

Ψ SYCHOUT

ISSUE 13



PSYCHOLOGY MYTHOLOGY

Illustration courtesy of Owen Davey

ΨSYCHOUT

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Please note, this magazine is written and edited by students of the Department of Psychology, University of York. Views reflect the position of our individual writers and are not the official position of the University or Department.

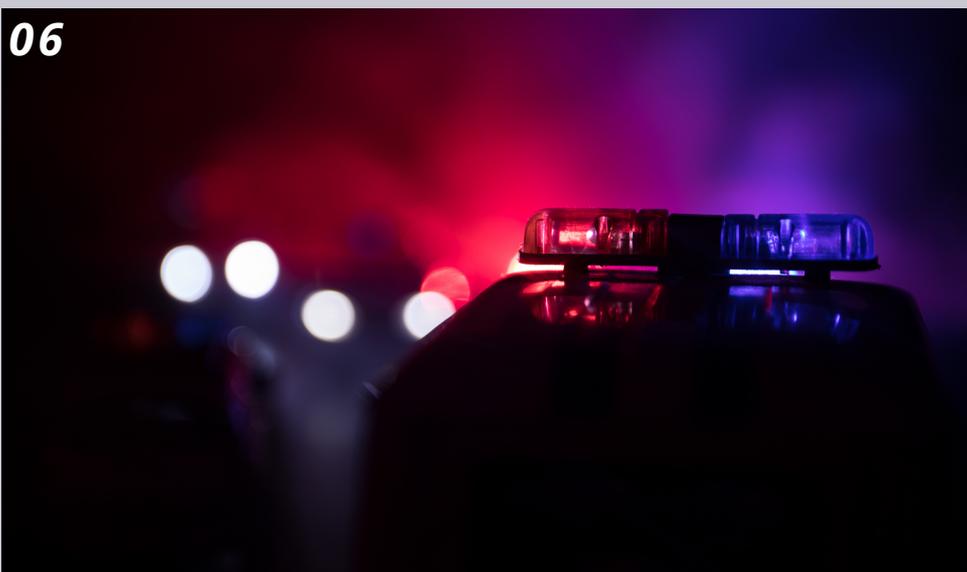
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EDITOR'S NOTE

From the connection between music genre and intelligence to the misrepresentation of forensic psychology in true crime dramas, this issue of PsychOut explores some of the greatest misconceptions surrounding psychology.



As you've probably guessed from the cover, this issue of PsychOut is all about misconceptions commonly held in the field of psychology. The scope of this issue is wide; from life as a mental health support worker to the link between music and intelligence! PsychOut also features misconceptions about forensic psychology that have been fueled by true crime dramas and an interview with one of York's very own PhD students who addresses the misconceptions surrounding postgraduate study. We would like to thank all the writers for their outstanding contribution to this newest issue of PsychOut and can't wait to publish more of their work.

We hope all our readers are well and staying positive!

LUCY STAFFORD & STACEY PROUD

Editors



PREVIOUS ISSUES

Find past issues of Psychout at:

<https://www.york.ac.uk/psychology/news-and-events/psychoutstudentmagazine/>

All references from this issue are also available online.

