



## School of Social Sciences Research Newsletter

Issue 12: February 2015

### Editorial

Welcome to the latest edition of the School of Social Sciences' Research Newsletter. I never fail to be astounded by the sheer volume of research and scholarly activities in which a large number of staff are engaged. Within this edition of the newsletter you will see that staff have been publishing books and journal papers, have secured research grant income, and been busy presenting at national and international conferences and events and/or raising their profile and that of NTU through the press.



As some of you may know I have been contributing to one of the Vice Chancellor's C21U dialogue groups on the Enriching Society theme, with a particular focus on research and one of the key issues that has emerged from that discussion is that our research should be of high quality no matter how quality is defined. There is good evidence within the current newsletter that this is definitely the case across the School of Social Sciences with particular examples being the prestigious award to the Emergency Services Research Unit in Psychology for their Knowledge Transfer Partnership with Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service and the SPUR award for student innovations made to colleagues in Social Work and Professional Practice.

This issue of the newsletter also provides the outcome of our REF submission which again demonstrates that we have many successes to celebrate. We will be including more information about REF 2014 in our next edition as we receive more detailed information from the REF panels and in particular HEFCE's funding allocations. In the meantime the contents of this edition of the newsletter shows that we are already building from a position of strength on our REF 2014 successes.

In this issue...

<b>REF 2014</b>	2
<b>Research Activity</b>	
Politics and International Relations	3
Psychology	4
Social Work and Professional Practice	5 - 6
Sociology	7
<b>Separate Features</b>	
Making 'Vodcasts' to teach about Social Work student's interventions whilst on placement	8
Internet Addiction in Psychotherapy	9
Buddhist Philosophy in Psychotherapy	10 - 11
<b>Conferences</b>	
Citizens, Parties and Political Action Conference	12
Emergency Services Conference	13
Upcoming MENA conference	14
<b>Research profile</b>	
Introducing...Dominic Holland	15

# Research excellence results celebrated by the School of Social Sciences

Colleagues in the School of Social Sciences have been celebrating following the publication of the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF) results. The excellent results reinforce the School's established reputation of producing high quality research of an international standing.

There was major success in the area of Psychology, which demonstrated the high quality and enhanced international standing of research conducted with the area. The 2014 Assessment showed:

- Psychology at NTU is one of the top risers in the REF 2014 research rankings.
- 60% of our research outputs were considered to be internationally-excellent or world-leading.
- 100% of our research impact is internationally-excellent with 73% described as world-leading.
- Our research impact and output is the highest of any UK psychology department with an equivalent research environment.

For the Social Work and Social Policy Unit of Assessment (U0A22) the Assessment highlighted that a large proportion of the research outputs submitted were judged to be of a quality that is recognised nationally or internationally. The Assessment also highlighted that an impressive 60% of our research impact is internationally-excellent or world-leading.

The School of Social Sciences also contributed to the Education Unit of Assessment submissions in which a large proportion of the research outputs submitted were judged to be of a quality that is recognised nationally or internationally.

Research Director for the School of Social Sciences, Professor Di Bailey, commented: "Our REF results provide good evidence that we know what works to consolidate and enhance our reputation for excellence in social sciences' research at NTU. We have in place a School-wide research strategy that will enable us to build on the successes of REF 2014 and support colleagues in our diverse disciplines to achieve their research aspirations moving forward. As Research Director for the School I feel very proud of our successes in REF 2014 and I am grateful to all staff for their commitment and dedication in achieving these results."

Given that we are still receiving information and updates about the outcomes from REF 2014 we will be including further information in the next edition of the School Research newsletter.

# Research activity in Politics and International Relations

The Division of Politics and International Relations held a research meeting in December 2014 to discuss their developing "Impact" strategy as we think ahead to the next REF in 2020. This was a lively event in which colleagues discussed themes that brought their research ambitions together and which might form the basis of future impact case studies. They have subsequently crafted a number of possible and evolving impact case studies which centre on the following themes:

- Security in the Middle East and North Africa
- Insecurity, Political Violence, and Change
- Young People, Voting and Political Engagement
- Urban Regeneration, Sustainable Communities and Adaptation to Climate Change
- Managing Environmental Security in the Pacific Islands through Enhanced Civil Society Participation.

In January 2015, **Dr Joanna McKay** was asked to be interviewed for BBC World TV and BBC Radio Scotland about the anti-immigration demonstrations that have been taking place in many German cities recently.

**Dr Jonathan Gorry** was quoted by the Daily Telegraph regarding the Michael Brown shooting verdict and the ensuing Ferguson Riots in November 2014.

