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President's message

Paul Norman

EHPS president

Dear Colleagues,

The EC recently met for its winter meeting in the beautiful city of Leiden in The Netherlands. All EC members were able to attend the 2 day meeting despite considerable travel delays as the result of heavy snow at Schipol Airport. Several of us arrived in the early hours of Saturday morning – myself after sharing a taxi from Antwerp to Leiden after the flight from Manchester to Amsterdam had been cancelled. The EC winter meeting provides an opportunity for the EC to review recent activities and discuss new ideas for future developments. The current EC is approaching the end of its two year term of office, so the timing was appropriate to consider future initiatives and innovations that may shape the work of the next EC. I have tried to highlight some of the key issues we discussed.

The EC at the winter meeting in Leiden

Membership and finances

Current membership numbers are very healthy. In 2011 we had 527 members and renewals for 2012 are also progressing well. If you haven't renewed your membership yet for 2012, please do so as soon as possible! Similarly, partly due to the increased size of the membership and the success of recent conferences, the financial situation of the society is also strong. We still have a large balance despite our efforts to support various new initiatives over recent years. We will be looking to further expand some of the activities we support over the next few years.

A key issue we discussed centred on the workload on the Treasurer/Membership Officer which has increased considerably as the society has grown. The EC made two important decisions to address this issue. First, we will recommend to the next EC that the roles of Treasurer and Membership Officer be split. Second, we agreed to increase the amount of administrative support that the Membership Officer receives. Hopefully, these changes will make the roles more manageable in future ECs.

We have also made some changes to the renewal process this year to try to automate as many procedures as possible and to develop the membership directory so that it is a useful resource for members. In particular, when joining or renewing membership, members are asked to indicate their main research areas. These can then be searched in the membership directly (and also by country) – this will hopefully enable members to identify other

members with similar research interests across Europe (and also help the development of special interest groups that are being managed by Synergy).

Health Psychology masters programmes in Europe

In response to requests from many National Delegates, the EC has convened a committee to consider the provision of Health Psychology Masters programmes in Europe. The committee is being chaired by the National Delegates Officer, Efrat Neter, and also includes Winnie Gebhardt (The Netherlands), Mark Forshaw (UK) and Christel Salewski (Germany). The committee will be considering current provision and seek to provide a resource or guidelines for members (following the Bologna Process). The committee plans to present its initial findings in a specific session at the conference in Prague to which all members, and especially National Delegates, will be invited to attend.

Journals

We were very happy to receive the news that Health Psychology Review is now included in the Social Science Citation Index. This will further increase its profile. Currently, the journal has an unofficial impact factor of 1.33 and this is likely to increase substantially in the next few years.

Our contracts with the publisher of our journals, Taylor & Francis, are set to be renegotiated in 2013. The EC therefore had an opportunity to reflect on our relationship with Taylor & Francis and discuss ways in which they could further support and promote our journals. The EC also discussed recent developments in open access journals and the scope for EHPS to be involved in such developments. Myself and the editors of our journals will be meeting with Taylor & Francis in the spring to discuss these issues in more detail. The EC will be seeking the views of members to inform our discussions.

Conferences

Preparations for the 2012 EHPS Conference in Prague are reaching an advanced stage. I am pleased to inform members that over 800 abstracts were received before the submission deadline. The Scientific Committee will be evaluating these abstracts and producing the scientific programme over the next few months. In order to include as many presenters as possible, delegates will be limited to the number of oral and poster presentations that will be considered. However, as with Crete, the full conference programme will start from the Wednesday morning to ensure that we can maximise the number of available slots in the programme. This means that the opening ceremony will take place on the Tuesday evening in the historic buildings of Charles University. Once decisions on submitted abstracts have been made by the Scientific Committee, I encourage members to take advantage of reduced registration fees by registering early. Preparations are also progressing well for the 2013 Conference in Bordeaux. We have now appointed a Scientific Committee, chaired by Holger Schmidt, that is now in the process of inviting keynote speakers (some of which have already been confirmed). Further details will be announced at our conference in Prague.

EC Elections

The term of office of the current EC comes to an end at the Prague conference. We will shortly be sending members an email requesting nominations for the new EC. I would encourage as many members of possible to put themselves for nomination to make a positive contribution to the society's work. Please contact any members of the current EC should you be interested in being nominated or if you want to discuss specific roles. This year we will be using an electronic voting system for the first time. We hope that this will make it easier for members to vote and thereby increase participation in this important democratic process.

We discussed many other issues at our meeting in Leiden and agreed a long list of actions for remaining months of the current EC. The next few months will be a busy time for the EC and you are likely to receive many emails with announcements and requests. This is a reflection of the vibrancy of the society and I hope they will not overwhelm your inboxes! We sincerely want members to be fully informed of, and participate in, the society's activities.

Best wishes from myself and all of the EC for a healthy and productive 2012.

Paul Norman
EHPS President

original article

What is wrong with mediators and moderators?*

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Mediator and moderator analyses are enjoying great and growing popularity among psychological researchers. However, their use as tools for causal analysis is alarming since this is exactly what these analyses are unsuited for. In this article, I posit that mediator and moderator models are based on a temporal illusion and that alternative arrangements of variables produce models that may explain relations between variables equally well. In fact, for each 3-variate model (whether mediator or moderator) five alternative models can be devised. This is empirically demonstrated with data from a large-scale study on employee attitudes and behaviors. The conclusion is that mediator and moderator analyses lead to inferences that are at best unfounded and at worst wrong, and that the only way to examine sequence and causal order is by means of temporal research. A possible remedy is two-dimensional modeling: it serves as a prophylactic against temporal illusions and as a tool that helps choosing proper methods of analysis.

The analysis of mediator and moderator effects has become one of the most popular analytical methods in psychology. A count based on journals covered by PsychInfo[1] shows that during the past two decades the numbers of articles analyzing mediation and/or moderation have increased exponentially. While the numbers of articles using mediation and moderation analysis were 537 and 209 in 1991, these numbers had grown to 3472 and 1979 by 2010. These figures are based on articles explicitly mentioning mediator and moderator variables and do not include studies using structural equation modeling that may also involve mediation or moderation.