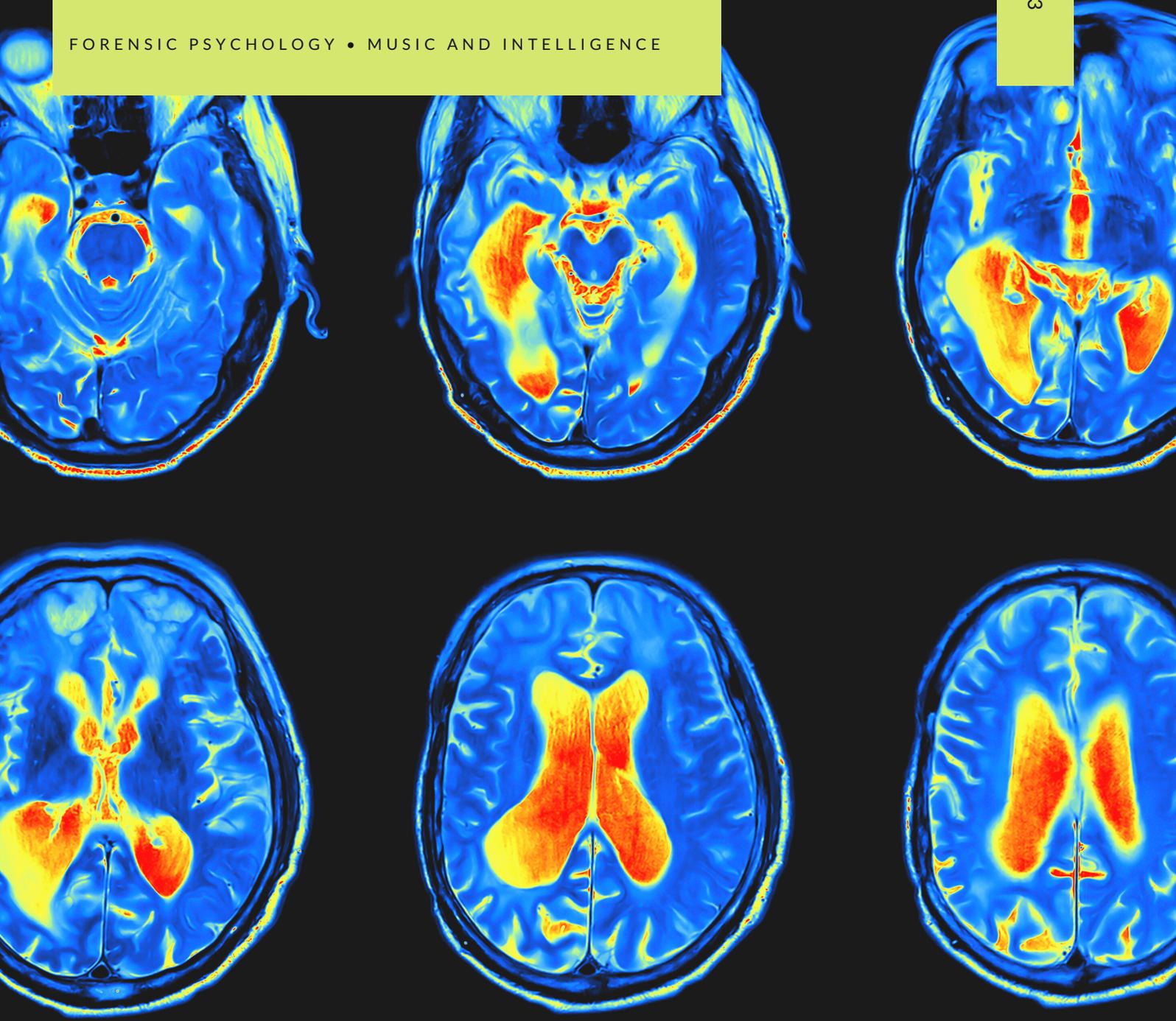


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Features

FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY • MUSIC AND INTELLIGENCE

ISSUE 13



FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY

True crime dramas and the misinformation they spread



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MUSIC AND INTELLIGENCE

Can classical music boost intelligence?



THE TRUTH ABOUT FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY

By Charlotte West

There is no doubt that in the last few years the popularity of true crime dramas has risen drastically, with platforms such as Netflix providing viewers with a detailed analysis into serial killers such as Ted Bundy, and leaving us with unanswered questions like - who killed JonBenet Ramsey? I myself am a huge fan of these series, but there is no doubt that what we see on the screen is not exactly what happens in everyday life. There are plenty of misconceptions surrounding forensic psychology, but I will touch on just a few.

One of the major misconceptions about forensic psychologists is the idea that they come into a criminal investigation and solve the crime. Forensic psychologists do work on criminal cases but this is mainly related to evaluating the mental health of defendants and witnesses - they do not decide who did what. Sometimes, they may work as advisors, such as the famous forensic psychologist Paul Britton, but they are not crime solvers. They have a psychological understanding which is then applied to a legal setting.

Charlotte west explains the misrepresentation of forensic psychology in popular true crime dramas.

"Forensic psychologists do not extract confessions from offenders."

"Almost all serial murderers showed organisation to some extent; they can instead be differentiated by the way they interact with victims."