NEW SECURITY CHALLENGES  
Series Editor: Stuart Croft



Countering Global  
Terrorism and Insurgency

Calculating the Risk of State-Failure  
in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq

Natasha Underhill



**Dr Natasha Underhill** recently published a book through Palgrave MacMillan titled: *Countering Global Terrorism and Insurgency: Calculating the Risk of State Failure in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq*.

It was released on 28 November 2014 and focuses on the issues of trans-national and domestic terrorism and the process of state failure. More information can be found here:

**[www.palgrave.com/page/detail/countering-global-terrorism-and-insurgency-natasha-underhill/?K=9781137383709](http://www.palgrave.com/page/detail/countering-global-terrorism-and-insurgency-natasha-underhill/?K=9781137383709)**



# Research Activity in Psychology

**Dr Christina Howard** and **Dr Matthew Belmonte** have been awarded €47,400 from the BIAL foundation for their project 'Neural correlates of tracking changing positions of objects'. The grant will be used to employ a research assistant for one year, during which time the team will run several experiments to uncover how the human visual system keeps track of moment-to-moment changes in visual information.

**Dr Maria Karanika-Murray's** co-authored book *Derailed organizational stress and wellbeing interventions: Confessions of failure and solutions for success* is due for publication in March 2015. The book identifies that efforts to improve workplace health and productivity (organizational interventions) often fail and failed interventions do not see the publication light. In the book the authors bring together 60 researchers experiences of derailed interventions.

**Dr Mark Andrews** and **Professor Thom Baguely** have been successful in obtaining ESRC funding as part of the Advanced Training initiative. This is a three year, £28K project entitled *Prior exposure: Training in Bayesian data analysis to complement and enhance traditional statistical methods for psychology and the social sciences* and will provide accessible Bayesian training to researchers (particularly PhD and early career researchers) with a background in non-Bayesian methods.

**Dr Maria Karanika-Murray** and **Professor Mark Griffiths** have co-authored a paper with others on 'Organizational identification, work engagement, and job satisfaction' which has been accepted in the *Journal of Managerial Psychology*. The article explores how a feeling of belonging with the organization can increase work engagement, which can in turn increase job satisfaction.

**Dr Maria Karanika-Murray** and **Dr Glenn Williams** have also had a paper accepted in *Work & Stress* titled 'LMX across levels of leadership: Concurrent influences of line managers and senior management on work characteristics and employee psychological health'. This article explores managerial levels and the impact that line managers and senior management have on employees' experiences of work and their well-being.

## National Award for university and fire service link-up



The **Emergency Services Research Unit** was delighted to be awarded the Societal Benefit Award by the Research Councils of the United Kingdom (RCUK), for the KTP that has made an outstanding and positive impact on society. The Knowledge Transfer Partnership, between ESRU and Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service, explored and evaluated community safety initiatives, initiated new partnerships with organisations - such as social housing landlords, and developed guidance on data sharing for the public good. This is the first time the university has won a Best of the Best KTP award from RCUK.

# Research activity in Social Work and Professional Practice

**Graham Whitehead** has recently had an article accepted in the *Asia Pacific Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy*, titled 'Developing enabling environments in practitioner training'. The article is in response to the World Health Organisation's (WHO) recommendations on effective and ethical disability provision, training providers need to consider more widely how to deliver psychological training which is sensitive to the needs of service users who have a disability. Johnson & Haigh (2011) discuss the use of the term 'enabling environments' which usefully summarises the challenge facing the profession with regard to practitioner training. Counselling and Psychotherapy education, by its very nature, requires training providers to demonstrate a commitment to accessibility and social inclusion for people with disabilities. By modeling examples of good practice, training providers can affirm and promote competence in professional practice which consequently impacts standards of psychotherapeutic care for this population. The creation and promotion of an enabling environment in practitioner training is achieved in a number of ways: affirming basic principles of social inclusion, modeling policies and procedures which shape the training environment, demonstrating evidence of professional practice in the disability arena and the assessment of practitioner competence to practice in a transcultural environment. Standards of ethical practice in this field warrant a clear statement and focus by training providers and a move towards the achievement of empathic resonance in practitioner training is suggested. This can only be effectively demonstrated where institutional policies and procedures are established to reflect the professional standards of the profession. The article includes several vignettes which aim to highlight consideration of the creation of an enabling environment in psychological training provision.

Following previous discussions with the Local Government Association in conjunction with the Association of Directors of Adult Services on Making Safeguarding Personal (MSP), **Matthew Gough** is working with Nottingham City Council, evaluating the implementation of their safeguarding investigations within the new MSP framework. He is qualitatively evaluating key patterns in outcomes for citizens following social work intervention that will contribute to the MSP approach to make safeguarding more person centred and focused around outcomes that the service user actually wants.