The notion of "*mediation*" grew out of research on "intervening mechanisms" that began in the 1920s, when researchers became interested explaining relationships between independent and dependent variables from hidden, non-observable mechanisms of the human mind (e.g. "drive"; Hull, 1943). The terms "mediation" and "mediator variable" only emerged during the 1950s (see for instance: Cofer, 1958; Hilgard, 1958; Rozeboom, 1956). The abbreviation "mediator" was adopted in later years (e.g. Birnbaum & Mellers, 1979). It is worth noting that "intervening variables" were originally seen as theoretical and non-observable, whereas "mediator variables" were typically conceived as observable and measurable. The notion of "*moderation*" comes from the world of statistics, where it was used in connection with regression analysis. The term "moderator variable" was introduced by Saunders (1955, 1956). It referred to a third variable that modifies or moderates the regression of one variable on another one. The moderator variable

*Abbreviated text based on: R.A. Roe (2011). What is wrong with mediators and moderators? *15th European Congress of Work & Organizational Psychology*. Maastricht, Netherlands, May 24-28, 2011.

[1] Counts conducted by October 19, 2011.

was originally seen as defining "groups" of subjects for which different regressions would hold. Gender, age, race and socio-economic level are examples of moderators used in early research. Expressions like "moderating effect" and "moderated regression" became widely adopted in the 1960s and 1970s. The original meaning of a variable "moderating" the relationship between two other variables was gradually replaced by the more generic notion of interaction effect, in which two or more independent variables can be seen as moderating each others effect on the dependent variable.

The fact that mediation and moderation are nowadays seen as related seems a matter of historical coincidence. Three developments are worth mentioning in this context. First, researcher's growing focus on variables rather than constructs, which diminished the conceptual distinction between mediators and moderators. Second, innovations in multivariate regression analysis, permitting layers of dependent variables and inclusion of interaction terms, which allowed bringing mediation and moderation together in one statistical framework. Third, the advent of causal modeling, based on the idea that partial regression coefficients allow making causal inferences from data obtained at one moment in time (Blalock, 1960). Mediators and moderators first appeared together in an article by James and Brett (1984). They also feature together in the often-cited article by Baron & Kenny (1986), which appeared two years later[2].

In spite of their different roots, mediation and moderation methods are currently used for a similar purpose, i.e. establishing causal relationships between three or more variables. Researchers typically postulate models in which one or more antecedent variables are hypothesized to "exert an influence" on one or more consequent variables, with mediator and/or moderator variables determining how this influence is exerted. Researchers test these models by examining the covariation between variables across subjects. The aim of this article is to remind researchers of the weaknesses of this approach, and the logical impossibility of inferring causal relations from between-subject differences, regardless whether the variables are measured at one point in time or at multiple points in time. I will argue that mediator and moderator analysis are based on a temporal illusion that thwarts the possibility to make causal inferences in the proper way, i.e. by means of temporal research (Roe, 2008).

Below, I briefly discuss how temporal illusions affect research practice and particularly the way of drawing mediator and moderator models. Next, I point out that alternative models can be drawn, which may theoretically be equally acceptable. I give examples of reciprocal mediation and moderation effects, using selected results from a study on work motivation and quality of working life, conducted in a sample of 2660 workers from three European countries, published in 2000 (Roe, Zinovieva, Dienes, & Ten Horn, 2000). Acknowledging that not all models may fit the data equally well, I next discuss the case of non-reciprocity and the issue of model fit. I demonstrate that information extracted from such cases provides no evidence of causal order. Finally, I propose two-dimensional modeling as a means to prevent confusion of between-subjects and within-subjects analysis and indicate how it can help doing causal analysis in a proper way.

Temporal illusions

The term temporal illusion is used here to denote the belief among researchers that the

[2] The improved test of mediation proposed by these authors made this article into the most cited in the field, counting 16,362 citations by October 19, 2011.

flow of time is present when it is not. Examples of temporal illusions are numerous. It is, for instance, customary among researchers to theorize about events and processes, which by definition unfold over time, to gather and analyze cross-sectional data from which time is lacking, and interpret results in terms of events and processes (e.g. Wang & Takeuchi, 2007). This practice is typically accompanied by the ritualistic statement "that the cross-sectional findings should be confirmed by longitudinal research" (cf. Schaubroeck, Lam, & Cha, 2007). Likewise, researchers often interpret between-subject correlations between variables X and Y as showing "an influence" of X on Y. They do this either for variables measured at one moment or at different time moments, which is equally unjustified. In the same spirit, and focal in this article, researchers wrongly infer mediator and moderator effects from between-subject correlations of variables measured at the same point in time.

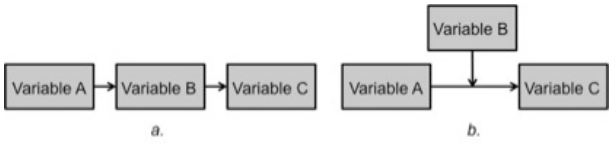

Figure 1. Basic mediator model (a) and moderator model (b)

Temporal illusions are unwanted and dangerous. They foster the misconception that differential (between-subject) and temporal (within-subject) research are two ways of testing the same theory that will—in the long run—produce the same results. Thereby they obstruct temporal research and hinder advance in psychological theory development. Moreover, they lead to inferences that are at best unfounded and at worst wrong, and they solicit interventions that are at best ineffective and at worst damaging.

Modeling mediation and moderation

Mediator and moderator analysis is based on models such as shown in Figure 1. In accordance with the direction of writing in Western cultures, these models are drawn from left to right. Mediators are positioned in the middle to suggest that they "*transmit the influence*" of the antecedent variable on the consequent variable. Moderators are inserted at some intermediate location and supposed to "*influence*" the relationship between adjacent variables.

It is important to note that, at least in cross-sectional research, this way of drawing mediator models is arbitrary and at the same time misleading. The models should rather be drawn like in Figure 2, which implies that there are multiple ways of defining the relationships, which might all account for given empirical evidence.

From the generic mediator model in Figure 2a six three-variable mediator models can be obtained. Figure 3 gives these six models and illustrates which parameters and fit would be obtained for each model for data on Responsibility, Meaningfulness and Performance taken from Roe, et al. (2000).

