

# Conferences beyond Psychology: A Review of the 2011 American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Joint Annual Meeting

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## ABSTRACT

Academic conference experiences are an integral component of the psychology graduate school experience in terms of professional development. It is important to also attend conferences hosted by fields other than psychology for the benefit of multi- and interdisciplinary research and treatment. One such closely allied field is psychiatry. In the current article, I review the AACAP/CACAP Joint Annual Meeting, co-hosted by the Canadian and American academies of child and adolescent psychiatry in Toronto, October 2011. The conference featured many sessions of interest to psychology students, both in both familiar presentation formats as well as in unique ones. In addition to conference highlights, I also outline some of my personal experiences and ways in which the conference could be potentially improved from the perspective of a psychology student, such as providing a student conference rate and strengthening the social program offered.

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## Résumé

La présence à des conférences universitaires demeure un élément intégral des expériences aux études supérieures en psychologie sur le plan du perfectionnement professionnel. Mais il est aussi important d'assister à des conférences organisées dans des domaines autres que la psychologie au bénéfice d'une recherche et d'un traitement multi et interdisciplinaires. L'un de ces domaines liés de près à la psychologie est la psychiatrie. Dans le présent article, je me penche sur la conférence annuelle conjointe AACAP/ACPEA, coparrainée par les académies canadiennes et américaines de psychiatrie de l'enfant et de l'adolescent qui a eu lieu à Toronto, en octobre 2011. Les présentations étaient en format familier, et d'autres uniques à la conférence. En plus des faits saillants de la conférence, je décris aussi certaines de mes expériences personnelles et des façons par lesquelles la conférence pourrait être possiblement améliorée à partir de la perspective d'un étudiant en psy-

chologie, comme d'offrir un tarif étudiant pour la participation à la conférence et renforcer les activités sociales offertes.

## Interdisciplinary Conferences

Students in psychology are often reminded about the importance of attending and presenting at academic conferences such as the Canadian Psychological Association's (CPA) annual meeting being held in Halifax this year. Attending conferences within the field of psychology provides students, researchers and professionals with opportunities to present their own research, receive feedback, and network with others who have similar interests. Attendees are able to have research presented in an interactive forum. For those in more clinical and applied fields, attending conferences may also offer insight into new clinical approaches and often provides students with an opportunity to meet with representatives from clinical internship sites. In the current article, I will emphasize the importance of attending conferences in fields other than psychology and review one such conference that I recently attended: the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) and Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (CACAP) Joint Annual Meeting.

It is hard to deny the importance of attending and presenting at conferences (Haines & Landrum, 2008; Tryon, 1985). However, when it comes time to consider which conferences to submit research applications, many students may not consider applying to conferences in allied disciplines such as education, nursing, occupational therapy, philosophy or psychiatry. These separate fields should not be overlooked. In recent years there has been a paradigm shift towards multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research (National Academy of Sciences, 2004). Presenting at conferences in other fields can help promote psychology as a valuable component of scientific research, as well as provide an opportunity to find potential research collabora-

tors in diverse fields. Attending conferences organized by another discipline can also be helpful for clinically focussed students, as many psychologists regularly interact with teachers, speech-language pathologists and social workers among other professionals. One can benefit from seeing what clinical approaches their professional peers' field has to offer.

### **The AACAP/CACAP Conference**

One field closely linked to psychology is psychiatry. Psychiatry, which uses a medical model in approaching the treatment and research of mental health issues, overlaps in many areas with psychology. This past October I had the opportunity to present a research poster at the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) and Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (CACAP) Joint Annual Meeting. My poster was based on work I had done while at my pre-internship clinical placement at Montreal's Jewish General Hospital's Early Childhood Disorders program in helping to develop objective methods of assessing the effectiveness of ADHD medication. The focus of the poster was on how to implement a method that could be used with a multi-disciplinary team.