**Dr Chak Kwan Chan** has recently had an article titled 'Workfare in undemocratic states: The case of China' accepted for publication in the journal of *International Social Work*. This article examines the problems caused by workfare in China. It is found that China's public assistance scheme is managed mainly by volunteers and government officials who do not necessarily possess relevant qualifications. Also, welfare claimants' benefits can be ceased without going through a rigorous procedure; they can hardly challenge the decisions of the authority because China's judicial system is interfered by central and local senior officials. This article concludes that workfare is a product of Western democratic countries; its implementation in undemocratic states will only increase power abuses among welfare bureaucrats and threaten the rights of claimants.

**Ricky Gee** attended the annual North American Conference on the Social Sciences held in Rhode Island, USA (September 2014) and presented the paper 'Micro-politics of 'career' in a postmodern age; new opportunities or a cult of reproductive speed'. Ricky participated with international colleagues, from across the social sciences, at this annual event held by The International Academic Forum in conjunction with its global university and institutional partners. Such an event presented an opportunity to engage within debate and discussion on the latest research, before a global audience, in a supportive environment so as to network and engage in new relationships.

The conference theme of 'Individual, Community & Society: Conflict, Resolution & Synergy' provided a great occasion to experience a diverse range of inter-disciplinary and international perspectives on a wide variety of topics. Topics ranged from: Japan's rise and decline as an economic superpower, Workplace Conflict and Mediation, Energy Means the World for the United States, Adult centric Tendencies within Social Work practice and many, many more. What became striking about such an assortment of knowledge sharing is how, what initially appeared disconnected, on second glance appeared to resonate with the imperative of 'speed of change' that many of us experience within the social strands that constitute a sense of 'career'. This opportunity provided an interesting insight into the diversity of studies occurring in the social sciences across the globe, as well as, an opportunity to make useful contacts to continue such fruitful discussions.



Photo by Thaddeus Pope - [www.thadpope.com](http://www.thadpope.com)

# Research Activity in Sociology

**Dr Andrew Wilson** attended a meeting of the Advisory Panel on Substance Misuse (APoSM) in Cardiff and is researching issues faced by an ageing population of Welsh substance users in prison as a co-opted member of the APoSM. Andrew, along with former colleague Phil Hodgson, is carrying a retrospective assessment of the effectiveness of an early intervention programme to reduce gang membership in Derby. They have had a paper based on the research accepted at the *British Sociological Association* conference in Glasgow. Andrew is also involved in the evaluation of a Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) funded project in Nottingham and has just finished a chapter on subcultures/gangs for a collection edited by Dick Hobbs in honour of Geoff Pearson. Andrew has also been made a member of the Advisory Panel on Substance Misuse (APoSM) to the Welsh Government.

In conjunction with the press office at NTU, **Professor Robert Dingwall** issued various expert comments to journalists around the Ebola crisis. This resulted in a range of national and international coverage, including the Daily Telegraph, Independent, Reuters, The Sun, Daily Mail, Daily Express and Metro. These comments linked to themes within Robert's two blog entries discussing the Ebola crisis, the first titled 'Ebola – What's the point of the World Health Organization?' and the second, 'Ebola: The Human Cost of Neglecting the Social Sciences'. To read Robert's blog entries, please visit:

- [www.socialsciencespace.com/2014/10/ebola-whats-the-point-of-the-world-health-organisation/](http://www.socialsciencespace.com/2014/10/ebola-whats-the-point-of-the-world-health-organisation/)
- [www.socialsciencespace.com/2014/12/ebola-the-human-cost-of-neglecting-the-social-sciences/](http://www.socialsciencespace.com/2014/12/ebola-the-human-cost-of-neglecting-the-social-sciences/)

Robert also made an appearance on infobae, an Argentine TV channel:  
[www.infobae.com/2014/08/07/1586074-un-brote-del-virus-del-ebola-buenos-aires-seria-controlado-rapidamente](http://www.infobae.com/2014/08/07/1586074-un-brote-del-virus-del-ebola-buenos-aires-seria-controlado-rapidamente)

**Dr Mike Sutton** recently had the paper that he gave at the British Society of Criminology Conference on Darwin's science fraud published (see [http://britsoccrim.org/new/volume14/pbcc\\_2014\\_sutton.pdf](http://britsoccrim.org/new/volume14/pbcc_2014_sutton.pdf)). One of the new discoveries mentioned in this paper is that Robert Chambers (among many others newly discovered to have done the same) had read and then cited Patrick Matthew's book containing the full prior-published theory of natural selection 28 years before Darwin replicated in the *Origin of Species* in 1859. It turns out that Darwin knew Chambers rather well – met and corresponded with him, as did many of his best friends. Yet Darwin – whilst admitting that Matthew had published priority over himself and Wallace – always claimed that neither he nor anyone known to him had read Matthew's book before 1860. In effect, Darwin claimed to have discovered natural selection independently of Matthew and independently of anyone else.