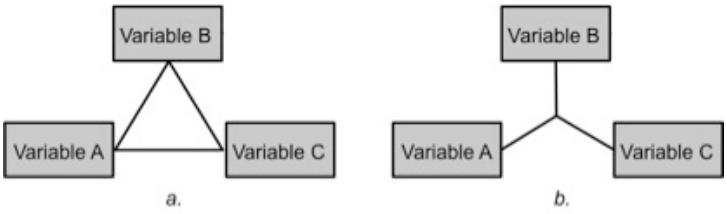

Figure 2. Alternative generic mediator model (a) and moderator model (b)

All six models show evidence of (partial) mediation effects of a magnitude similar to what is typically reported in the literature. This example demonstrates that variables can have *reciprocal* mediation effects: each variable mediates the relations between the other variables. All six models make sense from a

theoretical (and practical) point of view. Considering these models will make the reader realize that—given the cross-sectional nature of the data—*sequence is in the eye of the beholder*.

Figure 4 shows similar results for moderators. From the generic model in Figure 2b six moderator models are derived. Using data on Self-efficacy, Meaningfulness and Satisfaction from Roe et al. (2000) we, again, find that alternative models support equally acceptable interpretations, and that moderation effects can be reciprocal.

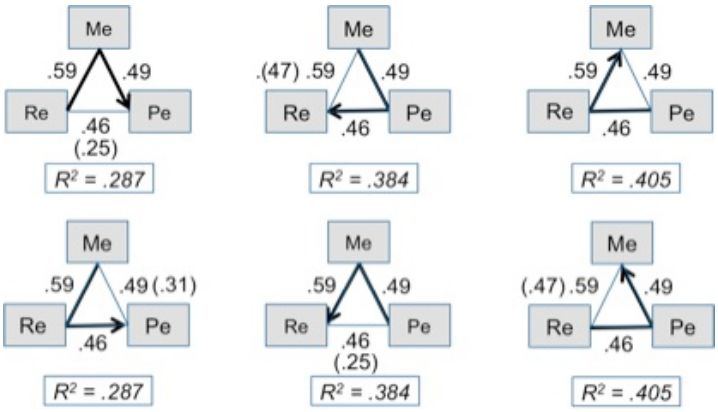

Figure 3. Six mediator models with correlations and partial correlations after partialing out the mediator (between brackets). Re = Responsibility, Pe = Performance, Me = Meaningfulness, R^2 = multiple correlation

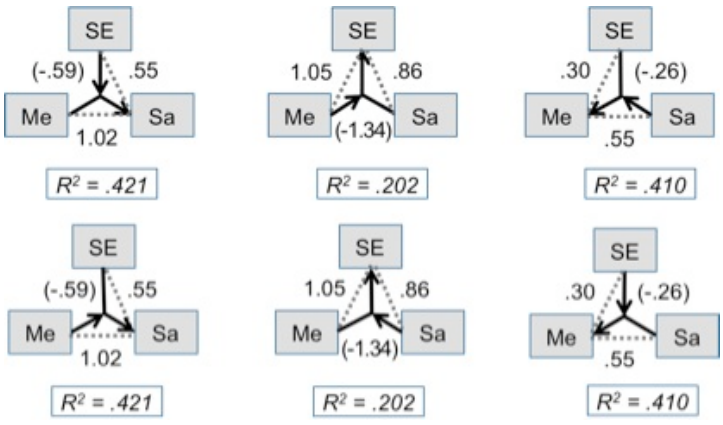

Figure 4. Six moderator models with regression coefficients for the predictor, moderator, and interaction term (between brackets). Me = Meaningfulness, Sa = Satisfaction, SE = Self-efficacy, R^2 = multiple correlation

Non-reciprocity: a best model?

Reciprocal mediation and moderation will not always occur. Conventional reasoning, based on the temporal illusion, might give rise to the idea that the model with the highest fit (% variance explained) shows the real sequence. Logically, there is no ground for the conclusion that the "influence of A on C" is "transmitted through B" or is "moderated by D" on the basis of model fit. The argument is clearly wrong, since all models merely reflect a single pattern of statistical associations between simultaneous measures. That is, the fit merely shows the proportion of *between-subject* variance explained and has no bearing whatsoever on within-subjects relationships. Any psychological interpretation in terms of processes, states or actions with a particular causal order is illusory.

This can perhaps best be illustrated with a practical example, namely that of the spatial dimensions of suitcase. Using a particular set of suitcases we might find that (due to different degrees of variation within this set) Depth and Width give a better prediction of Height than Width and Height predict Depth. The difference in % variance explained would obviously have *no temporal meaning whatsoever*.

The above examples are confined to the case of variables that are measured simultaneously, at a single moment in time. Some readers might believe that these problems vanish when a longitudinal rather than a cross-sectional design is used. However, this is not the case. Correlational analysis, even if it involves variables measured at different moments in time, is merely capturing between-subject differences. It fails to provide information on what happens within subjects, unless the processes referred to by the variables are "ergodic", that is, stationary (time-invariant) and homogeneous (identical for each subject). Thus, the problems of inference remain, unless researchers would be able to show

that the extraordinary conditions of ergodicity apply (Molenaar & Campbell, 2009).

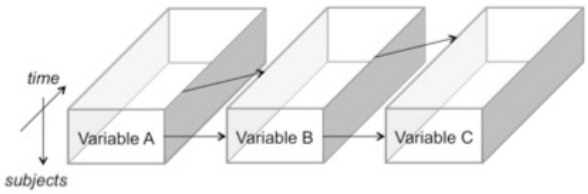

Figure 5: Two-dimensional model with arrows indicating covariation across subjects and across time (with lags).

A remedy: Two-dimensional modeling

A simple remedy to avoid the above problems is to change the way of drawing models by adding a time dimension. Figure 5 gives an example for the case of three variables.

This way of modeling makes a clear distinction between within-subjects and between-subjects covariation of variables. It suggests that, in order to investigate *mediation* effects, researchers should look for within-subject covariation between the antecedent variable, the mediator variable, and the consequent variable. It also makes researchers aware of the need to address sequence and time lags—something lacking from classical mediation analysis. If causal links are to be established, *there is a logical necessity for time lags to be larger than zero*, since temporal sequence is one of the necessary conditions for causality.

The way in which *moderation* has to be established is less obvious. If we go back to the earlier conception of moderator variable as a variable that defines subgroups of people showing differences in the regression between two other variables, a moderator variable would be one showing between-subject differences that are associated with between-subject differences in the within-subject covariation of an antecedent and consequent variable. In practical terms: the parameters of the regression over time of each subject would covary with their scores on the moderator variable.

