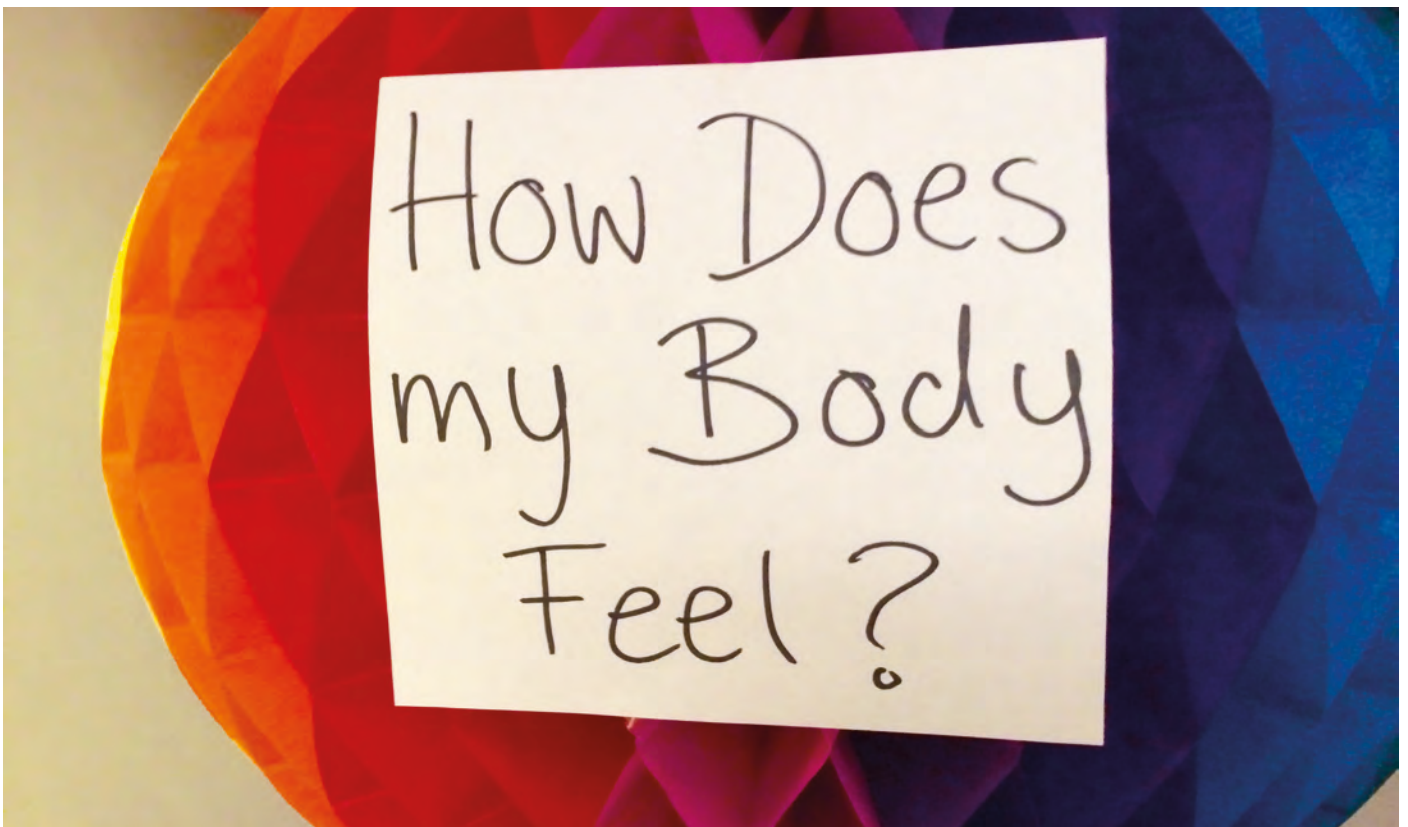


Feelings and Psychosis: A Cross College Studentship

Developing innovative methodological strategies to explore combinations of feelings, **Katie Melvin** discusses her project on experiences described as psychosis.



What is Psychosis?

Psychosis is a medical term used to describe experiences where our understandings and perceptions of reality differ from those held by people around us. Experiences described as an episode of psychosis often involve disruptions to thinking, speech, emotion, and behaviour. This tends to involve experiences called delusions, where we strongly believe things which are almost certainly untrue. It can also involve hallucinations, with sensory experiences seemingly without an external, material cause, such as hearing voices. Such episodes can be associated with traumatic experiences, lack of sleep, stress, neurological conditions (e.g. dementia or Parkinson's disease), drug and alcohol use, socio-economic disadvantage, and many other causes. Some people who experience an episode described as psychosis are given a psychiatric diagnosis such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder.

What do we mean by feelings?

Feelings involve the embodied states we experience but don't always notice, as we go through our daily lives, navigating our

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material and social world. The term 'feelings' broadly includes three types of embodied experiences: emotional feelings, extra-emotional feelings, and feelings of knowing (Cromby, 2015). Emotional feelings regard the bodily experience of emotional states such as uplifting happiness or sinking sadness. Extra-emotional feelings are broader states not always associated with emotion, such as hunger or sleepiness. Feelings of knowing, often referred to as gut-feelings, tend to be experienced in social relations and decision making, such as a sense of reluctance or certainty. This research about feelings forms part of social science's affective turn; an academic shift towards considering emotive and embodied aspects of experiences.

