



Exceptional Experiences : CEP 20th Annual Conference

6-8 September 2018

Regents University, London



Contents

Programme

Thursday 6th

Friday 7th

Saturday 8th

Posters

Venue

Rooms

Meals

Parking

Local Area

Restaurants

Pubs

Attractions

Maps

Campus map

Room map

Immediate vicinity

Abstracts

Keynote

Papers

Friday 7th

Saturday 8th

Posters

Delegate list

CEP

Contact details

Conference committee

EXCEPTIONAL EXPERIENCES CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

7-8 September 2018, Regents University, London

THURSDAY EVENING 6 September

Tuke 010

Pre-conference informal meeting (Maximum 30)

19.30 Jane Henry (Open) Personal exceptional experiences - an informal discussion

FRIDAY 7 September

Tuke Common Room (TCR)

8.20 *Registration opens*

MORNING Paranormal and anomalous experiences

9.00 Introduction

9.05 *Keynote:* Professor Chris Roe (Northampton) Making sense of exceptional experience

10.05 *Coffee*

10.35 *Paranormal experiences*

Ross Friday & Dr David P Luke (Greenwich) Now see hear! Detecting being watched or listened to via extrasensory-means

Dr Nicola Lasikiewicz & Dr Hannah Heath (Chester) Exploring the construction of a paranormal experience in relation to paranormal belief using story completion

Dr Anna Stone (UEL) An avowal of prior scepticism enhances the credibility of an account of a paranormal event

Dr Nicola Holt (UWE) Does 'altered consciousness' mediate the relationship between art-making and wellbeing? An experience sampling study

12.35 Posters

12.45 *Lunch*

FRIDAY AFTERNOON

Psychedelics and induced exceptional experiences

14.00 *Keynote:* Dr Milan Scheidegger (Zurich)

Neuroepistemology of drug-induced exceptional experiences

15.00 *Tea*

15.30 *Induced exceptional experiences*

Dr Oliver Mason (Surrey) Sensory deprivation and anomalous experience. Who, why and how?

Dr Devin B Terhune (Goldsmiths, UoL) & Dr David P Luke (Greenwich) Acquired synaesthesia following the use of psychedelics

Dr Vlad Kolodin (UCL) & Kalissa Dosbayeva (Khazakhstan Medical) Realist review of the relationship between different types of psychedelic drug, states of psychedelic experience and psychological outcomes

17.00 Posters

17.15 *Break*

17.30 Film

Bufo Alvarius - The Underground Secret (78 minutes) featuring Prof Stanislav Grof, Octavio Rettig Hinojosa (a shaman) and experiencers discussing their experiences with 5-MeO-DMT - a powerful psychedelic. The film has subtitles. It will be followed by a short discussion.

19.00 *Reception*

20.00 *Conference dinner*

SATURDAY 8 September

Tuke Common Room (TCR)

8.45 Registration opens

MORNING

Exceptional experiences, altered states, belief & outcome

9.00 Keynote: Prof Etzel Cardeña (Lund)

Derangement of the senses or
alternate epistemological pathways?
Research on alterations of
consciousness & human potential

10.00 Coffee

10.30 **Stream A:** Spontaneous exceptional experiences

Dr John NT Martin (Open University) Some contributions to a 'natural history'
of spontaneous 'exceptional experiences'

Erica Brostoff (BPS) Toward the future understanding of
premonition as a scientifically valid
exceptional experience

Dr Christine Simmonds-Moore (West Georgia) & C O'Gwin (NW Missouri
State) A survey on the correlates and
nature of subjective apparitional
experiences

Dr Elaine Finkelstein (TELERF) Specific cases of near-death and transient
death experiences that question the
current view of consciousness and
highlight their transformative impact

10.30 **Stream B:** Exceptional experiences: belief, meaning & setting
Tuke 009

Alice Herron (Surrey) & Prof Adrian Coyle (Kingston) Godless mystics: An
exploration of mystical-type experiences of
self-identifying atheists: Towards a
grounded theory

Katarina Johansson (Lund) Belief in unexplainable phenomena and meaning
making in a secular late modern society
(Sweden)

Dr Madeleine Castro (Leeds-Beckett) Ineffability and the social psychology of
transcendent experiences

Nell Aubrey (UCL) Super-natural habitat

12.30 Posters

12.45 Lunch

13.45 **CEP Meeting/AGM**

SATURDAY AFTERNOON

Transpersonal psychology and mystical experience

14.15 Transpersonal psychology symposium

Dr Scott Buckler (Nottingham) Maslow's concept of the plateau experience: An introduction and direction for future research

Dr Steve Taylor (Leeds-Beckett) Can the exceptional become normal? The possibility of 'post-traumatic transformation' following bereavement

Dr Madeleine Castro (Leeds-Beckett) Looking at transcendent exceptional human experiences (TEHEs) through a feminist transpersonal lens

15.45 Tea

16.15 Making sense of exceptional and mystical experiences and implications for consciousness

Professor Fraser Watts (Lincoln) A two factor theory of exceptional experience

Professor Max Velmans (Goldsmiths, UoL) Understanding mystical experience

17.30 Short break

17.35 Panel

Panel discussion, delegate questions and comments with Professors Etzel Cardeña & Chris Roe

18.15 Informal discussion

18.30 Close

Posters

Tuke Common (T015A)

Dr Elaine Finkelstein (The Transformative End-of-Life Experiences Foundation) An exploration of commonalities across different types of exceptional human experience suggests a different view of reality

Dr Nicola Lasikiewicz (Chester) Exploring perceived stress and coping in relation to paranormal belief and experience

Dr Kaja Julia Mitrenga, B Alderson-Day, J Moffat, P Moseley & C Fernyhough (Durham) Felt presence experiences in extreme and endurance sports

Ga in Shin, LH Goldstein & Dr Susannah Pick (Kings College London) Evidence for subjective emotional numbing following induced acute dissociation

VENUE

Rooms

Presentation rooms are on the ground floor.

Pre-conference informal discussion	Tuke T010 (Maximum 30)
Registration	Tuke Common Room (TCR T015A)
Presentations	Tuke Common Room (TCR T015B)
Smaller Sat morning smaller stream	Tuke Common Room (TCR T015D) or Tuke 009
Posters	Tuke Common Room (TCR T015A)
On-site accommodation	Reid Hall and Oliver building

Meals

Eating establishments are on the ground floor.

Pre-booked breakfast	Reserved table in Brasserie
Breakfast bought on day	Refectory
Tea and coffee	Morning and afternoon in TCR T015D Other times in Starbucks coffee shop behind main reception or Refectory
Pre-booked lunch	Tuke Common Room (TCR T015D)
Lunch bought on day	Refectory or Brasserie
Conference dinner	Brasserie
Dinner purchased on the day	Refectory which closes at 19.00 or off-site
Refectory	Opens At 8am on 7th & 8.30am on 8th. Closes at 19.00
Brasserie	Opens at 8.00am on Friday 7th and 8.30am on Sat 8th. Closes at 15.00

Parking

There is some car parking available on-site at Regents University but this is on a first-come first-served basis and charged at £15 per day. Regents University parking is only allowed on tarmac. *Absolutely no parking is allowed on any grass area.*

There is some parking in Regents Park outer and inner circle roads but this is generally restricted to a maximum of 2 or, less often, 4 hours and generally not available before 11am.

Alternative car parking includes:

Q-Park Penfield St NW8 from £14 per day

Bell Drive Car Park, 5 Bell St Paddington NW1 SB from £25 per day.

Alternatively see <https://en.parkopedia.co.uk>

LOCAL AREA

Restaurants

Local restaurant price ranges are for main courses (excluding sides etc). All have vegetarian food. Other diets (gluten-free etc) are indicated & you can often request special diets. Google & Trip Advisor offer many other restaurants in Baker St. & Marylebone.

Express lunches nearby

Regents University Refectory, Deli and Brasserie, Oliver Building (on campus). Refectory closes 7pm

Garden Cafe, Queen Mary's Rose Garden, The Inner Circle, Regent's Park, closes 4pm

Pret a Manger, 211-213 Baker St, NW1 6UY, includes vegan, open by 6.30am, closes 10/10.30pm. 6 minute walk.

Cheap restaurants

Ali Baba, 32 Ivor Pl, NW1 6DA. Middle Eastern, £6-12, 4.5*, closes 11.30pm

The Real Greek, 56 Paddington St, W1U 4HY. £4-7, 4.2*, includes vegan, gluten free, closes 10pm

Yo! Sushi, 194 Baker St, Marylebone, London NW1 5RT. Up to £9.50, 3.9*, includes vegan, closes 10pm

Diwana Bel Poori House 121 Drummond St, NW1 2HL Closes 11.30pm
Cheap S Indian vegetarian food £10. 18 minutes away.

Medium-priced restaurants

Nando's, 113 Baker St, W1U 6RS. Afro-Portugese specialising in chicken, £8-13 4.2*, includes, vegan, halal, closes 11.30pm

Twist, 42 Crawford St, W1H 1JW. International tapas with bar, £12-13.50, 4.8*, closes 11.30pm

Pizza Express, 133 Baker St, W1U 6SF. £10-15, 3.8*, includes vegan, gluten free, closes midnight

Bill's, 119-121 Baker St, W1U 6RY. Contemporary European, £10-20, 4.2*, includes vegan, closes 11pm

Slightly more expensive restaurants

Trishna, 15-17 Blandford St, W1U 3DG. Indian, Michelin star 2012, £11-32, 4.3*, closes 10.30pm

Clipstone, 5 Clipstone St, W1W 6BB. British, award winning, £19-28, 4.6*, closes 10pm

Winter Garden, The Landmark London, 222 Marylebone Rd, NW1 6JQ. Modern European, 2 AA Rosettes, grand hotel atrium, £18-42, 4.5*, closes 10.30pm

Pubs

The Metropolitan Bar, 7 Station Approach, NW1 5LA. Spacious with ornate columns, cask marque, good cocktails, meals £6.50-12.50, including vegan, gluten free ingredients, closes 11.30pm

The Sir John Balcombe, 21 Balcombe St, NW1 6HE. Quiet road, bright, piano, real ales, British food, £9-12, including vegan, closes 11pm

The Windsor Castle, 98 Park Rd, NW1 4SH. Airy with original Georgian features and fire, real ales, meals £9-12.50, closes midnight

Allsop Arms, 137-143 Gloucester Place, NW1 5AL. Traditional dark wood interior, meals £9-14.50, closes 11pm

The Globe, 43-47 Marylebone Rd, NW1 5JY. Traditional strip floor, cask ales, meals £10-15, including vegan, closes 11.30pm

Gastropubs

The Volunteer, 245-247 Baker St, NW1 6XE. Light with whitewashed panelling, craft beers and ales, British food, reservations required, £9-16, including vegan, closes midnight.

