PSYPAG
Psychology Postgraduate Affairs Group
Quarterly
Issue 88 September 2013

Special issue: The psychology of conspiracy theories

Towards a definition of 'conspiracy theory'

Has the internet been good for conspiracy theorising?

The detrimental nature of conspiracy theories

Also in this issue:

The psychology of conspiracy theories blog

Conference and book reviews

Editorial

Daniel Jolley

WELCOME to the 88th issue of the *PsyPAG Quarterly*. It is my pleasure to introduce this special issue on the psychology of conspiracy theories, which contains a range of high quality articles discussing conspiracy theories from a variety of different perspectives. Further, this issue also features a selection of conference and book reviews, which we hope together presents an interesting and thought-provoking issue.

It has been several years since the *PsyPAG Quarterly* has published a special issue, so I am delighted to have had the opportunity to bring together a selection of postgraduates to showcase their work on a topical phenomenon. Amongst these feature articles in this issue, Christopher Thresher-Andrews introduces the topic of conspiracy theories more broadly, and sets a strong grounding for the issue. In the next feature article, Robert Brotherton provides a detailed discussion on how to define a conspiracy theory, where he pays particular attention to the varying characteristics of conspiracy theories. Next, Anthony Lantian explores the different methodological approaches for studying conspiracy theories to date, and provides empirical examples of each of the different fruitful methods used. Michael Wood then discusses the digital revolution, in particular the rise of the internet, and whether it has been good for conspiracy theorising. Finally, I (Daniel Jolley) then present an article which provides a discussion on the detrimental nature of conspiracy theories, and highlights the impact of endorsement of, and exposure to, conspiracy theories on one's beliefs and behavioural intentions.

Further, blogging is a popular way to engage with a wider audience, and several collaborators from this special issue and I contribute to a blog that explores the psychology behind conspiracy theories (www.conspiracypsychology.com). Therefore, to showcase the selection of posts on this blog, several have been re-printed in this special issue. One of our aims is to demonstrate conspiracy theorising in the real world, with discussion relating to current events. We do hope you find these posts of particular relevance.

Alongside these feature articles, we are provided with an array of interesting conference reviews. Sara Robertson reviews the Annual Meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, and Clea Wright Whelan reviews the International Investigative Interviewing Research Group Annual Conference. Nancy Rowell reviews the British Psychological Society Cognitive Section Annual Conference, and Natalia Kucirkova reviews the Literacy Research Association Annual Conference. Finally, Laura Fisk reviews the Second International Congress on Borderline Personality Disorder and Allied Disorders. Each of the reviews presents an interesting dialog of these events, and highlights the positive impact

that attendance at such event can bring. Kimberley Hill also writes a book review on *Beyond The Brain*, by Louise Barrett. The review provides an intelligent overview of the book, whilst also clearly presenting the broader implications of the author's arguments in an engaging way.

If you have an idea for an article that you would like to write for the *PsyPAG Quarterly*, or would like to propose a theme for a special issue, please get in touch with the editors on quarterly@psypag.co.uk, or alternatively look on the PsyPAG website for more information at www.psypag.co.uk. The *PsyPAG Quarterly* is distributed to postgraduate institutions across the UK, and is an excellent opportunity to disseminate your ideas and research to a large community.

In conclusion, I would like to extend my gratitude to the *PsyPAG Quarterly* Editorial Team (2012–2013): Jumana Ahmad, Laura Scurlock-Evans, and Daniel Zahra, who have supported me running a special issue from start to finish. Secondly, a profound thanks to the contributors of this special issue: Christopher, Rob, Anthony and Mike. It is a pleasure to work alongside both talented and interesting people, and I am thrilled you agreed to be a part of this special issue.

Lastly, I would like to bring my column to a close by firstly wishing Daniel Zahra, who is stepping down from the Editorial Team, best of luck for the future! Then, second, sending a warm welcome to Emma Norris who has subsequently recently joined us.

If you have any comments on this special issue, please do get in touch by email, or Twitter.

Daniel Jolley
On behalf of the
PsyPAG Quarterly Editorial Team
Email: quarterly@psypag.co.uk
Twitter: @PsyPAGQuarterly

Outgoing Chair's Column

Fleur-Michelle Coiffait

I WOULD LIKE TO EXTEND a very warm welcome to all new and returning psychology postgraduates as this edition of the *PsyPAG Quarterly* sees us about to embark on a new academic year. I hope you all enjoyed the summer and had the opportunity to take a break from your studies and are returning this semester refreshed and revitalised. It is with sadness that I write this, as it is my final column as PsyPAG Chair and my time on the committee is coming to an end after three years. PsyPAG is a fantastic organisation and I encourage you to take advantage of all that PsyPAG has to offer in terms of bursaries, awards, news, peer support, free workshops and a very good value Annual Conference.

As I write this, I have just returned from this year's hugely successful Annual Conference, held 17–19 July in Lancaster. Keynotes included Professor Charlie Lewis, Professor Graham Hitch, and Professor Rob Briner – world-class leaders in their respective fields. The successful format of symposia convened by postgraduates continued this year with themed talk sessions on a wide range of topics. Workshops included a session with Dr Christian Jarrett, author of the BPS Research Digest, on how postgraduates can make the most of blogging, an interactive teaching workshop that explored findings of the PsyPAG Postgraduate Teaching Survey, and a 'meet the editor session' on publishing in peer-reviewed journals. Individual talks and posters spanned every area of psychology you can think of and bore testament to the sheer variety of exciting work today's postgraduates are contributing to the

cutting edge of psychology research. It was great to meet postgraduates at different stages of their studies and this offered a wealth of experiences and perspectives. At our Annual General Meeting, we bid farewell to a number of committee members standing down and welcomed new members onto the committee.

A huge thank you goes to the 2013 conference organising team: Bernadette Robertson, Sabrina Ammi, Hannah Roome, Michelle Mattison and Rebecca Frost. They organised a busy, varied and smooth running academic and social programme. The highlight for me was experiencing 'The Psychologist Bath' – a piece of interactive artwork commissioned to mark 25 years of *The Psychologist*. You can hear and see more at http://www.thepsychologistbath.org.uk Our sincere thanks go to Dr Jon Sutton, Managing Editor of *The Psychologist*, for making this possible and also for sponsoring the blogging workshop. There was a strong turnout from BPS Branches, Divisions and Sections who came along to engage with postgraduates and we are grateful for their generous support and sponsorship at our events.

In terms of upcoming PsyPAG events, we are holding a free one-day workshop for postgraduates on doing research in NHS contexts on Monday 21 October at the University of Manchester. This event will be advertised via our website, Facebook and Twitter feeds, as well as on the PsyPAG JISC-mail list. Following the success of our blogging workshop, we are interested in finding out more about how psychologists engage with blogs. We are seeking the views of psychology students (undergraduate and postgraduate), lecturers, researchers and practitioners via a brief online survey, at: http://ow.ly/1Y9wlu

I would like to finish by thanking the Society's Research Board for their continued support of psychology postgraduates. I would also like to thank the PsyPAG committee, whom I have thoroughly enjoyed working with over the past three years. I wish PsyPAG all the best going forward and have every faith that under Laura's leadership, PsyPAG will continue to do a fantastic job representing and supporting UK psychology postgraduates and will go from strength to strength. Over to you Laura…!

Fleur-Michelle Coiffait
Outgoing PsyPAG Chair.
Email: fmcoifait@gmail.com
Twitter: @PMLDresearch

Incoming Chair's Column

Laura Neale

HELLO and welcome to the latest edition of the *PsyPAG Quarterly* and my first column as incoming PsyPAG Chair. I am writing this on my return from PsyPAG's 28th Annual conference where during the Annual General Meeting I was elected as PsyPAG Chair (2013–2015). Having co-organised last year's conference and been a member of the PsyPAG committee for the last year, as the Division of Occupational Psychology Representative, I am very much looking forward to my new role in further assisting the committee in carrying out their fantastic hard work in supporting UK psychology postgraduates. I am very grateful for this opportunity and in particular the support I have received from the PsyPAG committee and Fleur-Michelle in

preparing for this transition. I hope to successfully follow in Fleur-Michelle's footsteps and will do my upmost during my term to repeat the hard work and dedication to PsyPAG of her and all previous Chairs who have ensured PsyPAG has continued to exist.

A number of members of the PsyPAG committee also stepped down at our Annual General Meeting, following years of volunteering their time to support postgraduates from their respective disciplines and networks. Thank you and good luck for the future to those who have recently stepped down and welcome to the newly elected members of the committee, I'm pleased to have the pleasure of working with you all over the next two years.

I echo Fleur-Michelle's comments regarding this years' conference which was a fantastic meeting comprising of exceptional oral and poster presentations from postgraduates and high profile keynote speakers. The jam packed social programme created many opportunities for networking with other psychology postgraduates of which I met many inspirational individuals from various areas of psychology at different stages in the training process. Particular highlights for me were the conference dinner at Barker House Farm on a lovely sunny evening and the Friday keynote from Professor Rob Briner who highlighted and demonstrated the importance of evidence based practice in psychology in an informative yet engaging manner, a topic which is pertinent to all psychology postgraduates at this early stage in their career.

The success of this year's conference was primarily down to the hard work of the conference organising committee from Lancaster University; Bernadette Robertson, Sabrina Ammi, Hannah Roome, Michelle Mattison and Rebecca Frost. I would like to take this opportunity to say an enormous thank you to them all. I am aware of the time, effort and dedication they have committed over this past year in order to make the conference a successful and enjoyable event for all delegates, whilst taking time out of their studies. I also wish to thank the many sponsors of the conference for their generous support which is very much appreciated.

I look forward to hearing about the upcoming PsyPAG workshops and events and please don't hesitate to get in touch with me at chair@psypag.co.uk if you have any ideas or suggestions as to how PsyPAG can further support UK psychology postgraduates. We also offer funding for workshops so if you have any ideas for workshops you would like to run please see http://www.psypag.co.uk/workshops/ for further information.

If you would like to get further involved with PsyPAG we still have a few vacant positions on our committee, details of which can be found at the back of the *PsyPAG Quarterly*, as well as the full committee list and contact details. If you would like to apply for any of the vacant positions please email the Vice-Chair, Emma Davies.

Finally, thank you to the Society's Research Board for their support and best wishes for all UK psychology postgraduates about to embark upon a new academic year.

Laura Neale
PsyPAG Chair
Email: chair@psypag.co.uk
Twitter: @PsyPAG

An introduction into the world of conspiracy

Christopher Thresher-Andrews

PRINCESS DIANA was murdered by the British Secret Service because she was pregnant with Dodi Fayed's baby. The government is adding fluoride to our drinking water in an attempt to weaken the population. Barak Obama is a Kenyan-born Muslim and thus ineligible for the Office of the President of the United States.

All of these statements have appeared at some point or other in popular media, debated by politicians, challenged and denied by government departments, and propagated heavily over the internet. A quarter of the UK population believe Diana was assassinated (YouGov, 2012); similarly 25 per cent of Americans think Obama was not born in the US (*CBS News/New York Times*, 2011). But these statements are not true.

They are examples of a cultural shift in the popularity of the 'conspiracy theory'; alternative narratives of a world overshadowed by malevolent groups hell-bent on the destruction of civil liberties, freedom and democracy. They suggest that governments, secret religious groups, scientists or private industry (often many of these combined) are responsible for either causing or covering up significant major world events for their own criminal ends.

What is a 'conspiracy theory'?

Traditionally, the definition of a 'conspiracy' is from the legal interpretation of an 'agreement between two or more persons to commit a crime at some point in the future'. Thus, in its broadest sense, a conspiracy theory is an accusation that the crime of conspiracy has taken place. However, there is something more unique and complex in what we culturally assume a 'conspiracy theory' to be (and as psychologists, find the most interesting).

What exactly constitutes a conspiracy theory is itself a topic of debate both within psychology and further afield in sociology and political science. Rob Brotherton's article in our special issue aims to explore these issues in more detail, highlighting the difficulties of studying something that we have yet to fully define. Broadly, psychologists feel that conspiracy theories are worth studying because they demonstrate a particular sub-culture of often heavily political activism that is at odds with the mainstream view. Conspiracy theories are unsubstantiated, less plausible alternatives to the mainstream explanation of an event; they assume everything is intended, with malignity. Crucially, they are also epistemically self-insulating in their construction and arguments.

Even with an attempt at a modern definition, conspiracy theories are not a new phenomenon. Although popular culture and the internet have played a significant role in the last 20 years allowing these theories to propagate and become more mainstream (Mike Wood's article explores the unique role of the internet in more detail in his article later in this issue), the conspiracy theory itself has origins in the earliest parts of modern civilisation. In the first century AD, the Roman Emperor Nero started a conspiracy theory that it was Christians who were responsible for the Great Fire of Rome. So reviled by the Christians was Nero that some even considered him the first Antichrist as prophesised in the *Book of Revelation*. Even Nero's suicide in 69 AD was tinged with conspiracy, with Romans believing he was being hidden until he could once again enact swift revenge on his enemies.

Conspiracies through history

Conspiracy theories have existed through time in multiple cultures throughout the world. The US in particular, seems to have a special relationship with the conspiracy theory, starting right from its own founding in the late 17th century. In his seminal article in 1964, Richard Hofstadter explored and charted the rise of what he saw as 'movements of suspicious discontent' throughout American history. Hofstadter discussed a sermon preached by Reverend Jedidiah Morse in Massachusetts in 1798 which highlighted 'secret and systematic means' by 'impious conspirators' to 'undermine the foundations of this Religion'. From these early events, Hofstadter defined conspiratorial thinking as a belief in a 'vast, insidious, preternaturally effective international conspiratorial network designed to perpetrate acts of the most fiendish character'. Reinforced by more recent empirical studies, the concept central of Hofstadter's essay was that conspiracy ideation arose because it gave a voice to the 'dispossessed' (Leman, 2007; Miller, 2002) or it gave people a chance to reassert their individualism or otherwise discontent with their position in society in general (Melley, 2000; Combs, Penn & Fenigstein, 2002).

In their more modern history, particularly in the US, conspiracies started out as a form of far right-anti-government rhetoric, coupled often with religious xenophobia and a search for protecting the freedoms of those who deserved them. This tended to be coupled with a feeling of political apathy or disengagement of what the theorists and their believers felt was a failure of traditional politics.

What insight does psychology offer?

Belief systems, cognitive biases and individual differences

But what in particular is it about conspiracy believers that are interesting from a psychological perspective? We find these theories and those who believe them incredibly resilient to counter-argument, driven by an often fanatical belief in their version of the truth, coupled with a heavy political overtone in that their opinions need to be heard. We see an interesting combination of cognitive biases, personality traits and other psychological mechanisms at play in the formation, propagation and belief in conspiracies.

Despite their popularity, very little psychological work has been completed in this area. The early work exploring conspiracy belief has focused on the processes of those who tended to believe in these alternative theories and explored some of the biases and individual differences at play.

The formulation of a belief in conspiracy that is resistant to contrary evidence was argued by Goertzel to demonstrate the idea of a 'monological belief system' (Goertzel, 1994). This allows believers an easier way of providing explanations of complex new phenomena that might threaten existing belief systems. It suggests that one conspiratorial idea serves as evidence for other forms of conspiracy, which has been more recently supported by research where participants who believed theories regarding the 9/11 terrorist attacks were more likely to believe in other non-related theories of conspiracy (Swami, Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2010). This remains one of the most consistently repeated findings from the research to date, and has even been extended to demonstrate that even contradictory theories are equally as likely to be believed, where the more participants believed that Bin Laden was already dead when the Americans reached his compound in Pakistan, the more they believed he was still alive. These mutually incompatible conspiracies demonstrate a common theme instead, that the message isn't as important as the idea that the authorities are responsible for a cover-up (Wood, Douglas & Sutton, 2012).

The way in which this message is argued and processed can also reveal interesting observations about the power of the conspiracy theory. Research looking at the mechanisms of conspiracy theory rhetoric

more closely has identified several key cognitive biases at work. These include a proportionality bias, the idea that large significant events have large significant causes (Leman & Cinnirella, 2007); an attribution bias, a tendency to overestimate the effect of dispositional factors, especially in an attempt to understand the intentionality of others (Clarke, 2002); and confirmation bias, where beliefs and ideas that are consistent with one's own ideas tend to be reinforced while alternative ideas are downplayed or ignored.

