The First National Conference of Applied Psychological Research in UAE
## Conference Programme

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Welcome from the Director

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to The First National Conference of Applied Psychological Research in UAE organized by the Psychology Department at Middlesex University Dubai. The Conference presents a unique opportunity for researchers in the UAE and the region to connect and discuss the latest developments and research in applied psychology, in areas such as education, health, culture and others. Applied psychology as a field is going through a dynamic period of research activity and interest, aligned with the changes and events taking place in the region and around the world. This Conference further adds to the exciting repertoire of events in the field globally, and enhances the cooperation and research profile of scholars investigating issues specific to the UAE and its surroundings.

Middlesex University Dubai is London’s first and only campus in the UAE, and the first university to offer a Masters programme in Applied Psychology, which today has more than 40 students. As a leader in this area, we are delighted to host The First National Conference of Applied Psychological Research in UAE which has attracted considerable interest. We are confident that you will benefit and enjoy this event, which will play an important role in the dissemination of knowledge in applied psychology in the years to come.

Professor Raed Awamleh
Welcome from Dr. Anita Shrivastava

I welcome you all to the First National Conference of Applied Psychology, organized by the Department of Psychology of Middlesex University Dubai. Research has always been the core of psychology and the rapid development brought about by primary data research in various applied fields has added to the scientific profile of our discipline. The research in Middle East using primary quantitative and qualitative methods is at initial stages. This conference showcases research from Middle East and beyond and contributes significantly towards further scientific research in applied psychology. The diversity of today’s conference topics signifies the wide horizon psychology has embraced.

I would like to thank all our presenters, attendees, and the Middlesex University administration that have made this conference possible. I hope you enjoy all the sessions today and that this becomes the stepping stone for continued research activities in the UAE.

Dr. Anita Shrivastava Kashi
Sr. Lecturer and campus program coordinator
Department of Psychology
Middlesex University Dubai
**It takes a world of differences to make a different world: Exploring differences in low attaining students’ and their teachers’ views on their learning and teaching environments: The case of one school in Dubai**

*Alizeh Batra, American University of Sharjah, UAE*

**Aims:** Students’ and teachers’ perceptions of their learning and teaching environments are of particular importance as a majority of the variance in student outcomes is influenced by factors at the classroom level, not the school level (Frederickson & Cline, 2002). The rationale behind this investigation was to explore whether low performing students, who do not have specific learning difficulties, could possibly benefit from an improvement in the classroom environment.

**Methods:** An assessment tool called The Psychology in Education Portfolio: The Learning Environment was used to collect data for this study (Frederickson & Monsen, 2000). Measures included the My Class Inventory- Short Form, the Student Classroom Environment Measure, the Teacher Classroom Environment Measure, and the Classroom Observation Schedule. Participants were chosen from Year 6 in one school in Dubai.

**Results:** The findings were consistent with the hypotheses: teachers seemed more satisfied with, and perceived a greater role for, students in the learning environment than students themselves believed. Surprisingly, however, both groups shared a similar view of their ideal learning environments: higher satisfaction, cohesion, and difficulty, but lower friction and competition.

**Discussion:** A reduction in friction, along with an increase in cohesion, has been linked with better student outcomes (Goh & Fraser, 1998). There is immense potential in developing this study into an interventional design or incorporating it into existing school improvement policies.

**Significance of Research:** The significance of these findings relates to the usefulness of the measurements for use in classroom research, and for testing the consistency of teaching practices and the effectiveness of interventions. More importantly, this study contributes to the relatively small body of knowledge present on the educational sector of Dubai, despite the immense growth seen by the sector recently.

**References**
Aims: Recent years have seen the categorical approach to mental disorders change into a more flexible and continuous approach extending from the general to the clinical population and schizotypy explains this same continuity in psychosis. In the general population, creativity has always been popularly associated with schizotypy and a major part of research has focused on them while ignoring other factors that could also affect variation in schizotypy (Schuldberg, 2005; Schuldberg, French, Stone & Heberle, 1988; Weinstein & Graves, cited in Kehagia, 2009). This research aimed to investigate possible relationships and predictors of schizotypy among creativity, extraversion, neuroticism and gender.

Methods: 91 students of MDX selected through opportunistic sampling filled out the Raine Schizotypal Personality Questionnaire (SPQ A), the IPIP Scales of extraversion and neuroticism, and the Carson Creativity Achievement Questionnaire.

Results: Pearson’s ‘r’ and Multiple regression analysis of the results found 1) Creativity was not a significant predictor of schizotypy, 2) Extraversion was a negative predictor of schizotypy, 3) Neuroticism was significantly positively correlated with schizotypy, 4) Extraversion, Neuroticism and gender contributed 31% variance in Schizotypy and therefore were significant predictors.