The Albany, 240 Great Portland St, W1W 5QU. Comedy and music some nights, craft beers & cask ales, late night food, £10.50-16.50, including vegan (also opposite Pizza Express), closes midnight/ 2am

The Prince Regent, 71 Marylebone High St, W1U 5JN. Flamboyant with chandelier and mirrors, real ales, meals £13-16.50 including vegan, closes 11pm

The Beehive, 126 Crawford St, W1U 6BF. Open fire, meals £9.50 – 22.50, closes 11pm

Local Attractions

Near

Regents University grounds

Regents Park Large park immediately surrounding Regents University

Madame Tussauds on Marylebone Rd next to Baker Street Station

London Zoo North East side of Regents Park

Lords Cricket Ground. North West of Regents Park

Sherlock Holmes Museum on Baker St. West of Regents Univeristy.

Further away

British Library East of Regents Park near St Pancras Station

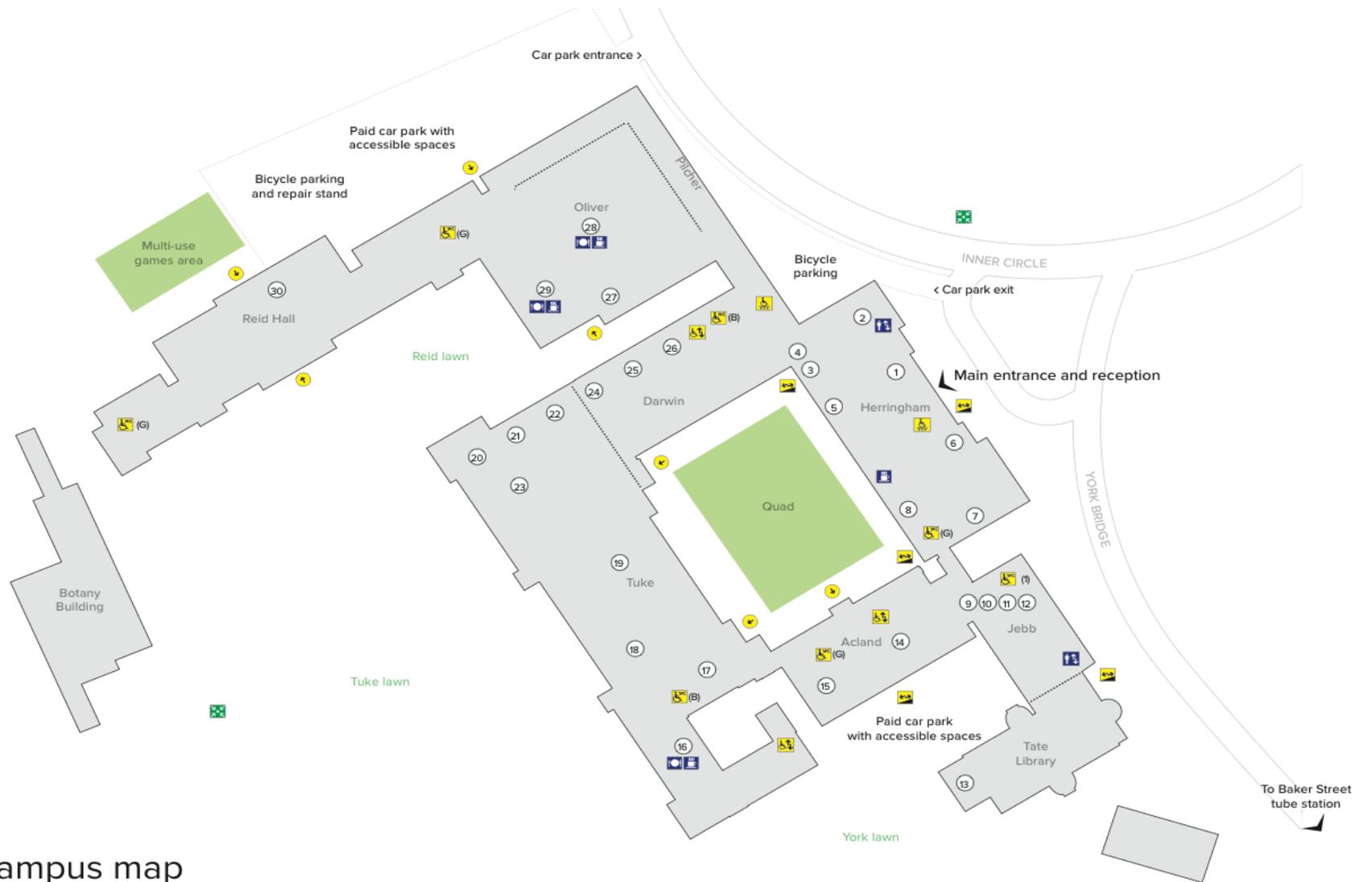
University College London South East of Regents Park

Bloomsbury South East of Regents Park.

Abbey Rd Studios North West of Regents Park.

Camden Market North of Regents Park

Oxford Street clothes shopping area South of Regents Park



Regent's Park campus map

- | | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level access Ramp access Accessible lift Accessible toilet Platform lift Narrow lift, may not be accessible to wheelchairs Food outlet Coffee shop Emergency muster point | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ① Security office (G) ② Herringham Hall (G) ③ Student finance office (1) ④ Admissions - Business & Management (1) ⑤ Admissions - Humanities, Arts & Social Sciences (2) ⑥ Bookshop (G) ⑦ Knapp Gallery (G) ⑧ Alumni Relations (2) ⑨ IT centre (B) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⑩ Library and study areas (G; 1) ⑪ Careers & Business Relations (2) ⑫ International Partnerships Office (2) ⑬ Postgraduate study area (B) ⑭ Student Union (G); Sports and fitness (2) ⑮ Student Centre (G) - Accommodation, Disability Officer, Immigration Advisory Service, Student Registry, Student Services ⑯ Bedford's Bar (B) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⑰ Student common room (G) ⑱ Tuke Hall lecture theatre (G) ⑲ Student lockers (B) ⑳ Tuke common room (G) ㉑ Media Services (B) ㉒ Thomson Reuters suite (G) ㉓ Tuke cinema (G) ㉔ TV studio (B) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ㉕ Theatre studios (B) ㉖ Showers (B) ㉗ Campus shop (G) ㉘ Refectory and dell (G) ㉙ Brasserie (G) ㉚ Halls of residence |
|--|---|--|--|--|

B = basement / G = ground floor / 1 = first floor / 2 = second floor

Campus map

Regent's Park

Herringham

- Herringham Hall (G)
- Interior Design workshop (B)
- Reception (G)
- Regent's Conferences & Events (G)
- Knapp Gallery (G)
- Security office (G)

Tuke

- Bedford's Bar (B)
- Media services (B)
- Student Union (G)
- Student common room (G)
- Tuke Hall lecture theatre (G)

Darwin

- Interior Design studio (1)
- Theatre studios (B)
- TV studio (B)

Acland

- Student Hub (G)
- Oliver**
- Bookshop (G)
- The Brasserie (G)
- Refectory and deli (G)

Jebb

- Careers & Business Relations (2)
- International Partnerships Office (2)
- IT centre (B)
- Library & study areas (1 and 2)

Reid Hall

- Halls of residence

Botany

- Facilities & Estates management

Map key

- Campus entrance
- Building entrance
- Accessible entrance
- Lift
- Bicycle parking
- Car park
- Assembly point
- Reception
- (B) Basement
- (G) Ground floor
- (1) First floor
- (2) Second floor

Regent's Park

Inner Circle
 Regent's Park
 London NW1 4NS
 Tel +44 (0)20 7487 7700

Marylebone

60 Paddington St W1U 4JA
 6-7 Garbutt Place W1U 4DU

regents.ac.uk



Campus map

Marylebone Site

Paddington Street	Garbutt Place
Design studios (1, 2, 3)	Fashion design studios (B, G, 1)
Marylebone Theatre (G)	Social and learning resources area (G)

