

EXPERIMENTAL PSYCHOPATHOLOGY: FROM LABORATORY STUDIES TO CLINICAL PRACTICE

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Recently, David Barlow (2004), a pioneer in the field of anxiety disorders, has proposed that psychologists should abandon the concept of psychotherapy and rather use the one of “psychological treatment”. The provoking idea behind this proposal is that the concept of psychotherapy, relying on the notion of “therapeutic school” should be discarded by professional psychologists because it relies too much on conceptions based on pre-scientific models. Barlow (2004) insists that, today, psychology as an empirical science has gathered sufficient knowledge and know-how to found clinical practice. It is no longer necessary to rely on pre-scientific theories. Further, Barlow’s perspective opens clinical practice to the entire field of psychology, i.e. to the advances accomplished by research on emotion, cognition, learning, development, etc.

In this perspective, the contribution of experimental psychopathology is central. This notion refers to the application of the methods, theories, and empirical knowledge of experimental psychology to the understanding of psychological disorders. Historically, Zeigarnik (1941, 1970), a Russian psychologist, first proposed the concept. For a long time, experimental psychopathology has mostly referred to the paradigms of learning psychology. At the end of the 1980s, it started to expand with the use of cognitive models and the study of basic cognitive functions, such as attention or memory in disordered individuals (Yiend, 2004). In the last 10 years, it has been further enriched with models and paradigms issued from the fields of emotion and of neurosciences (Andreasen, 1997; Davidson, Pizzagalli, Nitschke, & Putnam, 2002). Experimental psychopathology now constitutes a large and

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rich domain that has successfully incorporated the advances of the diverse fields of psychology as a science.

The development of experimental psychopathology in Belgium has followed the international trend. It was pioneered in Leuven, in the tradition of learning psychology by Paul Eelen (Centre for Theories of Learning and Experimental Psychopathology, K.U.Leuven). It has dramatically grown in the last ten years, with the creation of specific laboratories in different Belgian universities: the laboratory of experimental clinical psychology in Ghent, the laboratory of clinical psychology "emotion, cognition & health" in Louvain-la-Neuve, and the laboratory of cognitive psychopathology in Liège. Special interest groups related to experimental psychopathology have also been recently founded by the Belgian National Funds for Scientific Research.

This special issue of *Psychologica Belgica* is both the result and the testimony of the growth of the field of experimental psychopathology in Belgium. It grew out of two national meetings on experimental psychopathology that were organized, first in Louvain-la-Neuve in 2004, and then, given the success of the first issue, in Leuven in 2005. The third meeting took place only recently in May 2006 in Ghent, with the next one already scheduled for October 2007 in Liège. As organisers, we have invited the speakers of the two first meetings to contribute to this special issue and we were happy to receive enthusiastic responses to our proposal from all Belgium speakers, and from one of the keynote speaker, Antoine Bechara.

Gathering contributions from all Belgian laboratories active in experimental psychopathology, the present special issue offers a representative, yet diverse, picture of the research carried in that field in Belgium. It opens with a review of Michel Hansenne about the usefulness of event related potential (ERP) for experimental psychopathology. The use of ERP is further discussed by Salvatore Campanella and colleagues in a paper specifically addressing emotional disorders. Still in a neuropsychological perspective, Antonio Verdejo-García, Antoine Bechara, and colleagues examine the ecological (and thus clinical) validity of the Iowa gambling task for individuals suffering from alcohol dependency. In that population, Charles Kornreich and Pierre Philippot investigated specific deficits in emotional facial expression recognition. They extend their review of this type of deficit to other disorders. Bruno Verschuere studied a particular facet of emotion decoding: lie detection. With his colleagues, he offers an extensive review of the lie detection task in psychopaths, and why this task is especially flawed with this particular population. The next two papers address cognition in depression. Rudi De Raedt focuses on the activation of negative self-schema and the difficulty to disengage from them. Filip Raes, Dirk Hermans, J.M.G. Williams, Linda Geypen, and Paul Eelen investigate depressive rumination and its rela-

tion to autobiographical memory. Aurore Neumann and Pierre Philippot report on similar autobiographical memory processes, but in another population, i.e. schizophrenic patients. Still in the psychotic spectrum, Frank Larøi reviews the cognitive models of hallucination. Finally, going back to the roots of the field, Trinette Dirikx and colleagues present the notion of reinstatement of conditioned fear.

As one can read, this special issue on experimental psychopathology covers the broad spectrum of psychopathological disorders. It also presents contributions rooted in different traditions, such as learning psychology, cognitive psychology, neurosciences, or emotion psychology. Obviously, experimental psychopathology is alive and well in Belgium. With this project, we hope modestly to contribute to the development of a sound and useful scientific basis for psychological interventions in the clinical world.

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