

Appearance Research News

The Newsletter of the Centre for
Appearance Research

ISSUE 1

Welcome to the first edition of Appearance Research News, the newsletter of the Centre for Appearance Research, University of the West of England, Bristol. In this issue, we have included a brief overview of our work and aims and a Who's Who of researchers working in the Centre together with our latest news and research outputs.

If you have any comments or suggestions about this newsletter, please contact us on (0117) 328 3967 or e mail Diana2.Harcourt@uwe.ac.uk.

Introducing: The Centre for Appearance Research

The Centre for Appearance Research (formerly the Centre for Appearance & Disfigurement Research (CADR)) was established in 1997 within the Department of Psychology in the University of the West of England (UWE) to focus on psychological and psycho-social issues associated with appearance and disfigurement.

Having an unusual appearance can be particularly difficult in a society that places a strong emphasis on physical appearance, and one in which we are constantly exposed to images of the idealised 'perfect' body and face. The psychological implications for people with visual differences can be immense. Contrary to common assumptions, the degree of distress is not related to the extent of the disfigurement (Rumsey 2001). Typical problems include reduced self-esteem and psychological well being, increased depression and self-consciousness, difficulty with social interactions and employing effective coping strategies, body image concerns and a detrimental impact upon quality of life. Furthermore, people with an altered appearance may suffer from bullying and discrimination (see Lansdown et al 1997).

But appearance-related concerns are by no means the sole prerogative of people with a visible disfigurement. Recent research on the type and extent of body image concerns in the general population highlight the pervasive nature of appearance-related distress. The demand for cosmetic surgery procedures amongst adults and adolescents is increasing in the UK. In addition, the multi-million pound cosmetic industry is testimony to the importance attached by non-disfigured people to their appearance.

Whilst the medical, surgical and cosmetic aspects of appearance and disfigurement have attracted much research funding and investigation over the years comparatively little research attention has focussed upon the psychological aspects, despite the scale of the problem. Historically, the research efforts in this field have been sporadic and disconnected.

The Centre for Appearance Research aims to enhance understanding of the psychosocial, educational and cultural aspects of appearance issues. It also aims to raise the profile of psychosocial issues amongst healthcare professionals and to inform the development of effective ways of delivering healthcare to both children and adults.

The past year has been an exciting time of major expansion for the Centre. The original members of the Centre have been joined by psychologists with expertise in qualitative methods (Kate Gleeson, Hannah Frith & Yvette Morey), applied health psychology research (Simon Murphy, Marianne Morris, Maggie Redshaw) psychophysiology (Chris Alford) to offer a coherent, cohesive

and multi-disciplinary approach to the study of human appearance and identity, including disfigurement.

We now consist of 3 research groups (Appearance & Disfigurement Group; Qualitative Research Group; Applied Health Psychology Group) to reflect the range of expertise of the staff working within the Centre.

We recently decided to change the name to the Centre for Appearance Research, because of the possible negative connotations around the word “disfigurement”. However, the needs of people who are visibly different are still central to the Centre’s aims.

The Centre has close collaborative links with the charity Changing Faces, North Bristol NHS Trust, Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, the charity the Healing Foundation, the Medical Research Council, Universities of Bristol, Manchester and faculties within UWE. Members of the centre serve on the NHSE’s Cleft Implementation Group, National Burns Care Review, National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) and the British Association of Plastic Surgeons.

A steering committee oversees the work of the Centre. The steering committee currently consists of Dr Richard Lansdown (Chair) formerly Consultant Psychologist and Head of Psychological Medicine, Great Ormond Street Hospital, Mr Christopher Ward, Consultant Plastic Surgeon, Dr Michael Ashley-Miller, formerly Secretary of the Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust, Mr Anthony Brown, Trustee Changing Faces & Professor Peter Hampson, Head of Department of Psychology, UWE.

Who's Who.....

The Centre for Appearance Research consists of the following members of staff:

- **Dr Nicky Rumsey** is Research Director of the Centre, with expertise in the psychosocial aspects of appearance and disfigurement
- **Dr Chris Alford** will be researching the psycho-physiological responses to faces depicted with or without squints
- **Dr Alex Clarke** is a clinical psychologist who has published widely in the field of disfigurement
- **Mick Emerson** has expertise in the psychological aspects of clefts
- **Dr Hannah Frith** explores people's use of clothing to express their identity
- **Anna Fussell**, research technician supporting a variety of research projects within the Centre
- **Dr Kate Gleeson** is well known for her expertise in qualitative methods and with a particular interest in clothing, self presentation and identity.
- **Dr Diana Harcourt** researches the psychological and appearance-related aspects of cancer diagnosis and treatment
- **Dr Priscilla Heard** is currently exploring psycho-physiological reactions to faces with or without visible differences
- **Emily Lovegrove** researches appearance-related concerns of adolescents and interventions to tackle appearance related bullying in secondary schools
- **Yvette Morey** is researching youth clothing practices and identity
- **Dr Marianne Morris** is particularly interested in the appearance-related aspects of chronic conditions, especially diabetes.
- **Dr Simon Murphy** has expertise in the psychological aspects of health behaviour and health promotion, currently developing projects on sun-tanning behaviour and the appearance of companion robots
- **Dr James Partridge** is founder and Executive Director of the charity Changing Faces and Finance Director of CAR
- **Claire Phillips** is currently researching the extent and type of psychosocial needs amongst burns-affected patients
- **Dr Maggie Redshaw's** research interests include appearance-related concerns across the life-span and the psychosocial impact of the birth of a child with a visible difference

In addition, a number of PhD and Msc students are conducting research in the area of appearance. These include **Amanda Bates, Claire Gilbert, Clare Griffiths, Sue Jackson, Habib Naqvi and Anna Winterbottom.**

Good News!!!!!!