Map key

	(B) Basement
	(G) Ground floor
	(1) First floor
	(2) Second floor



How to find us

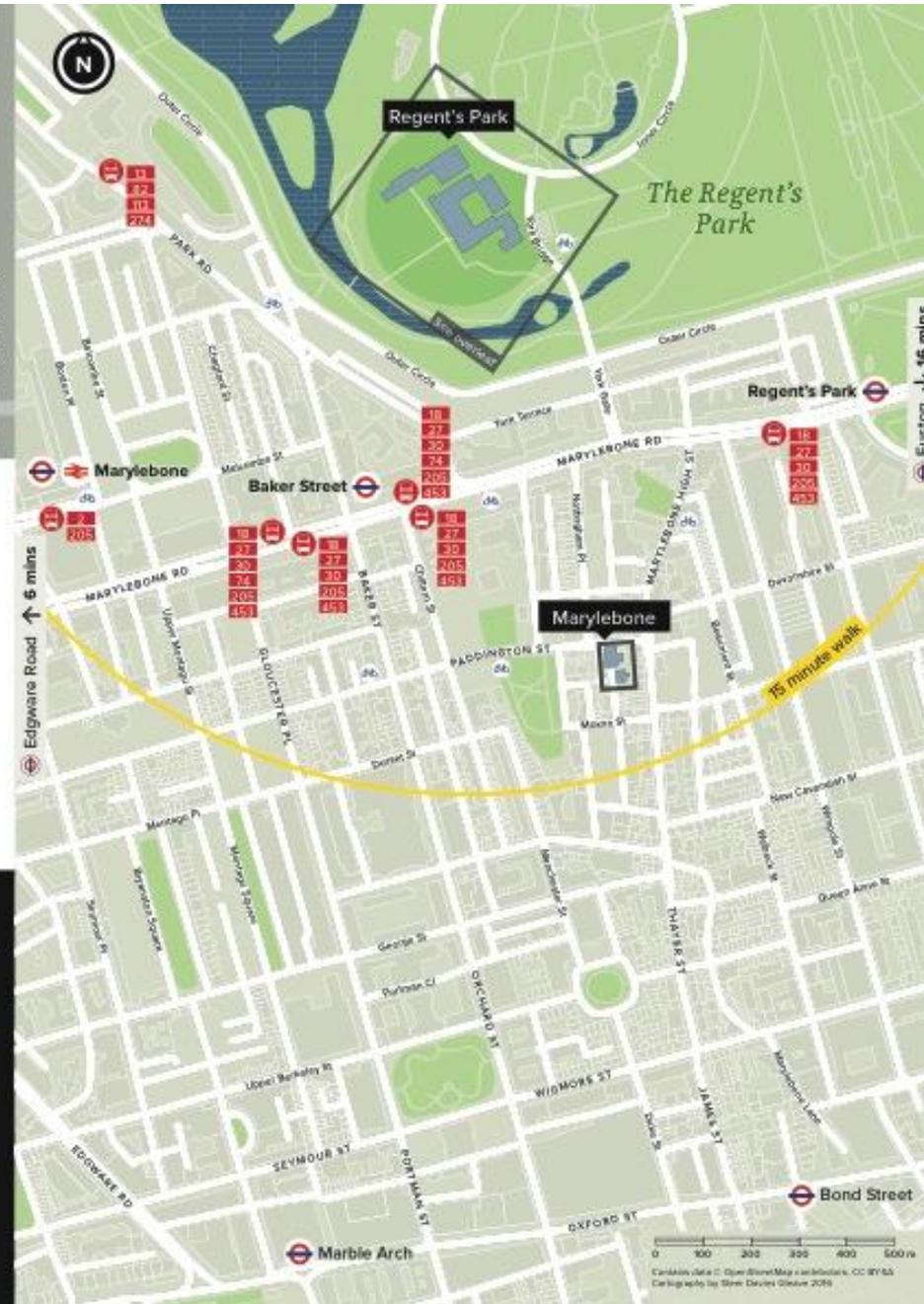
Our main campus at Regent's Park and specialist facilities at Marylebone are a short walk from each other. Both are a 10-minute walk from Baker Street station, making them easily accessible by public transport.

By Underground

Take the London Underground to Baker Street station. Take the Marylebone Road exit. Turn left and walk past Madame Tussauds to York Gate on your left.

For the **Regent's Park campus**, turn left into York Gate. Continue over the bridge into the park. The University entrance is on the left.

For the **Marylebone site**, cross the road at the traffic lights at York Gate. Turn left and then first right into Marylebone High Street. For the entrance to the Paddington Street building, turn right into Paddington Street. For the accessible entrance in Garbutt Place, turn right into Moxon Street, then right into Garbutt Place.



Regent's Park
 Inner Circle
 Regent's Park
 London NW1 4NS
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Marylebone
 60 Paddington St W1U 4JA
 6-7 Garbutt Place W1U 4DU

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ABSTRACTS

Keynote Presentations

FRIDAY 9.00



Making sense of exceptional experiences

Professor Chris Roe (University of Northampton)

paranormal phenomena, personal experience, parapsychology

Surveys consistently show that between a third and two thirds of people report belief in a range of so-called 'paranormal phenomena'; that is, phenomena that are regarded as contrary to generally accepted features or 'basic limiting principles' of the dominant materialistic scientific worldview. Levels of belief seem to be independent of geographic region and culture, and such phenomena have been reported throughout recorded history. The most significant driver of paranormal belief is personal experience; either that of the respondent, or of people they are close to and whose opinions they respect. It is the responsibility of parapsychology to make sense of those beliefs and experiences, both by interrogating them to see to what extent they can be accounted for in terms of conventional psychological terms, and also by subjecting the claims to experimental test under controlled conditions that potentially rule out normal explanations so as to determine whether current scientific models are adequate. In this talk I will draw particularly on research conducted at the University of Northampton over the last 20 years

(including case collections, interviews, and experiments) to elucidate the range of phenomena experienced and to illustrate the approaches used in parapsychology to investigate them.

Chris Roe is Professor of Psychology at the University of Northampton and Director of the Centre for the Study of Anomalous Psychological Processes that is based there, Chris is the Perrott-Warrick Senior Researcher (Trinity College, Cambridge) and Visiting Professor at Bucks New University. He is Chairman of the British Psychological Society Transpersonal Psychology Section, Past-President of the Parapsychological Association, a Council Member of the Society for Psychical Research and the International Affiliate for England of the Parapsychology Foundation. He is on the editorial board for the *Journal of Parapsychology*, *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* and the *Transpersonal Psychology Review*. His research interests are around understanding the nature of anomalous experiences and includes research on the phenomenology of paranormal experience, particularly as it affects wellbeing, the psychology of paranormal belief and of deception, as well as experimental approaches to test claims for extrasensory perception and psychokinesis, particularly where they involve psychological factors. Recent research has been concerned with the relationship between altered states of consciousness and psychic experience. He has published over 100 journal papers and book chapters and given over 150 invited and conference presentations.

FRIDAY 14.00



Neuroepistemology of drug-induced exceptional experiences

Dr Milan Scheidegger (University of Zurich, Switzerland)

psychedelic research, neuroscience, brain dynamics

Psychoactive plants have been used in ritualistic contexts throughout human history to induce exceptional experiences for therapeutic and psychospiritual purposes. Nowadays, in the context of the renaissance of psychedelic research, psychoactive drugs could serve as promising epistemological tools for the scientific exploration of altered states of consciousness. In this talk, I will give an overview about how drug-induced exceptional experiences can be explained from the perspective of contemporary neuroscience. In particular, advanced neuroimaging technologies provide exciting novel insights into the brain dynamics underlying pharmacologically induced altered states of consciousness. Beyond shaping social and cultural evolution, psychedelic states also raise profound philosophical questions about the nature of subjective experience and the creation of meaning in living systems. Interfaces between different epistemological perspectives such as pharmacology, neuroscience, biosemiotics, philosophy of mind, and deep ecology will be explored.

Milan Scheidegger is an integrative thinker with an academic background in medicine, neuroscience, philosophy, and psychiatry. His MD-PhD degree was in functional and molecular neuroimaging from the Institute for Biomedical Engineering (University and ETH Zurich). He is currently researching the neurobiology and pharmacology of altered states of consciousness as a resident physician at the Department of Psychiatry, Psychotherapy, and Psychosomatics (University Hospital of Psychiatry Zurich). He is member of the Swiss Society for Psycholytic Therapy (SAEPT) and investigates the potential of psychedelics such as ketamine, psilocybin, ayahuasca and DMT to facilitate therapeutic transformation. On his ethnobotanical expeditions to Mexico, Colombia and Brazil, he explored the traditional use of psychoactive plants in indigenous rituals. Beyond empirical research, he earned an MA degree in History and Philosophy of Knowledge (ETH Zurich).

SATURDAY 9.00



**Derangement of the senses or alternate epistemological pathways?
Research on alterations of consciousness and human potential
Professor Etzel Cardeña (Lund University, Sweden)
*altered states, anomalous experience, enhancement of abilities***

Our ordinary, waking state of consciousness, is typically considered by psychology as normative and the purveyor of the best apprehension of 'reality'. This has been the case despite its various perceptual and cognitive limitations - partly explainable by evolutionary pressures - and personal and cultural biases. In contrast, various philosophical traditions in both the West and the East, as well as a psychological school of thought traceable to William James and others, have deemed the ordinary state as circumscribed and potentially misleading, and have described alternate states of consciousness that may provide new insights into the nature of mind and its relation to reality.

This presentation will briefly describe some of the constraints of the ordinary state. Next, it will cover research on how spontaneous or purposefully induced (e.g., through hypnosis, or meditation) anomalous experiences and alterations of consciousness relate to enhancement of abilities, including decreased perceptual and cognitive automaticity; enhanced physiological control; recovery from different ailments; and positive changes in emotions, sense of meaning, and relationships with other beings and the environment.

The final section will review research evidence for one of the most daring claims about alternate states of consciousness: that they may give access to information not bound by common sense notions of time, space, and selfhood (i. e., psi phenomena).

Etzel Cardeña, a Fellow in APS and APA, holds the endowed Thorsen Chair in psychology at Lund University in Sweden (the top ranked Swedish university), where he directs the Center for Research on Consciousness and Anomalous Psychology (CERCAP). His areas of research include alterations of consciousness and anomalous experiences, dissociative processes and acute post-traumatic reactions, the neurophenomenology of hypnosis and meditation, and the stream of consciousness during waking and altered states. His Ph. D. is from the University of California, Davis, and he was a postdoctoral fellow and scholar resident at Stanford University. He has more than 300 publications, some in the top journals in psychology and related disciplines, including the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, *American Psychologist*, *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, *Cortex*, *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, *PLOS ONE*, and *Psychological Bulletin*. Various professional organizations have bestowed awards on his empirical, theoretical, and pedagogical contributions and he has been consultant to the DSM and ICD committees. His research has been funded by organizations in the US, Sweden, and Portugal.