If we assume we are all susceptible to the same cognitive biases involved in processing information, how can we determine what type of person is susceptible to belief in a conspiracy? There is a small body of work that has allowed us to predict some common characteristics of conspiracy believers using an individual differences approach. Here, research has found that conspiracy beliefs can be predicted by high levels of anomie (a lack or rejection of social norms), authoritarianism, and powerlessness, together with low levels of self-esteem and trust. (Abalakina-Paap et al., 1999). Further work has also demonstrated a relationship between conspiracist ideation and a low level of agreeableness and high levels of political cynicism (Swami et al., 2011). The findings from this perspective have reinforced the view that beliefs in conspiracies are a response to feeling disadvantaged, powerless, and hostile toward the traditional politics that have let them down. However, one of the major limitations of the current body of work is that it is still in its relative infancy, with a small but growing body of correlational, exploratory studies.

Aren't conspiracy theories just harmless fun?

Despite the increasing focus on this new area of research, there is a view that conspiracy theories are generally harmless and represent a typical and healthy by-product of a thriving and open democratic society (Hodapp & Von Kannon, 2008). These beliefs are often dismissed as harmless theories of minor fringe groups, but recently it has been shown that belief in conspiracy theories are having real-world consequences. The South African government's former embrace of AIDS denialism as part of a conspiracy has been estimated to have contributed to approximately 330,000 AIDS deaths as people delayed or ignored preventative measures and treatment programmes (Chigwedere et al., 2008). Similar trends have been seen where a belief in a conspiracy that pharmaceutical bodies conspire with government to administer harmful vaccinations has played a role in declining childhood vaccination rates (Salmon et al., 2005). Daniel Jolley's article will approach these concerning consequences in more detail, and also demonstrate with his own recent research how even exposure to conspiracy theories can decrease one's intention to engage with politics (Jolley & Douglas, in press).

Conclusion

This introduction to the research area has only scratched the surface of what is an interesting, challenging and growing area of research. We hope that we can stimulate new ideas, avenues of research to explore, and more interest into this area that can often be dismissed and downplayed as a sensible avenue for psychological explanation. But with recent world events sometimes becoming overshadowed with an increasingly vocal minority of conspiracy believers, we want to be able to more fully understand what drives an individual to seek these alternative explanations.

However, as we have seen, the majority of the work completed in this area has only focused on the correlational and not the causal. It has been demonstrated that there are various mechanisms at play both at the cognitive and social level that help explain why conspiracy theories are persistent and some attempts have been made to understand why they are chosen over the official stories. Are conspiracy theories the result of a

cognitive bias that allows for poor evidence-based judgements, or are they the result of an increasing 'silent majority' that feel distrust in government and authority, and feel that being part of an 'out-group' allows them to blame the 'in-group' for their powerlessness? Much work has hypothesised these links from a sociological and political science background, but little has been completed to actually empirically test the mechanisms by which these theories are created, and to build an official model of belief formation, maintenance, and destruction.

It is not really our place as psychologists to debate the truth behind these theories, although naturally we approach them as just that – alternative political 'manifestos' from a group of people that feel let down and alienated by traditional politics; feeling under threat from a paranoid world view that evil exists to destroy their freedom. A cruel and unsafe world is made more secure in the knowledge that somebody, somewhere is in control and in charge, and by having access to this privileged knowledge, the 'truth', they feel they have a solution for the world's problems.

Correspondence

Christopher Thresher-Andrews
Goldsmiths, University of London.
Email: c.thresher-andrews@gold.ac.uk

References

Abalakina-Paap, M., Stephan, W.G., Craig, T. & Gregory, W.L. (1999). Beliefs in conspiracies. *Political Psychology, 20*(3), 637–647.

CBS News/New York Times (2011). *Poll: One-in-four Americans think Obama was not born in the US.* Retrieved from: http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503544_162-20056061-503544.html

Chigwedere, P., Seage, G.R., III, Gruskin, S., Lee, T.-H. & Essex, M. (2008). Estimating the lost benefits of antiretroviral drug use in South Africa. *Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes, 49*, 410–415.

Clarke, S. (2002). Conspiracy theories and conspiracy theorising. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences, 32*, 131–150.

Combs, D.R., Penn, D.L. & Fenigstein, A. (2002). Ethnic differences in subclinical paranoia. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 8*, 248–256.

Goertzel, T. (1994). Belief in conspiracy theories. *Political Psychology, 15*, 731–742.

Grant, M. (1970). *Nero, Emperor in revolt.* New York: American Heritage Press.

Hodapp, C. & Von Kannon, A. (2008). *Conspiracy theories and secret societies for dummies.* New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Jolley, D. & Douglas, K.M. (in press). The social consequences of consiracism: Exposure to conspiracy theories decreases the intention to engage in politics and to reduce one's carbon footprint. *British Journal of Psychology.*

Leman, P.J. & Cinnirella, M. (2007). A major event has a major cause. *Social Psychological Review, 9*, 18–28.

Leman, P.J. (2007, 14 July). The born conspiracy. *New Scientist*, 35–37.

Melley, T. (2000). *Empire of conspiracy.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Miller, S. (2002). Conspiracy theories: Public arguments as coded social critiques. *Argumentation and Advocacy, 39*, 40–56.

Salmon, D.A., Moulton, L.H., Omer, S.B., DeHart, M.P., Stokley, S. & Halsey, N.A. (2005). Factors associated with refusal of childhood vaccines among parents of school-aged children: A case-control study. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine, 159*(5), 470–476.

Swami, V., Chamorro-Premuzic, T. & Furnham, A. (2010). Unanswered questions: A preliminary investigation of personality and individual difference predictors of 9/11 conspiracist beliefs. *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 24*, 749–761.

Swami, V., Coles, R., Stieger, S., Pietschnig, J., Furnham, A., Rehim, S. & Voracek, M. (2011). Conspiracist ideation in Britain and Austria: Evidence of a monological belief system and associations between individual psychological differences and real-world and fictitious conspiracy theories. *British Journal of Psychology, 102*(3), 443–463.

Wood, M., Douglas, K.M. & Sutton, R.M. (2012). Dead and alive: Belief in contradictory conspiracy theories. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 3*, 767–773.

YouGov (2012). *We ask: Conspiracy theories.* Retrieved from: http://yougov.co.uk/news/2012/07/04/we-ask-conspiracy-theories/

Towards a definition of 'conspiracy theory'

Robert Brotherton

TO UNDERSTAND the psychological origins of conspiracy theories, we first need to be clear about what we mean by 'conspiracy theory'. The phrase is firmly embedded in the contemporary lexicon. As of May 2013, a Google search for 'conspiracy theory' returns almost 10 million results. It is used by politicians, journalists, academics, and the general public alike to refer to particular claims or narratives. For the most part, the label is applied consistently; there is general agreement over which claims qualify as conspiracy theories and which do not (Byford, 2011; Keeley, 1999). Conspiratorial explanations of the moon landings, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the spread of HIV/AIDS, and the death of President John F. Kennedy, to name but a few prominent examples, are all commonly categorised as conspiracy theories (see McConnachie & Tudge, 2008).

However, 'conspiracy theory' is a deceptively simple term. Though it is widely used, articulating what it is that makes one claim a conspiracy theory but not another presents unexpected difficulties (Keeley, 1999). The claim that members of the US government were complicit in the attacks of September 11, 2001, for instance, is generally branded a conspiracy theory (e.g. Dunbar & Reagan, 2006; Grossman, 2006), yet the label is rarely applied to the claim that members of al-Qaeda secretly planned and executed the attacks. The two claims both postulate a successful conspiracy to commit the attacks. Why is it that, in popular discourse, the term conspiracy theory is applied to the former but not the latter?

The features which distinguish 'conspiracy theories' from other theorised conspiracies are not immediately obvious. Dictionary definitions (e.g. Thompson, 1995) fail to capture the nuanced meaning that the term conveys in common use. Psychologists researching conspiracist beliefs have generally avoided the task of articulating a definition altogether (e.g. Butler, Koopman & Zimbardo, 1995), or have sketched out brief, relatively superficial definitions (e.g. Swami et al., 2013; Whitson & Galinsky, 2008; Zonis & Joseph, 1994) with the unspoken assumption that the distinction between conspiracy theories and other claims is self-evident (Byford, 2011). The situation has been likened to attempting to define pornography – a task which forced US Supreme Court Justice Potter Stuart to conclude simply, 'I know it when I see it' (Byford, 2011). The frequency and consistency with which the label 'conspiracy theory' is used in popular discourse suggests that users feel sufficiently confident that they know a conspiracy theory when they see it. Yet it would be beneficial to stipulate a working definition which articulates these unspoken assumptions about the characteristics that identify a claim as being a conspiracy theory.

The characteristics of conspiracy theories

In popular use, the label 'conspiracy theory' refers to a special type of theorised conspiracy. I attempt to identify and describe the typical characteristics of claims commonly labelled as conspiracy theories by focusing on the context in which such claims exist, their content, and their epistemic rationale. I define conspiracy theory as an unverified claim of conspiracy which is not the most plausible account of an event or situation, and with sensationalistic subject matter or implications. In addition, the claim will typically postulate unusually sinister and competent conspirators. Finally, the claim is based on weak kinds of evidence, and is epistemically self-insulating against disconfirmation.

Context

Conspiracy theories are unverified claims. Conspiracies have occurred throughout history, and occur in some form every day – in politics, organised crime, insider dealing, scams, and so on. Philosopher Charles Pigden points out that 'if a conspiracy theory is simply a theory which posits a conspiracy, then every politically and historically literate person is a big-time conspiracy theorist' (Pigden, 2007, p.222). However, this is not how the label is commonly used. The term usually refers to explanations which are not regarded as verified by legitimate epistemic authorities. The theory may be regarded as indisputably true by those who subscribe to it, but this belief is invariably at odds with the mainstream consensus among scientists, historians, or other legitimate judges of the claim's veracity.

This is partly a matter of empirical support. The evidence offered in favour of conspiracy theories is generally perceived as deficient by epistemic authorities (e.g. Dunbar & Reagan, 2006; Posner, 1994). In addition to the lack of well-regarded evidence, however, the theories themselves often hinge on the fact that they are not widely accepted by the mainstream. Inherent in most conspiracy theories is the allegation that the conspiracy is ongoing, and thus is yet to be fully revealed and verified (Goertzel, 2010). In this way, conspiracy theories actively cultivate the perception that events are unsolved by searching for ambiguity, and arguing that all is not as it seems (Popp, 2006).

Conspiracy theories are less plausible alternatives to the mainstream explanation. Conspiracy theories are defined in part by their oppositional relationships with other explanations of the events or situations to which they pertain (Aaronovitch, 2009; Coady, 2006; Keeley, 1999; Oliver & Wood, 2012). A conspiracy theory is not merely one candidate explanation among other equally plausible alternatives. Rather, the label refers to a claim which runs counter to a more plausible and widely accepted account. Conspiracy theories invariably reject this mainstream explanation as being false. It is often construed as not merely a mistaken hypothesis, but as a deliberate fraud concocted by the conspirators to mislead the public (Barkun, 2003; Goertzel, 2010). Thus the very existence of an official story is incorporated into the conspiracy theory and is said to be evidence of a conscious plot to distract the public – *that's what they want us to believe* (Fenster, 2008; Keeley, 1999).

In conspiracist rhetoric, the mainstream explanation is usually termed the *official* story. This disparaging label is intended to imply that the explanation is merely an account that happens to be proffered by some official source, and so should not be trusted. Indeed, a conspiracy theory need not offer a coherent, fleshed-out alternative scenario. It may simply be based around the allegation that *something* is wrong with the official story (Lewandowsky et al., 2013; Wood, Douglas & Sutton, 2012).

Conspiracy theories are sensationalistic. Not all events are equally likely to become the subject of a conspiracy theory; the subject matter of claims labelled conspiracy theories is invariably sensational. Of the many historically documented conspiracies, and the many more which are undoubtedly occurring at this very moment, most are clearly limited in ambition and consequence. Typical conspiracies have mundane aims, such as profiteering or concealing some petty crime, and have localised consequences. Conspiracy theories, however, rarely concern these kinds of isolated and relatively unimportant events. Typically only events of obvious national or international significance attract conspiracy theories, such as terrorist attacks, natural disasters, disease pandemics, the deaths of celebrities, and plane crashes (Byford, 2011). These kinds of events are often profoundly shocking, have a large impact on public consciousness, and receive extensive media coverage. In fact, the larger the impact, the more likely an

event is to garner conspiracy theories (Leman & Cinnirella, 2007).

In addition to their significant subject matter, conspiracy theories have sensational implications. According to such claims our basic knowledge of current events and world history is claimed to be based on a fabrication. It is often the organisations and institutions that we normally expect to be accountable, such as democratically elected leaders, health-care providers, and the free media, that are portrayed as wantonly deceiving those who rely on them. If such claims were true, there would often be profound implications for our understanding of freedom, liberty, privacy, knowledge, political transparency, and even free-will. In many cases vindication of the claims would justify the impeachment of whole governments, the disbandment and criminal prosecution of entire organisations and industries, and the rewriting of history (Byford, 2011).

Content

Conspiracy theories assume that everything is intended. In the real world, conspiracies – even relatively simple, petty, straightforward plans – rarely work out exactly according to plan or remain undetected for long (Byford, 2011). In contrast, conspiracy theories posit an ordered world in which conspiracies are preternaturally successful; the competence and discretion of individuals, coalitions and bureaucracies is greatly overstated. According to conspiracy theories almost nothing happens by accident, only by agency (Barkun, 2003). Events and situations are explained not as a result of many different complex, chaotic, interacting, and uncontrollable factors, but solely as the result of the conspirators' desires and actions. Every observed detail is said to have resulted from conscious planning, direct intervention, manipulation, and deception. The potential role of chance, accidents, and unintended consequences is largely overlooked. Rather, the conspirators are assumed to be hyper-competent in their ability to successfully plan and control events and subsequently keep secret their actions (Byford, 2011; Popp, 2006; Popper, 2006).

Conspiracy theories assume unusually malign intent. While the act of conspiracy necessarily entails some element of secrecy, not all conspiracies are malevolent. In the real world, conspiracy is sometimes necessary and benign. Consider the routine operations of intelligence agencies in the interests of national security, or a group of people conspiring to throw a surprise party for a friend. Of course, cruel and destructive conspiracies do take place in the world, but even these tend to be limited in ambition and scope. The type of claims typically referred to as conspiracy theories invariably posit an altogether more sinister type of conspirator (Keeley, 1999; Kramer, 1998; Lewandowsky et al., 2013).

The malevolent intent assumed by most conspiracy theories goes far beyond everyday plots borne out of self-interest, corruption, cruelty, and criminality. The postulated conspirators are not merely people with selfish agendas or differing values (Bale, 2007). Rather, conspiracy theories postulate a black-and-white world in which good is struggling against evil (Bale, 2007; Barkun, 2003; Oliver & Wood, 2012). The general public is cast as the victim of organised persecution, and the motives of the alleged conspirators often verge on pure maniacal evil (Lewandowsky et al., 2013). At the very least, the conspirators are said to have an almost inhuman disregard for the basic liberty and well-being of the general population. More grandiose conspiracy theories portray the conspirators as being Evil Incarnate: of having caused all the ills from which we suffer, committing abominable acts of unthinkable cruelty on a routine basis, and striving ultimately to subvert or destroy everything we hold dear (Bale, 2007; Hofstadter, 2008; Popper, 2006).

Epistemic rationale

Conspiracy theories have low standards of evidence. In the 1960s Richard Hofstadter noted the 'heroic strivings' with which conspiracy theorists seek out evidence in favour of their claims (Hofstadter, 2008, p.36). This is perhaps even more obvious today, with entire online cottage industries devoted to particular conspiracy theories. However, not all evidence is treated equally. Conspiracy theories can be identified by the types of evidence that they are predicated on.

