. It is believed that the disorder begins as a sort of dream, which then turns into mania, taking over the individual entirely. Many Christians believe king Nebuchadnezzar suffered from Boanthropy as "He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle" (Daniel 4:33).

### 3. RILEY DAY SYNDROME OR FAMILIAL DYSAUTONOMIA

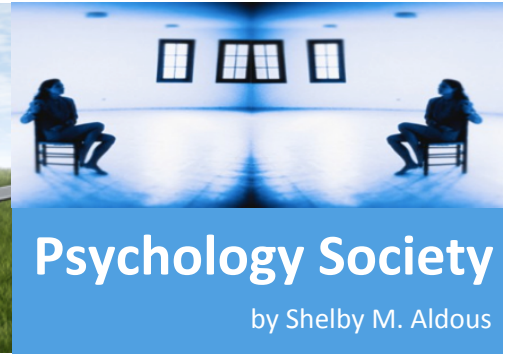
Familial dysautonomia is a disorder of the autonomic nervous system affecting the development of sensory neurons, so many sufferers are almost entirely insensitive to pain! Sufferers must inherit a copy of the defective gene from each parent to develop the condition and it is most common in people of Eastern European descent. Other symptoms are decrease in sense of taste, inability to detect changes in temperature and lack of tears when crying.

### 4. EROTOMANIA

This is a rare type of delusion in which the affected individual holds a genuine and unshakeable belief that a stranger, often a famous person, is in love with them. People with this kind of delusion believe that said person is declaring their love through special glances or body posture. When the love of the "secret admirer" is denied, it is dismissed by the erotomaniac as a ploy to hide the forbidden love from the rest of the world.

### 5. REDUPLICATIVE PARAMNESIA

A delusional misidentification syndrome characterized by the belief that a place has been duplicated. The syndrome is commonly associated with damage to the frontal lobes and the right cerebral hemisphere, brain areas concerned with memory and familiarity. People suffering from reduplicative paramnesia often deny their illness and experience out of body experiences.



## Psychology Society

by Shelby M. Aldous

Are you still pondering on whether to join a society? Or do you feel like you need something new and fresh to do during your time? Then really, you ought to be buying your Psychology society membership today and join us!!

The Psychology society is more than just a small group of psychology students having weekly meetings about all things psychology related. No, we are much more exciting than that! (Although, of course psychology is a common theme among most of our events, but in a fun and interesting way!) And anyway, there are nearly 50 members so we're not really a small group. This means it's more than easier for you to make new friends, both students from across the university and from your classes, and not just with those who are studying psychology; we welcome everyone!

We host exciting events not to be missed for our members, including movie nights, meals and parties (Christmas party and meal soon!), day trips and conferences. Coming soon we have an EEG presentation, courtesy of Dr Nick Cooper, Academic Director of the Centre for Brain Science, and a couple of his PhD students. The demonstration will include a description of what an EEG actually is, how it works and then a member of the audience will be used in the actual demonstration! It will be an insightful experience for all Psychology students to aid their forthcoming studies, so it really is recommended, however it must be stressed that a Psychology society membership will be needed for entry! We want to see you there, and that's on the 5<sup>th</sup> December at 6pm, so make sure you come along!

Next term we are also going to host a 'Personality Party' and try to get as many people to attend as possible, which is something only a Psychology society can do! It will involve party members wearing a t-shirt with a word describing their personality printed or written on it, and prizes will be available to the person with the most unique personality, and the most common personality. It's a chance to find people with similar attributes as yourself, appreciate different personality traits and what it means to have a personality, and so many other things; all while attending one of the biggest parties of the year!

As a society, we aim to help you enjoy your time in Essex and your chosen studies, meet new people, seize opportunities, and we aim to make your experience the most beneficial and enjoyable experience it could possibly be. It goes without saying that to be a member of this society will bring more benefits to you, than it would if you're not a member. Simple. So sign up today, have loads of fun, and deepen your psychology know-how here at Essex with us!