Most likely stemming from the representation of forensic psychologists in the media, many believe that their only job is to interrogate criminals and solve murders. Forensic psychologists can help with criminal cases, but for the most part this is to evaluate if a defendant can stand trial or if a claim of insanity can be held – they do not extract confessions from offenders, which is a common misconception. Evaluations can also occur in civil cases (e.g. evaluating a disorder such as depression) or domestic cases (e.g. investigating if parents are fit to raise children in a custody case).

Criminal profiling, also known as 'behavioural profiling', 'psychological profiling' and 'offender profiling', is a topic debated on heavily due to conflicting evidence. The general idea behind profiling is that after a crime is committed, a profiler can then assess the crime scene, victimology and interviews to create a profile of the characteristics of the offender.

It has been argued that the increasing popularity of this idea has outgrown the scientific evidence it stands on, with it being described as "little better than astrology" (Ainsworth, 2001).

In 1978, the FBI began a formal profiling process that included the 'organised/disorganised dichotomy', which suggested criminals were either organised (planned crime with little evidence at the scene) or disorganised (unplanned crime with forensic evidence left at the crime scene, suspect typically younger). However, their profiling system can be criticised for relying on an officer's experience rather than actual psychological evidence. Recently, psychologists have become more involved in profiling research in an attempt to increase the credibility of the concept. Canter tested the FBI's organised-disorganised model on 100 homicides and found that almost all serial murderers showed organisation to some extent: they can instead be differentiated by the way they interact with victims. Research using statistical tests such as that by Canter is will hopefully bring back some credibility to profiling.

The effects of these misconceptions have been studied in a piece of research by Julia Shaw and Michael Woodworth, who investigated how misconceptions surrounding forensic psychology related to punitive sentencing and tough-on-crime beliefs. Before and after an introduction to forensic psychology course, participants completed a questionnaire which assessed their misconceptions and then were asked to decide sentences for mock-jury scenarios. Overall, misconception endorsement decreased from 32% to 21% after taking part in the course. For example, endorsement for the statement 'we need to be tough on crime by giving convicted felons harsher punishment' went from 60% to 26%, suggesting a lack of knowledge about the justice system leads to more punitive beliefs.

Being a forensic psychologist actually involves applying clinical psychological knowledge to the justice system, and this can be in civil or criminal cases. This would include giving examinations of an individual's mental state, violence risk assessments, jury selection, child custody cases and civil law. Forensic psychologists do not only work in prisons and courts but can be seen in hospitals and mental health centres.



CLASSICAL MUSIC MAKES YOU SMARTER?

Explaining the greatest misconception regarding the relationship between listening to music and cognitive function.

By Bethany Bradford

Music has a huge presence in the human world; many of us barely go a day without hearing some piece of music. We use music to wake us up in the morning, to keep us company while travelling, and some of us even use it to help us fall asleep. As students, one of the biggest ways we use music is by listening to it when we study, either to alleviate boredom or maintain focus. For me, music is the driving force behind my studies and I'm sure that I'm not the only one who feels this way. But does listening to music actually help? Rumour has it that listening to classical music, especially music composed by Mozart, makes you smarter. This is known as the "Mozart Effect". But don't be fooled- this is one of the biggest misconceptions about the relationship between music and cognitive function.

The Mozart Effect is a phenomenon whose popularity originated from a study run by Rauscher, Shaw and Ky (1993). Rauscher et al. conducted a study to investigate whether listening to music had any effect on participants' spatial reasoning skills.



"A Governor of Georgia in the USA proposed a budget of \$105,000 a year that would ensure every child born in that state would be provided a CD of classical music."

The results from this study revealed improvements in spatial-temporal reasoning skills for participants after listening to music composed by Mozart, but not for participants who listened to verbal relaxation instructions or experienced silence. Although there was no reference from the researchers to intelligence, it began to be widely claimed that listening to classical music can enhance the listener's intelligence, with this study being wrongly cited as evidence.

This is not the fault of the researchers, but the journalists who exaggerated this concept. Since then, the term "The Mozart Effect" has been trademarked by Don Campbell in order to sell related products, and the Mozart Effect even led to a Governor of Georgia in the USA to propose a budget of \$105,000 a year that would ensure every child born in that state would be provided a CD of classical music (yikes!). Even now, despite the fact that research continues to fail to replicate these findings, there are still people who truly believe that listening to classical music will boost their overall intelligence.