Feelings are formed within an environmental context, with flowing and fluxing sensations throughout the body as we occupy a material, social, and relational space. Due to the breadth of this experience and its constant interrelationship with our experience of an environment, feelings can be difficult to research. Physiological measures can't always capture them, they can't always be expressed in words, and they can be difficult to quantify. This presents a methodological challenge but also an opportunity for interdisciplinary research. By looking across the boundaries of different subject areas, we may be able to develop innovative methods to optimise our understanding of feelings and their part in psychosis.

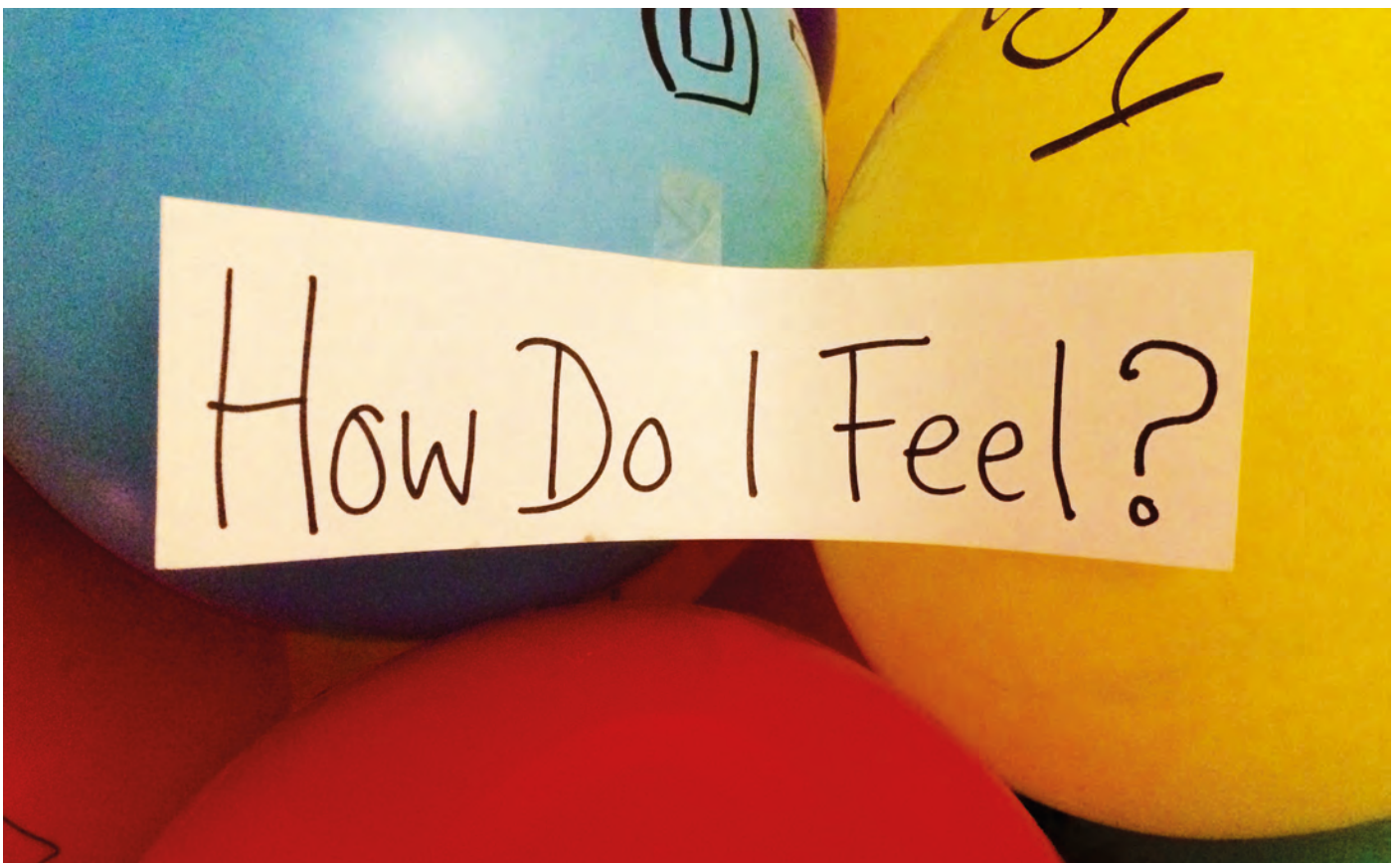
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“[the project] will support people who have experienced episodes described as psychosis.”

Why is this research important?

Lived experiences such as feelings and emotions are often neglected in research. Personal accounts and clinical understandings of psychosis tend to involve descriptions of people experiencing a sense of distress alongside other cognitive, functional, and interpersonal difficulties. Little is known about how feelings may play a role in experiences described as psychosis. This project therefore aims to explore what feeling states are present in experiences described as psychosis. More specifically, I hope to understand how feelings may co-occur and catalyse one another and what this lived, embodied experience is like.

Since this is a novel area of research without established methods, the project will most likely take a qualitative approach. Subsequent to a more thorough literature review, the project will develop an empirical methodological strategy to support people who have experienced episodes described as psychosis. This will hopefully allow them to share what those felt, embodied experiences were like. This provides an opportunity for people to share and talk through their experiences in a space where they are welcomed to do so. The project also provides a platform for people to contribute to the current academic discourse where their lived experiences are not often considered. This may support developments in academic, clinical and public understandings of these experiences, such that clinical practice and therapeutic interventions can be improved.



Katie Melvin is finishing her first year of a PhD within the School of Business and School of Psychology at the University of Leicester. Katie aims to employ her clinical and academic skills to further understand the role of feelings in experiences described as a first episode of psychosis.