Following this discovery about Chambers having read Matthew's book, Mike has been asked to co-author a book on Robert Chambers. His posthumous co-author is Iris Macfarlane (who amongst many other books) authored *Daughters of the Empire* and elsewhere busted the myth of the Black Hole of Calcutta. Iris died before her book on Robert Chambers was completed. However, her manuscript – as it is – has been professionally proof-read. Iris's son, Professor of Anthropology Alan Macfarlane (Kings, Cambridge), has completely entrusted Mike to finish his mother's book (which he has collaborated on) – in particular by inserting the New Data about Chamber's, Matthew and Darwin and explaining its relevance to the story of the discovery of the theory of Natural Selection.

The book is to be entitled "Robert Chambers of Edinburgh".

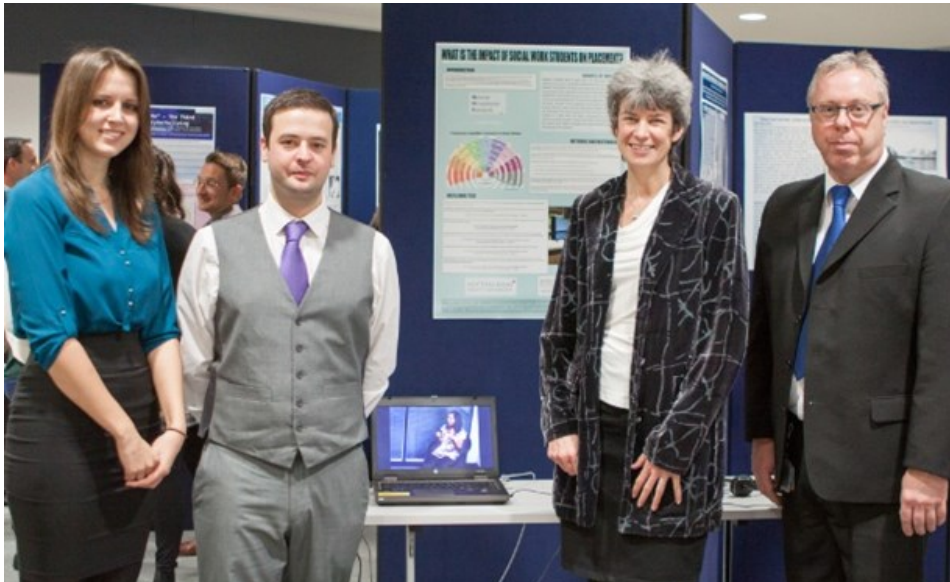
For more information about *Daughters of the Empire* visit [www.amazon.co.uk/Daughters-Empire-Memoir-Times-British/dp/0195678125](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Daughters-Empire-Memoir-Times-British/dp/0195678125)

For more information about Iris's book *Black Hole: The Makings of a Legend* visit [www.amazon.co.uk/Black-Hole-The-Makings-Legend/dp/004954019X](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Black-Hole-The-Makings-Legend/dp/004954019X)



# Making 'Vodcasts' to teach about Social Work student's interventions whilst on placement.

Contributed by Barbara Coulson, Social Work and Professional Practice



Thanks to the Student Participation in Undergraduate Research (SPUR) scheme, the social work course now has 18 new short video clips (Vodcasts) to use in teaching. With ethical approval, two second year student researchers Karen James and Tim Loudoun interviewed six of their colleagues during their summer vacation asking three very specific questions. The answers were skilfully edited so that the students' stories about their placement experience were captured in an engaging but professional way. The researchers used the facilities in the Chaucer Media-Suite under Phil Wane's expert guidance. With some file transfer techniques the finalised clips are in an MP4 format compatible with the teaching rooms. The researchers also provided summaries of the narratives and verbatim transcripts that can be used for adding subtitles and for coding purposes. One of the clips was piloted in September to prepare the returning

first year student cohort for their placements. The 5 minute video clip gave the student's account of a successful intervention involving using the organisation's safeguarding policy to stop a service user being financially abused by his step-father. The student empowered and enabled the client to challenge his step-father and cooperate with his mother to retrieve his bank card, change his PIN and thus gain control over his own money.

This example of a real-life situation was used to identify the skills and knowledge that could be demonstrated whilst on placement. The students regarded the exercise very positively with quotes such as "It helps me as I am able to relate it to what is expected of me at the end of the placement" and "It enabled us to link practice to written theory".