Recommended analyses

Two-dimensional modeling helps in finding better methods of analysis than conventional mediator and moderator analysis. *Mediator analysis* requires an assessment of three variables[3] over time. The three time-series obtained would need to be regressed on each other in the proper sequence (mediator on antecedent, consequent on mediator), with certain time-lags. The resulting set of regression parameters (within-subject, one for each subject) could then be subject to a clustering procedure (between-subject) to identify groups of subjects with similar mediation. If mediation effects are assumed to be similar for all subjects, one could, alternatively, estimate a single set of regression parameters for the whole sample of subjects using multilevel growth modeling techniques (e.g. Singer & Willett, 2003).

Moderator analysis would be slightly different. With a moderator conceived as a stable individual-difference variable, such as ability or personality, one would do the same as above with two rather than three variables within each subject. Next, subjects would be grouped by their within-subject regression parameters, and groups would be compared on the moderator variable. In case of a moderator conceived as varying over time, one would again have to establish three time series for each individual, but now one would define an interaction-term of the antecedent and the moderator and use that as a single (time-lagged) predictor of the consequent variable. Again, multilevel growth modeling could provide the needed techniques.

[3] I confine myself to the simplest case with three variables.

Next to correlational designs, researchers may also use experimental designs with repeated measurements in which antecedents precede mediators and mediators precede consequents. This is compatible with the suggestions of Kraemer et al. (Kraemer, Kiernan, Essex, & Kupfer, 2008) for the study of mediation and moderation in clinical research. Referring to experimental designs with two or three measurement moments, they point out that antecedent or "target" variables (to be understood as discrete treatments) must precede mediators and that moderators must precede antecedent variables[4].

A brief note seems in place about cross-lagged panel analysis (Campbell & Stanley, 1963), which researchers also use for causal inferences. Although its logic seems compelling since it implies measurements at two or more moments in time (and thereby sequence), it must be noted that cross-lagged panel designs suffer from confusion of between-subject and within-subject variation as well. The magnitude of the correlation between an antecedent variable at time 1 and a consequent variable at time 2 carries no information on within-subject changes (except for the case of ergodicity). Logic does not permit making inferences about causal order along the within-subject dimension from the proportion of variance between subjects.

Conclusions

Mediator and moderator analysis as we know and use it today is based on a temporal illusion, and not suited to make causal inferences. Establishing mediator and moderator effects requires models and designs that separate lagged covariation over time within subjects from differential covariation between subjects. Such models and designs allow researchers to avoid temporal illusions and engage in research that gives a valid image of how behavior unfolds and which factors govern it.

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[4] This condition is easily fulfilled with stable moderators, like e.g. gender. It is equivocal when moderators can change over time.

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original article

Coping self-efficacy and psychological distress: Results from an Italian study on nurses

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Background

Coping self-efficacy (CSE) beliefs refer to an individual's beliefs about one's ability to cope with external stressors. Efficacy beliefs can determine whether people will invest effort, and how long they will persist in their effort in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences. People with higher levels of CSE beliefs tend to approach challenging situations in an active and persistent way, whereas those with lower levels of CSE beliefs tend to direct greater energy to managing increasing emotional distress (Bandura, 1997). Although the construct is rooted in the Social Cognitive Theory of Bandura (1997), it is consistent with the assumptions of secondary appraisal of controllability as described in the Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). During the process of secondary appraisal, the individual judges that an outcome is controllable through coping; and addresses the question of whether or not he or she believes that they can carry out the requisite coping strategy (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).

CSE beliefs are not a general disposition; a high level of CSE in one domain does not necessarily correlate with high levels of CSE in other domains (e.g. Benight & Bandura, 2004;, Neilands, Chambers, Taylor, & Folkman, 2006). High CSE has been related to a wide range of physiological measures including lower catecholamine responsivity during stress (Bandura, Taylor, Williams, Mefford, & Barchas, 1985) and a reduced blood pressure response to fear arousal stressors (Bandura, Reese, & Adams, 1982). In addition, high CSE has been associated with a better psychological adjustment to highly stressful life changes and events, such as aging (Kraaij, Garnefski, & Maes, 2002), chronic disease (HIV-seropositive, Chesney et al., 2006), natural disaster (Benight et al., 1999), peer aggression among adolescents (Singh and Bussey, 2009), pre-competitive anxiety and subjective performance among athletes (Nicholls, Polman, & Levy, 2010), and physical assault (Ozer & Bandura 1990). Overall, these results suggest that CSE has direct effects on distress/well being outcomes, beyond the impact of external stressors. A high level of coping self-efficacy tends to create an adaptive approach leading individuals to view tasks or situations that require high efforts as challenging and as positive experiences. Whereas, when CSE perceptions are low, it is more likely that individuals perceive the same tasks or situations as stressful and greater energy is directed to manage the increasing emotional distress (Bandura, 1997).

However, it is surprising that a literature search, conducted in December 2011, using the keywords "coping self-efficacy", resulted in only 53 studies measuring CSE (in relation to stress), while the keyword "self-efficacy" resulted in 4922 studies and the keyword "coping" results in over 16200 studies. Moreover, to our knowledge, no published studies have looked at the relationship between occupational coping self-efficacy (which is an occupational version of coping self-efficacy beliefs, that refer to an individuals beliefs about ones ability to cope with specific occupational stressors) and

distress/well-being dimensions, beyond occupational stressors and job resources, such as job control and social support (Karasek & Theorell, 1990).

Our research

Therefore, on the basis of these considerations, the main purpose of the present study was to gain more insight in the relationships between occupational stressors, job resources (job control and social support), occupational coping self-efficacy, and job-related and general psychological distress and well being in nurses. More specifically, we explored the direct and moderating effect of occupational coping self-efficacy on distress/well-being.

Initially, we developed a situation-specific CSE measure for nurses, called the Occupational Coping Self-Efficacy for Nurses (OCSE-N) scale (Pisanti, Lombardo, Lucidi, Lazzari, & Bertini, 2008). Two different and highly correlated factors emerged that described the nurses self-appraisals of their ability to cope with occupational demands: coping self-efficacy to cope with the occupational burden and coping self-efficacy to cope with the relational difficulties in the workplace (χ^2 = 163.10; df = 36; CFI = .92; RMSEA = .08).