Conspiracy theories are primarily built upon negative evidence – gaps or ambiguities in knowledge. An alternative narrative is constructed out of what is perceived to be 'errant data' (Keeley, 1999). This term refers to details which are either unaccounted for by the mainstream explanation, or which seemingly contradict it. Such anomalies are rarely regarded by epistemic experts as sufficient to undermine the mainstream explanation in its entirety; in fact, they are usually seen as irrelevant or invented, or at least equally consistent with other explanations (Dunbar & Reagan, 2006; Lewandowsky et al., 2013). Yet conspiracy theories take these errant details and weave them into a coherent narrative. Every anomaly is interpreted as part of a singular conspiracy, rather than simply isolated unanswered questions remaining to be solved. This conspiracist narrative is then argued to be compelling evidence that the mainstream explanation is a falsehood, and, therefore, that a conspiratorial explanation must be true.

When positive evidence is presented in favour of a conspiracy theory, it is generally regarded by legitimate epistemic authorities as being of low quality. Conspiracy theories often rely upon the testimony of eyewitnesses caught up in chaotic and traumatic events, for example (Dunbar & Reagan, 2006). This kind of evidence is valued above subsequent methodical investigations, despite the abundance of psychological evidence pointing out the unreliability of eyewitness testimony (e.g. Wells & Olson, 2003).

Conspiracy theories are epistemically self-insulating. Because of their epistemic approach towards new information, conspiracy theories are well insulated against questioning or correction. The unparalleled evil and power of the postulated conspirators implies that they have virtually unlimited ability to control people and information. Thus, the continued failure of those in the mainstream to discover or expose the conspiracy can be interpreted as evidence of their complicity in the plot. This epistemic strategy has been termed 'cascade logic', referring to the tendency for conspiracy theories to remain viable hypotheses by implicating more and more people in the alleged scheme (Goertzel, 2010; Sunstein & Vermeule, 2009). In this way, conspiracy theories are able to incorporate any inconvenient data; the absence of substantiating evidence is interpreted as evidence of a conspiracy of silence, while evidence directly contradicting the theory can be seen as disinformation concocted by the conspirators as part of their cover-up.

By invoking the epistemic rationale of 'heads I win, tails you lose' (Boudry & Braeckman, 2012; Wiseman, 2010), conspiracy theories seal themselves off from respectful and impartial examination of all the evidence, and are ultimately unfalsifiable. As contrary information can be reinterpreted to fit with the conspiracy theory, providing credible evidence against a claim can even have the unintended consequence of reinforcing it (Goertzel, 2010; Keeley, 1999).

Conclusion

'Conspiracy theory' is the name commonly given to a particular category of claims: a sub-set of theorised conspiracies which reliably demonstrate certain characteristics. In terms of the context in which conspiracy theories exist, a conspiracy theory is an unverified and sensationalistic claim of conspiracy which contradicts a more plausible account. In terms of content, the claim assumes extraordinary malevolence and competence on the part of the conspirators.

In terms of epistemic rationale, the claim is based on evidence regarded as poor quality by legitimate epistemic authorities, and is resistant to questioning or correction.

Individually, these features are typical of conspiracy theories, but are not unique to them. It is the combination of all the features that identifies the most prototypical conspiracy theories. However, it is important to acknowledge that classifying a claim as a conspiracy theory unavoidably requires an element of subjective judgement and discretion. There is huge diversity amongst conspiracy theories – not all conspiracy theories manifest these attributes in precisely the same way or to the same extent – and most of the characteristics outlined here are not objective criteria. With these caveats in mind, I believe that the family-resemblance approach taken here offers a useful definition of conspiracy theory as it is used in popular discourse, and thus allows psychologists researching conspiracist beliefs to adequately delineate the object of scrutiny.

Correspondence:
Robert Brotherton
Goldsmiths, University of London.
Email: r.brotherton@gold.ac.uk

References

Aaronovitch, D. (2009). *Voodoo histories: The role of the conspiracy theory in shaping modern history*. London: Jonathan Cape.

Bale, J.M. (2007). Political paranoia vs. political realism: On distinguishing between bogus conspiracy theories and genuine conspiratorial politics. *Patterns of Prejudice, 41*(1), 45–60.

Barkun, M. (2003). *A culture of conspiracy: Apocalyptic visions in contemporary America*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Boudry, M. & Braeckman, J. (2012). How convenient! The epistemic rationale of self-validating belief systems. *Philosophical Psychology, 25*(3), 341–364.

Butler, L.D., Koopman, C. & Zimbardo, P.G. (1995). The psychological impact of viewing the film *JFK*: Emotions, beliefs, and political behavioural intentions. *Political Psychology, 16*(2), 237–257.

Byford, J. (2011). *Conspiracy theories: A critical introduction*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Coady, D. (2006). An introduction to the philosophical debate about conspiracy theories. In D. Coady (Ed.), *Conspiracy theories: The philosophical debate* (pp.1–11). Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

Dunbar, D. & Reagan, B. (2006). *Debunking 9/11 myths: Why conspiracy theories can't stand up to the facts*. New York: Hearst Books.

Fenster, M. (2008). *Conspiracy theories: Secrecy and power in American culture*. London: University of Minnesota Press.

Goertzel, T. (2010). Conspiracy theories in science. *Embo Reports, 11*(7), 493–499.

Grossman, L. (2006). *Why the 9/11 conspiracy theories won't go away*. Retrieved 10 August 2007, from: http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,1531304,00.html

Hofstadter, R. (2008). *The paranoid style in American politics and other essays*. New York: Vintage.

Keeley, B.L. (1999). Of conspiracy theories. *Journal of Philosophy, 96*(3), 109–126.

Kramer, R.M. (1998). Paranoid cognition in social systems: Thinking and acting in the shadow of doubt. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 2*(4), 251–75.

Leman, P.J. & Cinnirella, M. (2007). A major event has a major cause: Evidence for the role of heuristics in reasoning about conspiracy theories. *Social Psychological Review, 9*, 18–28.

Lewandowsky, S., Cook, J., Oberauer, K. & Marriott, M. (2013). Recursive fury: Conspiracist ideation in the blogosphere in response to research on conspiracist ideation. *Frontiers in Personality Science and Individual Differences, 4*, 73.

McConnachie, J. & Tudge, R. (2008). *The rough guide to conspiracy theories*. London: Rough Guides.

Oliver, J.E. & Wood, T.J. (2012). Conspiracy theories, magical thinking, and the paranoid style(s) of mass opinion. *University of Chicago Department of Political Science Working Paper Series*. Retrieved from: http://political-science.uchicago.edu/faculty-workingpapers/Oliver%20Wood%20Conspiracy%20Theories%20Working%20Paper.pdf

Pigden, C. (2007). Conspiracy theories and the conventional wisdom. *Episteme, 4*(02), 219–232.

Popp, R.K. (2006). History in discursive limbo: Ritual and conspiracy narratives on the History Channel. *Popular Communication, 4*(4), 253–272.

Popper, K.R. (2006). The conspiracy theory of society. In D. Coady (Ed.), *Conspiracy theories: The philosophical debate* (pp.13–15). Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

Posner, G.L. (1994). *Case closed: Lee Harvey Oswald and the assassination of JFK*. London: Warner.

Sunstein, C.R. & Vermeule, A. (2009). Conspiracy theories: Causes and cures. *The Journal of Political Philosophy, 17*(2), 202–227.

Swami, V., Pietschnig, J., Tran, U.S., Nader, I.W., Stieger, S. & Voracek, M. (2013). Lunar lies: The impact of informational framing and individual differences in shaping conspiracist beliefs about the moon landings. *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 27*(1), 71–80.

Thompson, D. (Ed.). (1995). *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (9th ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wells, G.L. & Olson, E.A. (2003). Eyewitness testimony. *Annual Review of Psychology, 54*(1), 277–295.

Whitson, J.A. & Galinsky, A.D. (2008). Lacking control increases illusory pattern perception. *Science, 322*(5898), 115–117.

Wiseman, R. (2010). Heads I win, tails you lose: How parapsychologists nullify null results. *Skeptical Inquirer, 34*(1), 36–39.

Wood, M.J., Douglas, K.M. & Sutton, R.M. (2012). Dead and alive: Beliefs in contradictory conspiracy theories. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 3*(6), 767–773.

Zonis, M. & Joseph, C.M. (1994). Conspiracy thinking in the Middle East. *Political Psychology*, 443–459.

Conference review:

Sights, sounds and science in New Orleans

Sara Robertson

The 14th Annual Meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, New Orleans, Louisana, 17–19 January 2013.

I RECENTLY ATTENDED the 14th Annual Meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology (SPSP) 2013 in New Orleans, Louisiana, with the help of funding from the Psychology Postgraduate Affairs Group. This was a fantastic opportunity to attend this conference for a second time, and I am writing this article to encourage others who have relevant research interests to consider attending in subsequent years.

SPSP is an annual conference which takes place in the US. This year, SPSP in New Orleans brought together approximately 4000 social and personality psychologists to present in 89 symposia and across seven poster sessions containing over 300 posters each. This made it a fantastic place to see a really wide variety of high-quality research and to network with fellow researchers from around the world.

Before the start of the main conference, many attendees attend a day of pre-conferences on more specialised topics. This year, there were 24 from which to choose; my colleagues and I variously attended days devoted to self and identity, lifespan social personality and close personal relationships. At such a large conference, these pre-conferences are invaluable in ensuring that you hear about at least some highly-relevant research and that you are able to discuss your research with specialists in a smaller group setting. At my pre-conference, we had a full programme of talks relating to lifespan development, but also an informal poster session and lunch at a nearby restaurant where it was possible to get to know other attendees and also try some excellent Louisianan foods.

The main conference then began that evening, after the day of pre-conferences. Although two-and-a-half days may seem short for such a major conference, the programme was action-packed and ran from 8.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m. There were regularly 11 parallel sessions running, which meant making lots of choices about what to see and what to miss. However, the poster sessions did not run parallel to the oral symposia, and instead were scheduled to coincide with breakfast, lunch or drinks receptions which encouraged lots of people to attend. This made them a great choice for research dissemination! One of the most memorable sessions I attended was the Award Lectures featuring big-name SPSP award winners, who presented an overview of their career achievements and main research findings as well as giving advice to aspiring academics. During this session, I saw both Dan McAdams and James Pennebaker speak, both of whom I cite regularly in my own work on the lifespan benefits of nostalgia. It was great to hear them talk about their research and give insights on the world of academia.

SPSP also has a very active Graduate Student Committee who organised several events specifically for students during the conference. These included a mentoring

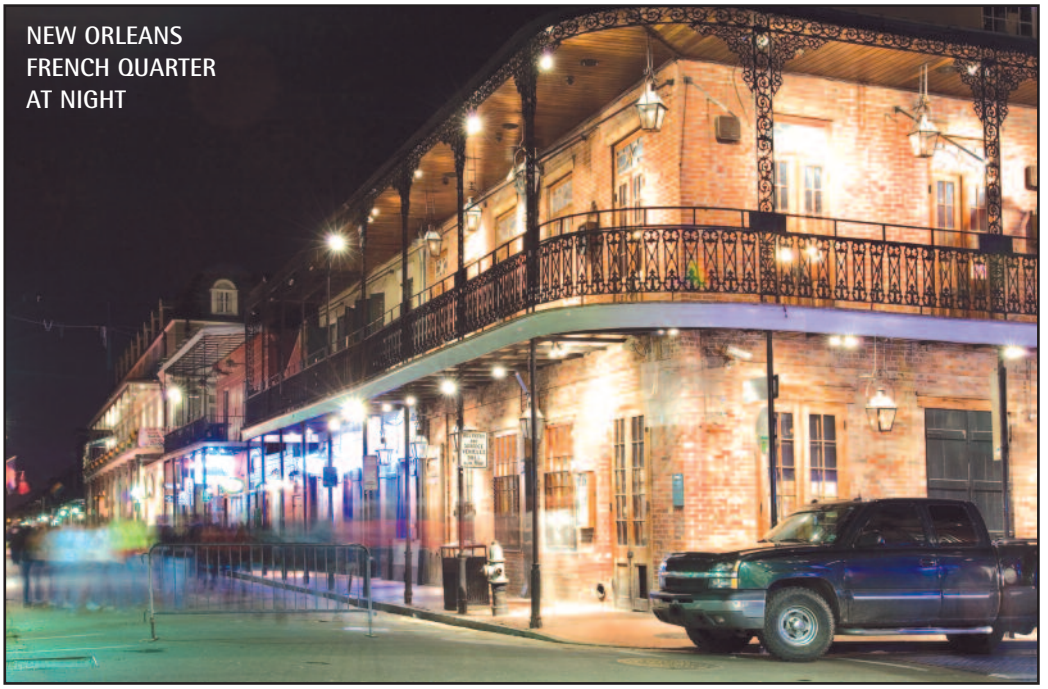
lunch, a speed dataing event (similar to speed dating, but instead of talking about yourself you give your 'elevator pitch' about your research) and a social event at a local bar. These provided excellent opportunities to meet other graduate students and seek out advice from more experienced members of the research community.

Although we had a busy conference schedule, we couldn't visit New Orleans without seeing, hearing and tasting some of the historic architecture, beautiful music and amazing food and drinks for which it is so famous. In our spare time, we managed to visit the Garden District and French Quarter, tasted gumbo, po boys and classic cocktails, and stopped to listen to incredible live jazz being played in the streets. On our final night in New Orleans, we were even lucky enough to witness the first of the Mardi Gras parades, which was quite an experience.

All in all, this conference was incredibly hectic, but I have returned home with many new ideas and lots of inspiration to carry me through my final year of my PhD. The next SPSP meeting takes place between 13–15 February 2014 in Austin, Texas. I would encourage you to plan early for funding and to submit an abstract to ensure that you can be there!

Correspondence

Sara Robertson
University of Southampton.
Email: S.Robertson@soton.ac.uk



NEW ORLEANS
FRENCH QUARTER
AT NIGHT

Conference review:

The International Investigative Interviewing Research Group Annual Conference 2012

Clea Wright Whelan

Toronto, Canada, 24–26 May.

THE International Investigative Interviewing Research Group (iIIRG), formed in 2007, is a worldwide network committed to improving investigative interviewing by facilitating knowledge exchange and collaboration between academics and practitioners. Research areas of group members cover a diverse range, from counter-terrorism to domestic abuse, child protection to false confessions, and fraud to eyewitness memory, to name but a few. The 2012 annual conference was held during a heatwave in May, in beautiful Toronto; fortunately, the conference venue was on the lakeside, allowing most delegates to keep their cool. I was particularly pleased to have had my abstract accepted for a presentation at this conference, as my PhD research has an applied focus; I am investigating cues to deception in public appeals for missing or murdered relatives, and the aim of my thesis is to develop a model of behaviours associated with deception in this specific, real life, forensic context. The iIIRG conference would be an ideal event at which to present my research, I thought, as it would be heard not only by academics, but also by practitioners to whom it is directly relevant.

On arrival, the truly international nature of the conference became apparent; there were delegates from all over the globe, from Finland to the Caribbean, Korea to Canada, Japan to Norway. There was also an impressive academic-practitioner mix amongst the delegates, not only in attendees, but also in presenters. The programme was organised into three parallel sessions over three days, and included presentations and posters from academic researchers, but also from serving police officers and professional investigative interviewers. For example, the sessions on suspect interviewing included presentations by investigative interviewers on the disclosure of child abuse images to suspects during interview, on interviewing a psychopathic suspect, and on the problems of false confessions, as well as presentations by academic researchers on, for example, the impact of empathy and question type on suspect interviews, and frequency and perceived effectiveness of interview techniques. Similarly, the keynote and invited speakers were a mix of academic psychologists and investigative professionals. For me, Dr James Ost's discussion on the complexities surrounding memory and allegations of historic abuse was particularly interesting, especially in relation to the other presentations on memory and on interviewing child victims. Keynote and invited speakers providing a non-academic perspective were; a senior judge, Justice Michelle Fuerst, who added to the debates around confessional evidence; assistant crown attorney Brian Manarin, making an argument for speedy trials; and Joseph Buckley, a developer of the 'Reid technique', one of the most widely used investigative interviewing techniques in the US, whose

presentation was followed by a particularly lively discussion.