Nevertheless, just because the Mozart Effect is a huge misconception, this does not mean that there is no relationship between music and cognitive function. In fact, research has found both positive and negative ways that music impacts our cognitive functions. Knowing these positive and negative

impacts of music on cognitive performance is useful in the long run, especially if we want to use this knowledge to develop strategies for individuals who suffer from cognitive impairments. For example, Hallam and Price (1998) found that playing calming music led to improvements in mathematics for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. It has also been reported that introducing soft background music into a classroom for the purpose of enhancing pupil's attention has been especially beneficial for children with diagnosed attention difficulties (Pelham et al., 2011). Outside of an educational setting, researchers have also observed improvements in work performance when workers are allowed to listen to music compared to co-workers who weren't (Oldham et al., 1995; Lesiuk, 2005). On the other side of this, lyrical music interferes with the listener's language comprehension processes (Anderson & Fuller, 2010), and that unpleasant, aggressive music can have a negative effect on performance in memory tasks (Hallam, Price & Katsarou, 2002).

Despite the misconception surrounding The Mozart Effect, the field of psychology that investigates the relationships between music and cognitive function is still a relatively small one and has a long way to go. However, what we've learnt so far could be used to inform education and medical practices and we should look forward to what this field of research is going to find in the future!

Psychology in Action

BEING A MENTAL HEALTH
SUPPORT WORKER

ISSUE 13



DUTIES

The responsibilities of a
mental health support worker



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BENEFITS

The rewards of being a
mental health support
worker



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT WORKER

By Maria Bano

A mental health support worker's role is to care for and assist adults with mental health issues. Working in mental health care can be unpredictable and challenging at times, especially when seeing patients deteriorate. There is not a 'one size fits all' rule, even for people suffering from the same condition. I provide more than just care, I also assist

patients in their everyday life. Depending on the patient, this may include waking people up in the morning, helping them build a healthy routine, being someone to rely on, and providing encouragement when trying something new or intimidating. Being observant and trusting your own judgements are therefore essential skills.



“Patients, with the help of recovery and support workers, explore their condition in depth and open up about feelings or experiences that they might otherwise find hard to share.”

I have worked as a support worker for almost a year now in a residential care home that provides a therapeutic community setting for adults struggling with mental health. What I appreciate most about my role is my involvement in encouraging development, well-being and independence for the residents. One of the first things I learned when I began this job was the importance of facilitating a supportive community for the residents. This is because while support from their families and friends is undoubtedly positive, societal attitudes are less understanding. Consequently, the organization I work for places emphasis not only on supporting an individual's mental health recovery, but also improving all aspects of their lives impacted by their disorder, such as their physical and social well-being. This means my day to day work can vary considerably. Some days I'll assist in group and individual recovery sessions, teach basic skills such as cooking, cleaning, healthy eating or assist in establishing an all-round healthy lifestyle by playing sports or hiking in the countryside. The individual and group sessions generally focus on recovery. This is where patients, with the help of recovery and support workers, explore their condition in depth and open up about feelings or experiences that they might otherwise find hard to

share. For instance, in the 'Hearing Voices Group' people share their experiences and interactions they have had with their voices. There are also sessions that explore individual interests, hobbies and educational abilities through 1-1 conversations. My role can be to encourage the residents to pursue these interests, while incorporating stimulating activities into their day to day routine, enabling them to reach their highest potential.

This experience has helped me develop many skills. These skills include working and communicating effectively within a team, but also with residents to ensure a strong rapport has been built between us. However, it is sometimes important to be firm when encouraging patients to break out of their comfort zone. My organizational, multitasking and punctuality skills have also been refined through having to operate within a strict time schedule.

Although the role of a mental health worker can be difficult at times, it is a highly rewarding job. Seeing the residents progress and take positive steps towards recovery, and knowing you have been part of it, is extremely fulfilling. Being part of a reliant, welcoming, supportive and compassionate team has made the whole experience worthwhile and one I would highly recommend.

Interview Exclusive

POSTGRADUATE STUDY AT THE UNIVERSITY
OF YORK

ISSUE 13



PhD MISCONCEPTIONS

What postgraduate study is
really like



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POSTGRADUATE CAREER PLANS

Academia isn't for everyone



INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

"YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE INTELLIGENT TO DO A PHD"

PhD student Jamie Cockcroft sits down with writers Lucy Stafford and Hannah Paish to debunk the largest myth to plague postgraduate study.