In the second phase (Pisanti, van der Doef, Maes, Lombardo, & Violani, 2011) we tested the direct and moderating effect of occupational coping self-efficacy on job demands and resources in explaining distress (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, somatic complaints, psychological distress) and job-related well-being (personal accomplishment and job satisfaction) in a sample of Italian nurses. From 9 Italian public health care organizations, 2292 nurses were randomly selected. Of this initial sample, 1509 nurses agreed to take part in the study. They were contacted at their workplace and received a questionnaire and an accompanying letter in which they were invited to participate in the study. They were asked to leave their completed questionnaires in a sealed box. Incomplete questionnaires were excluded, resulting in a final sample of 1479 nurses (65% response rate).

Results from hierarchical regression analyses showed that OCSE accounted for substantial additional variance in all outcomes (from 2% to 6%), after controlling for the job demands and resources (job control and social support) variables. In addition, the results indicate that occupational coping self-efficacy buffers the impact of low job control on distress. High OCSE moderates the harmful effects of low control on all distress outcomes (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, psychological distress, somatic complaints), whereas for nurses with low OCSE, lower levels of control are associated with higher distress.

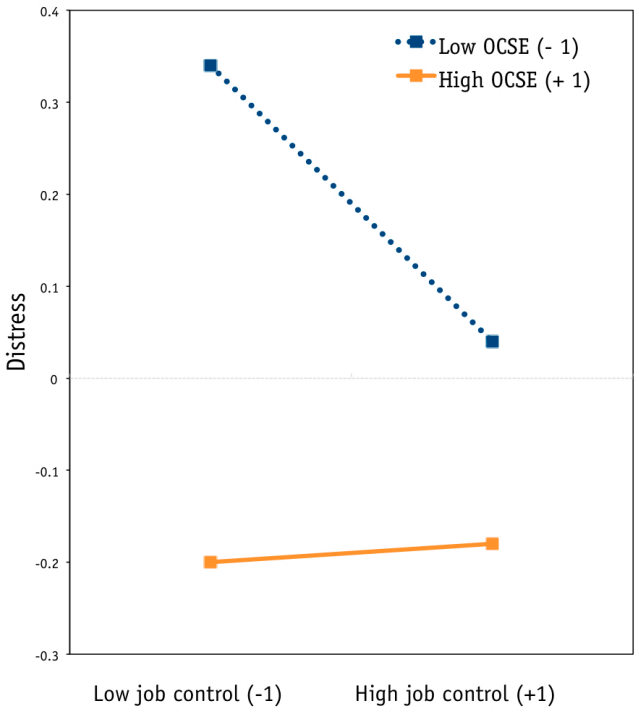

Figure 1. Interaction effect of job control and OCSE on psychological distress outcomes.

Conclusion

These findings lend support to the notion that it is important to measure self-efficacy related to the specific tasks employees have to deal with in their work context in order to gain insight into employee well-being and distress. Individuals with higher levels of OCSE are more likely to interpret occupational situations as challenging tasks. As a result, they may be more likely to invest more effort to effectively deal with a less favourable work situation, thereby reducing the potential for development of negative affective outcomes (Bandura, 1997).

Practical implications of the present studies are that, besides focusing organizational interventions on the reduction of demands, and enhancement of job resources, enhancing employees coping self-efficacy beliefs may have beneficial effects on their distress and well-being levels. Coping self-efficacy beliefs are directly amenable to intervention (Bandura, 1997). There are four processes through which occupational coping self-efficacy could be boosted, including mastery experiences (e.g. workshops that provide experiences of successfully facing occupational stressors), vicarious experience (e.g. examining how colleagues handle occupational stressors), verbal persuasion (e.g. encouragement from a more experienced and respected supervisor), and physiological states (e.g., positive and negative feedback received from physiological and emotional states when facing occupational stressors). According to social cognitive researchers (e.g., Bandura, 1997; Zimmerman, 2000), the most influential way to improve self-efficacy beliefs is by promoting mastery experiences. Mastery experiences provide individuals with an active experience of the positive effects of their actions, and their interpretations of these effects stimulate their efficacy beliefs. Success in coping with occupational stressors raises self-efficacy, whereas failure lowers it.

Therefore, we developed and implemented stress management-interventions that focused on organizational learning tools such as after-event reviews (AER) to analyze the causes for success or failure in facing specific occupational stressors of the nursing profession. AERs enable individuals to reflect on their cognitions, emotions and behaviours, and to understand what lessons can be drawn from their past experience, and to evaluate how these lessons can be quickly internalized to improve occupational self-efficacy (Ellis, Ganzach, Castle, & Sekely, 2010).

In conclusion, we believe that our understanding of the stress and of the adaptive strategies could benefit by testing comprehensive models including domain specific CSE beliefs. The self-evaluative appraisals of coping capability add important specificity in the understanding of secondary appraisal, an advance particularly relevant to research on stress.

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original article

Could it be that "doing nothing" is a healthy teenage behaviour?

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In recent years, debates about how best to manage young people's free time in order to maximise opportunities for their healthy personal development and socialisation are centre stage among child health practitioners, psychologists and educationalists and, often, a nightmarish concern for parents. The latter reportedly experience great levels of stress in the frantic race of raising well-rounded, emotionally healthy and academically achieving children*. More importantly, though, research shows that youngsters themselves experience pressure due to their overscheduled lifestyles, which often leave them with little time to play and engage in unplanned, yet equally significant, activities, such as spending time with their friends (Gleave and Kapasi, 2009). Popular parenting books and psychology literature (e.g. Crain's *Reclaiming childhood: Letting children be children in our achievement-oriented society*, 2003) also suggest that the lives of many young people are replete with anxiety, seemingly thus pointing to the need for a more balanced, carefree childhood.