I was lucky enough to deliver my presentation in a session chaired by Professor Ray Bull, a leading researcher in my own field of deception detection. His feedback, and the questions and feedback from the delegates, were valuable and interesting; I found receiving responses to my research from people outside my immediate academic community to be a positive experience (even if slightly daunting in anticipation!). I was also able to attend a presentation of research which I had previously seen published and found particularly interesting in relation to my own research; an investigation of cues to deception in 911 homicide calls by Susan Adams, an interviewing instructor at the FBI academy. This was a popular, interactive, and fascinating presentation, and I was extremely fortunate to be able to discuss deception detection with Susan at length throughout the rest of the conference.

The conference included the usual social activities (wine-tasting, and a formal dinner that inevitably became progressively less formal as delegates attempted native American dancing), as well as a visit to the Ontario Police College, which provided an interesting insight into how psychological research informs police practice. One of my overall impressions of the conference was that I was seeing psychology 'in action'; much of the research presented had direct, real world application, and the practitioner presentations identified real world problems and useful areas for future research. The result of the diverse range of delegates was an environment fertile for collaborative possibilities, not only internationally with other academics, but also with practitioners and potential 'end-users' of research; as a result of my presentation, I am now developing a research project in collaboration with a UK police force. Before the conference, I had not appreciated what a great opportunity attending and presenting would be, and I would recommend to all postgraduate students to attempt to do it at least once.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to those who made my attendance at this conference possible, including the University of Liverpool Graduate School, the ESRC, and PsyPAG.

Correspondence

Clea Wright Whelan

University of Liverpool.

Email: clea.whelan@liv.ac.uk

A review of different approaches to study belief in conspiracy theories

Anthony Lantian

CONSPIRACY THEORIES are defined by an 'attempts to explain the ultimate cause of an event (usually one that is political or social) as a secret plot by a covert alliance of powerful individuals or organisations, rather than as an overt activity or natural occurrence' (Douglas & Sutton, 2008, p.211). In recent years, a growing number of social psychologists intended to understand and to explain the popularity of the conspiracy theories (Brotherton, French & Pickering, 2013). Belief in conspiracy theories can be studied by different approaches, and each of these approaches requires a specific methodology.

Historically, the first empirical works that we could notice are correlational studies in which the interest was to explore the relation between belief in conspiracy theories and several personality variables (Abalakina-Paap et al., 1999; Goertzel, 1994). For example, belief in conspiracy theories is positively related to openness to experience (Swami et al., 2011, 2013), political cynicism (Swami, Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2010; Swami et al., 2011), and paranormal beliefs (Darwin, Neave & Holmes, 2011; Swami et al., 2011). We also know that belief in conspiracy theories is negatively related to level of trust of others (Abalakina-Paap et al., 1999; Goertzel, 1994; Wagner-Egger & Bangerter, 2007), self-esteem (Abakakina-Paap et al., 1999; Swami et al., 2011), and agreeableness (Swami et al., 2010, 2011). Of course, the correlational approach is limited because it could not ensure the causal direction of these effects.

Another approach of the study of belief in conspiracy theories is to explore the determinants of the belief in conspiracy theories, or in other words, to understand why some people tend to be inclined to belief in conspiracy theories. This question could be tested by using experimental design. For example, Douglas and Sutton (2008) has shown that, in comparison to a control condition, the simple fact of reading statements about conspiracy theories relative to the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, conduces to increase the level of belief in conspiracy theory about Diana's death. In the same vein, being exposed to information supportive the theory that National Aeronautical and Space Administration (NASA) fakes the moon landing resulted in stronger adhesion to belief in the moon landings conspiracy theories (Swami et al., 2013). Taken together, these researches show that the simple fact to be exposed to conspiracy narratives increases the belief in various conspiracy theories. Nevertheless, there may be more distant determinants of the conspiracism. For example, being experimentally induced to feel a lack of control (compared to a control condition) lead participants to be more likely to interpret that a personal conspiracy has been made against them (Whitson & Galinsky, 2008). Other studies conducted in Poland have shown that conspiracy thinking about ethnic and national groups increases just before parliamentary elections (Kofta & Sedek, 2005) or university examination (Grzesiak-Feldman, 2013). This indicates that conspiracy thinking could be a mean of collective self-defense against an impression of threat on the part of an outgroup (Kofta & Sedek, 2005).

Another approach is to determine what the psychological consequences (e.g. attitudes and behaviours change) that follow an exposure to such conspiracy theories are. This question is important, especially since

we seem to underestimate the extent to an exposure to such conspiracy theories can influence us (Douglas & Sutton, 2008). For example, compared to people who read articles about refutation of governmental or climate change conspiracy theories, people who read articles about governmental or climate change pro-conspiracy theories are less inclined to engage in political behaviours or, respectively, climate change behaviours (Jolley & Douglas, in press).

Recently, understanding the functional roles of conspiracy theories approach is the source of growing interest on the part of researchers (Newheiser, Farias & Tausch, 2011; Swami et al., 2013). The question behind is why people endorse conspiracy theories, and what are the psychological functions it serves? There might be socio-cognitive reasons, for example, the reasoning that a major event has a major cause (Leman & Cinnirella, 2007; McCauley & Jacques, 1979). Some authors think that belief in conspiracy theories potentially allows 'people to alleviate or cope with threats to their sense of meaning and control.' (Newheiser et al., 2011, p.1011).

In conclusion, this review is not intended to be exhaustive; moreover we could easily imagine a mixture of different approaches. More specifically, it should be underlined that in some cases, it may be difficult to distinguish the determinants of the conspiracy belief from the functional role of conspiracy belief. It may be expected that in the future, more integrative models are going to be made to give meaning of this phenomenon (i.e. belief in conspiracy theories), with respect to its complexity.

Acknowledgment
I would like to thank Professor Dominique Muller for his comments on this article.

Correspondence
Anthony Lantian
Université Grenoble Alpes, France.
Email: anthony.lantian@upmf-grenoble.fr

References

Abalakina-Paap, M., Stephan, W.G., Craig, T. & Gregory, W.L. (1999). Beliefs in conspiracies. *Political Psychology, 20*, 637–647.

Brotherton, R., French, C.C. & Pickering, A.D. (2013). Measuring belief in conspiracy theories: The Generic Conspiracist Beliefs scale (GCB). *Frontiers in Psychology, 4*, 279.

Darwin, H., Neave, N. & Holmes, J. (2011). Belief in conspiracy theories. The role of paranormal belief, paranoid ideation, and schizotypy. *Personality and Individual Differences, 50*, 1289–1293.

Douglas, K.M. & Sutton, R.M. (2008). The hidden impact of conspiracy theories: Perceived and actual influence of theories surrounding the death of Princess Diana. *Journal of Social Psychology, 148*, 210–221.

Goertzel, T. (1994). Belief in conspiracy theories. *Political Psychology, 15*, 731–742.

Grzesiak-Feldman, M. (2013). The effect of high-anxiety situations on conspiracy thinking. *Current Psychology, 32*, 100–118.

Jolley, D. & Douglas, K.M. (in press). The social consequences of conspiracism: Exposure to conspiracy theories decreases intentions to engage in politics and to reduce one's carbon footprint. *British Journal of Psychology.*

Kofta, M. & Sedek, G. (2005). Conspiracy stereotypes of Jews during systemic transformation in Poland. *International Journal of Sociology, 35*, 40–64.

Leman, P.J. & Cinnirella, M. (2007). A major event has a major cause. *Social Psychological Review, 9*, 18–28.

McCauley, C. & Jacques, S. (1979). The popularity of conspiracy theories of presidential assassination: A Bayesian analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 37*, 637–644.

Newheiser, A., Farias, M. & Tausch, N. (2011). The functional nature of conspiracy beliefs: Examining the underpinnings of belief in the Da Vinci Code conspiracy. *Personality and Individual Differences, 51*, 1007–1011.

Swami, V., Chamorro-Premuzic, T. & Furnham, A. (2010). Unanswered questions: A preliminary investigation of personality and individual difference predictors of 9/11 conspiracist beliefs. *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 24*, 749–761.

Swami, V., Coles, R., Stieger, S., Pietschnig, J., Furnham, A. & Voracek, M. (2011). Conspiracist ideation in Britain and Austria: Evidence of a monological belief system and associations between individual psychological differences and real-world and fictitious conspiracy theories. *British Journal of Psychology, 102*, 443–463.

Swami, V., Pietschnig, J., Tran, U.S., Nader, I.W., Stieger, S. & Voracek, M. (2013). Lunar lies: The impact of informational framing and individual differences in shaping conspiracist beliefs about the moon landings. *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 27*, 71–80.

Wagner-Egger, P. & Bangerter, A. (2007). La vérité est ailleurs: Corrélats de l'adhésion aux théories du complot. *Revue Internationale de Psychologie Sociale, 20*, 31–61.

Whitson, J.A. & Galinsky, A.D. (2008). Lacking control increases illusory pattern perception. *Science, 322*, 115–117.

(Image courtesy of Robert Brotherton)

The psychology of conspiracy theories blog

http://www.conspiracypsychology.com

Example blog posts from the postgraduate contributors.

21 per cent of US voters believe Obama is the Anti-Christ: The problem with conspiracy polling

Christopher Thresher-Andrews
christopher@conspiracypsych.com

Posted on 8 May 2013.

A recent poll by 'Public Policy Polling', (despite the name, a private US polling company) conducted an automated telephone poll of 1247 registered US voters and asked respondents a variety of questions about their belief in various popular conspiracy theories. The topline results are available on Public Polling Policy's website (http://publicpolicypolling.com/), and are well worth exploring in detail.

The main focus of the research was to measure conspiracy belief across party lines (Democrat vs. Republican) as well as to provide a general background measure of conspiracy belief in specific theories. The results were interesting (and sometimes contradictory compared to other polls), but helped to cause many sensational (and occasionally misleading) headlines around the world.

There are several important things to note here when we consider these results. This was a poll of registered voters – an important distinction if we assume that one of the correlates of conspiracy belief, political cynicism/apathy is relevant. If conspiracy believers feel that the world is being controlled by a malevolent group, or that the government is corrupt, they may not be registered to vote as they may feel there is little point. Another distinctive point to make is that conspiracy belief is often seen to be higher among ethnic minorities, whom, especially in the US, may not necessarily be registered voters.

Apart from the potential sampling errors, we have to consider very specifically how these types of questions are asked. Conspiracy theories are multi-faceted and multi-dimensional in their focus, but at their core, boil down to five or six key components. As a result, the wording of a question to discuss a particular kind of conspiracy theory may inadvertently skew results.

A perfect example of this is the question that asks:

'Do you believe aliens exist, or not?'

This does not cover any conspiracy directly. It doesn't cover governments covering their existence up, denying they exist, or any influence aliens may have over the general population. Many notable physicists and scientists believe in the existence of aliens; it could be considered a statistical hubris to assume we are alone in the universe – but the idea that aliens have visited Earth and/or govern-

ments attempt to conceal this is a complete separate belief that is far more closely related to conspiracist ideation.

Perhaps the biggest problem of all is the idea that belief is a binary dichotomous construct. A yes/no response to these questions do not give us nearly enough information to make sensible conclusions, especially when the questions are worded in such a way to only explore a very specific or very general conspiracist idea. The 9/11 question is of particular relevance here. The original question wording was:

> *'Do you believe the United States government knowingly allowed the attacks on September 11th, 2001, to happen, or not?'*

The low results to this question surprised many and perhaps can be explained because most of the conspiracy theories surrounding 9/11 maintain that rather than letting it happen, the government (or corrupt elements thereof) planned and carried out the attacks instead. This is an important ideological and political point and represents a very different type of conspiracy, one which perhaps is more commonly believed. Other polls have often asked questions that relate directly to the government planning and carrying out the attacks, rather than 'letting them happen'.

So, while the discussion continues about the accuracy of these latest results, and the concern that 21 per cent of voters apparently believe President Obama is the Anti-Christ, it is important to recognise the potential problems and pitfalls about sampling and constructing this type of data without the proper consideration for this complex and often contradictory area of belief.

Authoritarianism and conspiracy theories – what's the connection? Is there one?

Michael Wood
mike@conspiracypsych.com

Posted on 15 March 2013

Although I don't do it as much as I used to, I still enjoy arguing about conspiracy theories with people on the internet. As I'm generally pretty skeptical of conspiracy explanations, I usually find myself defending whatever the conventional explanation for something is, and as often as not I get accused of believing without question whatever the government (or Big Pharma, or whoever) tells me. Basically, people accuse me of being an authoritarian, which I'm decidedly not (much to my parents' dismay).

There has been a lot of psychological research on authoritarianism, much of it by Theodor Adorno and Bob Altemeyer. Some has even concerned conspiracy theories, but as you'll see, the results are a bit inconsistent. Some studies have shown that people who are more authoritarian are more likely to believe conspiracy theories. For instance, in a seminal study in conspiracy psychology, Marina Abalakina-Paap and colleagues showed that specific conspiracy beliefs tend to be associated with high levels of authoritarianism. Several studies by Monika Grzesiak-Feldman have shown that anti-Semitic conspiracy theories in Poland are more likely to be held by authoritarians. Likewise, a study in the 1990s by Yelland and Stone found that authoritarians are more amenable to persuasion that the Holocaust was a hoax, orchestrated by a massive Jewish conspiracy. Viren Swami, a psychologist at the University of Westminster, has demonstrated that anti-Semitic conspiracy theories are associated with authoritarianism in a Malaysian sample as well.

But there's some evidence pointing the other way as well. In a separate study, Swami and his colleagues at the University of Westminster showed that 9/11 conspiracy beliefs are associated with negative attitudes toward authority, and John W. McHoskey found that people high in authoritarianism were more likely to be anti-conspiracist when it comes to the JFK assassination.

So what's going on here? It looks like the content of the theories is what matters. The research on the psychology of authoritarianism has long shown that authoritarians tend to derogate and scapegoat minorities, which seems to be what's going on in a lot of

these anti-Semitic cases: a minority is being blamed by the majority for the ills of society. Swami's Malaysian study actually proposes that the anti-Semitism shown by the Malaysian respondents might be a proxy for anti-Chinese racist attitudes: there are very few Jews in Malaysia, so Malaysian authoritarians might displace their ethnic aggression from a relatively powerful and socially accepted minority group (Chinese) onto one that is almost non-existent in their society and so can be scapegoated without consequence (Jews).

In contrast, a lot of modern conspiracy theories have a very populist and anti-government tone. They blame authorities for the evils of society, not minorities – the American government blew up the Twin Towers, MI6 killed Princess Diana, and so on. So it makes sense that authoritarians would be less likely to believe that their governments are conspiring against them and anti-authoritarians would find this idea more appealing. There's no uniform association between authoritarianism and conspiracy belief – it seems to depend on the specifics of the theory in question.

As a side note: there is still some crossover between the anti-Semitic conspiracy world and the more anti-authoritarian theories like the 9/11 truth movement. 9/11 conspiracies are very popular in the Arab world, where there's also a lot of anti-Semitism. There is also some crossover in the domain of anti-Zionism, which most anti-authoritarian conspiracy theorists seem to adhere to – David Dees is a good example (probably most of his cartoons feature anti-Zionist elements) – but anti-Zionism is not anti-Semitism, it's just a point on which authoritarian and anti-authoritarian conspiracy theorists often agree.

Still, anti-semitism used to be much more socially acceptable than it is now, and its influence persists in the darker corners of even some modern conspiracy theories. You can see this a lot in editorial cartoons, where conspirators, especially bankers, are portrayed as having exaggerated hooked noses and tentacles straight out of *Der Ewige Jude*. The artists probably have nothing against Jewish people, but are instead following the conventions of anti-banker propaganda that were first established in the early 20th century, when Nesta Webster was in her prime, the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* were still a going concern, and people were generally just really worried that the Jews were up to something. For a good example, check out the cartoon at http://imgur.com/gVpwG, in which puppets representing international banks are manipulated by a hook-nosed Jewish caricature of a hydra. This would not look out of place in the 1920s if it weren't for the rest of the picture – the hydra and its puppets are faced by a placard-wielding crowd dominated by icons of latter-day conspiracist culture like Alex Jones, Jesse Ventura, and Ron Paul. This mixing of the newer populist and older authoritarian brands of conspiracism may be a strange cocktail, but it's not a rare one by any means.