Mick Wilkinson and I will be continuing to use clips in our

teaching with the new first years to illustrate a variety of theoretical issues and introduce them to the type of experiences they might encounter when they start their placement. A new national curriculum means undergraduate social work placements now start in their second year, so these Vodcasts are a brilliant form of preparation.

Working with SPUR students bought a wealth of youthful experience and energy that enlivened the project and made it happen. They gained expertise in interviewing, recording, researching and presenting to take forward into their next placement and ultimately their social work careers.

An excellent learning opportunity with productive outcomes that will inform future teaching and learning.



# Internet addiction in Psychotherapy

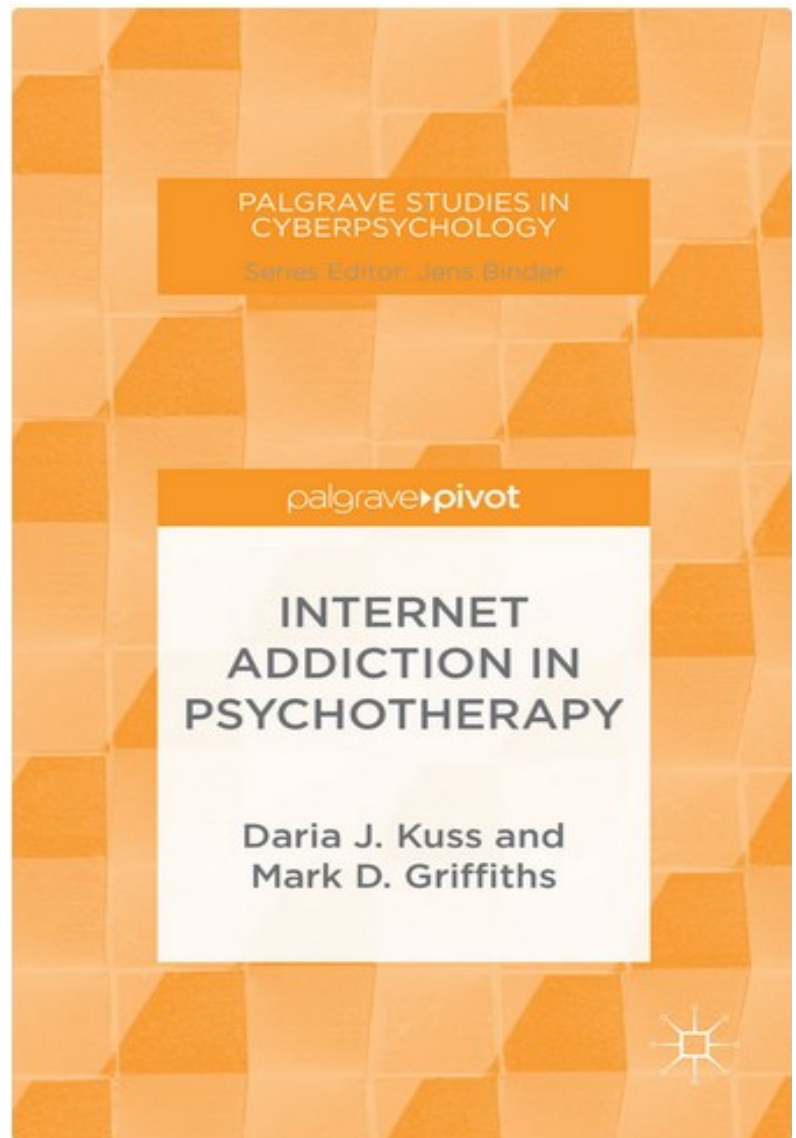
Dr Daria Kuss

Daria Kuss has published her second book, *Internet addiction in psychotherapy*, together with Mark Griffiths, as part of the Palgrave Pivot Cyber psychology series, which is edited by Jens Binder. Following on from her first book *For the Horde!* (Lambert Academic Publishing), where she described how playing the online game World of Warcraft reflects participation in popular media culture, in her new book, she explores expert psychotherapists' understanding of Internet addiction.

Internet addiction has gained increasing scientific recognition in the last decade, with some researchers claiming it is a '21st Century epidemic'. Literature addressing its treatment is scarce, and there is little consensus among experts as to the most effective intervention. *Internet addiction in psychotherapy* aims to fill the gap by exploring how Internet addiction therapy experts experience the presenting problem of Internet addiction in psychotherapy. A total of 20 psychotherapists from six different countries (Germany, Austria, Switzerland, UK, USA, and Canada) were interviewed regarding their individual experience of treating patients suffering from Internet addiction. Data were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Two superordinate themes were identified during the analysis: "risk" and "addiction".