Firstly, we'd like to get to know you a bit more. Can you tell us a little bit about yourself and your work?

I was first drawn to York by the prospects of conducting my research with Aidan Horner. I have been a PhD student here at York for about 1 and a half years. In that time, my research has been primarily concerned with the cognitive neuroscience and neuroimaging branch of psychology. More specifically, my research has focused on how memory is used day to day and how it guides our future. I'm aiming to have completed my PhD within 3 years, meaning I have another 1 and a half years on my research speciality. Alongside my research, I also teach in the department. At the moment, I mostly teach the research methods and statistics module, which I have surprisingly enjoyed!

What have you enjoyed the most about your PhD journey?

As I've mentioned, I have really enjoyed teaching the department's undergraduate students all about research methods and statistics. My teaching is done primarily through tutorial groups, so it's been really nice to supplement the lectures they attend and really develop their appreciation for statistics. I love statistics, so I'm more than eager to foster their own enthusiasm for it. I've also enjoyed all the challenges I've faced, such as computer programming, because they've taught me new skills. In fact, I can now code in 3 different languages, which essentially means I can code for 3 different programmes. Another huge part of my PhD that I've enjoyed is the opportunity to work on my own project. As an undergraduate student, you



often move through your own degree contributing to a research idea that has been conceived by someone else. But being a PhD student gives you a newfound freedom to conduct research on an area that you're personally passionate about, which is really refreshing.

What have been some of the biggest challenges you've faced in your PhD?

I would have to say that the biggest challenge I've faced is independence, in the sense that it's your own responsibility to structure your days and decide how flexible your routine can be. It's particularly daunting because it's so different from what I've grown

familiar to! Both my undergraduate and masters degree were taught, meaning I was routinely told where to go, what to learn, and how to excel in my assessed work. Now, it's very much up to me how much work I do and when I do it, which requires me to monitor my own self-control and discipline so I'm on track to complete my PhD within 3 years. Another challenge is being able to accept that I don't always know what is going on, especially in supervision meetings. In the early stages of my PhD, I was guilty of pretending to know what my supervisor was talking about. Now, I have the self-confidence to speak up when I don't understand something and ask for help, which is what a supervisor is there to do! A final challenge I've faced is imposter syndrome. Being

surrounded by such gifted academics can sometimes allow feelings of self-doubt to creep in, so imposter syndrome is definitely something I've had to deal with.

What do you think are some of the most common misconceptions about doing a PhD?

Intelligence: you don't have to be intelligent to do a PhD. Of course, it helps, but it's more about time management and diligence. Also, you don't need to know everything at the start. You're still a student who's there to learn, a lot of people think when they apply that they need to be able to do everything from the word go but that's not the case, you shouldn't be. If you are, there's no point doing a PhD!



PICK THE SUPERVISOR, NOT THE INSTITUTION. YOU'LL BE WORKING WITH THEM VERY CLOSELY FOR THREE YEARS, SO IF YOU DON'T GET ALONG WITH THEM I WOULDN'T RECOMMEND APPLYING



Another misconception is that you're guaranteed to stay in academia: only about 3% of people stay in academia after completing the qualification. That's often the route people are aiming towards but it isn't the route for everyone. The PhD is to develop skills and make yourself more employable.

What are your current career plans?

I think I'll either stay and do more research as a Postdoc, or the more likely option is that I'll become a data analyst as I'm really into statistics.

Any advice for people applying for a PhD?

Pick the supervisor, not the institution. You'll be working with them very closely for three years, so if you don't get along with them I wouldn't recommend applying even if it's

at a very prestigious university. Also, look at what the university offers in terms of support for you, such as the good mental health program that York has in place. It's more about looking at what's available at the institution rather than its reputation. For example, I wanted to do neuroimaging so I chose York because it has YNIC. Another important thing is to be sure that you want to do a PhD for the right reasons since you'll be spending three years on a very specific topic, so make sure that it's something you're interested in and will allow you to stay motivated. Something I regret is not getting research experience after my degrees or not taking time out of academia to do research assistant jobs to get an idea of what a research environment is like. This kind of experience can help you decide whether a PhD is right for you. It's also worth looking at funding and the terms and conditions of it so that you know what the policies are for things such as sickness pay.

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