Conspiracy theorising in the wake of the Newtown shooting

Robert Brotherton
rob@conspiracypsych.com

Posted on 15 December 2012

On 14 December 2012, 26 people, most of them young children, were killed in a shooting spree at Sandy Hook elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut. Unconfirmed rumours about the identity and motives of the person responsible immediately began to be passed around, and later retracted, by the news media; however, as I write this, police are still trying to piece together exactly how the tragedy came to happen. It will likely be some time before the relevant authorities are able to gather and verify all the facts, and make the details available to the public.

For some conspiracy theorists, though, no further explanation is needed. They already know what caused the shooting: It was the US government – the same government which, they say, was behind other

horrific shootings such as those at Columbine High School, Virginia Tech, a cinema in Aurora, Colorado, a Sikh Temple in Wisconsin, and a shopping mall in Oregon. For these conspiracy theorists, the shooting in Newtown is just the latest in a long line of false-flag operations staged by people within the government as a ruse to justify taking away the 2nd Amendment right to bear arms. Within hours of the Newtown shooting articles appeared on professional conspiracy theorist Alex Jones' website insinuating that the shooter (or more likely multiple gunmen) could be a government patsy under the influence of mind control, and accusing President Obama of faking tears during a press conference. Elsewhere, theorists saw the correcting of unconfirmed rumours in the media as evidence of a cover-up, and even hinted that chem-trails seen over Connecticut may somehow have played a role in the events.

This shows the conspiracist mindset in action. People who endorse one conspiracy theory tend to buy into many others – including theories with no logical connection and, as Mike Wood and colleagues demonstrated, occasionally even theories which directly contradict each other. This suggests that at least some people come to believe conspiracy theories not through rational and impartial evaluation of the evidence supporting each claim, but rather because they have an overarching worldview in which conspiracy is the default explanation for any event or observation. This is why even in the minutes and hours immediately after an event, when few facts can be known for sure, some people will already be convinced that the answer is conspiracy.

We all have a strong and emotional reaction to shocking events like the murders in Newtown. For some people this reaction is to instantly jump to the conclusion that it was a conspiracy. The rest of us can get on with grieving the loss of innocent lives, figuring out what happened, and discussing what can be done to prevent senseless tragedies like this from happening again.

[Update – 17 June 2013] Since I wrote this post, Sandy Hook conspiracy theories have continued to be passed around online. The post still gets views every day from people Google-searching for terms like 'Newtown conspiracy' or 'shooting conspiracies'. Unfortunately, there have been more tragedies over the intervening months, including the Boston Marathon bombing and the killing of an army officer in Woolwich, London. These events, too, have been accompanied by baseless conspiracy theories promulgated before the full facts could possibly be known. It seems that little happens in the world without producing a knee-jerk assumption of conspiracy among at least some individuals.

HIV/AIDS conspiracies and their consequences

Daniel Jolley
dan@conspiracypsychology.com

Posted on 14 November 2012

As we all know, conspiracy theories are a popular topic. Ask anyone, I'm sure they will have some sort of opinion (pro-conspiracy, or anti) on the topic. This is exactly the reason why conspiracy theories need to be explored, thus bringing us that bit closer to understanding them. With so many millions endorsing conspiracy theories, does it have a detrimental impact on their beliefs, attitudes and behaviours? Or, instead, are they just harmless bits fun, which should not bother us?

This is a question that has fascinated me for several years now, and it appears from my own research, and others, that conspiracies are indeed not just 'harmless fun'. This does not seem to be surprising to me. As, for example, if individuals are believing that those in power, or at least perceived to be, are involved in significant events, then surely this is going to have an impact on whether, let's say, they want to engage with these powerful figures.

This idea was further supported when I attended a speakers' event at the London School of Economics (LSE) on Tuesday 13

November 2012, organised by a fellow postgraduate, Clara Rubincam. The event was called *'Conspiracy theories and distrust in health programmes in Africa'*, where the speakers consisted of: Dr Laura Bogart, Professor Tim Allen, Professor Nicoli Nattrass, Dr Heidi Larson and Dr Melissa Parker. Each of the speakers discussed the rise in conspiracy beliefs in Africa concerning HIV/AIDS, and the subsequent decline in uptake for medicines and condom use. Conspiracy beliefs were discussed as being a central reason in this decline regarding usage of medicines, but also confusion was a big issue. For example, the panel provided some example quotes from local residents, from memory they were as follows:

> *'We need to pay for water; however, these medicines are given out to us for free from the western people. Why are medicines free, but water is not? It surely must be some type of experiment.'*

Further:

> *'We are told that all medicines need to be given to you by a doctor, however, school teachers are giving out tablets to help with a tropical disease. How can teachers give out medicines, it must be something else they are giving us.'*

These are interesting statements, and are indeed rational questions to be asking. Coupled with the mistrust in the HIV/AIDS medicines, it can fuel disengagement.

Moreover, the LSE event made it increasingly clear the difference between conspiracy theories about governments (e.g. 9/11, Princess Diana) and HIV/AIDS. This was highlighted by a trend in all the talks that suggested it was those in power who actually increased endorsement of these conspiracy theories. Indeed, if the president of the country believes the conspiracy theories that it is the Western world who have man-made HIV/AIDS to eliminate Black people (and, furthermore, subsequently making using the medicines illegal), this, as you can imagine, increases endorsement of the conspiracy within the general population. Therefore, one scholar is starting to develop ways to tackle this using a variety of interventions. She has been looking into cognitive behavioural therapy, amongst other things. She has not got any empirical data on this yet, but her ideas are going in the right direction. More specifically, her idea is to get people to talk about HIV/AIDS more openly, and also provide them with the information about how the medicines work, thus limiting their confusion.

Conspiracy theories, and indeed their consequences, are an important area of discussion. As shown from the LSE event alone, conspiracy beliefs are widespread, and their popularity is growing. They should however be taken seriously, by both people on the street, but those in power too. It is not surprising that HIV/AIDS conspiracy theories are becoming popular when the President of the country is publicly endorsing them.

About

Robert Brotherton: Rob is a doctoral researcher at Goldsmiths, University of London, where his thesis addresses how to define the term conspiracy theory, how to measure conspiracist beliefs, and the cognitive origins of conspiracy theories.

Daniel Jolley: Dan is a doctoral student at the University of Kent. His research aims to explore the social psychological consequences of conspiracy theories by employing experimental methods.

Christopher Thresher-Andrews: Christopher is a doctoral researcher at Goldsmiths, University of London. One element of his research aims to explore possible psychopathological links to conspiracy belief.

Michael Wood: Mike's research concerns the relationships between different kinds of conspiracy beliefs, persuasive techniques used by pro-conspiracy-theory and anti-conspiracy-theory advocates online, and conspiracy theories as a worldview or ideology.

Conference review:

The British Psychological Society Cognitive Section Annual Conference 2012

Nancy Rowell

Glasgow, 29–31 August.

THE COGNITIVE SECTION Annual Conference 2012 was held in Glasgow at the end of August and, as ever, provided an opportunity to get a flavour of what is happening in a range of areas in the cognitive world. Although perhaps smaller than usual there was still a fascinating selection of talks to attend, plus a poster session for research students. Due to the parallel nature of the sessions, decisions have to be made as to which talks to attend. This is not easy, as they all seem interesting. I found that sessions which did not initially appear to be linked with my own research provided me with thoughts and ideas for avenues to investigate!

This was not the first time I have attended the Cognitive Section Annual Conference, which I have always found to be welcoming and a supportive arena in which to start your presenting career. For the first time I presented a poster at the conference, a great opportunity to clarify your thinking on your research so far. The poster session is particularly useful for explaining your research in a more informal way to academics who may not necessarily be experts in your area and thus provides you with a chance to practise your dissemination skills.

The keynote speakers were Professor Ap Dijksterhuis, on 'System 3 thinking'; Dr Eirini Mavritsaki with Professor Glyn Humphreys, on 'Bridging the gap between physiology and behaviour (a neural network model)' and Professor Robert Logie, on 'Working memory in the healthy, ageing and damaged brain'. All keynote talks were very interesting and thought-provoking.

The conference opened with Professor Dijksterhuis, outlining his proposed theoretical model of decision making. The model incorporates a new thinking system, 'System 3' into the existing framework. System 1 is considered to be fast and automatic and used for relatively mundane decisions; System 2, is slow, conscious and logical and used for decisions that are more important but where the weightings are clear; and System 3 complements these. It is slow, largely unconscious and effortless, more abstract and exploratory and used where there are major decisions which involve copious amounts of information where the weightings are unclear and emotional issues also have to be taken into account.

Following this keynote presentation I attended the symposium on ear-witness testimony. The symposium discussed reasons as to why voice recognition appears to be even more unreliable than visual (face) recognition. For example, in the 'face overshadowing effect' performance is reduced if there is also visual information available. One suggested explanation is that there are stronger links between face recognition units and person identity nodes (PINs) than between voice recognition units and PINs. It was also suggested that, in a similar way to faces, there are partially distinct brain areas where familiar and unfamiliar voices are processed and that familiar voice recognition occurs close to/in the fusiform face area.

The morning of the second day involved a symposium on working memory and presentations related to person recognition. I chose to attend the latter, where I learned that whilst unfamiliar people may be identified from their gait, although less well than from viewing the face, identification is best when both face and moving body are visible. Eye-witness testimony was also explored in the session. For instance, it has been shown that child witnesses are more likely to make false identifications in target-absent video line-ups, where the line-up is shown twice. Another study showed that overt verbalisation (description) when encoding to-be-remembered stimuli benefited the recognition of objects but not faces, which raises questions about differences between perceptual and semantic expertise.

The related area of eye-witness face recognition was the subject of one of the afternoon symposiums, geared towards more applied aspects like factors that affect the quality of facial composite construction.

Between the two symposiums was the keynote by Dr Mavritsaki and Professor Humphreys, who had won the Annual Award for their work with neural networks. The award is given for outstanding published contributions to research in the area of cognitive psychology and the work that was described was impressive, showing how computational models can be used alongside experimental studies to advance our knowledge and understanding of human cognition.

On the final day I attended the symposium on visual working memory, to increase my knowledge of this area. I was able to get up-to-date with current models of working memory. Attention and binding are two areas that evoke interest in this field, as does the effect of ageing upon working memory efficiency. It appears that different functions within working memory may deteriorate at different rates, although older and younger participants may use different strategies in tests, so that the tests are not measuring the same thing across the age span. In collaboration with the BBC, Professor Logie was able to obtain a large amount of data from an online study. There is so much data that it is still being analysed. The enormous number of participants gained will enable analysis across a number of demographics and may yield some fascinating results. This highlighted one of the benefits from assessing cognitive functioning online, the ability to access a wide variety and large number of individuals.

Next year's conference is to be held jointly with the Developmental Section, which promises to be another few days packed with thought-provoking presentations. I am sure this will make decisions on which sessions to attend even harder!

Correspondence

Nancy Rowell
The Open University.
Email: Nancy.Rowell@open.ac.uk

Conference review:

The Literacy Research Association Annual Conference 2012

Natalia Kucirkova

San Diego, 28 November to 1 December.

THE 62nd Literacy Research Association (LRA; www.lra.org) Annual Conference was held in November/December 2012. A central polemic of the conference was the theme of new technologies and their impact on all aspects of our lives, including young children's literacy. This is a topic central to my own research, which focuses on the influence of new technologies (notably iPads) on young children's reading and language development. Tablets, PCs, interactive whiteboards, and their related software applications (e.g. apps, blogs, wikis, etc.) were all heavily debated at the conference, with some exciting research from 'real life' settings (e.g. schools, workplace, kindergartens).

I was a discussant at a symposium which brought together research on interactive whiteboards, iPads and robotics engineering with young children in the US and Canada. I found the variety and novelty of platforms a real bonus to the heated debate on outdated patterns of classroom instruction. As such, the symposium was a good reflection of the general trend at the conference – there was a mixture of digital tools investigated, but a similarity of their use for literacy teaching and learning. Research questions generated predominantly on the basis of practical problems (i.e. issues of access, socio-economic and cultural differences, attitudes and misconceptions) and innovative approaches to their study and prevention, were also reflected in the Presidential Address given by Professor Robert T. Jimenez from Vanderbilt University. Professor Jimenez reminded the audience of the need for socially responsible research, motivated by reference to the work by Jim Cummins, Luis Moll and other 'research gurus' of culturally responsive instruction. As much as I liked and agreed with the content of Professor Jimenez's keynote, I somehow felt that the format of the session was little innovative and 21st century-like. I may have been influenced by the striking 'knowledge access difference' between a posh Sheraton hotel conference room and the San Diego downtown swamped by homeless, but I felt a strong need for a more productive workspace, both for the keynote and the conference overall.

As I was sitting on the plane back home, I was pondering the future of academic conferences. At LRA2012, there was a great conference schedule app and delegates could tweet and Facebook and upload their presentations online. However, the format of most of the sessions (keynotes and symposia which constituted the majority of the conference sessions) was still little aligned with the spirit of the research presented: 21st century literacies and 21st century communication spaces are participatory, community-based, integrative, multimodal. In today's age of information-at-your-fingertips, I agree with advocates of virtual conferences that there is little point of travelling thousands of miles if we can all upload our papers, videoed presentations to a shared space and can maintain conversations with researchers of similar interests online. On the other hand, it is also true that there is something about the 'tap-on-your-back' way of networking which would be difficult via email/skype/telephone.

Reflecting on my experience at LRA2012, I wonder whether a hybrid of the two formats is possible with the roundtable sessions.

Although currently not in high regard, I found the roundtable sessions a great space for discussion and knowledge-exchange. In contrast to a symposium, at a roundtable session, there was plenty of time for asking questions and initiating discussion with interested researchers (at LRA, I was given a 45-minute long slot). With everyone sitting close to each other, there were unique possibilities for show-and-tell, for example, I could show a particular piece of my work direct on my iPad and let other delegates 'have a play' themselves. In general, during a roundtable session, it is rarely the case that the audience would browse the web or passively participate; a roundtable speaker needs to engage and convey enthusiasm. There is never a moment of 'reading-slides-with-back-to-the-audience', instead the speaker only talks about aspects of work directly relevant to those who came to listen; links are emailed and business cards physically exchanged. In addition, the round shape of the table seems to encourage an almost equal peer-to-peer conversation, and the banquet-style room set-up indicates a departure from the traditional 'Sage on the Stage' knowledge paradigm.

Perhaps adopting the best practices from traditional meeting formats, and combining them with the newest ideas in communication and literacy research is a way forward for 21st century academic conferences.

I am sure readers of this piece will have many ideas for how to foster innovation and interactivity in conferences of their own individual disciplines. If you have ideas you would like to share on this topic, please read and contribute to the forum thread: 'Future of academic conferences' at psypag.co.uk.

Acknowledgements

My thanks goes to all those who made my attendance at the LRA conference possible and enjoyable, including PsyPAG.

Correspondence

Natalia Kucirkova

The Open University.

Email: n.kucirkova@open.ac.uk

Has the internet been good for conspiracy theorising?

Michael Wood

THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION, spearheaded by the rise of the internet, has led to significant changes in how we communicate ideas and accumulate information. Many see it as self-evident that this revolution in communication has been a boon to conspiracy theories: Willman (2002) characterised the upswing of conspiracy theory belief in the US in the 1990s as a probable response to the unknowability of an increasingly technological world, and Stewart (1999) described the architecture of the web as an interconnecting mesh of hyperlinks as following the structure of a conspiracy theory itself. With the declining power of traditional gatekeepers to information such as publishers, television producers, and government agencies, it is easier than ever to gain access to viewpoints considered unacceptable or ridiculous by the mainstream. Indeed, research has shown that people who once were afraid to express their opinions openly are now free to gather with like-minded individuals on forums, blogs, and social media, developing opinion-based communities of a breadth and depth never seen before (McKenna & Bargh, 1998). But has the internet really been good for conspiracy theories? Naturally, it depends how one defines 'good.' If the question is one of exposure to a wider audience, then certainly conspiracy theories seem to have benefited tremendously. What about popularity, appeal, and usefulness as explanations, though? Do conspiracy theories developed in the Internet age make any more sense than their pre-digital counterparts? This is a somewhat more complicated question.