No messing around

Interestingly, however, although health researchers and practitioners caution against overburdening young people with extra-curricular activities, discussion on the *benefits* for youngsters of unstructured free time, of "doing nothing" and hanging out with their friends is still insufficient and mostly anecdotal. Mahoney, Harris, & Eccles (2006) partly attribute this silence to the increasing dependence of psychological research on its timely and appropriate integration with policy. Young people's practice of spending time with their friends or alone on fortuitous activities is typically seen by parents, teachers, as well as policy makers as an unproductive waste of time, which may even lead youngsters to drifting into antisocial behaviours. Matthews, Taylor, Percy-Smith, and Limb (2000), for example, illustrate the unfair victimisation of youngsters who hang out at shopping malls, which is arguably based on the ungrounded assumption that a group of children meandering in public space are anything but innocent; they must be either troublemakers or, even, shoplifters. It is then no surprise that advocating youngsters "doing nothing" can hardly pass through the policy making threshold. In a world that nurtures antagonism from the very early childhood years, and venerates the tangibles of success, whether these are school grades and diplomas, what counts are purposeful and goal-oriented activities, as opposed to random chatting with friends or aimless Internet browsing. This partly, then, explains adults' effort to regulate children's use of online resources, which offer unprecedented opportunities for unsupervised and fortuitous messing around. Horst, Herr-Stephenson, and Robinson (2010, p. 47) argue, for example, that

*The terms "children" and "young people" are used interchangeably in the context of this paper, following the diverse ways in which they feature in the referenced sources.

> the desire to restrict hanging-out practices at school in favour of keeping students "on task" while using new media and technology for production or research, combined with concerns about which media and websites are suitable for citation, can prompt teachers and principals to develop rules about the appropriate use of media structures.

Various childhood sociologists and psychologists argue that the roots of the over-scheduling phenomenon can be traced even deeper to the prevailing social perceptions of youth, which is typically seen as a transitional phase from immaturity to adulthood, rather than a life cycle of its own (Matthews et al., 2000). In this light, the process of upbringing should be highly controlled and regulated, so that youngsters develop into responsible citizens, according to the adult perspective and status quo. This arguably also explains the tendency to organise meticulously young people's free time with extra-curricular activities, which aim at their socialisation, personal development and success.

However, childhood is becoming increasingly liquidated, with the gap of generations constantly narrowing and youngsters permeating areas that were previously an adult preserve: from formal decision-making panels in governing bodies to the cityscape, streets and malls. Thus, while parent's efforts are directed towards balancing surveillance and protection on the one hand, and opportunities for independent initiative on the other, by means of providing safe, organised learning contexts, young people are obstinately claiming even more autonomy, especially in the face of peer pressure to "play" outside the home, further, longer and later (Matthews et al., 2000, citing Valentine, 1999). When young people's presence and agency in public space, however, is not grounded on purposeful activities and set learning objectives, it is often seen as discrepant. Put simply, a group of teenagers hanging out in playgrounds, especially during the evening when unregulated by the adult gaze, is perceived as unacceptable and dangerous, in contrast with toddlers' use of the designated space, in daylight and under adult control (Matthews et al., 2000).

Growing up obliquely: examples of young people's fortuitous learning and meaning-making

And yet, we tend to forget as parents, psychologists and educators that the most effective learning, seen in the broadest of senses, takes place with a more natural rhythm for youngsters than the pace imposed by goal-directed activities; and in an environment that takes advantage of children's own natural curiosity, with adults providing an unobtrusive presence (Jackson, 2008). This kind of experiential learning, which is based on one's own needs and natural inclinations, enables youngsters to develop autonomy, which is arguably the healthiest coping strategy and attitude to problem solving (Jackson, 2008). Take, for example, teenagers fortuitous online searching. It involves a flexible, open-ended genre of participation in the networked and digital media ecology, which enables these fluid shifts in attention and co-presence between online and offline contexts (Horst et al., 2010). As Horst et al. (2010, p. 65) further argue, although this kind of messing around is usually seen as

> a challenge to traditional ways of finding and sharing information, solving problems, or consuming media, it also represents a highly productive space for young people in which they can begin to explore specific interests and to connect with people outside their local friendship groups.

Rather than being a waste of time, this digital messing around forges an array of opportunities for youngsters' sociability and

play. It represents a strategy, though more informal from institutional learning practices and formal socialisation contexts, for finding resources to facilitate homework, play creatively and share all such activity with their peers. Above all, it is an important step into unfamiliar worlds, without, however, requiring expert knowledge to begin; it is usually a self-directed, self-taught activity, which enables teenagers to develop a sense of agency and ownership and thus scaffold future learning experiences (Horst et al., 2010). These are all critical life skills for young people's healthy adaptation in a complex world, where individuals are required to balance initiative and co-operation.

Another example of how unstructured free time can be a powerful opportunity for socialising and learning is youngsters hanging out in malls and shopping centres. According to research by Matthews et al. (2000), what teenagers like about such places is that they can meet with their friends in a safe, warm and dry space; watch people and the bright lights; eat and shop; chat and banter playfully. Even though such activity may seem pointless to the adult perspective, it is nonetheless an important medium for young people's *own* socialisation, a way to assert their sense of belonging and group membership (Matthews et al., 2000). "Just being" with their friends has been identified elsewhere in research as a significant reason for young people to participate in extra-curricular activities (Patsarika, 2011). What is more, Patsarika's research has demonstrated that although informal activities may lack the educational, *didactic* element that organised frameworks of activity essentially promote, it is their intrinsically experiential and *participatory* element that enables young people to construct their value systems, personal and group identities and, thus, build a healthy moral character.

Theorists on "doing nothing" and its benefits for young people's health and well-being

Stemming from the above discussions is that more attention should be perhaps directed to the social, emotional as well as cognitive benefits of unstructured free time for youngsters. Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, and Eyer (2008) keenly defend the so-called "empty hours" that leave youngsters to their own devices, even to the point of being bored, which is when the urge to use one's own imagination and creativity comes in. According to Hirsh-Pasek et al., young people need time to daydream, reflect on and nurture their inner lives, and sensibly manage their own time. Freed from the "safety-net" of organised activity frameworks, they learn how to explore the world at their own pace and handle problems with others and on their own. This, in turn, enables them to develop self-responsibility and self-reliance. For all these reasons, Hirsh-Pasek et al. argue, parents should not lament that their children should be always "doing something"; it is when free time lacks a predefined objective that opportunities for children to discover, create and innovate open up.

Importantly, all this is supported by evidence from clinical and children's literature that spontaneous activities have a positive impact on young people's emotional, psychological and, even, physical health; Elkind (2008), for example, argues that a "light-hearted" approach to childhood increases chances for their academic achievement, happiness and overall well-being. Similarly, Rosenfield and Wise (2001) caution against overloading children with extra-curricular activities, which may lead to burnout with a range of symptoms: from headaches and stomachaches to temper tantrums, sleeping problems and difficulty to concentrate at school.