The first superordinate theme represents the individual, situational and structural factors that may put a person at risk for developing Internet addiction. The second superordinate theme noted Internet addiction as actual psychopathology, containing addiction symptoms, criteria and diagnosis, and drawing on the similarities of Internet addiction with other addictions. The Internet addiction therapy experts highlighted the existence and severity of Internet addiction as discrete psychopathology requiring professional therapy. The findings establish a relevant knowledge base of potential problems related to Internet overuse.

Single chapters and the full book can be viewed and ordered at [www.palgrave.com/page/detail/internet-addiction-in-psychotherapy-daria-j-kuss/?K=9781137465061](http://www.palgrave.com/page/detail/internet-addiction-in-psychotherapy-daria-j-kuss/?K=9781137465061)



# The Self and the Non-Self: Applications of Buddhist Philosophy in Psychotherapy

Contributed by William Van Gordon, Edo Shonin, and Mark D. Griffiths  
Division of Psychology, Nottingham Trent University

Psychological approaches to treating mental illness or improving psychological wellbeing are invariably based on the explicit or implicit understanding that there is an intrinsically existing 'self' or 'I' entity. In other words, regardless of whether a cognitive-behavioural, psychodynamic, or humanistic psychotherapy treatment model is employed, these approaches are ultimately concerned with changing how the 'I' relates to its thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, and/or to its physical, social, and spiritual environment. Although each of these psychotherapeutic modalities have been shown to have utility for improving psychological health, there are inevitably limitations to their effectiveness and there will always be those individuals for whom they are incompatible. Given such limitations, research continuously attempts to identify and empirically validate more effective, acceptable and/or diverse treatment approaches. One such approach gaining momentum is the use of techniques that derive from Buddhist contemplative practice. Although mindfulness is arguably the most popular and empirically researched example, there is also growing interest into the psychotherapeutic applications of Buddhism's 'non-self' ontological standpoint (in which ontology is basically the philosophical study of the nature or essence of being, existence, or reality).

Within Buddhism, the term 'non-self' refers to the realisation that the 'self' or the 'I' is absent of inherent existence. On first inspection, this might seem to be a somewhat abstract concept but it is actually common sense and the principle of 'non-self' is universal in its application. For example, Buddhism teaches that the human body comprises the five elements of water, wind (i.e., air), earth (i.e., food), sun (i.e., heat/energy), and space (i.e., in the bodily cavities and between molecules, etc.). This means that although the body exists in the relative sense, it does not exist in the absolute sense because the body cannot be isolated from all of its contributing causes. Just as a wave does not exist in separation from the ocean, the body does not exist in separation from all other phenomena. According to the Buddhist teachings, when looking at the body, we should also be able to see the trees, plants, animals, clouds, rivers, oceans, planets, and so forth. Thus, the body, and indeed the entire array of animate and inanimate phenomena that we know of, cannot be found to exist intrinsically or independently.

The Buddhist teachings go on to assert that suffering, including the entire spectrum of distressing emotions and psychopathologic states (including 'addiction'), results from adhering to a false view about the ultimate manner in which the self (and reality more generally) exists. As a means of operationalising this notion within Western psychological and clinical domains, we recently introduced the concept of 'ontological addiction'. Ontological addiction can effectively be considered a new category of addiction (i.e., in addition to what are typically called chemical addictions and behavioural addictions) and we have previously defined it as **"the unwillingness to relinquish an erroneous and deep-rooted belief in an inherently existing 'self' or 'I' as well as the 'impaired functionality' that arises from such a belief"**. Due to a firmly-embedded (yet scientifically and logically implausible) belief that the self is an inherent and independently existing entity, Buddhism asserts that afflictive mental states arise as a result of the imputed 'self' incessantly craving after objects it considers to be attractive or harbouring aversion towards objects it considers to be unattractive.

In Buddhist terminology, this process is known as 'attachment' and it is deemed to be an undesirable quality that reinforces ontological addiction. We have previously defined attachment as **"the over-allocation of cognitive and emotional resources towards a particular object, construct, or idea to the extent**

**that the object is assigned an attractive quality that is unrealistic and that exceeds its intrinsic worth".** Thus, attachment takes on a different meaning in Buddhism in relation to its construction in Western psychology where attachment (i.e., in the context of relationships) is generally considered to exert a protective influence over psychopathology.

Having understood from a Buddhist perspective that attachment (and harbouring an erroneous belief in an inherently existing self) is not advisable for adaptive psycho-spiritual functioning, Buddhism teaches that the next step towards recovery from ontological addiction is to embrace 'non-self' and begin deconstructing our mistaken belief regarding the existence of an 'I'. Based on this Buddhist approach, a number of novel psychotherapeutic techniques have recently been developed that integrate meditative practices aimed at cultivating an understanding of the 'non-self' construct. For example, Buddhist Group Therapy is a six-week program that has been shown to be effective for treating anxiety and depression. Another example is an intervention we developed called Meditation Awareness Training (MAT). MAT is an eight-week secular program that, in a number of separately published studies, has been shown to be an effective treatment for individuals with anxiety and depression, schizophrenia, pathological gambling, workaholics, work-related stress, and fibromyalgia.