The instantaneous nature of online communication allows for collaborative interpretations of world events as they unfold. High-traffic internet conspiracy forums have ongoing discussions of breaking news, providing a conspiracist view of events as they unfold as a counter to the conventional accounts that propagate through popular consciousness through the mainstream media. The recent Woolwich attack, in which a British soldier was killed in the streets of London, elicited a great deal of conspiracy theorising on the popular conspiracy forum GodlikeProductions.com. Commenters highlighted apparent inconsistencies in media coverage of the issue, opining that it 'smells like a False Flag, MK Ultra Kind of Opertaion [sic]' (Ohwell, 2013). This kind of collaborative problem-solving allows people to interpret events in ways that align well with their worldviews, an important component of maintaining conspiracy beliefs (Newheiser, Farias & Tausch, 2011; Darwin, Neave & Holmes, 2011).

Moreover, research has indicated that a generalised opposition to official narratives may be the major determinant of conspiracy belief (Wood, Douglas & Sutton, 2012), and this is something that would no doubt benefit from the large amount of data circulating the internet regarding any given event. Recent incidents such as the Boston Marathon bombing have a great deal of widely available documentary evidence about them – CCTV images, TV news footage, amateur photos and videos, and eyewitness accounts given as blog posts, YouTube videos, and so on. By sheer weight of numbers, there are bound to be some apparent inconsistencies that can be seized upon and used as evidence against the mainstream narrative of the event (Novella, 2009), even if they don't lend themselves well to a coherent alternative explanation. In this sense, the information age has been a real

boon to conspiracy theorising, providing it with the raw material it needs to keep suspicion of mainstream narratives high.

However, Clarke (2008) has highlighted a potential problem for conspiracy theories – just as the internet allows people to instantly disseminate conspiracist explanations for events, it allows anti-conspiracists to publicise criticisms just as quickly. Clarke argues that the more specific a conspiracy theory is, the easier it is to argue against, so in order to shield their theories from criticism conspiracy proponents have been making their theories more and more vague, leaving the specifics of what happened as an exercise for the reader. The paradigmatic case of this sort of vagueness is the 9/11 Truth Movement, which, despite its age and popularity, spends little time pointing out perpetrators of and motives for carrying out the 9/11 attacks. It seems far more common to examine alleged anomalies and dodge providing a coherent interpretation for the available evidence (Clarke, 2008); indeed, the popular conspiracy documentary *Loose Change* makes very few actual accusations of conspiracy, relying largely on oblique suggestions, leading questions, and innuendo (Rowe, Bermas & Brown, 2005). This pattern of vague theorising has repeated itself with many events since then: the 7/7 bombings in London, the 2011 Norway attacks, and even natural disasters such as the 2011 tsunami that devastated Japan. If Clarke's characterisation of this vagueness as a recent consequence of internet communication is correct, the theory that conspiracy belief is more concerned with opposing official narratives than with promoting alternative ones might only apply to post-internet conspiracism (Wood et al., 2012). This could certainly be seen as a negative consequence for conspiracism – if the point of conspiracy theorising is to come up with alternative explanations for events, a move away from doing so toward pure criticism of officialdom is hardly a step in the right direction.

Of course, vagueness is not the only possible way to shield oneself from criticism on the internet. An alternative presents itself in the private nature of many online discussion fora: those with dissenting views can simply be banned from discussion in a particular venue, such as a forum or blog. This certainly solves the problem of direct criticism, but may have other consequences – an ideologically homogenous discussion group risks becoming an 'echo chamber' (Sunstein, 2002); an environment in which group polarisation is likely. Group polarisation, the process by which groups' opinions can become more and more extreme over time, can be especially strong in electronic settings (Lee, 2007; Spears, Lee & Lea, 1990) – particularly those which are anonymous. Conspiracy theories which arise within echo chambers might be more specific than those developed in environments in which they are subject to criticism, but without moderating or dissenting voices they may end up being more implausible to a general audience than their vague cousins, being so extreme in their claims that they are unpalatable to those outside of the echo chambers in which they were developed.

On balance, then, is the internet good or bad for conspiracy theories? Does the potentially harmful tension between vagueness and polarisation – between open and closed discussion – outweigh the beneficial effect of a larger audience, more raw material, and easier dissemination of ideas? It may be too early to tell, although a potential clue come in the form of a new class of conspiracy theories that has arisen in the past couple of years. This is the 'staged hoax' or 'crisis actor' conspiracy theory, which contends that major events are in fact elaborate hoaxes. A prime example – and one of the first in which the 'crisis actor' theories went mainstream – is the Sandy Hook school shooting of 2013: many conspiracy theorists claim that the shooting never took place, and that the grieving parents and witnesses who were interviewed on television are in fact professional actors hired to give the appearance of a tragedy having taken place (e.g. Seitz-Wald, 2013; a quick search for

'Sandy Hook crisis actor' or similar will bring up many thousands of results). Similarly, the Boston Marathon bombing has a number of YouTube videos dedicated to describing how the explosions were the result of phony Hollywood pyrotechnics, and a man who appeared to have had his legs blown off in the attack was really a double-amputee Iraq war veteran in make-up.

While the 'crisis' class of theory no doubt has its antecedents in the 20th century, as most contemporary conspiracy theories seem to (Barkun, 2006), it is first and foremost a phenomenon of the internet age, and is perfectly suited to the enormous amount of documentary evidence surrounding recent events. While a false-flag scenario might have trouble explaining a particular apparent anomaly, a staged hoax theory would have no trouble doing so. For instance, a popular fixation in the early days of the 9/11 Truth Movement was the appearance of a mysterious metallic-looking object on the wing of one of the passenger jets that hit the World Trade Center. Early versions of *Loose Change* alleged that this was a 'missile pod,' an explanation that proved problematic and was ultimately dropped from later editions. Few contemporary 9/11 Truth Movement texts make much of the 'missile pod' theory. However, the same anomaly could be easily explicable as an example of poor production in a crisis-actor scenario: perhaps a fault in the computer graphics used to generate the images of the aircraft. Moreover, crisis actor theories give the opportunity for easy cross-referencing with other conspiracy theories: several YouTube videos purport to point out people at the site of the Boston Marathon bombing who look vaguely similar to others who were involved in the Sandy Hook shooting, giving further support to the idea that both were the result of crisis-acted fakery with nothing of substance behind them.

I argue that crisis actor theories are in many ways a distillation of what makes conspiracy theories in general – and internet-based conspiracy theories in particular – appealing. Experimental work has demonstrated that inducing a feeling of lacking control causes more beliefs in conspiracy theories (Kay et al., 2009; Whitson & Galinsky, 2008), and correlational studies consistently show an association between conspiracy theory belief and an external locus of control (Hamsher, Geller & Rotter, 1968). These sorts of findings have been interpreted in a variety of ways, one being that conspiracy beliefs help to restore a sense of certainty and a perception that the world is in principle knowable and controllable (Hofstadter, 1965; Swami, Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2010). The idea that significant world events are simply hoaxes crafted by 'crisis actors' takes this tendency to the furthest extreme – not only do events occur only because some near-omnipotent controllers want them to, every aspect of how they are viewed, perceived, and interpreted, from top to bottom, is controlled as well. Moreover, there is surely some psychological comfort in believing that a horrific event like a mass murder of schoolchildren never really happened at all – that it was all fake.

So what does the future hold for conspiracy theories on the internet? Are they bound to descend into vagueness (Clarke, 2008) and echo chamberism, or will they reach new heights of popularity and mainstream legitimacy (Stewart, 1999; Willman, 2002)? The crisis actor theories, I think, are the future of internet conspiracism; rather than fighting for specificity, they embrace the vagueness and flexibility that is at the heart of conspiracy culture.

Correspondence

Michael Wood
University of Kent.
Email: mw337@kent.ac.uk

References

Barkun, M. (2006). *A culture of conspiracy: Apocalyptic visions in contemporary America*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Clarke, S. (2002). Conspiracy theories and conspiracy theorising. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences, 32*, 131–150.

Darwin, H., Neave, N. & Holmes, J. (2011). Belief in conspiracy theories: The role of paranormal belief, paranoid ideation, and schizotypy. *Personality and Individual Differences, 50*, 1289-–1283.

Hamsher, J.H., Geller, J.D. & Rotter, J.B. (1968). Interpersonal trust, internal-external control, and the Warren Commission report. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 9*, 210–215.

Kay, A.C., Whitson, J.A., Gaucher, D. & Galinsky, A.D. (2009). Compensatory control: Achieving order through our mind, our institutions, and the heavens. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 18*, 264–268.

Lee, E.J. (2007). De-individuation effects on group polarisation in computer-mediated communication: The role of group identification, public-self-awareness, and perceived argument quality. *Journal of Communication, 57*, 385–403.

McKenna, K.Y.A. & Bargh, J.A. (1998). Coming out in the age of the internet: Identity 'demarginalisation' through virtual group participation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 75*, 681–694.

Newheiser, A.K., Farias, M. & Tausch, N. (2011). The functional nature of conspiracy beliefs: Examining the underpinnings of belief in the Da Vinci Code conspiracy. *Personality and Individual Differences, 51*, 1007–1011.

Ohwell (2013, 22 May). Post #38031149. Message posted to: http://www.godlikeproductions.com/forum1/message2240349/pg40.

Rowe, K. (Producer), Bermas, J. (Producer), Brown, M. (Producer) & Avery, D. (Director) (2005). *Loose change* [Motion Picture]. United States: Microcinema International.

Seitz-Wald, A. (2013, 8 January). *Meet the Sandy Hook truthers*. Salon.com. Retrieved from: http://www.salon.com/2013/01/09/the_worst_sandy_hook_conspiracy_theory_yet/

Spears, R., Lea, M. & Lee, S. (1990). De-individuation and group polarisation in computer-mediated communication. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 29*, 121–134.

Stewart, K. (1999). Conspiracy theory's worlds. In M. George (Ed.), *Paranoia within reason: A casebook on conspiracy as explanation* (pp.13–20). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Sunstein, C.R. (2002). The law of group polarisation. *The Journal of Political Philosophy, 10*, 175–195.

Swami, V., Chamorro-Premuzic, T. & Furnham, A. (2010). Unanswered questions: A preliminary investigation of personality and individual difference predictors of 9/11 conspiracist beliefs. *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 24*, 749–761.

Whitson, J.A. & Galinsky, A.D. (2008). Lacking control increases illusory pattern perception. *Science, 322*, 115–117.

Willman, S. (2002). Spinning paranoia: The ideologies of conspiracy and contingency in postmodern culture. In P. Knight (Ed.), *Conspiracy nation: The politics of paranoia in post-war America* (pp.21–39). New York: New York University Press.

Wood, M., Douglas, K.M. & Sutton, R.M. (2012). Dead and alive: Beliefs in contradictory conspiracy theories. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 3*, 767–773.

The detrimental nature of conspiracy theories

Daniel Jolley

A 'NEW WORLD ORDER' is conspiring to rule the world. Paul McCartney died and was replaced by a look-alike. The US Government covered up a UFO crash at Roswell, in 1947. Global warming is a hoax. Each are a conspiracy theory (Public Policy Polling, 2013), defined as a proposed plot by powerful people or organisations, working together in secret to accomplish some (usually sinister) goal (e.g. Coady, 2006; Douglas & Sutton, 2008; Goertzel, 1994; Wood, Douglas & Sutton, 2012). Whilst initially conspiracy theories were seen to be foolish (e.g. Melley, 2002), and, therefore, arguably harmless, current research presents a different tale. Psychologists are learning more about the consequences of conspiracy theories and are highlighting the potential detrimental influence of mere exposure to such theories (e.g. Jolley & Douglas, in press). Thus, conspiracy theories can shape people's belief structures and potentially impact their lives in a substantial way. This article, therefore, aims to present an overview of this work.

As discussed in a recent commentary, conspiracy theories are not just harmless fun, but instead potentially have real behavioural outcomes that should concern us (Jolley, 2013). However, research exploring the consequences of conspiracy theories is limited, whereby the focus has instead been heavily centred on exploring who believes them and why. Nevertheless, current research has some interesting connotations, where for example there has not been any demographic variables (e.g. age, gender, educational level, occupation) shown to reliably predict conspiracy beliefs (e.g. Goertzel, 1994; Swami, Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2010). This suggests from a simple socio-demographic stance that we are all susceptible to conspiracy theories, which may subsequently help explain why conspiracy theories have flourished, with many millions endorsing conspiracy theories today (e.g. Sunstein & Vermeule, 2009). Therefore, with such a vast amount of endorsement, it is important to understand the consequences of holding such a belief.

What's the impact?

Socio-political behavioural domain

Conspiracy theories have been shown to impact one's beliefs, attitudes and behavioural intentions. For example, Swami et al. (2013) demonstrated that being exposed to conspiracy information concerning NASA faking the moon landing resulted in greater endorsement of belief in the moon landings conspiracy theories. Building on this, Douglas and Sutton (2008) have shown that participants who were exposed to conspiracy information concerning the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, were unaware of the change in their conspiracy endorsement, thus revealing the 'hidden impact' (p.217) of mere exposure to conspiracy information. Similarly, conspiracy beliefs can also be associated with one's attitudes. For example, Swami (2012) has demonstrated that among a Malaysian Malay sample, belief in Jewish conspiracy theories were associated with greater racist attitudes concerning Chinese citizens. Further, research by Imhoff and Bruder (in press) have shown that conspiracy mentality is associated with negative attitudes towards powerful groups, whereby it was specifically found to be a significant predictor of prejudices against a variety of high-power groups (e.g. Jews, Americans, capitalists).

Moreover, Butler, Koopman and Zimbardo (1995) and Jolley and Douglas (in press) have shown in a series of studies that exposure to conspiracy information can also be detrimental to one's behavioural intentions. Specifically, Butler et al. (1995) found that people who were exposed to Oliver Stone's *JFK* film – which highlights several prominent conspiracy theories surrounding the assassination of President John F. Kennedy – endorsed the conspiracy to a greater extent than those who had not yet viewed the film. In addition, increased conspiracy endorsement was associated with lesser intention to vote.

Jolley and Douglas (in press) replicated and extended these findings by first demonstrating that after exposure to pro-conspiracy information concerning governments being involved in plots and schemes, participants' were less likely to engage with politics, relative to those who were exposed to information refuting conspiracy theories. This effect was shown to be caused by an increase in feelings of political powerlessness. In the second study, this detrimental pattern was extended to the domain of environmental campaigns, whereby exposure to pro-information concerning climate change reduced one's intention to engage in carbon friendly behaviours, relative to those who were exposed to information refuting conspiracy theories, or a control condition. Similarly to Study 1, this effect was caused by increased feelings of powerlessness, but also increased feelings of uncertainty [about climate change] and disappointment towards climate scientists.

These studies highlight the potential effects of being exposed to pro-conspiracy information, and clearly demonstrate cause and effect with regards to conspiracy theories and their impact. Further, for the first time reasons behind the effect between exposure to conspiracy theories and societal disengagement were explained with regards to a variety of mediator variables. However, conspiracy theories have also been shown by a number of scholars to be influential in a variety of other behavioural domains. Whilst this research has not been causal in nature, their findings do point to a powerful conclusion showing that the potential detrimental impact of conspiracy theories is not just unique to the socio-political behavioural domain.

Health-related behavioural domain

Belief within society that vaccines have dangerous side-effects and might cause harm is widespread (e.g. Salmon et al., 2009). According to the anti-vaccine movement, those involved within the vaccine industry fake their data on vaccine efficacy as a way to suppress evidence of problems due to the healthy profits being made (Kata, 2012; Offit, 2010). The internet has been shown to play a significant role in disseminating this anti-vaccine information to parents (Kata, 2010), whereby parents have been seen to be more likely to seek information about vaccines via the internet than their GP (Downs, Bruine de Bruin & Fischhoff, 2008). These anti-vaccine conspiracy beliefs have, therefore, unsurprisingly been shown to feature prominently in discussions regarding reasons for parents not immunising their children (e.g. Mills et al., 2005; Salmon et al., 2005). Thus, whilst the decrease uptake of vaccines could be for several reasons, it highlights the contributing potential detrimental effect of conspiracy theories.