PAPERS

FRIDAY 10.30

Parapsychology & Anomalous Experiences

Now see hear! Detecting being watched or listened to via extrasensory means

Ross Friday and Dr David Luke (University of Greenwich)

extrasensory surveillance detection, scopaesthesia

Many people have turned to see someone behind them due to a 'sense' they were being watched. Others have 'inexplicably' become aware of a conversation involving them, despite it being inaudible. There are many theoretical explanations for these events, one of which is that extrasensory awareness is evolutionarily advantageous, and therefore may have developed during an era in which danger was ever-present with survival depending on such capabilities. Evidence supporting the existence of extrasensory surveillance detection would have implications beyond purely scientific interest, yet the phenomena remains under-researched and may benefit from a fresh approach. New research being conducted at the University of Greenwich is examining not only the possible existence of 'psychic' detection – but also which measures best predict this ability should it exist.

The ability to detect attention has previously been restricted to the psychic staring effect, also known as scopaesthesia - a phenomenon in which people respond via non-conventional means to being the subject of another person's gaze (Sheldrake 2003). However, a new investigation has been furthering the research by incorporating the sense of being heard as well as seen, which we call acoustesthesia. The existence of these abilities was gauged in an initial experiment by the accuracy of participant's self-reports of being watched or listened to, physiological reactions determined by electrodermal activity (EDA) which measures the electrical conductance of the participant's skin to indicate arousal, and differences in their behaviour under varying conditions a) not under any

surveillance (control group), b) whilst being watched, c) whilst being listened to, and d) whilst being watched and listened to.

Results of the self-reporting aspect of the experiment suggested that whilst the data appeared to initially show participants were able to detect being watched and listened to, when reporting bias was accounted for the results were not significantly different from control conditions. Similarly, the participants' EDA during the physiological reaction section of the experiment produced results that were not significant. However, there were very interesting and highly significant differences between conditions when analysing changes in behaviour. These differences were measured by participants increase or decrease in response time when undertaking a cognitive task.

To test whether this outcome could be replicated, the experiment was repeated. This time however, improvements and amendments were made to the methodology as the first experiment hinted at aspects which may have accounted for both significant and not significant results. Statistical power was improved by running more self-report trials to counteract the apparent reporting bias, and the EDA test was run in combination with the cognitive task that had previously yielded positive results to investigate the experimenters' developing theory that the ability to psychically detect being watched or listened to may be determined by the necessity to access such a phenomenon. Finally, to further test this idea, an ambitious field experiment was conducted to consider real-world implications.

References

Sheldrake, R. (2003) *The sense of being stared at and other aspects of the extended mind*. New York, NY: Crown Publishers.

Exploring the construction of a paranormal experience in relation to paranormal belief using story completion

Nicola Lasikiewicz & Hannah Heath (University of Chester)

paranormal belief, anomalous experience, story completion, qualitative

Objectives: Paranormal belief refers to the endorsement of phenomena that are scientifically unsubstantiated, and contain a cognitive, affective, and behavioural element that convey what a person believes in, how it makes them feel, and how it may modify their behaviour. Beliefs can, therefore, be an insight into a person's sense of reality. However, previous research often utilises quantitative measures of belief, which limit the scope for elucidating what a person considers to be paranormal. Consequently, this study utilised a story completion task to explore peoples understandings of unusual experiences, how anomalous events are constructed, and the role belief can play in the interpretation of an unusual experience.

Design & Methods: 157 participants (85% female) aged between 18 and 53 years old ($M=21.80$ years, $SD=6.62$), and predominantly university students, completed a story completion task via an online survey.

Questions to assess basic demographic information and paranormal belief were also included. Participants were asked to finish a story stem wherein the protagonist, along with friends, stay the night in a reputedly haunted house and hear a noise. Participants were asked to write for ten minutes, completing the story. The resulting stories were analysed using Thematic Analysis.

Results: Demographic analysis indicated that 34% of the sample identified as paranormal believers with 38% not sure, and 28% non-believers. 33% of the sample reported an anomalous experience, with the majority (69%) indicating that this was a haunt-type experience. 18% were not sure if what they had experienced was paranormal, and 50% had no such experience. From the analysis of the stories, four preliminary themes were generated. The first theme, 'Explanations', charts how participants either drew on paranormal explanations, such as a ghost activity, human non-paranormal explanations, such as practical jokes, or non-human non-paranormal explanations, such animals or the wind.

Some participants wrote cliff-hangers that did not provide a concrete explanation for the noises. In the second theme, participants drew on popular 'Environmental Symbols' of paranormal experiences, such as creaking floors, low temperature, dilapidation, and religious iconography and ephemera of Satanism. In the third theme, 'Uncertainty', despite the protagonist choosing to stay in a reputedly haunted house, stories suggested a discomfort around possible paranormal explanations, a hope for non-paranormal explanations, and relief when a non-paranormal explanation was found. Yet some also indicated disappointment when the cause was non-paranormal. Finally, the fourth theme, 'Structure', details the narrative structure that many of the participants took. Routinely they built a sense of fear throughout the stories, would use cliff-hangers, and would provide resolutions that would vacillate between the paranormal and non-paranormal.

Conclusions: To the author knowledge, this is the first study to use story completion method in exploring paranormal belief. The initial themes generated offer an interesting insight to the key elements of how a paranormal experience is explained. Further analysis into how these themes may link to paranormal belief will be conducted in order to establish the role that belief plays in the construction of unusual experience.

An avowal of prior scepticism enhances the credibility of an account of a paranormal event

Anna Stone (University of East London)

paranormal, narrative, sceptic, prior scepticism

Objectives: More people believe in the paranormal than claim personal experience, which suggests that social learning may be a factor. Wooffitt (1992) suggested that a narrator of an account of an ostensibly paranormal event may enhance their own credibility, and the attribution to a paranormal cause, by making an avowal of prior scepticism. This relies on the principle of inoculation, in which the narrator disarms in advance a likely counter-argument, for example, that the narrator is gullible and saw

only what they expected to see, by declaring themselves to have been a sceptic before experiencing this particular event. This study aimed to perform an empirical test of the efficacy of the avowal of prior scepticism. Experiment 1: Design and Methods: Participants read one of two scenarios narrated in the first person implicitly suggesting either telepathy or precognition as a causal explanation. The narrator was presented as a prior sceptic, prior believer, or not interested. After reading the scenario participants answered questions about their perception of the event and the narrator. Participants (n=100) were 70 females, 23 males, and 7 unspecified, with ages ranging from 18 to 54, mean 24 years. All were undergraduate psychology students at the University of East London and so represented a diverse range of ethnic and social backgrounds.

Experiment 1: Results: The data were analysed by ANOVA and t-tests. The main finding is that the causal attribution to telepathy or precognition was stronger if the narrator took a position of prior scepticism compared to prior belief. For a female narrator, but not male, a prior believer was perceived as more gullible than a prior sceptic.

Experiment 2: Design and Methods: The same basic design and methods were used as Experiment 1 with a different participant sample. The main difference in the procedure was that participants were briefed in advance on the results of Study 1 and the avowal of prior scepticism was explained. Participants (115) were 83 female, 24 male, and 8 unspecified, with ages ranging from 18 to 55, mean 25 years. All were undergraduate psychology students at the University of East London.

Experiment 2: Results: The main result of Experiment 1 was reversed in Experiment 2 in which participants were pre-warned about the avowal of prior scepticism; the causal attribution to telepathy/precognition was weaker if the narrator declared prior scepticism than if they declared prior belief. The gender effect in Experiment 1 was not apparent.

Conclusion: The avowal of prior scepticism was effective in enhancing the credibility of the narrator and the likelihood of attribution to a paranormal cause, unless participants are pre-warned to see it as a manipulative device. It appears that the change in position from prior sceptic to a diametrically opposing view enhances the perceiver's view of the strength of the evidence. A female believer was perceived as more gullible than a

female sceptic, and more gullible than a male believer, in accordance with the stereotype of females as more gullible and trusting, and less rational and analytic, than males.

Does 'altered consciousness' mediate the relationship between art-making and wellbeing? An experience sampling study

Nicola Holt (University of the West of England)

art, creativity, altered states of consciousness, experience sampling methodology, eudemonic happiness

Objectives: Previous research suggests that creativity, in the arts in particular, is associated with altered states of consciousness (ASCs) (Holt, 2007). To further understanding of the phenomenology of this, the current study used the experience sampling method to explore the occurrence of ASCs in the daily lives of artists, and their relationship with art-making and creative ideation.

Design & Methods: The experience of artists was repeatedly sampled over seven days, through an experience sampling questionnaire that signalled participants, at random intervals, to describe their mood, cognition, altered state of consciousness (radical alterations in awareness of body, perception, time and meaning) and recent creative cognition and behaviour (drawing on Pekala's [1991] Phenomenology of Consciousness Inventory). Participants also completed wellbeing measures including the Orientations to Happiness Questionnaire (Peterson & Seligman, 2005). Multi-level modelling was used to analyse this nested data, with 2495 sampled experiences (level one – 'the experiential level') nested within 41 artists (level two – 'the person level').

Results: Recent art-making was significantly associated with experiential shifts: improvement in hedonic tone; vivid internal imagery (visual and auditory); altered state of consciousness and the flow state. Moments of inspiration and 'thinking about creative projects' were also significantly associated with these experiential dimensions, in addition to improved self-esteem. Further, the frequency of art-making across the week was associated with eudemonic happiness (having a meaningful life). Cross-

level interactions, between experiential and person-level variables, suggested that those high in eudemonic happiness were more likely to experience an altered state of consciousness during art-making. Conclusions: The current study suggests that at the experiential level, different stages of the artistic creative process (inspiration, thinking about one's creative projects and art-making) are associated with altered states of consciousness. Further, the study provides important empirical support for the role of the flow state and altered states of consciousness as a route to wellbeing through art-making, particularly through creating or developing a sense of meaning.

FRIDAY 15.30

Induced Exceptional Experience

Sensory deprivation and anomalous experience. Who, why and how?

Oliver Mason (University of Surrey)

sensory deprivation, schizotypy

Objectives: To outline evidence supporting the hypothesis that sensory deprivation produces anomalous experiences in some prone individuals, and to investigate the mechanisms by which this may occur.

Design and Methods: I report on a sequence of experiments that use an anechoic chamber environment to artificially restrict sound and vision to an absolute minimum (effectively zero). Individual differences are measured by a variety of self-report instruments assessing anxiety, schizotypy, suggestibility and fantasy proneness. Experiences are reported using the Psychotomimetic States Inventory.

