PRESENTING IN JAPAN AND LITHUANIA - REFLECTIONS FROM OUR STAFF

July was an exciting and eventful month for some of our staff members. During this month, five staff members presented papers at well-known, international conferences. While some of our colleagues were exchanging academic ideas in Japan, others were meeting academics in Lithuania.

The 31st International Congress of Psychology, Japan

Prof Zelda Knight, Dr Carol Saccaggi and Ms Melissa Card presented their work at the International Congress of Psychology (ICP) conference held in Yokohama, Japan.

Prof Zelda Knight reflects: “The ICP 2016 Conference, held in Japan, was a wonderful experience. The conference itself attracted more than 18000 psychologists and was a massive success.” The paper that Prof Knight presented at the conference, entitled, “Exploring temporality in psychoanalysis: Repeating the past and finding the future”, has just been published in an edited volume entitled, “Psychotherapy: Methods, Outcomes and Future Directions.”

Abstract

Traditionally little was written about the future in psychoanalysis. This chapter explores the experience of the future because without a sense of the future, patients cannot move forward psychologically. The original Freudian idea of the compulsion to repeat has implications for how the future is experienced and conceptualised. In this chapter, the future is linked to the concept of ‘potential space’ and the ‘what can be’ experience as well as the notion of the ‘return of the repressed’, indicating that the future, as potential for what can be, was blocked and repressed in the past resulting in a lost future. Little emphasis has been placed in psychoanalysis on how the future is an integral part of therapy and the how the re-working of temporality leads to healing. In exploring the future, which is also linked to hope, the corrective emotional experience is seen as a way in which the future can be found and grasped and how, in therapy, the future can be conceptualised as creating a new self. I present a short case from my clinical practice to exemplify these suggestions.

Dr Carol Saccaggi presented two papers at this same conference and had this to say about it:

“Both my papers were related to psychobiography topics and were very well received. Psychobiography is a new and innovative method in qualitative psychology and it was a really good experience to present on this novel topic and introduce this method to people from around the world. The highlight of the conference, for me, was seeing just how many South African scholars were represented at this prestigious international conference. It felt great to be part of such a strong South African contingent and it impressed on me that the scholarship coming from South Africa is truly world class.”
Abstract

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, more commonly referred to as the Mormon church, is one of the largest and fastest growing religious denominations in the world. This presentation highlights findings from the psychobiographical analyses of two prominent Mormon leaders (Woodruff Wilson, 1807-1898; Gordon Bitner Hinckley, 1910-2006). These men guided the Mormon Church through very different circumstances and contexts, and the psychobiographical analysis illustrates how their unique personalities influenced the decisions they made on behalf of the religious organisation. The presentation traces similar psychological trajectories in their development of a religious belief system, suggesting that they both moved through phases of conversion, immersion, prominence, leadership and then preserving. The study contributes to the understanding of Mormonism, as well as to the understanding of the psychological factors influencing religious leaders. Implications for future research are discussed.

Melissa Card presented on the countertransference experiences of psychoanalytic psychotherapists working with anorexia patients.

Abstract

It has been argued that working therapeutically with anorexia patients can be very difficult for most healthcare professionals because of strong negative countertransference reactions. There are some psychotherapists, who refuse and others, who prefer to work with anorexia patients despite the difficulties associated with the treatment process. This study attempts to provide an understanding of countertransference experiences of psychotherapists willing to work with anorexia patients, as well as explore the negativity surrounding the treatment process of anorexia nervosa. Identification and management of countertransference reactions towards anorexia patients is critical to containing and maintaining the psychoanalytic therapeutic process. Using a phenomenological approach three psychotherapists working with anorexia patients were interviewed and their narratives were used to understand their
struggles and triumphs in the therapeutic process. The main themes explored are: the therapeutic relationship, coping and management of countertransference and understanding theory.

The International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development (ISSBD)

Dr Pieter Basson and Dr Gert Kruger presented their work at the ISSBD in Wilnius, Lithuania. Dr Basson presented on “The Executive functioning as predictor of positive affect.”

Abstract

The purpose of the study was to investigate the possible biological foundations of positive affect, with particular reference to executive functioning and the frontal lobes in the intact brain. The specific research question was: Can frontal executive functioning predict positive affect?

Design: The paradigmatic background for the research question is positivism. An ex post facto predictive design was used in order to answer the research question.

Method: A convenience sample of 203 participants aged 20-28, from various cultural groups but all proficient in English, with matriculation exemption, was selected. The participants completed two test batteries: i) An executive function battery consisting of the Delis-Kaplan Executive Function Test and the Executive Function Index and ii) The Positive Affect Battery which consisted of a compilation of seven tests measuring positive affect (Optimism, Hope, Satisfaction with life, Gratitude, Resilience, Self-efficacy and Forgiveness). Logistic regression was used to ascertain if executive functions predict positive affect.

Results: Logistic regressions were performed by dichotomizing the dependent variable i.e. the scores on each of the positive affect battery subscales. Executive functioning was found to predict the experience of positive affect to a large extent.

Conclusions: It was indicated that positive affect has a biological link to executive functioning.
Dr Gert Kruger presented on “Executive functions and humor styles: A canonical correlation analysis”.

Abstract:

Executive functions are involved in the organization and direction of cognitive activities, emotional responses and overt behaviors. With regard to emotional responses, the prefrontal cortex of the brain appears to mediate executive functions in such a way that they are related either directly or indirectly to positive affect regulation. It has been found that humor can induce positive affect which can contribute to overall well-being, the alleviation of depression and better coping during stressful events. Humor produced in interactions (i.e. humor styles) is, however, not always beneficial nor positive. Four humor styles have been identified, namely affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive and self-defeating humor styles. Affiliative humor is regarded as useful to foster interpersonal relationships, while self-enhancing humor is primarily employed in situations where coping is required. Both these humor styles are considered to be beneficial to the individual. Not beneficial to the individual is aggressive humor, which is employed as a form of dominance in social interactions. Similarly, self-defeating humor is used to denigrate oneself in order to be viewed in a more positive light by others. The role of, and relationship between the executive functions and humor styles are, however, unclear. This study investigated the relationships between the executive functions of empathy, strategic planning, organization, impulse control, motivational drive and the four humor styles (affiliative humor, self-enhancing humor, aggressive humor, self-defeating humor). Participants were 965 undergraduate students between 18 and 46 years old (mean age of 20) who completed the Humor Styles Questionnaire and the Executive Functioning Index. A canonical correlation analysis with the executive functions as predictor variables and the humor styles as criterion variables indicated two functions. The first function showed the expected negative relationships between strategic planning, impulse control and empathy, and the aggressive and self-defeating humor styles. The second function showed the expected positive relationships between motivational drive and empathy, and the affiliative and self-enhancing humor styles. An unexpected negative relationship with impulse control also emerged. Results are discussed in terms of the role of these executive functions when using socially desirable and undesirable humor styles. Directions for future research are given.