Similarly in the heath domain, research has shown endorsement of birth control and HIV/AIDS conspiracy theories, which propose that HIV/AIDS are a form of genocide against African Americans, have been associated with increased negative attitudes towards contraceptive behaviours (e.g. the use of condoms). This, therefore, suggests that conspiracy theories can have potentially negative consequences for the prevention of pregnancy and sexually-transmitted illnesses (Bogart & Thorburn, 2006; Bird & Bogart, 2003). Similar results have been found in research conducted by Hoyt et al. (2012) and Bogart et al. (2010), whereby HIV conspiracy beliefs were associated with

increased risk relating to HIV by discouraging appropriate treatment behaviour.

Further, conspiracy ideation in general has been shown to be associated with mistrust in science such as rejection of climate science and other established scientific findings, such as smoking causes lung cancer (Lewandoswky et al., 2013; Lewandowsky, Oberauer & Gignac, 2013). Therefore, this opens the possibility that if one rejects the scientific finding of smoking causing lung cancer due to conspiracy ideation, could this subsequently lead to *grave* consequences? Whilst this is mere speculation, from following the conclusions of the previous empirical work discussed, it certainly suggests a daunting answer.

Is it all bad?

Whilst this article has centred on the negative aspects of conspiracy theories, there are several noteworthy positives. For example, conspiracy theories may allow people to reveal anomalies, inconsistencies, or ambiguities in official accounts of events (Clark, 2002). Further, conspiracy theories allow challenges to existing social hierarchies and encourage government transparency (e.g. Clarke, 2002; Swami & Coles, 2010). Conspiracy theories also pose novel explanations for events which, as suggested in our recent paper, may, therefore, appeal to dispositionally creative, curious or open-minded people (Jolley & Douglas, in press). This, therefore, highlights the flip side of conspiracy theories and suggests such beliefs are not all bad. However, it could be argued that the negatives may outweigh the positives, and calls for further empirical work to explore this possibility.

What's next?

Research exploring the consequences of conspiracy theories is building, whereby a compelling tale is emerging. Therefore, whilst continuing to further explore the consequences associated with other behavioural domains, psychologists also need to develop interventions in order to limit the potential detrimental nature of conspiracy beliefs. For example, scholars Sunstein and Vermeule (2009) have provide some initial discussion regarding this. They firstly comment that conspiracy theorists are unlikely to be persuaded by attempts to outrightly dispel conspiracy theories; it may even be counterproductive because efforts to rebut conspiracy theories also legitimise them.

Instead, Sunstein and Vermeule (2009) suggest that the government can minimise this effect by refuting only a very small number of theories, by enlisting independent groups to supply rebuttals, and by cognitive infiltration. The latter involves planting doubts to undermine crippled epistemology about conspiracy theories within communities those who subscribe to such theories. This allows cognitive diversity to be introduced. More simply, such an intervention may focus on directing counter-arguments against the conspiracy allegations themselves to conspiracy theorists, and as such cloud their epistemology in accepting such theories. Swami et al. (2013) has provided initial evidence towards such a proposed intervention, whereby information critical of the moon landing conspiracy theory attenuated conspiracist beliefs, relative to supportive information, and a control condition.

However, these are preliminary discussions on how a conspiracy theory could be intervened, and scholars do need to further develop these potential avenues. For such a successful intervention to be implanted, the research exploring both the consequences and psychological drives of conspiracy beliefs needs to go hand in hand. The potential for such an interaction is promising.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that conspiracy theories can have potentially detrimental effects on behavioural intentions in a variety of domains. This is important as it demonstrates that conspiracy theories can distract attention away from

important scientific, political and societal issues (Linden, 2013). Whilst conspiracy theories do allow people to question those in power, the draw back on the hidden impact these theories can have on beliefs, attitudes, and potentially behaviours is alarming. Whilst conspiracy theories can be a popular topic of conservation, their negative impact does need to be highlighted and, in the near future, limited.

Correspondence
Daniel Jolley
University of Kent.
Email: dj93@kent.ac.uk

References

Bird, S.T. & Bogart, L.M. (2003). Birth control conspiracy beliefs, perceived discrimination, and contraception among African Americans. *Journal of Health Psychology, 8*, 263–276.

Bogart, L.M. & Thorburn, S.T. (2006). Relationship of African Americans' socio demographic characteristics to belief in conspiracies about HIV/AIDS and birth control. *Journal of the National Medical Association, 98*, 1144–1150.

Butler, L.D., Koopman, C. & Zimbardo, P.G. (1995). The psychological impact of viewing the film *JFK*: Emotions, beliefs and political behavioral intentions. *Political Psychology, 16*, 237-257.

Clarke, S. (2002). Conspiracy theories and conspiracy theorising. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences, 32*, 131–150.

Coady, D. (2006). *Conspiracy theories: The philosophical debate*. Hampshire, England: Ashgate.

Douglas, K.M. & Sutton, R.M. (2008). The hidden impact of conspiracy theories: Perceived and actual influence of theories surrounding the death of Princess Diana. *Journal of Social Psychology, 148*, 210–221.

Downs, J.S., Bruine de Bruin, W. & Fischhoff, B. (2008). Parents' vaccination comprehension and decisions. *Vaccine, 26*, 1595-1607.

Goertzel, T. (1994). Belief in conspiracy theories. *Political Psychology, 15*, 731–742.

Hoyt, M.A., Rubin, L.R., Nemero, C.J., Lee, J., Huebner, D.M. & Proeschold-Bell, R.J. (2012). HIV/AIDS-related institutional mistrust among multi-ethnic men who have sex with men: Effects on HIV testing and risk behaviours. *Health Psychology, 31*, 269–277.

Imhoff, R. & Bruder, M. (in press). Speaking (un-) truth to power: Conspiracy mentality as a generalised political attitude. *European Journal of Personality*.

Jolley, D. (2013). New voices: Are conspiracy theories just harmless fun? *The Psychologist, 26*(1), 60–62.

Jolley, D. & Douglas, K.M. (in press). The social consequences of conspiracism: Exposure to conspiracy theories decreases the intention to engage in politics and to reduce one's carbon footprint. *British Journal of Psychology*.

Kata, A. (2010). A postmodern Pandora's box: Anti-vaccination misinformation on the internet. *Vaccine, 28*, 1709–1716.

Kata, A. (2012). Anti-vaccine activists, Web 2.0, and the postmodern paradigm – an overview of tactics and tropes used online by the anti-vaccination movement. *Vaccine, 30*, 3778–3789.

Lewandowsky, S., Cook, J., Oberauer, K. & Marriott, M. (2013). Recursive fury: Conspiracist ideation in the blogosphere in response to research on conspiracist ideation. *Frontiers in Psychology, 4*, 73.

Lewandowsky, S., Oberauer, K. & Gignac, G.E. (2013). NASA faked the moon landing – therefore, (climate) science is a hoax: An anatomy of the motivated rejection of science. *Psychological Science, 24*(5), 622–633.

Linden,S. V. (2013, April 30). Moon landing faked! – why people believe in conspiracy theories. *Scientific America*. Retrieved from: http://www.scientificamerican.com/

McCauley, C. & Jacques, S. (1979). The popularity of conspiracy theories of presidential assassination: A Bayesian analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 37*, 637–644.

Melley, T. (2002). Agency, panic and the culture of conspiracy. In P. Knight (Ed.), *Conspiracy nation: The politics of paranoia in post-war America* (pp.57–81). New York: New York University Press.

Mills, E., Jadad, A.R., Ross, C. & Wilson, K. (2005). Systematic review of qualitative studies exploring parental beliefs and attitudes toward childhood vaccination identifies common barriers to vaccination. *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology, 58*, 1081–1088.

Offit, P.A. (2010). *Deadly choices: How the anti-vaccine movement threatens us all*. New York: Basic Books.

Public Policy Polling (2013). *Democrats and Republicans differ on conspiracy theory beliefs*. Retrieved from: http://www.publicpolicypolling.com/pdf/2011/PPP_Release_National_ConspiracyTheories_040213.pdf

Salmon, D.A., Sotir, M.J., Pan, W.K., Berg, J.L., Omer, S.B., Stokley, S., Hopfensperger, D.J., Davis, J.P. & Halsey, N.A. (2009). Parental vaccine refusal in Wisconsin: A case-control study. *World Medical Journal, 108*(1), 17–23.

Sunstein, C.R. & Vermeule, A. (2009). Conspiracy theories: Causes and cures. *Journal of Political Philosophy, 17*, 202–227.

Swami, V. (2012). Social psychological origins of conspiracy theories: The case of the Jewish conspiracy theory in Malaysia. *Frontiers in Psychology, 3*, 280.

Swami, V. & Coles, R. (2010). The truth is out there: Belief in conspiracy theories. *The Psychologist, 23*, 560–563.

Swami, V., Chamorro-Premuzic, T. & Furnham, A. (2010). Unanswered questions: A preliminary investigation of personality and individual difference predictors of 9/11 conspiracist beliefs. *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 24*, 749–761.

Swami, V., Pietschnig, J., Tran, U. S., Nader, I. W., Stieger, S. & Voracek, M. (2013). Lunar lies: The impact of informational framing and individual differences in shaping conspiracist beliefs about the moon landings. *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 27*, 71–80.

Wood, M., Douglas, K.M. & Sutton, R.M. (2012). Dead and alive: Beliefs in contradictory conspiracy theories. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 3*, 767–773.

Conference review:

2nd International Congress on Borderline Personality Disorder and Allied Disorders

Laura Fisk

European Society for the Study of Personality Disorders: www.esspd.eu
Amsterdam RAI Convention Centre, 27–29 September 2012.

SO MANY BRILLIANT PEOPLE, so little time. That would probably give some idea of the scale and scope of the 2nd International Congress on Borderline Personality Disorder and Allied Disorders. With 1000 delegates from nearly 50 countries, the congress reflected a clear desire for better understanding and support for people living with an often marginalised category of mental health diagnoses.

It was a humbling reminder of the privilege afforded me as an English speaker from a prosperous and influential nation: this was an international conference, yet everyone was speaking English, and the seminar on psychopharmacology guidelines at the end of the second day was oversubscribed and all about extolling the virtues of the UK's NICE guidelines.

Perhaps one exception to this was in the keynote given on health economics by Jan van Busschbach, senior investigator at a key centre for BPD in the Netherlands: here, the NHS was anecdotally presented as spending less than other health care providers round the world. It provided a reminder of the context in which treatments are provided in the rest of the world and the importance of considering how costs of not providing treatment need to be explored alongside the costs of different types of treatment, and evaluating 'stop rules' for when treatment is no longer cost-effective. Indeed, it was interesting to hear the argument put forth for limiting claims made about high prevalence rates for BPD, where this is traditionally a key way in which writers and researchers establish their stake.

All this made for an interesting context for John Gunderson's keynote addressing the long-term experiences of those with a personality disorder diagnosis, offering a detailed exploration of the ways in which interventions might and might not expect to make an impact. Specifically, Gunderson offered a 'surprisingly positive' view of individuals' long-term experiences: perhaps more surprisingly was the ability of a medical doctor to present an argument that seemed to me to be endorsing greater consideration of constituent aspects of a person's experiences – just as in clinical psychology's 'formulation' approach. So, we were treated to analysis of a first look at findings indicating that different characteristics of BPD show different patterns of change – presenting some good news that rates of self-harming tend to diminish relatively readily, while people find more success in managing conflict in relationships, and the point that short-term interventions can make a big difference. Areas showing reduced rates of change seemed to be reflections of the difficulty involved in tolerating arguably more existentially-based difficulties, like loneliness and emptiness. However, less philosophical were data concerning clients' employment experiences: too few people were recorded as having enjoyed paid employment for extended periods of time. While this perhaps presents a clear area that may be addressed by intervention, there is possibly something

telling about clinicians' expectations and priorities for clients which doesn't necessarily match the knowledge we have that having a stake in society, for example, through employment, is a key part of achieving mental well-being – we need only witness one of the rationales offered for the UK's Improving Access to Psychological Therapies service.

So while over the long-term, experiences can be seen as being generally positive almost independently of intervention, there still seems to be merit in attention being given to offering something, because people need to want to live and BPD is associated with high rates of suicide. Marsha Linehan's aspiration that 'her' therapy, DBT, be a 'life worth living' programme is very much in line with this thinking. A key point I have taken away from this well-delivered session was the way in which she somehow managed to speak both with authority and humility about her subject. This was true for each of the speakers on psychotherapy approaches that I observed: mentalisation-based therapy, dialectical behaviour therapy and transference-focused psychotherapy, each straight from the proverbial horses' mouths: Anthony Bateman, Marsha Linehan and Otto Kernberg. It was clear that while different approaches had different opinions about how to go about it, all have a deep respect and desire to help those they work with. And if there's only one thing I will take from the Congress it is this.

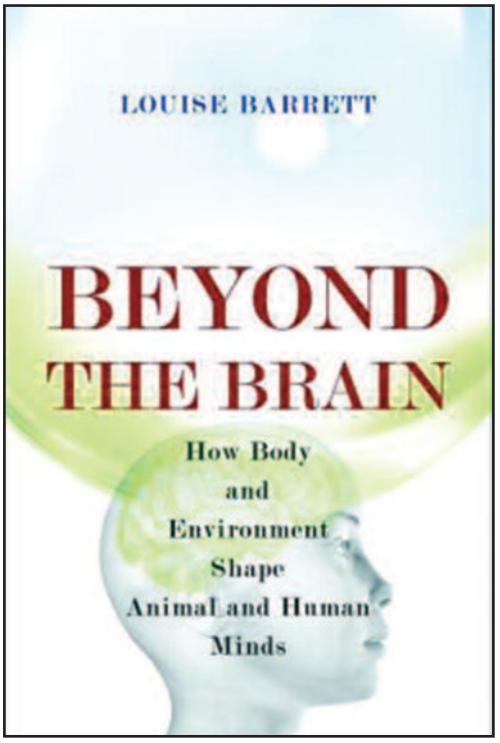
Correspondence
Laura Fisk
Newcastle University.
Email: l.fisk@newcastle.ac.uk

AMSTERDAM RAI CONVENTION CENTRE

Book review

Beyond The Brain: How Body and Environment Shape Animal and Human Minds
Louise Barrett
Princeton University Press, 2011
ISBN: 978-0-69112-644-9;
304 pp; Hardback; £26.95

Reviewed by Kimberley M. Hill



Barrett's book provides an engaging overview of the rapidly evolving field of embodied, embedded cognition, which suggests human and animal behaviour does not necessarily originate from representational processes within the brain. Instead, an organism's behaviour relies on the mutuality between their body and the environment.

One of the most important points made by Barrett in this book is that cognition is not a detached brain process, separate from the environment. Currently, the brain is studied in isolation, but Barrett insists that this is due to a common boundary misconception. Researchers currently separate perceptual processes from cognition and view the body as a boundary separate from the environment. However, due to the reciprocal and interactive relationship between the brain, the body and the environment, Barrett suggests that perception and action should not be studied separately. Barrett makes a strong case for the fact that organisms do not create replica, representational worlds inside their brains and that existing models and explanations of behaviour are overcomplicated. The evidence that Barrett presents for this is varied and compelling, with examples from the animal kingdom, motor neurone research, everyday examples whereby humans off-load cognition into the environment and a re-evaluation of Turing's research. According to Barrett, cognition is not exclusive to the brain, but is embodied within an organism's body, within their actions and embedded within the changeable, dynamic environments that they navigate. As organisms are inseparable from their environments, it is this interaction which produces behaviour. In order to understand this, Barrett recommends that the reader reconsiders their current views of cognition.

Humans have one of the largest brains in the animal kingdom and it is widely assumed that human behaviour is caused by complex, computational brain processes. However, Barrett explains that this is not necessarily the case. There is also a tendency for humans to apply this premise to animals, which is misleading as animals have different bodies to humans, live in different environments and are not bound by the same social and cultural implications. To support this, Barrett provides comprehensive examples of organisms and robots with basic internal structures that depict advanced behavioural complexity. For instance, purpose-built

robots with powerful central processors show poorer behavioural flexibility compared to robots that have small processors, but have perceptual sensors that allow them to act based on their environment. Barrett dedicates a chapter of this book to the Portia hunting spider, whose behaviour is often described as representationally-dependent. It is commonly thought that these spiders hold concepts in their minds about their world and plan their hunting routes accordingly. However, Barrett argues that complex behaviours, such as mimicry, stalking or smokescreen techniques are context-dependent and could actually use very little brain power. This behaviour could instead be explained in terms of powerful perceptual skills and a few simple rules. Importantly, Barrett explains that, as researchers attempt to explain behaviour in terms of brain functioning alone, they overlook the active role of the organism's body and the environment in influencing behaviour.