Willis (1990) argues that young people's casual interactions rather than simply adorning their "official" public lives as learners, i.e. adults and citizens in-the-making, are essentially creative through their symbolic power. They enable young people to develop their vital capacities and find alternatives to the impoverished roles proffered by modern state bureaucracies and rationalised industry and, thereby, leave their own small mark in the world. In condemning young people's unorthodox and seemingly idle way of ascertaining their agency in their social milieus, we deny them the essential tools of growing up healthy and confident human beings.

Educational research complements this discussion in suggesting that a rounded and healthy human disposition involves both formal and ordinary, inconsequential practices. As Jackson (2008) puts it, "Homo Sapiens" (i.e. the wise man) occurs from the intertwining of *all* human dimensions: "Man as Maker", "Man as Knower" as well as "Man as Enquirer" or "Man as Player". In this light, he argues that play is not something that we do; it is who we are, a cultural disposition. Such an all-encompassing understanding of the notion of engaging with the world, i.e. as learning, playing and messing around, defines humans complex, rich, messy and ever-changing relationship with it (Jackson, 2008).

Conclusions

Reflecting on the above debates, my intention has not been to weigh the pros and cons of young people's organised and unstructured activities, thus introducing dichotomous understandings in the modern epidemic of guidelines and manuals for raising healthy and successful children. The benefits for young people of organised activities are numerous and indisputable, discussed as they are by psychological research (e.g. Mahoney et al., 2006). The aim of this paper, instead, has been to exculpate the practice of "doing nothing" as a healthy teenage behaviour, which is hopefully shown to deserve more attention by academic researchers and practitioners alike.

By the same token, although the paper brought forward the power relationships between adults and young people, its goal has not been to broaden the gap between the adult and child perspective. What might be an interesting reflection to muse on, however, is that our understandings of young people's growth and socialisation more than often impinge on stereotypes about their social role as immature learners growing into the "normal" state of adulthood. Dominant adult perceptions of what constitutes "best practice" for young people's learning, emotional development and overall well-being (e.g. through regulated Internet use, or delineated and controlled use of public space), partly stem from the constructed divide between childhood and adulthood. It is, therefore, important that we acknowledge and embrace each young person's particular emotional, psychological, physical and cognitive needs, and engage in open dialogue with them, in order to help them live balanced and happy lives, both in the present and future. ■

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create report

A synergistic visiting scholar grant

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Background

On February 2011, I was very pleased to visit Professor Kerry Chamberlain at Massey University in New Zealand, funded by an EHPS visiting scholar grant. The aim of the visit was to work further on a qualitative research project which was initially developed during the EHPS Synergy workshop in Cluj-Napoca in August 2010, facilitated by Prof. Kerry Chamberlain.

This project was part of my PhD research and built on previous work I have done at Coventry University, under the supervision of Professor David French, who fully supported the idea to ask Prof. Chamberlain for his expert advice. My PhD research focuses on building an evidence base for effective walking groups. The project supported by this funding used an innovative methodology to approach the research aims, to improve our understanding and provide original insights into the area. It used the novel go-along walking methodology. The go-along walking methodology refers to a conversation style interview, where interviewer and interviewee walk along and discuss characteristics of the place that might have an influence on the interviewees behaviour and experience of meaning making. During walk-along interviews, the context where behaviour occurs becomes a stimulus for discussion, information that would not be available in such details, in an abstract face-to-face setting. Walk-along interviews provide a deeper, elaborated and more relevant data to the focus of the research than face-to-face interviews.Prof. Kerry Chamberlain has made an outstanding contribution to qualitative research within health psychology. His work leads the field of qualitative health psychology worldwide. His practice in the development and refinement of qualitative methodologies has enhanced significantly our understanding on health behaviours. The idea of working with Prof. Chamberlain on the go-along walking methodology started as a unique opportunity for me to advance my qualitative research skills. The funding provided by the EHPS allowed this to be developed into a visit to a different way of approaching qualitative research questions.

Visiting Kerry Chamberlain

During my visit I had the chance to work further with Prof. Chamberlain on the go-along walking methodology and produce the first draft of the study. We discussed what and how this innovative methodology adds to the general research question of my thesis and how the results could be applied into practice. The process of analysis of the walk-along interviews was also developed after discussions with Prof. Chamberlain during the visit. A skype meeting with Prof. French, who supervises my thesis, contributed significantly to the project's progress, within the overall aims of the PhD research. The findings provided us with a new insight into the health behaviour in context and we expect it to be published soon. From the first meeting with Prof. Chamberlain I came across with his admirable talent to challenge your thinking in a way that boost your ability to see, talk and argue about issues that arise through different phases of research, from the research questions and theoretical background to the applicability and usefulness of the research findings. He generously and creatively

questioned and advised on the project, setting an example of how innovative ideas can be applied into research practice.

I was also pleased to participate in the Albany Discourse and Narrative Group (ADaNG) meeting, where Prof. Chamberlain and his colleagues discuss ideas, get informed and comment on research, advise on each others research and produce collaborative projects. Members of ADaNG team, who have used the go-along methodology, shared their experience with me, discussed challenges and ethical dilemmas that might arise during walk-along interviews and effective ways to deal with them, proposed relevant literature and stimulated alternative ways of approaching qualitative research. Less formal discussions with Prof. Chamberlain's colleagues about qualitative research followed.

Visiting Prof. Chamberlain could not be limited to project-related work only. I participated in a group meeting about qualitative analysis and methodologies, where Prof. Chamberlain with his unlimited enthusiasm and professionalism engaged us in a dialogue and encouraged us to step back from specific research questions and critically approach our role as researchers when interacting with participants and analyzing data. A considerable part was given to the process of analysis and how different challenges can be met. Prof. Chamberlains comments made complex issues seem simple and manageable, by giving efficient examples and tips. A fruitful exchange of ideas about different methodologies and whether and how these could serve the research questions was done, with Prof. Chamberlain motivating and leading for more elaborative and critical way of thinking.

Apart from several formal one-to-one and group meetings with the aim to progress my understanding on the go-along methodology and to advance my education on qualitative research, I was very happy to accept Prof. Chamberlain and his wife Vivians generous hospitality, which provided me with the opportunity to spend much more time with him. Less formal drive-along, eat- along and walk-along conversations, gave me the opportunity to discuss with Prof. Chamberlain any practical and theoretical challenges I faced when doing qualitative research. Prof. Chamberlain was always welcoming to take advantage of any available time we had, so that this visit could be of high benefit for the project and my education. During formal and less formal discussions Prof. Chamberlain not only taught me some important skills when doing qualitative research but also was an inspiring mentor who led by example.

