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Special Issue Editorial: Cognitive Processes in Psychosis

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Cognitive Processes in Psychosis: Editorial

This Special Issue of the Journal of Experimental Psychopathology is dedicated to celebrating the achievements of theory and research on the topic of cognitive processes in psychosis. Drawing together contemporary ideas in this field into a Special Issue, is a timely and valuable exercise. A greater understanding of psychosis may be gained by focusing on the correlates, causes and consequences of cognitive processes that are implicated along the psychosis continuum, and can enhance theory and practice relating to psychotic experiences.

Psychosis describes a set of symptoms that include delusions, hallucinations and confused or disturbed thinking indicative of a loss of touch with reality. Schizophrenia and related psychotic disorders can create a huge burden for those who suffer from them, for their carers, and society more broadly (Knapp, Mangalore & Simon, 2004; Rossler, Salize, vanOs & Riecher-Rossler, 2005). Historically psychosis was thought of as best understood in purely biological terms, but recent decades have witnessed the development, testing and refinement of a number of psychological models of psychosis which acknowledge an interaction of biological, emotional, cognitive, behavioural and social factors in the onset and maintenance of psychosis (e.g. Freeman, Garety, Kuipers et al, 2002; Garety, Kuipers, Fowler, Freeman & Bebbington, 2001; Morrison, 2001).

Cognitive processes in psychosis, and in particular appraisal processes and information processing biases of reasoning and attribution have received growing research attention in recent years. These common processes shared across the population continua are increasingly understood to account for variance in the experience of onset and maintenance of psychosis. In addition to building more sensitive and specific models of psychosis, a better understanding of the role of cognitive processes in psychosis can inform developments in collaborative therapeutic approaches which encourage reappraisal and reduce distress (Kuipers, Gaety, Folwer, Freemand, Dunn & Bebbington; 2006). There is evidence of small-to-medium beneficial effects of our most well tested cognitive and behavioural therapies for psychosis (Wykes, Steel, Everitt, & Tarrier, 2008). The magnitude of these benefits might be improved by the development of more targeted, symptom specific interventions which take into account a refined knowledge of cognitive processes developed from work such as that presented in this Special Issue.

This Special Issue presents a snap-shot of cutting edge research, theory and practice in cognitive processes in psychosis. It contains 14 contemporary journal articles submitted by international experts and rising stars within this research domain. Predominantly scientist-practitioners, the authors represent many of the world's best research centres exploring the role of cognitive processes in psychosis.

Three theoretical reviews are presented, investigating the role of biased cognition in psychosis (Sauvlich), cognitive appraisals in auditory hallucinations (Griffiths et al), and the application of multi-level models of information processing to psychosis (Heriot-Maitland).

Then follow three papers detailing new technologies to be utilised in research on cognitive processes in psychosis. These papers present the case for using mobile technology for frequent mood monitoring in bipolar disorder (Malik & Holmes), a new questionnaire measure of sub-threshold psychotic symptoms during recovery (Hodgekins et al), and an adaptation of the classic jumping-to-conclusions beads task specifically developed to measure reasoning biases in social contexts (Westermann et al.).

The remaining 8 empirical papers investigate the correlates, causes and consequences of biased cognitive processes and psychosis across the population continua.

Four studies explicitly explore the continuum of cognitive processes associated with psychosis in nonclinical, student populations. Simpson et al investigate the relationship between safety behaviours rumination and paranoia, whilst Ashcroft et al test a mediational model proposing a relationship between childhood experiences of being bullied and paranoid thinking. Wade, Wigg and Mansell investigate mood dependent advice taking in students reporting high and low experiences of hypomania. Reed et al explore the effect of imagery on hallucinatory content in student participants scoring high in schizotpy.

In patients diagnosed with schizophrenia, Lincoln and colleagues propose and test the role of illusory correlations in psychotic experiences, Peters explores the corrective effect of forewarning on memory and meta-memory deficits and Woodward et al propose and test a model suggesting that impaired evidence integration may play a role in the maintenance of delusional beliefs in patients diagnosed with schizophrenia. Finally, Silverstein et al explore gamma-synchrony during face processing in first episode psychosis.

This special issue takes stock of and extends many key issues in the development of theory and research on cognitive processes in psychosis. It highlights issues of measurement, specificity and the real world applicability of contemporary research into cognitive processes in psychosis. I hope that you enjoy reading the content of this Special Issue, and that it provides food for thought for further important theory and research in this area.

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