In order to illustrate how the body and the environment could shape cognition and behaviour, Barrett provides a useful review of James J. Gibson's theory of direct perception. A main premise of Gibson's theory is the idea that organisms actively use their perceptual systems to directly detect information from their environment. The brain's role in this process is to orientate the perceptual systems for detecting information and behaviour is then produced as organisms exploit environmental features in order to act on the world. This idea contradicts the dominantly-held view that perception is indirect and organisms are passive receivers of information. A main component of Gibson's theory, the affordance construct, represents opportunities for action, based on environmental properties viewed in relation to an individual. Barrett explains that this theory suggests behaviour is adaptive, as an organism can actively improve the type of information perceived, as they are aware of their own capabilities, physical build and environment and can then take advantage of this available information. More importantly, humans design their environments to offer them the right affordances, or possibilities for action. Therefore, Barrett explains that behavioural variance may be due to the different types of affordances offered to organisms with different bodies within different environments and this may provide a new perspective into individual differences in behaviour.

Barrett's case for the inclusion of the body and the environment in the study of cognition is compelling. Barrett explains that, while internal representations and concepts may be required, researchers must reverse their usual way of thinking and consider behaviour as a bidirectional process, not a linear relationship between stimulus and response. Instead, behavioural processes may involve controlling perceptual systems and feedback, with reciprocation between external and internal processes. Barrett frequently draws upon the work of Andy Clark and his notion of the extended mind. This theory suggests that common misconceptions about where action starts and perception ends have led psychologists to focus on what is in the head alone when investigating behaviour. Instead, the mind, body and the environment could act as one complex, non-linear cognitive system. Throughout the book, Barrett provides rich examples to support the premise that the environment is actively involved in cognitive processes and that perception and action are not separate. This evidence includes traditional examples from mirror neuron research, whereby a neuron in the motor cortex fires both when an organism acts and when the organism views the same action being performed by another. Other evidence includes environmental props used every day by humans, including diaries, calendars and calculators which support cognitive functioning. Barrett makes a refreshing contribution to this area of research by including evidence from the animal kingdom, which is both comprehensive and persuasive. Each of these examples suggests that cognition is embodied and

embedded and extends to our environments and the objects within it.

This book is the perfect synthesis of research for those interested in an embodied, embedded approach to cognition and comes highly recommended. Compared to other books in this area the breadth that this book covers in such a short time is remarkable. Barrett expertly integrates areas of evolutionary biology, anthropology, artificial intelligence, psychology and philosophy in order to explore cognition and behaviour as arising from the interaction between the brain, body and environment. Barrett lets the evidence speak for itself and introduces key theories in a timely and coherent manner in order to invite readers to challenge the existing assumptions that they hold about the world. Barrett's writing style is unique, relatable and academic, a style that is accessible to both professors and non-academics. Not only does this book have broader implications for how behaviour is studied, but for the entire field of psychology, as the study of cognition begins to become more embodied and embedded.

Correspondence
Kimberley M. Hill
Department of Psychology, Social Work and Public Health,
Oxford Brookes University.
Email: Kimberley.hill-2011@brookes.ac.uk

PsyPAG Bursaries

Bursary	Deadline
Up to £300 for an international conference bursary	10 October 2013
Up to £100 for a domestic conference bursary	
Up to £50 for a travel bursary	
Up to £100 for other events (e.g. training events, workshops, etc.)	No deadline

For more information about any of the financial support PsyPAG offers, please visit our website: **http://www.psypag.co.uk/bursaries**

The British Psychological Society
Division of Sport & Exercise Psychology

Division of Sport & Exercise Psychology Conference 2013

16–17 December – Midland Hotel, Manchester

Registration open

Early-bird rates available until 31 October

Programme timetable

Now available from the website

Confirmed Keynote Speakers

Dr Marc Jones, *Staffordshire University*
Adventures in psychological stress: From playing field to country park

Professor Vincent Walsh, *University College London*
Sport and the brain: Why it matters

2013 Conference Themes

- Psychology for Performance
- Psychology for Health and Well Being
- Clinical Aspects of Sport and Exercise Psychology
- Professional Training and Supervision in Sport and Exercise Psychology


Find us on facebook /BPSConferences


Follow us on Twitter #dsepconf @BPSConference @BPS_DSEP

www.bps.org.uk/dsep2013

Dates for your Diary

4–6 September 2013
British Psychological Society Division of Qualitative Methods in Psychology Annual Conference
Huddersfield University
http://www.bps.org.uk/qmip2013

3 September 2013
Pre CogDev2013 Conference Workshop:
Advice and Inspiration: Getting published and planning your career
The University of Reading
More info: CogDevPGWorkshop@gmail.com.

4–7 September 2013
British Psychological Society Division of Cognitive and Developmental Psychology Joint Conference (CogDev2013)
The University of Reading
http://www.reading.ac.uk/pcls/CogDev2013.aspx

6–8 September 2013
British Psychological Society Consciousness and Experimental Psychology Section Annual Conference
University of Bristol
http://cep.bps.org.uk/

11–13 September 2013
British Psychological Society Division of Health Psychology Annual Conference
Holiday Inn, Brighton Seafront
http://www.bps.org.uk/DHP2013

20–22 September 2013
British Psychological Society Transpersonal Psychology Section Annual Conference
Cober Hill, Scarborough
http://transpersonalpsychology.org.uk/

19 October 2013
Guidance for postgraduate students presenting research to a professional audience
Holiday Inn, Bristol City Centre
http://www.bps.org.uk/events/guidance-postgraduate-students-presenting-research-professional-audience

25 October 2013
SPSS Users Conference
University of York
http://spssusers.co.uk/Events/2013/

8 November 2013
British Psychological Society Psychology of Education Section Annual Conference
York Marriott Hotel, York
http://www.kc–jones.co.uk/rsm/6/event–page/331/1/

14 November 2013
Psychology4Graduates
Regent's College, London
http://www.bps.org.uk/events/conferences/psychology4graduates-event-2013/locationtravel-info

15 November 2013
British Psychological Society Division of Neuropsychology Annual Conference
Holiday Inn, London-Bloomsbury
http://www.kc–jones.co.uk/rsm/6/event-page/361/1/

29 November–1 December 2013
iCog: An interdisciplinary conference for postgraduates and early-career researchers in cognitive science
University of Sheffield
http://www.i-cog.com

4–6 December 2013
British Psychological Society Division of Clinical Psychology Annual Conference
The Royal York Hotel, York
http://www.bps.org.uk/events/conferences/division-clinical-psychology-annual-conference-2013

16–17 December 2013
British Psychological Society Division of Sport & Exercise Psychology Annual Conference
The Midland Hotel, Manchester
http://www.bps.org.uk/events/conferences/division-sport-exercise-psychology-annual-conference2013

The British Psychological Society website has a full list of Society events: http://www.bps.org.uk/events

PsyPAG Committee 2013/2014

Position	Currently held by	Due for re-election
Core Committee Members		
Chair	Laura Neale chair@psypag.co.uk	2015
Treasurer	Katie Rix k.r.rix@greenwich.ac.uk	2015
Vice Chair	Emma Davies vicechair@psypag.co.uk	2015
Communications Officer	Hamish Cox webmaster@psypag.co.uk	2015
Information Officer	Kazia Solowiej info@psypag.co.uk	2014
PsyPAG Quarterly Editors quarterly@psypag.co.uk	Jumana Ahmad ja337@kent.ac.uk	2014
	Daniel Jolley dj93@kent.ac.uk	2015
	Laura Scurlock-Evans l.scurlock-evans@worc.ac.uk	2014
	Emma Norris e.norris.11@ucl.ac.uk	2015
Division Representatives		
Division of Clinical Psychology	Moitree Banerjee motree.banerjee@sussex.ac.uk	2015
Division of Counselling Psychology	Sue Whitcombe suewhitcombe@02.co.uk	2014
Division of Educational & Child Psychology	Zayba Ghazali zghazali@ioe.ac.uk	2015
Divn for Academics, Researchers & Teachers in Psychology	Charlottee Taylor c.e.taylor@worc.ac.uk	2015
Division of Forensic Psychology	Dean Fido n0407102@ntu.ac.uk	2015
Division of Health Psychology	Kimberley Hill Kimberley.hill-2011@brookes.ac.uk	2014
Division of Neuropsychology	Naomi Aoife Bowers naomi.bowers@strath.ac.uk	2015
Division of Occupational Psychology	Charlotte Winter winc1_10@uni.worc.ac.uk	2015

Position	Currently Held By	Due for re-election
Division Representatives (contd.)		
Division of Sport & Exercise Psychology	Hamish Cox hacox@uwic.ac.uk	2014
Section Representatives		
Cognitive Psychology Section	Sam Reeves Samantha.reeves@canterbury.ac.uk	2014
Consciousness and Experiential Psychology Section	Vacant	2015
Developmental Psychology Section	Katie Rix K.R.Rix@greenwich.ac.uk	2014
History and Philosophy of Psychology Section	Marta Wanat marta.wanat-2011@brookes.ac.uk	2015
Psychology of Sexualities Section	Vacant	2015
Mathematical, Statistical and Computing Section	Lisa Lumley-Imerson Lisa.lumley-imerson@research.sunderland.ac.uk	2015
Psychobiology Section	Bernadette Robertson b.robertson2@lancaster.ac.uk	2014
Psychology of Education Section	Jillian Adie jillian.adie@strath.ac.uk	2015
Psychology of Women Section	Donna Peach donna@donnapeach.co.uk	2015
Psychotherapy Section	Kate Doran k.doran@sheffield.ac.uk	2015
Qualitative Methods in Psychology Section	Marta Wanat Marta.wanat-2011@brookes.ac.uk	2015
Social Psychology Section	Daniel Jolley dj93@kent.ac.uk	2014
Transpersonal Psychology Section	Jacqueline Stone Jacqueline.Stone@northampton.ac.uk	2015
Coaching Psychology	David Greenberg dmg39@cam.ac.uk	2015
Community Psychology	Michael Walton michael.walton@stu.mmu.ac.uk	2015

Position	Currently Held By	Due for re-election
Branch Representatives		
North East of England Branch	Vacant	2015
North West of England Branch	Jin Zhou jin.shou@go.edgehill.ac.uk	2015
Northern Ireland Branch	Lisa Graham lgraham28@qub.ac.uk	2014
Scottish Branch	Niamh Friel n.friel.1@research.gla.ac.uk	2015
South West of England Branch	Amy McAndrew Am375@exeter.ac.uk	2014
Welsh Branch	Alys Griffiths alys.griffiths-2 @postgrad.manchester.ac.uk	2014
Wessex Branch	Vacant	2015
West Midlands Branch	Sarah Hennelly sarah.hennelly-2011@brookes.ac.uk	2015
London and Home Counties Branch	Lynsey Mahmood lm454@kent.ac.uk	2015
Board Representatives		
Publications and Communications Board	Patrycja Piotrowska Pj.piotrowska@sheffield.ac.uk	2014
Ethics	Sarah Barron 070247@live.smuc.ac.uk	2014
Research Board (Chair)	Laura Neale laura.neale@northumbria.ac.uk	2015
Other Committees		
Conference Standing Committee	Bernadette Roberston b.robertston2@lancaster.ac.uk	2015
Undergraduate Liaison Officer	JJ Begum j.begum@gold.ac.uk	2014

psychology4 graduates 2013

Registration is now open for our first ever **Psychology4Graduates** event to be held at the Regent's College Conference Centre on 14 November 2013.

Are you going to graduate from an undergraduate degree in 2013 or 2014? Have you graduated in the last few years and are considering studying psychology at postgraduate level?

Either way this event is for you!

We have designed Psychology4Graduates to highlight the career opportunities available to you as a psychology graduate, with a focus on the routes to becoming a Chartered Psychologist. We will have talks from psychologists where you'll hear about their careers and get an insight into what postgraduate study in psychology involves. Plus in our interactive break sessions, you will have an exclusive opportunity to meet and mingle with established psychologists from all of the applied areas (that's right, all of them!) - a unique chance for you to get your questions answered in a friendly, relaxed environment. The event promises to be educational, informative and entertaining and will hopefully leave you feeling inspired and well informed about your future career in psychology.

Delegate rates are discounted for members and places are limited so visit **www.bps.org.uk/p4g2013** for more information and to register your place today.

PsyPAG Quarterly submissions guidelines

The Quarterly is a developing journal, which is distributed free of charge to all psychology postgraduates in the UK, receiving wide readership. It accepts articles on all areas of psychology.

Types of articles accepted

Featured Articles and Discussion Papers: Articles can cover a wide range of topics. Articles may describe a piece of original research; provide an overview of a theory, area or issue.

Research in Brief: A short report of original research, often preliminary findings.

Interviews: An interview with anyone connected with psychology, usually written in a question and answer format.

Conference Reviews: Provide an overview of a conference, outlining the main themes of the conference.

Departmental Reviews: An overview of a department as well as research interests of the postgraduates.

Book and Software Reviews: A review of books or software relevant to psychologists.

Hints and Tips: Hints and tips that will be useful to postgraduates. For example, how to apply for funding.

Postgraduate Research in Brief: This is a reference list of research that has recently been published by postgraduates within a particular area or department.

Word limits

The Quarterly has a broad word limit of 500–2500 words per paper, excluding references. The maximum word limit is flexible for in-depth discussion papers, longer interviews or hints and tips. The word count will differ depending on the type of article, for example, conference and book reviews should be shorter than featured articles.

Formatting

Please submit all articles in Microsoft Word. The content, including tables, figures, and references should all comply with the most recent APA guidelines. You should also include your contact details at the end of each article in the format of:

Correspondence
Name
University of X.
Email:

Submission

To submit an article, please send as an email attachment to: quarterly@psypag.co.uk.

If you have any further questions, please contact the editors at
quarterly@psypag.co.uk
or send in your question via twitter @PsyPAGQuarterly

About PsyPAG

PsyPAG is a national organisation for all psychology postgraduates based at UK Institutions. Funded by the Research Board of the British Psychological Society, PsyPAG is run on a voluntary basis by postgraduates for postgraduates.

Its aims are to provide support for postgraduate students in the UK, to act as a vehicle for communication between postgraduates, and represent postgraduates within the British Psychological Society. It also fulfills the vital role of bringing together postgraduates from around the country.

- PsyPAG has no official membership scheme; anyone involved in postgraduate study in psychology at a UK Institution is automatically a member.
- PsyPAG runs an annual workshop and conference and also produces a quarterly publication, which is delivered free of charge to all postgraduate psychology departments in the UK.
- PsyPAG is run by an elected committee, which any postgraduate student can be voted on to. Elections are held at the PsyPAG Annual Conference each year.
- The committee includes representatives for each Sub-Division within the British Psychological Society, their role being to represent postgraduate interests and problems within that Division or the British Psychological Society generally. We also liaise with the Student Group of the British Psychological Society to raise awareness of postgraduate issues in the undergraduate community.
- Committee members also include Practitioners-in-Training who are represented by PsyPAG.

Mailing list

PsyPAG maintains a JISCmail list open to ALL psychology postgraduate students. To join, visit **www.psypag.co.uk** and scroll down on the main page to find the link, or go to **http://tinyurl.comPsyPAGjiscmail**.

This list is a fantastic resource for support and advice regarding your research, statistical advice or postgraduate issues.

Social networking

You can also follow PsyPAG on Twitter (**http://twitter.com/PsyPAG** and add us on Facebook: **http://tinyurl.comPsyPAGfacebook**.

Again, this information is also provided at **www.psypag.co.uk**.

Contents

The British Psychological Society
Promoting excellence in psychology

St Andrews House, 48 Princess Road East, Leicester LE1 7DR, UK
t: 0116 254 9568 f: 0116 227 1314 e: mail@bps.org.uk w: www.bps.org.uk

ISSN 1746-6016