

Conference Report  
**Diversity and Integration in Scottish Psychology and Evolution Research**  
Held Tuesday 7 February 2012 at the University of Stirling

This one-day meeting was held with the support of the University of Stirling and the European Human Behaviour and Evolution Association. The primary aim of the meeting was to encourage discussion between members of several prominent Scottish research groups in the human evolutionary behavioural sciences. We intended to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and expertise, particularly at postgraduate level, with the goal of facilitating mutually beneficial collaborative links across the research groups. Ten speakers gave presentations for an audience of 60 delegates. The speakers represented a total of six different academic departments in Scotland, as well as one English institution (Professor Robin Dunbar from the University of Oxford was invited as an external guest speaker).

The day began with a plenary lecture by Professor Dunbar, who discussed human social networks, and the importance of social support. Postgraduate speaker Mari McLeod of the University of Abertay stayed with this theme, talking about her research on the effects of social exclusion on young children within small groups. Completing the morning session, Kristen Knowles, a Stirling PhD student, presented her research involving the experimental manipulation of voice pitch, and its effect on memorability.

Professor Ben Jones of the University of Aberdeen opened the afternoon session by talking about his recent work on the effect of “eavesdropping” on encounters between other individuals on the perception of dominance, which took inspiration from studies of quail to generate hypotheses about human social responses. Postgraduate student Bill Thompson, of the University of Edinburgh, took us away from participant testing with a talk about his work modelling language evolution, which indicated that capacities for cultural transmission weaken selection for hard-wired learning biases. Another Edinburgh PhD student, Mark Adams, presented his research on personality and genetics. Dr Corey Fincher, a postdoctoral researcher from the University of Aberdeen, closed the early afternoon session with a presentation reviewing his studies on the relationship between parasite stress and international relations, which have shown that measures of in-group versus out-group social interaction can be predicted from exposure to pathogens in human populations.

Following a short break for some coffee and cake, Dr Thom Scott-Phillips of the University of Edinburgh addressed the question of the uniqueness of human language as a communication system: the combinatorial properties of human language are certainly unusual within animal communication systems, but not, it would seem, completely unique. In the penultimate talk of the meeting, St Andrews postgraduate Milena Dzhelyova presented her facial attractiveness research on the halo effect. The final presentation was given by Dr Lars Penke of the University of Edinburgh, who discussed the evolutionary genetics of individual differences.

The meeting certainly met its aims in terms of capturing the diversity of research in the human evolutionary behavioural sciences. The range of approaches represented across the Scottish research groups is striking (topics including cultural evolution, individual differences, sexual selection, behavioural genetics, and language evolution, and methods including laboratory experiments, real world data collection, and modelling), and this was captured in our line-up of speakers. Consequently it is fair to say that most delegates left the

meeting having been exposed to something that was relatively new to them. The meeting appeared to have been generally very well received, and many were eager to know whether similar meetings would be held in the future. We do anticipate organising similar events, and we have set up a mailing list for those who would like to be kept informed about future meetings.

People can sign up to the mailing list at:

**<http://lists.stir.ac.uk/cgi-bin/mailman/listinfo/SPERN>**

Further information, including photographs of the meeting, can be found at:

**<http://www.alittlelab.stir.ac.uk/sites/spern/index.htm>**

Christine Caldwell, Anthony Little & Craig Roberts  
University of Stirling