Results: Most studies employ MANOVA/MANCOVA analyses to assess for effects of condition and participant group on a range of independent variables. The effects of sensory deprivation are large and may be predicted by a range of individual differences.

Conclusions: Some individuals are more prone to experience anomalous experiences under conditions of sensory deprivation in as little as 15 minutes exposure. Though anxiety, suggestibility and fantasy proneness

are relevant, these do not fully explain their occurrence. Vulnerability to hallucinations, and positive schizotypy more generally, remain predictive of a range of experiences under sensory deprivation. These results can be interpreted as supporting a Bayesian account of anomalous experiences.

Acquired synaesthesia following the use of psychedelics

Devin. B. Terhune, (Goldsmiths, University of London) & David P. Luke (Greenwich University)

consciousness, multisensory, psychedelics, serotonin, synaesthesia

Objectives: Synaesthesia is an anomalous experience in which an inducer stimulus in one sensory modality will involuntarily trigger a concurrent experience in a second modality. The induction of transient episodes of synaesthesia with psychedelic drugs has potential implications for the neurophysiological basis of multisensory processing and plasticity. It also represents a potentially important counter-example to one of the dominant theories of synaesthesia (cross-activation theory). Nevertheless, drug-induced synaesthesia remains controversial because these episodes do not meet behavioural adjudication criteria for developmental synaesthesia (consistency and automaticity of synaesthetic associations). We describe a case of acquired synaesthesia (LW) following ingestion of the psychedelic drug 2C-B, a serotonin agonist. The present study sought to determine whether this case meets the standard behavioural adjudication criteria for synaesthesia.

Design & Methods: We evaluated the consistency of multiple forms of LW's synaesthetic associations using a standardized synaesthesia battery and the automaticity of his face-colour synaesthetic associations using a face-colour priming task. LW's performance was compared to normative data and that of matched non-synaesthete controls.

Results: Multiple forms of LW's synaesthesia met criteria for inducer-concurrent consistency and he exhibited larger face-colour congruency effects in both error rates and response times in the priming task relative to controls. These effects were large in magnitude and associated with

very low probabilities of occurrence in the general population. These results will be discussed in the context of recent empirical research on drug-induced synaesthesia.

Conclusions: These results demonstrate a case of drug-induced acquired synaesthesia that meets the two hallmark adjudication criteria for developmental synaesthesia. In turn, these data suggest that LW's self-reported associations qualify as genuine synaesthesia. Accordingly, this case challenges cross-activation theory and implicates serotonin in the development of synaesthesia.

Protocol for a realist review of the relationship between different types of psychedelic drug, states of psychedelic experience and psychological outcomes

Vlad Kolodin (School of Pharmacy, University College London) &

Kalissa Dosbayeva (Kazakhstan Medical University KSPH)

psychedelic therapy, psychedelic experience, mental health, realist review

Purpose: This study explains the preparations, discussions and stages of data collection for a realist review protocol, and also provides results from a narrative analysis of existing literature on the strengths and limitations of common methodological and theoretical approaches to psychedelic research.

Background: Research in the area of psychedelic therapy has been increasing in recent decades. There are now a number of studies that promise a significant improvement in treatment for certain common mental health and behavioural problems. Yet, whether and how psychedelic therapy produces such a different range of subjective psychological effects, which states of consciousness are involved, whether these are caused by psychedelic therapy, how they influence mental health improvement, and what kind of psychological mechanisms inform these changes remains largely uncovered. The relatively new, realist evaluation approach involves identifying underlying causal mechanisms and exploring how they work under what conditions. The stages of this realist review included: concept development and framework formulation, looking for and analyzing the

evidence, extracting and synthesizing the evidence, and developing hypotheses.

Approach: A narrative analysis was conducted of articles (n=52) describing different types of psychedelic therapy, psychedelic experiences, exceptional states of consciousness, psychological outcomes of psychedelics and methodological approaches for psychedelic therapy research. In addition, certain book chapters (n=12) were reviewed. Articles reviewed were limited to those published within the last 5 years, while books, chapters and declarations from the past 20 years were included. In this literature review we generally focused on types of psychedelic treatment, exceptional states of consciousness and psychological effects (cognitive, emotional characteristics, and subjective experiences).

Conclusions: The most common types of substances for psychedelic therapy were D-lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD or LSD-25), dimethyltryptamine (DMT), psilocybin (4-phosphoryloxy-N, N-DMT), generally using magic mushroom and ayahuasca. The most common exceptional states of consciousness reported were self-transcendence, mystical experiences, cosmic unity, egolessness, timelessness, and spacelessness. The methodologies included quantitative approaches, systematic review, meta-analysis, different types of qualitative study including grounded theory, narrative analysis, thematic analysis and a few theoretical reviews. Many studies focused on neurological effects use quantitative research methodology that could overshadow the links between exceptional states of consciousness, psychological changes and mechanisms related to psychedelic therapy. Narrative qualitative research methodologies and grounded theory contain common limitations like a lack of structure, and potential difficulties with integration of the results into practise. We suggest that a realist review approach can benefit both the theoretical and practical outcomes of psychedelic therapy, due to the combination and synthesis of evidence and the potential for mapping links between exceptional states, types of psychedelic therapy and long-term psychological outcomes. Based on this literature review we made a preliminary mapping and developed a protocol for a realist review of the relationship between different types of psychedelic drug, states of psychedelic experience and psychological outcomes. Some highlights will

be presented. The limitations of the current literature review include some deviation from the preliminary inclusion criteria and lack of discussion with experts in psychedelic therapy.

FILM

FRIDAY 17.30

Bufo-Alvarius: The Underground Secret

A film about experiences with 5-MeO-DMT, a powerful psychedelic featuring Professor Stanislav Groff, Octavio Rettig Hinojosa (a shaman) & experiencers discussing their experiences. It has subtitles. Director: Filip Zaruba. 78mins followed by a short discussion.

SATURDAY 10.30

Stream A: Spontaneous Exceptional Experiences

Some contributions to a 'natural history' of spontaneous 'exceptional experiences'

John NT Martin (Open University)

non-veridical experiences, natural history approach, illustrations, cataloguing

Objectives: To illustrate a range of qualitatively distinct 'exceptional experiences' (EEs), and to argue for the need for better documentation of the different types of EE reported by a normal non-clinical population of 'well' people.

Background: Under survey conditions a significant proportion of the 'well' general public report spontaneous occurrence of EEs of various kinds.

However:

- Cultural norms and the often perceived association between EEs and mental or neurological problems (both by the lay public and medical professions) tend to make people reluctant to discuss such experiences openly.
- Reports of EEs often seem deeply implausible to those who have not experienced them:
- EEs are often bizarre even to participants, and the metaphors called on as the participant struggles to describe what has happened may make limited sense to non-participants.
- EEs tend to be infrequent and involuntary, and so can't be demonstrated on demand.
- Where apparently inflated claims are made about EEs, this can also raise scepticism.

Problems such as these make it difficult to get an acceptable and reliable picture of the nature and distribution of such experiences in the 'well' population.

Approach: The paper will use EEs encountered by the author to illustrate a range of qualitatively distinct phenomena of this type, offer possible explanations, and consider whether some types of EE may be mere

neurological quirks, while others may relate to important mechanisms that underlie cognition.

The author's involvement with EEs includes:

- A range of EEs encountered in the late '70s/early '80s, mostly in connection with a three year psycho-therapy training course run on neo-Reichian lines.

- Experiences triggered by attendance at a Tavistock Leicester Conference in the early '80s.

- Experiences in subsequent years of what Lawley and Tompkins (2000) refer to as 'metaphor landscapes', in which problems can often be resolved by working with metaphoric imagery. A video demonstration of this is available.

- A few other miscellaneous occurrences.

Conclusions: This paper will argue for the need for a 'natural history' approach in which EEs reported by ordinary people can be gathered, recorded, categorised and (where possible) demonstrated, quite separately from any claims about their possible causes, consequences or implications. It will surely make sense to have a confident grasp of what we are dealing with before we start discussing its wider ramifications.

Toward the future understanding of premonition as a scientifically-valid exceptional experience

Erica Brostoff (BPS)

premonition, psychological processes, information analysis

Purpose: The presentation aims to make premonitions understandable in psychological terms and acceptable both to scientific sceptics who reject the concept of knowledge from the future, and to lay persons who report premonitions as sometimes troubling due to their content and inexplicable origins.

Background: Premonitions are controversial both scientifically and in public discourse, due to the possible claim of knowledge from the future.

Explanations are little explored in detail in the research literature of anomalous experience. This presenter was challenged by her own

disturbing and exceptional experience of premonitions to find psychological explanations. These premonitions concerned the vulnerability and/or fatality of persons who sometimes were seeking her support, and in other contexts. Such premonitions are frequently reported as spontaneous anomalous or exceptional experiences.

Approach: A preliminary literature search was made to find clinical publications likely to include such topics as premonition. The clinical setting has some advantages as a form of natural experiment, which include intended understanding and intersubjectivity of the clinician towards the client, and sometimes careful contemporaneous record keeping. A published paper by a clinician Seitz (1975) gives examples of his premonitions. He experienced unease about former clients who shortly afterward telephoned for further appointments. He identified cues retrospectively that triggered these reactions. He also makes recommendations as to how such cues could arise in everyday life.

Examples of these principles at work in everyday life, are given in Brostoff (2015) reporting cues that triggered premonitions about future vulnerabilities of persons known to her, which proved to be accurate. In an analysis somewhat similar to behaviour sequence analysis (Clarke, 2018) these cues will be demonstrated in the presentation, to be based on pattern recognition, figure/ground discrimination, creative visual reconstruction of knowledge that is initially out of awareness, and overall, based on a grounding in similar life experience between the parties.