The AACAP/CACAP Joint Annual Meeting was held at the Sheraton Centre Toronto Hotel from October 18-23, 2011. Both the AACAP and the CACAP rotate their conference site from year to year, and have hosted a joint conference four times in the past 15 years, with three of those times being in Toronto. In addition to its familiar Toronto location, the AACAP/CACAP Joint Annual Meeting also had many of the same presentation formats seen at the CPA Annual Convention, including poster sessions, symposia, workshops, committee meetings and award presentations. Since most psychiatrists in attendance were also active practitioners, there were a number of session formats that focussed on the specific treatments of clients. This included clinical perspective sessions that highlighted the "clinical wisdom" of the practice of child and adolescent psychiatry, and clinical case conferences in which clinicians would present a particularly difficult case for discussion with those in attendance. In addition to the clinical case conferences, conference attendees could also attend clinical consultation breakfasts. During the clinical consultation breakfasts, groups of 15 or fewer would discuss a specific case or topic, such as the individual psychotherapy of adolescent sexual abuse. Some of the highlights of the conference program included separate symposia on integrating neuroscience and intervention in pediatric trauma, developmental and biopsychosocial perspectives on treating pediatric bipolar disorder, and findings from the Autism Genome Project (Anney et al., 2010; Hu-Lince, Craig, Huentelman, & Stephan, 2005). There were plenty of sessions available to attend each day.

Before attending the conference, I did not know what to expect. As a school and applied child psychology student

at McGill University, most of the conferences that I had attended and presented at were organized by psychologists. I expected a lot of research on pharmaceutical approaches, very little information on talk-based therapy, a lot of pharmaceutical representatives, plenty of medical students and not a lot of psychologists. Many of these assumptions were incorrect. For one, there were strict limits on the presence of pharmaceutical representatives and how they were allowed to interact with conference attendees. Additionally, each presenter was requested to disclose any potential conflicts of interest at the start of their presentation. In terms of the research presented, a common topic was the use of medication to treat clients, but there were still a substantial amount of presentations on non-pharmaceutical approaches to treatment. Thus, an attendee could avoid medication-focussed sessions and still have plenty of options in terms of what to attend. I was also surprised to find that unlike other conferences where the poster sessions seem to be populated by students, established psychiatrists were among the most common poster presenters. In fact, I did not seem to see as many psychiatry students as I had expected. Although this made the actual presentation of my poster a little anxiety inducing as the majority of people who stopped to ask me questions were experienced researchers in psychiatry, it had the added advantage that I was able to receive detailed feedback on my methodology and suggestions for potential future directions. Finally, upon reviewing the conference program it appeared as though psychologists were well represented as I was able to spot a few familiar names.

Despite the many positives elements of the AACAP/CACAP Joint Annual Meeting, I felt as though there were a few drawbacks as well. For one, I found that compared to other conferences I attended, the AACAP/CACAP Joint Annual Meeting did not offer as much in the way of social activities. There was a welcome reception on Wednesday evening featuring Pink Freud and the Transitional Objects, a musical troupe of psychiatrists, and an "open mic" night on Thursday. While conference attendees were provided with some options in terms of the social program, I felt it was unfortunate that each event was held at the convention centre. After a day spent attending events it may have been tempting for many attendees to spend the rest of their evening in their hotel room after dinner. Although places of interest in Toronto were outlined on the conference website, attendees were not provided with any organized outings that explored the city of Toronto. This was unfortunate, as visitors from the United States may have missed an opportunity to explore Canada's largest city. Additionally, I was disappointed to discover that the student socials were restricted to medical students. Finally, the cost of the conference may be considered high for some, as registration for the full length of the conference was \$475. Fortunately, non-member non-psychiatrists who were presenting only had to pay a \$125 to \$150 registration rate.

Medical students and psychiatry residents could attend for free, but this offer was not extended to students in other disciplines such as psychology. Certainly extending this offer to include students from other fields would have been welcome, or at the very least including a separate student rate.

Overall, the AACAP/CACAP Joint Annual Meeting had a strong program with many presentations and sessions that are of interest to psychologists and psychology students who work with children and adolescents. Psychologists and individuals in other fields were very welcome at the conference, as many of the psychiatrists I talked to were glad to have others there who provided a different perspective. Although high registration rates may hinder a psychology student's ability to attend as a non-presenter, if your research involves adolescents or children and is in an area that overlaps with aspects of psychiatry I would definitely recommend applying to present at either the CACAP or the AACAP Annual Meeting. For the next two years, the two organizations are going their separate ways. The CACAP will be holding their meeting at the Palais des congrès in Montréal, from September 30 to October 2, 2012 and then in Vancouver in 2013. The AACAP will be hosting their next annual meeting in San Francisco from October 23-28, 2012,

and at Walt Disney World in Florida in 2013. I hope that this review has convinced you to consider attending and presenting your research at either academy's meeting. See you in Montréal in the fall!



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