

Why students should go to the conference

THE Annual BPS Student Members Group Conference kicked off with guest speaker Professor Vincent Egan (Glasgow Caledonian University) talking about 'sensational and lurid interests in mentally disordered offenders'. Egan successfully put to rest the stereotypical image of forensic psychology, which he referred to as being interpreted through media depiction as the 'Miss Marple/James Herriot' approach. Forensic psychology is a fast-growing area within psychology, and this presentation was an excellent start to the day.

In the afternoon Wendy Nicholls (Loughborough University) set out to examine the effect of a 'mental health related' course (psychology) on the attitudes of people towards individuals with a mental health disorder. She found that participants who were undertaking a combined honours degree course had significantly more negative attitudes. She also considered the effect of 'year' on their attitudes, finding that the first-year students had attitudes that

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were significantly more negative than those of the final-year students. She concluded that knowledge of mental health problems, which came about through the studies taken as part of a taught course, led to the development of a more positive attitude towards individuals with mental health problems. Nicholls

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was genuinely enthusiastic about her study, which was an inspiration to the student audience attending the SMG conference.

Cedric Ginestet (Thames Valley University) presented a very interesting study conducted to uncover whether psychology students perceived e-therapy as a therapeutic service. Although therapeutic interventions are being implemented more and more through the internet, Ginestet's study highlighted the view that e-therapy is seen as challenging traditional methods of therapeutic intervention, such

as face-to-face contact, talking and synchronous intervention. The findings included positive opinions concerning the flexibility of internet interventions, but overall there appeared to be a negative opinion towards e-therapy, rejecting it as non-therapeutic. The lack of client-therapist relationship was seen to be a major problem, as was the ethical validity of such services. Ginestet concluded that these findings highlight the reluctance of people to adapt to new technologies. This was another fascinating talk and it was good to see qualitative methods being used – they

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appear to be becoming more and more popular within psychology research.

So what did I get from this year's conference overall? Yes, there was the opportunity to hear both academics and students present their research; there was the chance to purchase discounted journals and books; good food and wine were partaken of and enjoyed; but most of all, I felt the most glorious sense of achievement. I have gained so much in the way of confidence and experience, made lots of new friends and even managed to find a 'statistics for psychology' book that avoids mathematics! So if anyone has the slightest doubt or is wondering what the big deal is about conferencing, I have only one thing to say: Go for it, you have absolutely nothing to lose and so very much to gain!

■ *Angela McNeilly is a final-year student at Glasgow Caledonian University and Deputy Editor of PsychTalk.*

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