Conclusions:

1. It is possible to determine some established psychological processes underlying some premonitions.
2. It is not necessary to rely on supposed information from the future for explanation, thus making premonitions more scientifically acceptable.
3. The fundamental basis for the experience of premonition lies in shared response to life events and knowledge temporarily out of awareness. – potentially shareable but potentially intrusive information.
4. Difficulties in applying the method of analysis (possibly to be called "information sequence analysis") include potential misremembering due to the emotional nature of the information: examples will be given.

5. Understanding principles underlying some premonitions can contribute to de-mystification, also to less credulous acceptance of some claimed details of published cases of premonition, an example given.

6. Definitive explanation of premonitions is never likely to be conclusive, as some experimentalists and theoreticians will prefer the concept of information from the future.

A survey on the correlates and nature of subjective apparitional experiences

Christine Simmonds-Moore (University of West Georgia) & Chase O'Gwin (Northwest Missouri State University)

apparitions, synesthesia, boundary thinness, somatic tendencies

Objectives: This project sought to further explore the psychometric correlates of different types of apparitional experiences, with a particular focus on synaesthesia, creativity, perceptual sensitivity, different types of boundary thinness and body-based awareness (interoception and somatic focus). We predicted that there would be a difference between synaesthetes and non-synaesthetes in the general tendency to experience apparitional experiences. We also predicted that synesthesia (scored as a dummy variable), creative tendencies, sensitivity, body awareness and boundary thinness would positively predict scoring on a general tendency to experience apparitions (in a regression analysis). We also planned to explore differences between ways of experiencing apparitions (including eyes open compared to closed; visual compared to other sensory experiences and spatial versus in the body) on personality scoring (using MANOVA). We also planned to sample a subset of different types of apparitional experience to develop a theory of apparitional experiences using grounded theory.

Design & Methods: This study was run as an online survey using Qualtrics. A series of questions that describe a range of different apparitional experiences were developed from existing measures. This included 2 items pertaining to apparitions from the Anomalous Experience Inventory and 5 items from Irwin, Drinkwater and Dagnall (2013). The

research team added an item pertaining to “visit dreams” (a type of encounter with the deceased that only occurs during the dream state). Questions were written neutrally, but with response options that allowed for paranormal or mainstream appraisals for experiences. Additional questions asked about different ways of experiencing apparitions (including whether eyes were open or closed, the senses that were involved in the experience, the spatial location of the experience and the nature of the apparitional experiences; presented as an open-ended question). A battery of individual difference measures included a measure of creativity (Weibel, Martarelli, Häberli & Mast, 2017); synesthetic experiences; locus of control, the Revised Transliminality Scale; Hartmann’s Boundary Questionnaire a measure of hyperaesthesia and two measures of body awareness (interoception - Multidimensional Assessment of Interoceptive Awareness (MAIA), Mehling, 2012) and a brief measure of somatic focus). The study url was distributed locally (to students in the psychology department at UWG, all staff and faculty at UWG and the community surrounding UWG) in addition to psychology students at Northwest Missouri State University and via social media. Results: Data will be analyzed using quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative analysis will include difference tests (synaesthetes versus non-synaesthetes) and correlations between individual difference variables and general tendencies to experience apparitions. Regression analyses will explore the statistical predictors of apparitional experiences (from the battery of individual difference measures). Comparisons between different ways of experiencing an apparition in terms of scoring on personality variables will be calculated using a series of MANOVA calculations. A grounded theory will be undertaken on a subset of open-ended responses concerning different types of apparitional experiences to develop a theory of this type of experiences.

Conclusions: This research extends existing knowledge about the psychology of apparitional experiences.

Specific cases of near-death and transient-death experiences™ that question the current view of consciousness and highlight their transformative impact

Elaine L Finkelstein (TELERF)

near-death experience, consciousness, transformation

This presentation will share elements of the very personal, exceptional human experiences (EHEs) of specific individuals, all of whom were experiencing severe physical trauma at the time of their EHE. Each of these individuals experienced either a Near-Death Experience (NDE) or Transient-Death Experience (TDE)™. I define a Transient-Death Experience as a profound psychological experience that occurs when an individual is, temporarily, clinically dead. Having researched cases of this nature for eighteen years, it is clear that every experience has both unique aspects as well as similarities with others. Within this, patterns which raise fundamental questions about consciousness emerge. The individual experiences that will be highlighted in this presentation are four of my most recent cases and, with the permission of the experiencers, will be shared for the first time. Where relevant, however, the experiences, thoughts and emotional responses of other experiencers will be included.

Through focusing on the profound experiences of these individuals this paper will highlight how, and why, elements of these particular EHEs pose challenges for materialism. As this presentation will illustrate, these experiences may occur at a time when the body is so severely physiologically compromised that conscious experience and awareness is seemingly not possible. For example, as one of the cases presented will illustrate, at a time when medical professionals at the scene of an accident did not expect the victim to survive, this victim was experiencing something so incredibly vivid that the memory of it remains clear and the psychological impact of it is both ongoing and cumulative. In spite of the permanent disability this victim is left with, the transformative impact of this experience continues to be immense.

The transformative impact and changes that accompany NDEs and TDEs can be profound. This transformation will be addressed by highlighting some of the most significant post-experience considerations

in these cases and others. These considerations span the immediate, post-experience psychological needs and responses of the experiencers, the potential transformative effects of the experience, as well as the potential consequences, some of which may be highly challenging. Such considerations are particularly significant for mental health professionals who assist those who have had an NDE or TDE to validate, embrace and fully integrate their experience, as well as to manage the subsequent changes.

SATURDAY 10.30

Stream B: Exceptional Experience, Belief and Meaning

Godless mystics: An exploration of mystical-type experiences of self-identifying atheists, Towards a grounded theory

Alice Herron, (University of Surrey) & Prof. Adrian Coyle, (Kingston University, London)

atheists, mystical-type experiences, meaning-making

Objective: Reports of spiritual and mystical experiences have been studied extensively in Psychology of Religion. Most research has focused on religious believers. Where non-believers were included in previous studies, they tended to comprise only a small percentage of the research participants. The aim of the study was to explore, for the first time, the spontaneous mystical-type experiences of a number of self-identifying atheists and how they made sense of their experiences without a religious or spiritual framework to guide their interpretation.

Design and Methods: Twenty-nine participants were recruited from atheist, non-religious and sceptical organisations. Constructivist grounded theory was the chosen analytical method for the study. Through analysis of participant's written accounts and in-depth interviews, the study explored what atheists understood to be the meaning of their experiences both at the time of the reported event and their current understanding of it; what effect, if any, it had on their lives and whether their atheist identity was affected by the experience.

Results: A model for the experience was identified that highlighted the importance given by participants to the context of their experience and the atypical circumstances in which they found themselves prior to it. The analysis also highlighted the tensions between the intuitively perceived meaning of the experience and participant's atheist identity. Three pathways were identified as to how the atheists resolved the tension. Conclusion: Such experiences can be conceptualised as intuitive meaning-making efforts occurring when there is a discrepancy between situational meaning & the individual's global meaning construct. Limitations: The study relied on post-experience accounts.

Belief in unexplainable phenomena and meaning making in a secular late modern society like Sweden

Katarina Johansson (CTR Lunds Universitet, Sweden)

unexplainable phenomena, meaning making, sense of coherence, no institutional religion, religiosity, spirituality, late modern society, cultural phenomena, experience, narrative

The aim of this thesis is to survey and map out what it means to believe in unexplainable phenomena, that is phenomena not scientifically explained, in a secular late modern society.

The study is explorative and the methods used are five focus group interviews supplemented with a questionnaire, performed in southwest of Sweden. Theories used in the inductive analysis to explain belief in unexplainable phenomena at a macro level are the secularization theory, subjectivizing theories, theory of late modern society, socialization theories and the theory of invisible religion, and at a micro level theories of meaning making and theories of cognitive science of religion.

The deduction of the study is that belief in unexplainable phenomena is meaning making in several ways in a contemporary late modern society and a possible source of a sense of coherence (SOC), resilience and wellbeing, and that there is no disagreement between belief in unexplainable phenomena and science, but to institutional religion, interpretative prerogative and religious authorities of different kinds. Narratives of experiences of unexplainable phenomena are not only

meaning making, but the main approach to explain and legitimize the belief in unexplainable phenomena. However most of the informants have some fear of being regarded as dopey or half-witted, hence it's common not to openly talk about the belief, but to find and choose a secure constructive and sharing context off- or online.

In summary this study shows that new approaches and methods are needed to be able to better capture contemporary non-institutional religion, religiosity and spirituality as a cultural phenomena, not at least to include belief in unexplainable phenomena in studies of contemporary religiosity.

Ineffability and the social psychology of transcendent experiences

Madeleine Castro (Leeds Beckett University)

ineffability, transcendent experiences, social psychology

This presentation aims to demonstrate both the social significance and socially embedded nature of transcendent experiences (TEs as one form of Exceptional Human Experiences or EHEs – White, 1994).

Transcendent or mystical experiences are often referred to as ineffable (Bucke, 1905; James, 1901; Maslow, 1964 and Stace, 1960). This attribution places these experiences in some senses out of reach, potentially as the numinous 'other' in Otto's (1923) conceptualisation and certainly as off-limits to the material plane. However, the way in which these experiences are shared, communicated and written about requires a manifestation in more earthly-bound mediums. Whilst this could be a piece of art or music, it is invariably language through which these experiences are depicted. Drawing on several accounts collected via interviews for my doctoral research (Castro, 2009), and using a particular approach to language in the social sciences informed by Conversation Analysis and Discursive Psychology I consider what the invocation of ineffability 'does' on a social level and the implications of this claim. In doing so, I argue that in locating TEs beyond language, experiences simultaneously establish a prodigious level of profundity for their experiences (Castro, 2009) and equally advocate that first-hand

experience is necessary for understanding, therefore perhaps drawing boundaries around those qualified to speak authoritatively about TEs. What is interesting then, is that experiencers also work hard to position themselves as normal or ordinary in interaction (Sacks, 1984; Wooffitt, 1992). These potential tensions in the accounts can offer us clues about the social context in which these experiences are embedded as not only psychological, but also social, phenomena.