**** Funding Successes ****

Congratulations to Nicky Rumsey who has successfully obtained funding of \$197,000 from the United States Department of Health & Human Services for a 3-year multi-centre study examining the quality of life of adolescents with congenital and acquired conditions affecting the head and/or neck area. The application, submitted in conjunction with researchers from the University of Washington, Seattle, reflects and strengthens the Centre's international reputation. The three year project is due to start in July 2002.

Congratulations also to Kate Gleeson and Hannah Frith who have been awarded £9,928 by the Arts & Humanities Research Board for a project titled Visual and Textual Representations of Identity.

RAE success:

Four members of the Centre, Nicky Rumsey, Simon Murphy, Maggie Redshaw & Chris Alford were entered for the latest Universities Research Assessment Exercise under the category Professions Allied to Medicine for which a 3A rating was obtained.

CAR Book:

Open University Press has invited members of the Centre for Appearance Research to write a book titled "The Psychology of Appearance and Disfigurement". It is due for completion at the end of 2003.

Forthcoming Events:

Conference:

The Centre for Appearance Research will be hosting a conference that will provide a forum for the discussion of appearance-related issues and promote innovative research and good practice in the area.

It will especially relevant to health care professionals, academics and researchers working in the areas of appearance and disfigurement. The conference is planned for 2003, further details will be available on the webpage shortly.

Seminars:

CAR will be hosting a series of seminars as part of the Faculty of Applied Sciences Faculty Research Seminar Programme, speakers confirmed so far include:

- Dr Michelle Crossley, author of “Re-thinking Health Psychology” (Open University Press) who will give a seminar on a critical approach towards health psychology;
- Dr Sarah Grogan of Staffordshire University and author of “Body Image” who will give a seminar on socio-cultural influences on body image;
- Dr David French of the Health Services Research, Psychology & Genetics Research Group at King’s College London. David will be presenting work that has examined perceptions of risk relating to coronary heart disease.

Look out for further details of these seminars.

Recent Research Outputs by CAR members:

Kate Gleeson and Hannah Frith were recent guests on a radio show hosted by Prof. Frank Burnett discussing the findings of their recent research exploring clothing and self presentation and the appearance related concerns of men.

The following papers have been accepted for publication:

Kleve, L. & Rumsey, N. (2002). The effectiveness of cognitive-behavioural interventions provided at Outlook: A disfigurement support unit, *Journal of Evaluation in Clinical Practice*, in press.

Rumsey, N. & Clarke, A. (2002). Meeting the appearance-related concerns of dermatology patients, *Journal of Dermatology Nursing*, in press.

Harcourt, D. & Rumsey, N. The Psychological impact of mastectomy with or without breast reconstruction: a prospective, multi-centred study, *Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery*, in press.

Di Harcourt presented a poster on breast cancer patients’ decision-making about breast reconstruction at the 2002 Breakthrough Breast Cancer Conference in London.

Yvette Morey presented a paper titled “clothing diaries as method: truth or performance” at the Annual UWE Psychology Postgraduate Conference in Bristol.

Kate Gleeson & Hannah Frith presented a paper titled “Clothing practices: getting noticed, negotiating the gaze” to the Women’s Research Group at Bristol University in May 2002.

Mick Emerson & Lynn Maddern presented a paper titled “Outcomes of a psychological intervention for children with a different appearance” at the Annual Scientific Meeting of the Craniofacial Society of Great Britain & Ireland in April 2002. At the same conference, Nicky Rumsey was an invited speaker and presented a paper titled “Changing the ethos of cleft care: the role of the psychologist”.

Nicky was also an invited speaker at the SW Regional Cleft Study Day where she presented a paper on the psychosocial needs of cleft-affected patients and at the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health Annual Conference, York where she gave a presentation titled “I don’t like the way I look: Meeting the needs of young people with appearance-related concerns”.

Nicky Rumsey also attended the American Cleft Palate/Craniofacial Association Annual Conference in Seattle where she presented two papers titled “Implementing a routine psychosocial audit: Comparison of a cleft and non-cleft sample” and “Developing the UK Standards of Psychological Care for Cleft- Affected Patients”.

On 15th May **Nicky Rumsey** and **James Partridge** appeared on the Gloria Hunniford show to talk about the charity Changing Faces’ work and its 10th anniversary.