A special place in this report should be given to Vivian and other visiting students, for the time we shared walking, chatting, swimming and having much more memorable experiences in beautiful New Zealand.

Finally, taking this opportunity I would like to express my gratitude to EHPS for this grant and to Prof. Kerry Chamberlain and Prof. David French for supporting this synergistic project and visit.

On the eve of the first year of EHPS association with the United Nations

Irina Todorova
EHPS past president

On April 29th 2011 we received the good news that the EHPS has been associated with the United Nations – specifically with the Division of Public Information (DPI)/NGO section, at UN Headquarters in New York. Our initial association is for a trial period of 2 years (which is standard), during which time we will be solidifying EHPS' relationship with the UN and its activities, attending the NGO meetings and discussions, connecting especially with other professional psychological societies who are associates (such as: American Psychological Association (APA), the International Association for Applied Psychology (IAAP), the International Council of Psychologists (ICP), the International Union of Psychological Sciences (IUPsyS), and the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI).

To ensure presence at the United Nations, in the summer of 2011 the EC appointed several EHPS members as representatives to the UN. Several other members expressed interest to be involved in this aspect of EHPS and we have formed a subcommittee with members: Alden Lai, Jessica Lake, Marta Marques, Susan Michie, Nihal Mohamed, Efrat Neter, Golan Shahar, Suzanne Skevington, Irina Todorova and Sebastian Wagner. Three of the representatives are currently working in New York City, and can attend monthly briefings and other activities at UN headquarters. The committee went through a process of priority setting, clarifying directions in which to develop the association. Through a survey of UN committee members and EC members the six most important goals they identified for the next year were: Keeping the UN informed about EHPS; Being informed about EHPS members' activities and research projects that are relevant to UN philosophy or are in collaboration with UN institutions; Keeping EHPS members informed about UN activities; Developing contacts with other psychological organizations at the UN; Participating in the organization of the annual "Psychology Day" at the UN; Developing contacts and EHPS presence at WHO.

In order to share all important information regarding the EHPS UN affiliation, Manja Vollmann developed a section in the EHPS website. Please visit it and share your ideas: www.ehps.net/index.php/EHPS/ehps-at-the-united-nations.html. Additionally, to stimulate active discussion and sharing of ideas regarding health psychology's contribution to global health and health policies, Alden Lai has developed a new blog at http://ehpsattheun.wordpress.com. You can get in touch with him to login and contribute to the discussion: ehpsattheun@gmail.com.

Annual Reports to the United Nations are submitted for each calendar year by associated organizations, in order to continue association. We submitted our first Annual Report to the UN in January 2012, covering the period of April – December, 2011. Many EHPS members shared information about their recent involvement in

UN related projects and institutions, such as the WHO, UNESCO and others. Thank you for your contributions, illustrating members' diverse ties with United Nations research and health promotion activities and contribution to research in global health!

Two EHPS representatives participated in the 64th Annual UN DPI Conference in Bonn, Germany in 2011: Alden Lai and Golan Shahar. Their joint report from the conference was published in the December 2011 issue of the European Health Psychologist: "Connecting the Dots": EHPS and the United Nations" (Lai & Shahar, 2011). The authors present five conclusions from this UN DPI/NGO Conference and propose that EHPS members consider them and discuss how to put them into action. Their more detailed individual reports are also available at: www.ehps.net/index.php/EHPS/ehps-at-the-united-nations.html.

At the start of our second year of association with the UN, we can begin identifying the most important next steps which we will be embarking on.

Continued exchange of information between EHPS and the United Nations, including on-going updates of EHPS members' research projects and contacts with United Nations institutions.

Preparing for Consultative Status at the United Nations: An association with DPI is mainly information based—keeping the UN informed about EHPS and sharing information about the UN with EHPS members, and can be considered a first step of a larger process. While this exchange of information will continue, an organization can have palpable input on international policies and priorities when it has consultative status to the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) http://csonet.org/?menu=83 and with the World Health Organization. Then, these organizations can call on EHPS for relevant consultations or EHPS can be proactive in submitting proposals and recommendations to them. Acquiring such consultative status can be achieved through separate application procedures, both to ECOSOC and WHO. Luckily, the EHPS UN committee has many dedicated members who are committed to furthering this process, and we will be initiating preparations for applying. Marta Marques has started working on our application for association with WHO, through their Civil Society Initiative.

Psychology Day at the United Nations: At the start of our second year, the EHPS UN representatives in New York will be attending the Fifth Annual Psychology Day at the United Nations, which is on the topic of "*Human Rights for Vulnerable People: Psychological Contributions and the United Nations Perspective*". It is organized by the psychological organizations at the UN. The Day will be on April 19th and will have panels on: Mental Health and Sustainable Development; Refugees and Psychosocial Wellbeing; Poverty Eradication in the Lives of Women and Children. At this Annual Psychology Day the EHPS will participate as a member of the audience; however this will also be the start of our contacts with the psychology organizations at the UN and we can be actively involved in the planning of the next, the Sixth Psychology Day at the UN in 2013.

Roundtable on the topic of United Nations Association in Prague, 2012: To ensure communication about these issues among EHPS members and friends, we have submitted a proposal for a roundtable to the 26th Conference of the EHPS in Prague, to be held in August 2012, "EHPS association with the United Nations: How can health psychology influence global health policies?" During this roundtable, we can discuss our future activities related to the UN/WHO, and in particular we will elucidate

the purpose, strategies and substance of what the contribution of health psychology and EHPS can be to global health policies. Please join us at the roundtable to share your ideas and opinions, including ideas for similar events at future EHPS conferences.

Integrating all contributions so far regarding the EHPS vision and strategy about what it means for health psychology to have an impact on global health and health equity through UN institutions (Lai & Shahar, 2011); how EHPS can constructively contribute to UN policies, projects and resolutions and putting these into practice. The progress so far has been possible thanks to the input and contributions of many EHPS members (Todorova, 2010). We invite all interested EHPS members to continue to share your perspectives at the roundtable in Prague, on the EHPS-UN blog and all possible forms of communication.

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