Conclusions: Extravert and neurotic characteristics seem to be associated with schizotypy, gender also seems to be playing an important role in Schizotypy variance. Contrary to previously established findings creativity was not an associated factor.

Significance: The significance of this research lies in accepting Schizotypy as spectrum of personality which is highly warranted by general population and research finding suggesting a relationship between other personality factors and Schizotypy seems an important step in this direction.
Background: Tattooing has been living its renaissance in the past few decades. This study hypothesized a marked shift from a negative perception of tattooing towards a positive perception.

Methods: Available scientific articles about the psychology of tattooing were reviewed until 2009 and empirically supported common beliefs about tattooed people were collected from extracted articles. These beliefs were eventually summarized in 35 statements. Each question had two items measuring beliefs: one towards men, one towards women. The 70-item questionnaire was snowball-sampled to participants and was completed by 384 in total. Participants indicated the extent they agree with the statements. Separate explorative factor analyses were conducted (principal component analyses) on the statements describing men and women.

Results: Four components of possible perceptions were extracted; beliefs labels about tattooed men and women similar, distinguishing between social deviancy and social disapproval, masculinity and individuality. Participants’ demographic data was used to determine common factors which may affect people’s perception.

Conclusion: Results show that tattooed people are not regarded socially deviant and disapproved by young adults. Sex, race, income, drinking and smoking habits, and also whether a person had a tattoo or piercing (or intended to have one later) had an effect on people’s perception of people with tattoos.

Significance: The study estimates that about 17% of people in UK and Hungary have at least one tattoo on their body, but almost 30% of non-tattooed people would want one. Results mainly indicate the perception of people aged between 18 and 35 and suggests a shift in perception of tattooed people compared to previous generations.
Exploring the outcomes, expectations and attitude change of students on short term international study programs: Comparing Australia, Fiji, New Zealand, Austria, Holland, and UAE.

Cody Morris Paris  
Middlesex University Dubai  
Dubai, UAE

Aims: As universities prepare students for the 21st century, the importance of a globalized education is increasing. Many universities now offer students the ability to integrate a study abroad program into already intensive academic programs by offering short international study opportunities (2-8 weeks). The purpose of this study was 1) to examine the extent to which tourism students’ expectations were fulfilled after participating in a short term study abroad program, and 2) to examine the attitude change of the students towards other countries after the trip.

Methods: The study focused on four groups of undergraduate students from a large public university in the USA participating in four different study abroad programs: Australia and Fiji, Australia and New Zealand, Austria and Holland, and Dubai, UAE. The study abroad students were surveyed twice: 1) prior to the trip (pre-trip), and 2) after the trip (post-trip). Attitudes were measured using a set of 23 attitude questions were measured using a semantic differential scale, and expectations/outcomes were measured a set of 21 Likert-type questions. A MANOVA model with students’ expectations and outcomes as the dependent variables was developed to compare the differences in the expectations and outcomes between study abroad programs. T-tests were used to examine significant differences between pre and post attitudes. Overall pre and post attitudes were compared between each country using ANOVA.

Results: Expectations that are based upon outer-directed values and motivations are likely to be fulfilled as people’s behavior and perceptions are likely to conform. Expectations that are based upon inner-directed values are more likely to be unfulfilled or exceeded as behavior is less likely to be conformed. Expectations based upon motivations for education, travel, and escape are more likely to be exceeded. Attitude change towards a destination, whether positive or negative, is often the result of objects and situations outside of the direct control of the students, such as interactions with non-tourism services and local people.

Conclusions: The formation of attitudes towards a destination and the reformation of attitudes after visiting a destination are result of situational experiences and the fulfillment of outer-orientated values/motivations/expectations. The results of this study further support the expectation theory of attitude change, as well as builds upon the findings of two previous studies conducted by the authors:

Socioeconomic disadvantage and the management of Irish primary schools: A qualitative sub-study

Lynda Hyland
Middlesex University Dubai
Dubai, UAE

Aims: Socioeconomic difficulties are an oft-cited cause of school-based child behavioural difficulties. Several studies have shown that perceptions regarding behavioural aetiology may directly impact efforts to manage behaviour in schools. Despite the growing frequency of such studies among teachers, there is a relative dearth of research with school principals. This study aims to examine the beliefs of Irish primary school principals regarding the role of socioeconomic disadvantage in child behaviour management.

Methods: As part of a large-scale randomised controlled trial in South-Western Ireland, six primary school principals (selected using maximum variation sampling) participated in semi-structured interviews. Data were analysed using the Framework approach.

Results: Emergent themes include ‘home (in)discipline’, ‘parental avoidance’ and ‘the relative advantages of disadvantage’.