Super-natural habitat

Nell Aubrey (Department of History, University College London)

wilderness, demon, ghost, visions

Anomalous experiences have been a significant feature of the 'Wilderness' throughout recorded human history. 'Wilderness' covers a range of settings; uninhabitable desert wastes, inaccessible mountains or forests, empty lonely pathways and aspects of the human built environment; ruins of tombs and temples, or settlements desolated by time, war or natural disaster. Despite geographical and ecological variability, the Wilderness is depicted as an arena for preternatural and supernatural encounters across multiple regions and cultures from the Ancient Near East to the present. The nature of anomalous experiences associated with the Wilderness varies, but a unifying element of the many different types of sources; religious, medical, magical, ethnographic and folkloric, is the intrinsic danger posed by intruding into the domain of powerful and ambiguous, otherworldly forces. The Desert theophanies of the Biblical texts are an anomaly in the lore of the Ancient Near East, and even within the Judeo-Christian tradition, these experiences are the tip of a much deadlier iceberg in which seeking the Divine in the Wilderness is fraught with physical and spiritual dangers. Across the wider cultural milieu the Wilderness is the arena of experiences with all manner of threatening entities; ghosts, goblins, trolls and monsters of all kinds. Using research from the Cognitive Science of Religion, Ancient History and Psychology, I will explore why the Wilderness is so strongly associated with anomalous experiences, and I will draw on the rich

background of folklore and mythology to consider how it developed as the natural habitat of the Supernatural, and what one might encounter there.

SATURDAY 14.15

Transpersonal Symposium

An Introduction to Transpersonal Psychology: Research perspectives on transcendent human experiences

Scott Buckler, Nottingham, Steve Taylor, Leeds-Beckett & Madeleine Castro (Leeds-Beckett University)

Transpersonal Psychology, feminist perspective, post-traumatic transformation, plateau experience, bereavement

The theme of this symposium is to introduce the area of transpersonal psychology, while sharing three research perspectives related to transcendent human experiences.

Scott Buckler provides a general introduction to the area of transpersonal psychology, specifically focusing on the later work of Maslow and his concept of self-transcendence characterised by the plateau experience. Steve Taylor explores how bereavement can lead to personal transformation through a mixed methodological approach of interviews and psychometrics.

Madeleine Castro's research explores transcendent exceptional human experiences (TEHE) through a feminist perspective, specifically exploring the effects of sharing TEHEs in a supportive, unstructured environment. Cumulatively, these perspectives are indicative of research trends within the field of transpersonal psychology, with the floor being opened to discuss how both the Consciousness and Experiential Psychology Section and the Transpersonal Psychology Section can explore collaborative links.

Maslow's concept of the plateau experience: An introduction and direction for future research

Scott Buckler (Nottingham University)

self-transcendence, Maslow, plateau experience

Objectives: The purpose of this paper is to discuss Maslow's concept of self-transcendence characterised by the plateau experience, along with discussing the development of a psychometric and subsequent work in this area.

Background: Self-actualization and the associated characteristic of peak experience have received significant research attention, despite a series of definitional, theoretical and methodological issues (Cleary & Shapiro, 1995). Maslow specifically warned about pursuing the peak experience instead suggesting that research should focus on the plateau experience (Maslow, 1970; Krippner, 1972). In the past 40 years however, the plateau experience has remained relatively obscure (Buckler, 2011; Hoffman, 2008; Gruel, 2015). The properties for the plateau experience have subsequently been identified as: an increased sense of serenity; mindfulness; and an acceptance of the impermanence of life, or a lower death anxiety (Maslow, 1970).

Methods: The aforementioned properties have an associated series of established psychometrics. Due to the variety of psychometrics, their associated scales and their response formats, a synthesis between the measures was established culminating in the PLateau EXperience Scale (PLEX).

Results: The PLEX was developed through a sample of 863 respondents. Given the theoretical nature of the PLEX and the identification of pool items from previous psychometrics, confirmatory factor analysis was adopted, where factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.25 were retained and factor coefficients of 0.40 or greater were required for the interpretation of the factor structure. A very high reliability of between .816 to .873, and a three-week test-retest with high reliability of .773 were reported. Additionally, on two occasions there was a medium positive correlation between the PLEX and Jones and Crandall's (1986) Short Index of Self-Actualization (SISA): Occasion 1 ($r=.373$, $n=55$, $p<.0005$

explaining 14% of the shared variance), Occasion 2 ($r=.517$, $n=55$, $p<.0005$ explaining 27% of the shared variance). The correlation between the PLEX and SISA indicated that individuals who scored highly on self-actualization similarly scored highly on plateau experience.

Conclusion: The development of the PLEX may strengthen the empirical basis for transpersonal psychology while providing a measure to enable comparison of transpersonal practices and the associated effects on participants. Further studies are required with different samples to ensure that the PLEX is a suitable psychometric for wider use.

Can the exceptional become normal? The possibility of 'post-traumatic transformation' following bereavement

Steve Taylor (Leeds-Beckett University)

post-traumatic transformation, bereavement, identity

Purpose/Objectives: This presentation describes a recent study by the author of 16 individuals who experienced personal transformation following bereavement. The characteristics of their transformational experiences included a less materialistic attitude, a different attitude to death, and a sense of connection to nature. The changes were reported as stable and permanent, over long periods of time (a mean of over 13 years since the original bereavement experiences).

Background: Previous research has also shown that it is possible to undergo a profound personal transformation following intense forms of psychological turmoil such as a diagnosis of cancer, intense stress, addiction, and so on. Bereavement has emerged as one of the most powerful triggers of such a transformation.

Method: A mixed methods approach was used, including a qualitative thematic analysis of interviews and two psychometric scales, including a Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Inventory. Both approaches found significant evidence of positive personal change.

Conclusion: Cases of post-traumatic transformation suggest that it is possible to experience the characteristics of "peak experiences" of "awakening experiences" on a stable, ongoing basis. There may be

parallels between the transformation experienced by the participants and Abraham Maslow's descriptions of "self-actualizers" and the states of optimum human development (or "awakening") described by spiritual traditions. It is suggested that post-traumatic transformation may be due to a dissolution of the normal sense of identity - perhaps caused by a loss of psychological attachments - which enables a new sense of identity to emerge.

Looking at transcendent exceptional human experiences (TEHEs) through a feminist transpersonal lens

Madeleine Castro (Leeds Beckett University)

transcendent EHEs, feminist approach, transpersonal psychology

This paper considers the benefits of adopting a feminist transpersonal ethos towards researching TEHEs. During doctoral research I interviewed 30 people who reported having a transcendent experience (Castro, 2009). Transpersonal and feminist methodological approaches both emphasise the potential importance of the involvement and participation of the researcher during the research process (e.g. Anderson & Braud, 2011; Braud & Anderson, 1998; Devault, 1999; Reinharz, 1992), which can be an emotional and potentially transformative experience. A respectful and sensitive approach to 'honouring human experiences' is encouraged in transpersonal research. This is paralleled by the way in which feminist research has aimed to prioritise lived experiences and give voice to the marginalised.

In many ways, TEHEs can be considered sensitive experiences, as although they are not necessarily indicative of mental distress or individual suffering they have historically been considered potentially pathological. Thus, sharing these experiences with strangers can be a potentially daunting experience (Castro, 2009).

However, it is possible that sharing TEHEs can have positive effects. Primarily, the individuals might be increasing the chances of integrating their experience(s) more effectively (there is certainly evidence for disclosure having positive affects in a structured or therapeutic

environment – e.g. Palmer & Braud, 2002; Parra & Corbetta, 2013). But equally, the effects of being heard and/or listened to in an unstructured environment, but in a sensitive, respectful, and non-judgemental manner, should not be underestimated.

Researching these experiences was often an intense and personally-involving experience and I found myself effected by many of the participants and their stories. I explore these issues in relation to several accounts from my doctoral research (Castro, 2009) and illustrate just what adopting a feminist transpersonal ethos brought to the project.

SATURDAY 16.15

Making Sense of Exceptional & Mystical Experience & Implications for Consciousness

A two factor theory of exceptional experience

Professor Fraser Watts (University of Lincoln)

two-factor, exceptional, development, hard-wired, culture

Purpose: This theoretical paper develops a two-factor theory of exceptional experience, with biological factors mainly determining the likelihood and strength of exceptional experiences, and contextual factors influencing how they are interpreted.

Background: The theory builds on Stanley Schachter's well-known two-factor theory of emotion, which has been developed (in separate places) as a theory of religious experience by Wayne Proudfoot, Mark Wynn and Fraser Watts. It is here broadened out to apply to a range of exceptional experiences. Two-factor theory provides a way of synthesising the constructivism of Steven Katz with Robert Forman's theory of pure consciousness.

Approach: The approach draws on Philip Barnard's Interacting Cognitive Subsystems, which has two distinct central cognitive subsystems, 'propositional' (more linguistic) and 'implicational' (more intuitive and embodied), and Iain McGilchrist's theory of lateralisation (which contrasts left-brain and right-brain cognition). Different kinds of exceptional

experience integrate these two modes of human cognition in different ways.

Conclusions: The nature of spiritual experience seems to change with cognitive development, becoming more interpretative with the development of 'formal operations'. This probably recapitulates the evolution of religion, which developed from more embodied, experiential modes to more doctrinal ones. There is currently a cultural shift towards valuing exceptional spiritual experiences that are less heavily interpreted, reflected in the shift to being 'spiritual but not religious'. However, the interpretative community always seems to play a significant role, not just in religion. For example, psychedelic communities have their own preferred patterns of interpretation, even though the impact of psychedelic substances is dominant. Interpretative communities often hold strong beliefs about the veridicality and the transformative power of exceptional experience.