From a mechanistic point of view, greater awareness of 'non-self' is believed to assist in gradually uprooting egoistic core beliefs and can complement therapeutic techniques that work at the surface level of behaviour and cognition. Furthermore, an understanding of non-self can enhance therapeutic core conditions because **the more the therapist understands and embodies the concept of non-self, the less likelihood that the therapy will be about the selfhood of the therapist.**

For some, Buddhist concepts such as non-self may be difficult to conceptually grasp and reflect what might be seen as a paradigm shift when compared with well-established Western psychological beliefs regarding the ego and the self. As such, psychotherapists will carefully need to assess the suitability of utilising 'non-self' meditative techniques for their own clients. Although further empirical evaluation of these new approaches is required, preliminary findings indicate that techniques aimed at cultivating an awareness of the Buddhist 'non-self' construct may have applications in psychotherapy settings.

### Further Reading

Chan, W. S. (2008). Psychological attachment, no-self and Chan Buddhist mind therapy. *Contemporary Buddhism, 9*, 253-264.

Shonin, E., Van Gordon W., & Griffiths, M. D. (2013). Buddhist philosophy for the treatment of problem gambling. *Journal of Behavioural Addictions, 2*, 63-71.

Shonin, E., Van Gordon W., & Griffiths, M. D. (2014). The emerging role of Buddhism in clinical psychology: Towards effective integration. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality, 6*, 123-137.

Van Gordon, W., Shonin, E., Sumich, A., Sundin, E., & Griffiths, M. D. (2013). Meditation Awareness Training (MAT) for psychological wellbeing in a sub-clinical sample of university students: A controlled pilot study. *Mindfulness, 5*, 381-391.

Van Gordon, W., Shonin, E., Griffiths, M. D., & Singh, N. N. (2015). There is only one mindfulness: Why science and Buddhism need to work together. *Mindfulness*, DOI 10.1007/s12671-014-0379-y.

### Acknowledgement

This article is adapted from content that was first published by the authors on the Meditation Practice and Research Blog at [www.edoshonin.com](http://www.edoshonin.com)





## Citizens, Parties and Political Action: Political Participation and the General Election 2015

The Division of Politics and International Relations held its fourth research conference within the last 12 months when it hosted the ***Citizens, Parties and Political Action: Political Participation and the General Election 2015*** conference on Wednesday 4 February.

The 2015 General Election is only months away and promises to be the most unpredictable contest in the modern era. The Westminster parties are under threat from rival parties emerging from the margins. The electorate is increasingly sceptical of the ability of political parties to offer clear solutions to bring an end to austerity politics - and who they will vote for (and indeed whether they will vote at all) is at this stage an open question. This conference provided an ideal and timely opportunity to discuss cutting-edge research that considers all of these matters, asking questions about how the health of British democracy might be improved, and whether there are possibilities to fix the developing rift between citizens and mainstream democratic politics. There were three panels, including international speakers on the following topics:

- Beyond the mainstream: The emergence of 'new' parties across Europe
- Political participation, political movements and parties
- Mobilising political action: The challenges of political participation inequalities.

In addition, there was a panel of experts and local politicians who considered the crucial question at our afternoon roundtable, "*Should 16 and 17 year olds be given the vote?*"



# Emergency Services Research Unit – Emergency Services Conference

The latest biennial Emergency Services Conference was held on Tuesday 11 November 2014. Hosted and organised by the School's Emergency Services Research Unit, the event aimed to create a space for all emergency services practitioners, and academics to come together and share research, knowledge and practical concerns. This year's event brought together academics from all across the UK, and Europe, from the USA and Canada, as well as practitioners from all the traditional blue light services.

**"Thanks for a great conference... it feels like a community gathering, which I think is very special." Kim Hagen, Trilateral Research and Consulting.**

The Conference awards the Anne Eyre Award for distinguished contribution to emergencies related endeavour. This year we were very pleased to be able to acknowledge the work of Professor Robert E. England of Oklahoma State University, who has done a vast amount of practical and academic good for the international fire service community. The conference was also very pleased that O2 offered a prize for the best Practitioner Paper on Communications, which was awarded to Steve Chu, Head of Strategy and Engagement at South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service.