Discussion: In keeping with findings reported in qualitative and quantitative literature, all participants hold a firm belief that behavioural difficulties stem predominantly from the home. Difficulties in parental engagement are most notably reported in areas of extreme disadvantage. In schools designated as disadvantaged, there is a clear acknowledgement of the importance of home-school relations and an accepted view that schools should lead parental engagement efforts. Some benefits of working in disadvantaged schools, such as government-funded supports, are noted.

Significance: Attitudes of those in positions of authority are vital as is they who transmit information regarding ‘school culture’ to staff and parents of students alike. Furthermore, these findings have implications for the adoption of school-based behaviour management programmes in Ireland, and beyond.
**Background:** Most treatments for depression focus on reducing symptoms rather than on creating positive states of mental health. Empirical studies to verify the efficacy of positive psychological interventions (PPIs) in primary care are needed. We developed groups designed to increase levels of happiness among patients in a primary care setting with symptoms of depression. The objective was to determine whether these PPIs would improve physical and mental health over time.

**Method:** The 6-week program involved interventions such as engaging in good deeds, writing gratitude letters, and introducing empirical research. Patients completed the SF12v2® at the beginning and end of the program and at 3- and 6-month follow-up. Measures included physical functioning, bodily pain, mental health, social functioning, and vitality. Patients also participated in focus groups to discuss their experiences.

**Results:** Scores improved from baseline to 6-month follow-up for health, vitality, mental health, and the effects of mental and physical health on daily activities. Patients reported greater energy and more daily accomplishments, along with reductions in functional limitations.

**Conclusion:** Interventions designed to promote happiness created sustained improvements in mental and physical health and functioning. This study provides support for PPIs in creating improvements for patients with depression in primary care.

*This article has been submitted for publication and is currently under review.*
It’s the hormones fault! Impaired spatial task performance after pheromone exposure in healthy young men

Jakob Pietschnig  
Middlesex University Dubai  
Dubai, UAE

Ingo W. Nader  
University of Vienna  
Vienna, Austria

Georg Gittler  
University of Vienna  
Vienna, Austria

Aims: Hormonal influences on cognitive task performance have been subject to intense scientific investigation in recent years. Particularly the role of androgens has been under scrutiny since it has been suspected that more androgynous hormonal levels may improve spatial task performance and vice versa. In the present placebo-controlled experiment we aim to clarify the role of short-term pheromone exposure on spatial task performance in healthy young men.

Methods: In all, 129 male non-smokers (mean age = 25.1; SD = 4.0) were assigned to one treatment or one of two control groups. Spatial task performance was assessed by means of the adaptive three-dimensional cube test, a Rasch-homogeneous test measure, thus allowing application of methods of Item Response Theory (IRT) and separate modelling of treatment effects.

Results: Calculation of a series of Linear Logistic Test Models and model comparisons indicated impairing effects of pheromone exposure on spatial task performance in the treatment group compared to both control groups. Comparisons within control groups revealed no difference between placebo-exposed and non-exposed subjects.

Discussion: The present study showed considerable and quickly emerging impairing effects of pheromone exposure on spatial task performance in a group of healthy young men. Individuals were almost twice as likely to solve an item correctly when assigned to one of the control groups compared to the treatment group. Such impairing effects may be conceivably due to pheromone-evoked increased levels of free circulating testosterone.
The aim of this study was to examine and compare the beliefs of the Emirati and non-Emirati population about what causes mental health problems and their help seeking attitudes. There is a scarcity of research to substantiate how mental illness is perceived in the UAE in light of recent modernization and acculturation. It was hypothesized that there would be a significant difference between the two groups on causal attributions and help seeking attitudes. It was also hypothesized that the help seeking attitudes of both groups would be related to a number of demographic variables and would be negatively related to the causal attributions. It is important to understand people’s beliefs and attitudes in this area to inform mental health services delivery approaches in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). A mixed method design was used to conduct this study and a total of 102 participants were drawn from eight organizations in the UAE. The sample consisted of 53 Emiratis and 49 non-Emiratis (17 Westerners, 22 Middle Eastern and 10 Asians) and two scales were administered to carry out this investigation: Attributions of Causes of Psychological Disorders (ACPD) and Attitudes towards Seeking Psychological Help (ATSPPH). Significant group differences were found in attributions and help seeking attitudes, with the non-Emirati group being more likely to attribute psychological disorders to psychosocial factors and to seek professional psychological help in comparison to the Emirati group. However, no relationships were found between the help seeking attitudes and demographic variables as predicted and only a moderately negative relationship was found between attributions and help seeking in the non-Emirati group and none in the Emirati group.
Conference Chair:
Dr. Anita Kashi

Conference Committee:
Lynda Hyland
Dr. Jakob Pietschnig