Understanding mystical experience

Professor Max Velmans, Goldsmiths (University of London)

consciousness, reflexive monism, mystical experience

The materialist worldview treats consciousness as a "hard problem", and largely subscribes to human exceptionalism – that human consciousness, and perhaps that of some closely related animals is an extremely rare emergent from an otherwise insentient universe. In this paper I develop the opposite view, based (a) on a reflexive analysis of conscious phenomenology that is consistent with a self-observing universe, (b) on the conditions for the emergence and evolution of consciousness being more consistent with radical evolutionary continuity rather than discontinuity, and (c) on the evidence from mystical experience, which, according to William James, "... appears to provide insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive insight." Rather than being knowledge of something, this is knowledge by identity (being or becoming what one wishes to know), a realization encapsulated in the ancient teaching "Tat twam asi" (Thou art that). I also suggest a simple way to incorporate such

experiences and understanding into conventional depth psychology and physics.

POSTERS

An exploration of commonalities across different types of exceptional human experience suggests a different view of reality

Elaine L Finkelstein (*The End-of-Life Experiences Research Foundation*)

Commonalities, differing exceptional experiences, reality

In this paper, the cross-section of exceptional human experiences (EHEs) that will be explored are near-death and transient-death experiences™ (profound psychological experiences that occur when a person is, temporarily, clinically dead), transformative end-of-life experiences, experiences of after-death communication and apparent past-life recall. Commonalities in terms of the content of these different types of EHEs, as well as in the post-experience impact, further validate these experiences and raise significant questions about what we regard as absolute reality. A number of these commonalities will be identified and described in this paper.

The similarity of experience between, for example, near-death experiencers, specifically, or amongst those who are close to the end-of-life, specifically, has been very evident in the research that I have undertaken with clients and research participants. A specific focus on near-death experiences highlights that although each experience is unique in many ways, there are themes and patterns that run like common threads through the fabric of nearly all near-death experiences, millions of them. Peace, joy, profound and unconditional love, heightened awareness and feeling very much alive are just some of them. Beyond this, however, and when analysing the broader spectrum of EHEs in both my own research as well as in the work of highly regarded researchers in the various fields of EHEs, similarities across differing types EHEs can be identified. This paper will highlight the similarities in experience across the five types of EHEs listed above, all of which involve different conditions and occur under differing circumstances. This cross-correlation across seemingly dissimilar EHEs speaks to the authentic nature of these

exceptional experiences and, as previously suggested, will form the focus of this paper.

In closing, this paper will touch on certain experiences that we may easily dismiss but which are, in fact, exceptional in their own right. They, too, raise questions about the nature of consciousness. They also suggest that perhaps it is us that creates the barriers between what is regarded to be normal or real, and what is considered exceptional or anomalous. Perhaps these exceptional experiences are showing us that the mind, and reality, are far more than one may choose to believe.

Evidence for subjective emotional numbing following induced acute dissociation

Ga In Shin, Laura H Goldstein, Susannah Pick (*King's College London*)
dissociation, mirror-gazing, emotional processing, depersonalization, emotional numbing

Objectives: Dissociation can be conceptualized as a habitual avoidance strategy to alleviate negative affect associated with aversive experiences. Thus, dissociation exists as a core symptom of several highly disabling neuropsychiatric disorders (e.g., depersonalization/derealization, post-traumatic stress disorders). Some evidence supports a negative impact of dissociative states on emotional processing and an association with inhibited emotional responsivity and disease severity in clinical samples. Here, we investigated empirically the influence of induced dissociation on emotional responsivity in healthy individuals, using Caputo's (2010) mirror-gazing technique. We aimed to assess post-induction subjective responsivity to standardized emotional images. We also explored susceptibility to the procedures by measuring relevant psychological variables with self-report questionnaires.

Design & methods: This study adopted a mixed between- (condition: control and mirror-gazing) and within-group (stimulus valence: positive, neutral, negative) design. Fifty participants were randomized to either dissociation-induction (mirror-gazing, n=25) or control (no mirror-gazing, n=25) conditions, followed by state dissociation and affect measures, and

the experimental test of emotional responsivity. The experimental dependent variables were subjective ratings of valence (unpleasant-pleasant, 1-9) and arousal (low-high, 1-9), and reaction times. Spatial and verbal working memory tests were also administered post-induction. Self-report measures of traumatic experience, emotion regulation and trait dissociation were completed pre-induction.

Results: The dissociation manipulation effect was corroborated by a significant between-group effect on post-induction state dissociation scores ($p=.043$, $\eta_p^2=.084$) with elevated scores in the dissociation-induction group relative to controls. Multi-scale Dissociation Inventory (trait dissociation questionnaire) scores: disengagement ($p=.003$), depersonalization ($p=.026$), derealization ($p=.001$), emotional constriction ($p=.001$), memory disturbance ($p<.001$), and identity dissociation ($p=.004$), and Traumatic Experience Checklist scores ($p=.041$) were positively correlated with state dissociation scores post-induction in the dissociation-induction group. In the emotional processing task, there was a significant interaction between stimulus valence (positive, negative, neutral) and condition (dissociation-induction, control) ($p=.009$, $\eta_p^2=.126$). Pairwise comparisons revealed that the dissociation-induction group rated both negative ($p=.028$) and neutral stimuli ($p=.025$) as significantly more pleasant than controls. In contrast, there was a non-significant trend for positive stimuli to be rated as less pleasant by the dissociation-induction group compared to controls ($p=.060$). There were no significant effects of condition on arousal ratings, reaction times, or working memory tests.

Conclusions: These findings confirm that the mirror-gazing technique successfully elicits dissociative states in the laboratory and suggests that individuals with more traumatic experiences and increased dissociative tendencies may be more susceptible to acute dissociation after such manipulations. We extend previous research by demonstrating that elevated state dissociation results in anomalous subjective emotional responses to both negative and neutral stimuli. The dissociation-induction group's perception of neutral and negative images as more pleasant suggests that acute dissociation resulted in reduced aversive experiences (i.e., emotional numbing), in line with clinical and theoretical assumptions.

These findings provide evidence for the short-term alleviation of negative affect during dissociative states, which may serve as a coping mechanism for some individuals. Further investigation of dissociative phenomena and their impact on emotional processing in both clinical and non-clinical samples appears warranted.

Exploring perceived stress and coping in relation to paranormal belief and experience

Nicola Lasikiewicz (University of Chester)

anomalous experience, paranormal belief, stress, coping

Objectives: Previous research has shown that paranormal belief is often higher in those experiencing stress or challenge, suggesting that that it may reflect a unique form of coping. Of the possible origins of paranormal belief, prior paranormal experience is often cited as a strong predictor. Yet, few studies have explored whether the relationship with stress and coping extends to such experiences. This study aims to explore whether those who have experienced anomalous events are characterised by greater stress and more emotion focused coping.

Design & Method: Participants ($N=315$) aged between 18 and 60 years ($M=22.44$ years, $SD=7.06$) completed measures of paranormal belief, perceived stress, coping, and desirability of control as part of an online survey. Anomalous experience was measured in terms of whether a person has experienced an anomalous event, and further, whether the participant attributed that experience to a paranormal cause using the Survey of Anomalous Experience (SAE, Irwin, Dagnall & Drinkwater, 2013).

Results: All participants reported experiencing at least one of the twenty anomalous experiences listed in the SAE. Further, 50% of participants surveyed attributed at least one of these experiences to a paranormal cause. The most common experiences included reports of a sense of presence, experience of extrasensory perception e.g. thinking of a person and they call, and aspects of precognition e.g. dreaming of a future event and it coming true. As expected, those who attributed their anomalous

experiences to a paranormal cause reported significantly greater paranormal belief, but also greater perceived stress, greater distancing, and greater escape-avoidance in terms of coping. When predicting whether a participant attributed anomalous experience to a paranormal or non-paranormal cause, paranormal belief was the best predictor of attribution, with the model correctly classifying 75% of cases.

Classification success increased to 81% when measures of perceived stress, control, and coping were added, with perceived stress identified as a significant predictor followed by a trend for distancing.

Conclusions: The data suggests, first and foremost, that belief is an important factor when exploring anomalous experience, as expected.

However, there is preliminary evidence that, as is the case with paranormal belief, perceived stress and elements of coping may also play a role in understanding anomalous experience. However, it is not clear in the current data set whether paranormal belief was an antecedent or consequence of paranormal experience. This may have implications for the potential relationship with stress and coping. More research is needed to tease apart these complex interrelationships.

Felt presence experiences in extreme and endurance sports

Kaja Julia Mitrenga Durham University, Ben Alderson-Day, Jamie Moffatt, Peter Moseley & Charles Fernyhough (Durham University)

felt presence, hallucinations, extreme sports

Objectives: 'Felt presence' hallucinations are intuitive feelings of person or agency being nearby, usually occurring without any perceptual characteristics. In this online study, we explore these experiences in people who engage in extreme and endurance sports. We aim to explore whether different examples of felt presences share the same underlying factors. The study is the first one to report on the felt presences in this sample.

Design & Methods: Eighty-five respondents completed the online survey. Participants were recruited through email advertisements sent to sports

clubs and societies across the United Kingdom. We compare participant reports of i) hallucination proneness (Revised Launay–Slade Hallucination Scale, Bentall & Slade, 1985), ii) sleep disturbance (the Sleep Condition Indicator, Espie et al., 2014), iii) paranoia (the Paranoia Checklist, Freeman et al., 2005), iv) dissociation (the Dissociative Experiences Scale, Carlson & Putnam, 1986), and v) felt presence experiences (the Felt Presence Schedule, Mitchell et al., 2015; Wood et al., 2015).

Descriptions of specific felt presence experiences are recorded through two open-ended questions. We use thematic analysis to identify recurring characteristics – contexts of occurrence and phenomenological features associated with felt presence hallucinations.

Results: In terms of different contexts of occurrence, we identify felt presences related to sleep, experiences of grief/death, physical stress and exhaustion, and periods of distress/illness. We also characterise features relating to phenomenology of the experience, including visual, auditory/verbal, tactile and olfactory modalities. We investigate further whether these individual differences in experiences of felt presence relate to hallucination proneness, paranoia, dissociation and sleep disturbances. Conclusion: We aim to investigate whether felt presence experiences share common underlying factors by distinguishing different groups of these experiences, and comparing them based on the results from measures included in the survey.

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