

Blackpool illuminated

BY AVRIL CADDEN

BLACKPOOL. Usually the home of the funfair, seagulls and 'kiss me quick hats'. But for a few days in March host to a party of eager aspiring psychologists as the annual Student Members Group conference came to town.

Mhari Wallace (Glasgow Caledonian University) kicked off our impressive programme of events with an informative discussion on autistic children and their relationship with their siblings.

Ever get the feeling that you are being stared at? Could it be that somebody thinking about somebody else causes a physiological response in that person? Gareth Logue (Glasgow Caledonian University) suggested that extravert people may not be as sensitive at picking up 'staring signals' because they have a higher threshold for arousal.

The differences between the sexes were the focus of Sarah Angus (also from Glasgow Caledonian University), who studies personality and behaviour characteristics within the context of sexual betrayal. Relating her findings to evolutionary history, Angus suggested that men will sexually betray their partner more often than women and that women are likely to commit infidelity with some form of emotional attachment.

Conversely, Kate Nicholls from City University challenged us to dismiss gender stereotypes and concentrated solely on the concepts of monogamy versus infidelity. Giving us plenty of food for thought, Nicholls used discourse analysis to present participants' meanings of monogamy and infidelity as continually shifting, depending on the context of the subject of the conversations.

Gender and personality traits were also used by Catherine Smyth of Strathclyde University, to test the recall of emotional detail via a series of either negative or positive pictures. She concluded that personality had no effect on memory recall. But overall the negative pictures were recalled more than positive pictures, and a higher proportion of positive than negative pictures were recalled in terms of their emotional detail.

Who would you trust? Who would you believe most, a renowned professor or a layperson on the street? SMG Conference Officer Alexa Spence (Strathclyde University) was wearing one of her many

hats – none of which said 'kiss me quick' – to present her paper on inoculation. Inoculation is a method (analogous to biological immunisation) of presenting arguments and counter-arguments to strengthen an individual's attitudes, enabling participants to better defend against future attacks on their point of view. Examining mainly the effect of source credibility, she



used high- versus low-credibility conditions for both supporting and counter-arguments. However, it was the difference between argument types (i.e. whether for or against) that was found to be significant in reinforcing attitudes, not the difference in credibility.

Our invited speaker Rory O'Connor from Strathclyde University gave an illuminating and well-attended talk on suicide. His enthusiasm and passion for his subject reverberated around the room and brought about a lively discussion afterwards. He dispelled the myth of suicide as down to 'being depressed' and lifted the stigmas attached to this behaviour. With the use of some very clever, striking analogies and pictures, like 'bad apples versus rotten barrels', he clearly illustrated his points. He identified memory biases, looked at the tendency of hopelessness, the role of perfectionism and coping behaviours. The combination of high maladaptive coping and high socially prescribed perfectionism (i.e. the standards and expectations of others) was said to lead to hopelessness, which was found to lead to the greatest risk of suicide. We were left with a positive message in that we have an ability to predict and also that there is

something that we can do in terms of intervention, reframing and prevention.

Bruce Napier, our invited speaker from the University of Wales, Bangor, ensured an eager audience with a headline-grabbing title ending in the words '...how not to get thrown out of the BPS before you've even started'. As someone who has sat on a Local Research Ethics Committee (LREC), he was very welcome. The differences between medical and psychological research were looked at and the work of the LREC. We heard about the four Cs: competence, consent, confidentiality and conduct. He finished with a brief look at the Society's own codes of conduct.

Claire Thorn (University of Buckingham) told us all about SKIDZ, a project to teach young people new skills and to create new opportunities. The results showed that youths attending courses at SKIDZ would attach significantly higher importance to their life goals compared with youths not attending SKIDZ. At the same time, however, it was noted that youths with a more disadvantaged family background placed less importance on personal goals.

The students in Blackpool had travelled from all over the country. Some funded it all by themselves; some lucky members managed to secure funding from their university. Thanks go to all students who attended the conference, and thanks also to our invited speakers for their support.

As yet another successful SMG conference drew to a close, the lively Blackpool nightlife was only just beginning to wake up. Having made the most of their brain power during the day, the weary students still managed to find the energy to reward themselves with a night out on the town, sampling the delights of the brightly coloured neon lights before saying goodbye to the seafront and making their journeys back home.

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Articles, cartoons and other contributions for the 'Students' page are most welcome.

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