# Upcoming conference

Middle East and North Africa Research Cluster Second Annual Conference (MENA)

## Regional Integration vs National Disintegration in the Post-Arab Spring Middle East and North Africa

**Date:** Thursday 9 April 2015

**Time:** 9 am - 5.30 pm

**Location:** Nottingham Trent University, City site

The national and transnational challenges that have emerged since the uprisings in 2011 that are commonly referred to as 'the Arab Spring' – in particular the increase in extremism, and the emergence and intensification of civil wars – have garnered significant attention in both media coverage and academic research. However, simultaneous (and far older) processes of regional integration – in varying forms from free trade agreements like the Greater Arab Free Trade Area, to economic and political union like the Gulf Cooperation Council – have also been influenced by the changes of the past four years.

This one day interdisciplinary conference is aimed at a broad audience of academics, practitioners and students interested in the contemporary MENA. The conference will explore the processes of change currently shaping the MENA. This conference aims to draw together research from different fields (including International Relations, International Political Economy, Middle Eastern Studies, History, Business and Law) in order to explore how far the changes shaping the MENA are leading to the region's polarisation between states that are integrating politically and economically with each other on the one hand, and states that are disintegrating internally on the other.

The event will run over one day and will consist of six panels running over three panel slots (two in the morning and one in the afternoon) followed by a keynote speaker session in the afternoon.

Find out more at [www.ntu.ac.uk/mena2015](http://www.ntu.ac.uk/mena2015)





# Interview with Dominic Holland, Research Assistant in the School of Social Sciences

## What is your particular area of research?

"At the moment I'm working in the fields of heterodox political economy – especially Marxist social theory – and dialectical critical realist philosophy."

## Please tell us about your research background.

"My research background is interdisciplinary. I completed an undergraduate degree in economics at the University of Cambridge but dissatisfaction with the mathematical formalism of orthodox economics led me towards heterodox political economy and critical realist philosophy of science which I studied when completing a Master's degree in Research Methods in Politics at the University of Sheffield. I stayed in the Department of Politics at Sheffield in order to conduct my doctoral research on the problem of interdisciplinarity. This research was both social scientific and philosophical in its approach to the problem and included case studies of research in classical and contemporary political economy. If I had to define myself, I would say that I am a social scientist who engages in problem-driven research – which means that I draw on concepts and theories from a range of disciplines in order to answer a question of interest."

## What are your current research projects/activities?

"I'm working on two projects: one on developing a culture of engagement amongst undergraduate students in the Division of Politics and International Relations, the other (which I'm working on in my own time) on explaining political disengagement in Britain and other industrialized countries. Political disengagement is the process whereby certain citizens decide not to participate in formal political practices such as voting in a general election, campaigning for a political party and contacting a political representative about an issue of concern."

## What sparked your interest in your current research topic?

"I became interested in the phenomenon of political disengagement on discovering that leading political scientists (such as Gerry Stoker at Southampton) had admitted that they were struggling to explain this phenomenon. I've always been attracted to research challenges, which the problem of political disengagement certainly is."

## Which aspects of research do you find the most interesting?

"The most interesting aspect is definitely the generation and analysis of data. For my doctoral research on interdisciplinarity I conducted in-depth interviews with researchers who either had engaged or were engaging in interdisciplinary research in the social sciences. It was fascinating to hear what they had to say about the social and intellectual pressures on them and how they negotiated these in their working lives."

## What is the one piece of research that you are most proud of and why?

"I produced an article on the relationship between the economic and the political in Marxian political economy last year for Historical Materialism. It's an immanent critique of recent attempts by leading Marxist social theorists to overcome the problem of reductionism in Marxist social theorising. I argue that the problem still exists (despite their efforts), identify the causes of the problem and show how adopting a dialectical critical realist social ontology solves it. I'm pleased with my argument – whatever the reviewers will say – because I think I've found a solution to a problem which has affected Marxist social theorising for over one hundred years."

## How do you envisage building on your research activity at NTU?

"I'm hoping to widen my range of expertise in research methods. The project I'm working on in conjunction with Dr. Kevin Love (how to develop a culture of student engagement in higher education through partnership) will help me to do this as we'll be generating qualitative data through focus groups, a method of inquiry I've not had much opportunity to use. I'm also looking forward to finding out more about the work of other researchers across the School of Social Sciences. I'm always interested in what other researchers are doing: I find I gain inspiration for my own work through talking to them."

# Dates for your diary

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**Spring bank holiday** - 25 May

**Examinations (four week block)** - 11 May – 5 June

**End of academic year** - 5 June

**Clear weeks to Graduation week** - 6 weeks

**Graduation** - 20 - 24 July

**Examinations** - 1 September – 11 September

**Welcome Week** - 25 December

**Term One starts (10 weeks UG and PG)** - 5 October

## Next issue: MAY 2015

If you wish to contribute to the next issue of the newsletter, then please contact Claire de Motte:  
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