



FALL 2014 MEMBERS

# Anxiety Studies Division Annual FALL Newsletter

## IN THIS ISSUE

## New in the Anxiety Studies Division

As we approach our fifth year we are excited to share a new endeavour to keep you updated with the Anxiety Studies Division (ASD). Please enjoy our first yearly newsletter to catch you up on our current studies, recent findings and publications, and other exciting news, available also on our website ([www.uwaterloo.ca/anxiety-studies](http://www.uwaterloo.ca/anxiety-studies)).

In this and future newsletters, you can expect to hear about our current studies and some of our recently completed studies. If you would like to suggest the ASD to a friend or

family member please invite them call or email us at 519-888-4567 ext. 35920 or [anxiety@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:anxiety@uwaterloo.ca) - we are always looking for more valued members of our research participant pool!

### DO YOU NEED TO UPDATE YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION?

Send an email to [anxiety@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:anxiety@uwaterloo.ca) to update your phone numbers or email addresses.



### Research Findings

Hear about the exciting results and conclusions from two of our latest studies which were made possible by your generous participation - Pages 2 & 3.



### Current Studies

We are currently recruiting participants from the ASD for three paid studies: "Evaluations of strangers study", the "Memories and images study" and "Associations among anxiety, mood, and attentional processes". We are emailing and calling eligible ASD members to invite you to participate based on your response profiles. If you receive an email or phone call from us, please do let us know whether you are interested in participating!

**Research Findings:** *Self-portrayal concerns mediate the relationship between recalled teasing and social anxiety symptoms in adults with anxiety disorders*

by Colleen Merrifield, Daniel Balk, & David A. Moscovitch



Previous research on individuals with anxiety disorders has demonstrated that both childhood peer maltreatment (bullying, teasing, etc.) and concerns about negative self-portrayal (worries about revealing one's perceived self-flaws to others) are related to elevated symptoms of social anxiety. In this study, we examined whether and how concerns about negative self-portrayal might influence the relationship between recalled childhood teasing history and current symptoms of social anxiety in a sample of 238 individuals with anxiety disorders who were recruited through the Anxiety Studies Division (ASD) participant pool.

To investigate this issue, participants completed an in-depth diagnostic assessment with a trained interviewer and several self-report questionnaires. The results of the study demonstrated that self-portrayal concerns accounted for about half of the overall relationship between the frequency of recalled childhood teasing and current symptoms of social anxiety. These findings suggest that self-portrayal concerns may function as the "psychological glue" that binds together the frequently observed association between early encounters with teasing and later development or exacerbation of social anxiety symptoms.

These findings require replication and extension in future studies but may have important implications for understanding the specific psychological effects of early peer maltreatment and for developing and applying appropriate interventions in clinics, homes, and schools.

Merrifield, C., Balk, D., & Moscovitch, D.A. (2013). Self-portrayal concerns mediate the relationship between recalled teasing and social anxiety in adults with anxiety disorders. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 27, 456-460.

## Research Findings: *A Diary Study on Compulsions in OCD*

by Bianca Bucarelli & Christine Purdon

One aspect of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) that, surprisingly, remains poorly understood, is why a particular action is repeated, often to the point that doing so interferes with other important goals. In order to understand this puzzling phenomenon better we asked people who reported that they experienced obsessions and compulsions to keep a diary of their compulsions over three days, reporting on one compulsive episode every morning, afternoon and evening. We asked many questions about the compulsion, including how the decision to terminate it was made. To understand why compulsions persist better we divided people's compulsive episodes into those which had ended because the person felt "certain" or "certain enough" that it had been done properly, or that they had got "the right feeling" and those which were terminated because the person had no choice (had to get to work), someone reassured them or completed the task for them, or they got too tired to continue.



We reasoned that episodes in which certainty or the "right" feeling was achieved were "successful" in that they achieved the goal of the compulsion whereas those that ended for other reasons were "unsuccessful" because neither certainty nor the "right" feeling were obtained. We then compared "unsuccessful" compulsive episodes to "successful" compulsive episodes. Our results told us that compulsions were successful over 50% of the time - no wonder people use them! BUT what was really interesting was that the more often the compulsive act was performed, the LESS confidence people had in their memory for it and as to whether or not it had been done properly.

This tells us a few important things. First, compulsions are repeated NOT because people are silly, stupid, lacking in willpower, "sick" or damaged. Instead, compulsions are repeated because they work half of the time! If something works you are likely to repeat it. But, when it doesn't work, it REALLY doesn't work - we found that the more it is repeated, the LESS confidence people had in whether or not it had been done properly - which leads to more repetition. And then the obsession seems to take on greater importance, which makes it seem even more important to get the compulsion done right. All of this helps us better understand compulsions and alter our treatment for OCD so that people are better able to respond to obsessions in a way that doesn't interfere with other important things.

Bucarelli & Purdon (2014). More is definitely less: A diary study of compulsions. Manuscript under review in the *Journal of Behaviour Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry*.