

issue (remember colour palettes?). The best consequence of this long refinement process was that the reviews were not painful to read at all!

What's next?

CS: Will you be following up on this research? How will what you learnt in the process inform your future work? And what big questions do you see on the horizon for cultural evolution as a field?

EM: My current work follows closely from my PhD – I study innovation and cumulative improvement through theoretical and large-scale experimental approaches – so you'll hopefully be seeing more specific, controlled studies from me, complimenting this observational approach. This has definitely been a topsy-turvy ride, but I don't think

I'd change anything about it. I might have a stack of folders full of unproductive analyses, but I've learned from all of the uncertainty, and that's what PhDs are all about.

Looking forward, I'm not going to try to predict where the field is going, but I'm very excited to read Celia Heyes' new book, 'Cognitive Gadgets: The Cultural Evolution of Thinking'. □



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Tom Morgan in the School of Human Evolution and Social Change at Arizona State University.

Wisdom of the Crowd

Our resident Agony Aunt offers guidance on the crucial questions bothering early-career researchers, with additional advice crowd-sourced from Twitter. In this issue:

How to make the most of your first academic conference?

Conferences! Some people love them, some hate them. They can be stressful, exhausting, and expensive. But conferences are also fantastic networking opportunities, provide a chance to present your work to the (potentially) small number of people in the world who are genuinely interested in it, and they can be a lot of fun – especially if you follow this advice!

Making the most of the conference is important – after all, you may well have paid a lot of money to attend, and the conference might only come around every couple of years. My first piece of advice, though, is not to put too much pressure on yourself. It's likely that you won't make it to every talk you want to hear, or that you won't have a chance to talk to every senior academic you're



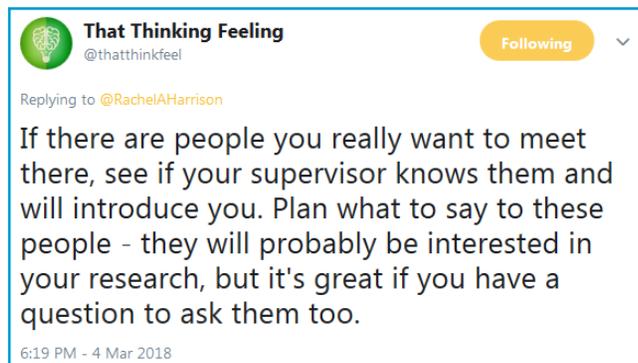
Agony Aunt

How to master your first conference

hoping to track down. And that's ok! No one manages to do everything at every conference.

To give yourself the best conference experience possible, make a plan. Pick out key presentations you don't want to miss and plan out a schedule so you can make it to as many as possible. Follow @laurenmrobin's advice and look up speakers in advance, and aim to introduce yourself for a quick chat. Having a plan and a schedule for the conference will help you minimise your chances of missing that key talk related to your research.

Now, introducing yourself to leading researchers in your field can be easier said than done (it's certainly something I find challenging!). When you're planning for your conference, you could email senior researchers and ask if you can schedule in a chat over coffee one day. This is a particularly good idea if you have something substantial to discuss, like a potential collaboration. From Twitter, @thatthinkfeel suggests asking your supervisor if they can introduce you – this is a great way to enlist a little moral support in your networking endeavours. If you're lucky, your supervisor will do the “this is x, they work on y” icebreaking legwork for you – but make sure you have thought of something to say yourself, whether it's an ‘elevator pitch’ about your own work or a question about theirs.



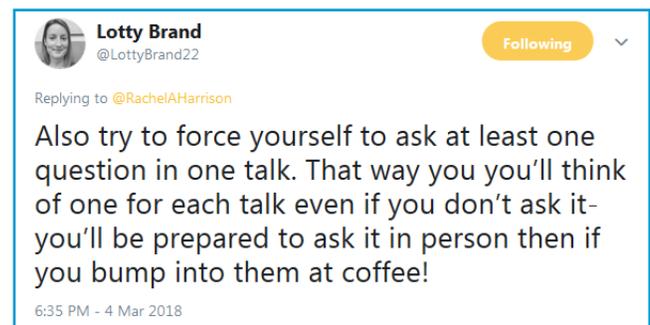
Don't panic if you don't manage to talk to that key researcher in your field. Conferences can be hectic for everyone, and you might find that senior academics have full schedules and simply aren't around during coffee breaks – or are constantly in the middle of in-depth conversations that you

don't want to interrupt. If this happens, don't beat yourself up, just follow up after the conference with an email – ask a question about their talk or recent publication, and maybe arrange to chat when you next attend the same conference.

Conferences aren't just about getting facetime with the 'big names', though. Great collaborations (and friendships!) can come from chatting with your fellow early-career researchers. As @riveramichael points out, this will not only ensure you have someone to chat with at every coffee break, but also leave you with a life-long network of peers.



Now, conferences aren't just about networking during coffee breaks. You'll also spend a lot of time listening to other researcher's presentations, and perhaps you'll be presenting your own research. 'How to give a good conference presentation' ought to be an advice column in its own right, so instead I'll pass along this advice from @lottybrand22 on being an engaged audience member.

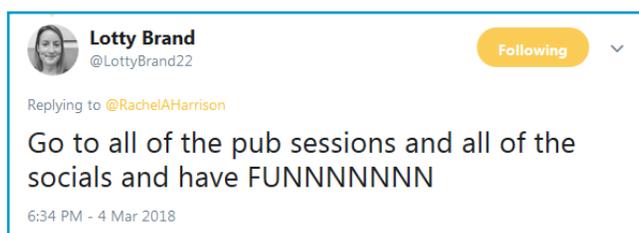


And conferences aren't just about work! If you're lucky, you'll be visiting a new city (and perhaps

even a new country) so take some time off to explore. Pick a session or two that you don't mind missing, and go and do a little sight-seeing. You'll feel refreshed afterwards and better able to take in the talks you do attend. And, as @thatthinkfeel points out, a little bit of alone time can be a great way to recharge.



Finally, most conferences include some evening social events - @lottybrand22 recommends attending as many as you can – don't hole yourself up in your hotel room every evening, go and have some fun! Again, this may also be a great opportunity to see some more of the host city, and it can also be a further networking opportunity. Some conferences have early-career research socials, which are great for meeting people at a similar stage to yourself in a more relaxed setting.



As @eithnekavanagh points out though, there can be pitfalls to the pub social or wine reception! Keep in mind the 9am plenary talk when you reach for that fourth glass of free wine.

Meanwhile, in our final piece of Twitter advice, @skipsahoi sees wine receptions and lunches as a key opportunity to reclaim the registration fee.

While I myself often find @eithnekavanagh's advice to limit alcohol consumption tricky to follow,

I cannot in good conscience recommend that you attempt to drink the registration fee. Feel free to try to consume a few hundred euro's worth of croissants at the morning coffee break, though.



I hope this advice proves useful! Conferences are, in my opinion, one of the best aspects of a career in research, but they are undeniably stressful experiences at the same time. Remember that all early-career academics are probably experiencing the same anxiety – whether they're nervous about meeting a senior researcher in the coffee break or panicking about presenting their research. Relax, smile, and introduce yourself, and you'll find you have a roomful of new friends in no time.



Thanks to @skipsahoi, @laurenmrobin, @lottybrand22, @eithnekavanagh, @riveramichael and @thatthinkfeel for their words of wisdom.

If you have a question for the Cultured Scene Agony Aunt (+ Twitter commentators) email journalsec2@yslr.co.uk, and look out for tweets in the future asking for advice. □