1. Introduction

Welcome to Relationship News, one vehicle for relationships in PORIG. As a result of the forum of Committee members at the November 2007 Conference (see 3. Forum Results below) we want to encourage membership participation in creating new approaches to our mission:

“We should seek to be the commentators of choice on relationship issues in Oz:

- with focus on disconnectedness and failed relationships at various social levels
- and, depathologising interpersonal conflict with the aim of prevention (psycho-education)”

In the first instance, we solicit contributions roughly in these areas. Contributions could include suggestions for other areas of priority focus for PORIG. Please keep to 750 words max.

A kick off arguing for urgency and focus in PORIG appears below. It reflects the opinions of the author only.

2 – Opinion

Why PORIG should focus more sharply in its work....

Stating the obvious is satisfying because easy and irritating because necessary – a combination that increases the likelihood of my failing to do this well. I make 3 points about urgency for PORIG to become more influential in the APS and our society. One, relationships are the core (foundation?) of human activities, even in our dreams; two, the need for
human activities to respond / initiate change are greater than they have been for some time; and, three, the resistance to relationship mindedness is deeply embedded in our dominant social structures and political processes.

The first is obvious, but perhaps we do not see it easily because we assume it, naturally enough. Take a look at the 26 other APS interest groups and find one which does not depend for its subject matter and effectiveness on relationships. How many of these have a conscious relationship theory for their interest and practice?? How about our 9 colleges?

The second is implicit, but out of our normal range of perception, and difficult to say with confidence for individuals. This is a subject of much writing – a useful summary book is Powerful Times (2005) by Eamonn Kelly. Three years haven’t dented its prescience. It strikes me that a key problem now is ‘how can we start moving towards any future we might desire?’ To answer this requires analysis of the now(s) we are in. A quick take at that produces something like this:

1) Everyday language is so debased that truthful speaking in public life is difficult – all things are reduced to potential calculables in short term ROI projections.
2) Public deliberative processes are now conducted almost wholly in adversarial terms – demonising the others as the first move; every public issue is now a “debate” to be settled by point scoring, not truth making.
3) The systems and tools of political representation are in disrepair. In other Anglo countries the participation rates in major elections – national and regional / state – yield results based on victory by less than half of less than half of the possible electorates
4) Add the above together and you have the basis for the no accountability processes and discourses which dominate public space – it’s all spun.
5) The ‘economy’ is clearly producing a variety of dysfunctional results in the midst of its successes; these are revisited daily in the national media.

Kelly adds, “..... the world has never been certain. Humanity has experienced great shifts and rifts, profound anxieties, and deep confusion many times throughout its history....... Yet the world—the entire world—has surely never been more certain. As our systems—technological, financial, social, economic, cultural, and political—become more complex, more global, more interdependent, and develop at an accelerating pace, increasing (and increasingly widespread) uncertainty is an inevitable and ongoing consequence.”

Third, the difference between ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ skills in life, is coloured by the implication of weakness in the labelling. In the APS and PORIG this plays out partly in the loose divide between research and practice. In times of uncertainty, with increased rates and ranges of change, ‘soft’ skills will become even more important. For years the business community has known that large changes like mergers and acquisitions fail at better that 50% rate due to failures of ‘soft’ skills. That’s not likely to decline under these conditions, but the resistance to engaging those skills remains high. What should PORIG contribute to this challenge?? Which of its’ relationships should we focus on?
I look forward to your contributions.

Warmly,
Torrey Orton - News Editor  torrey@innerchange.com.au
Feb. 18, 2008

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3 - Forum Results

APS Relationship Interest Group Conference Forum Results
Nov. 11, 2007 – 9:45-10:45am

Pax – Fallon, Fitness, Bowles, Orton, Rice, Rouch, Welch, Wilkinson, Karantzas, Pearce, Murphy

The group addressed 3 questions:

1. What aspects of r’ship should the IG focus on?
2. Who should be our target audience(s)?
3. How should we go about engaging them?

The results of discussion are presented in the rough order they occurred and are based on charted records on the day. It was agreed that this may provide a starting place for IG Committee discussion and action through the year. The following was discussed in the context of our being an existing forum for networking, etc. among relationship focussed researchers / practitioners.

We should seek to be the commentators of choice on relationship issues in Oz:

- with focus on disconnectedness and failed relationships at various social levels
- and, specifically responding to / combating the medicalisation of depression and other psychological injuries,
- and, depathologising maladjustment with aim of prevention (psycho-education)

Recognising that ‘community’ understanding of psych and science is very low, we need to focus on concept clarity, paradigm shifts and the meaning of ‘The research shows...’ reports in our influencing efforts

Some of the target groups apart from schools and the ‘community’ may be other psychs, NGO’s like Beyond Blue and government initiatives like BMHOCs and professional colleagues like GP’s.

And some of the pathways / alliances to influencing such people and organisations might include APS publications and Colleges (especially Educ.+Development and Counselling) and other Allied health practitioners. Developing our own media contacts might occur in tandem with wresting the referral of queries from the generic APS respondents now doing so.
It is with pleasure that I can report on the great success of our annual conference. Over 100 participants attended the two days of keynote presentations, forums, papers, and posters. Planning for the conference began over 18 months ago and we were very pleased when the International Association for Relationships Research (IARR) agreed to co-badge our event as a mini-conference of the IARR. This assisted us in advertising the event internationally and attract presenters and participants from around the world.

The three keynote presentations were a particular highlight of the conference. Phil Shaver spoke on his work with Mario Mikulincer and others in advancing our understanding of attachment at the levels of the individual mind, dyadic relationships, and relationships in group and organisations. Marita McCabe gave a fascinating presentation on work examining sexual functioning in men and women as they age. Jeff Simpson’s keynote on his experimental work examining working models and care-giving in romantic partners demonstrated the major contribution he is making to the field.

Forty research papers and 11 posters were presented over the two days of the conference with a truly impressive range of topics that covered the lifespan. Electronic versions of the 2007 Program (including abstracts) and the Conference Proceedings will be available via our website (www.groups.psychology.org.au/porig/). Importantly for our conference, empirical, theoretical, and practice issues were covered. The three forums were also a very popular way to encouraged interaction, engagement and energise participants.

An important highlight of the conference was the presentation ceremony for the Relationship Interest Group awards. This year the Research Award was awarded to Associate Professor Julie Fitness for her outstanding contribution to research on relationships and her major contributions to the community of relationships researchers. Two Thesis Awards were awarded this year. Doctor Alexandra West was presented an award for her dissertation titled ‘Relational Standards – Rules and Expectations in Romantic Relationships”. Doctor Laureen Breen was presented an award for her dissertation titled ‘Silenced Voices: Experiences of Grief Following Road Traffic Crashes in Western Australia’.

For the first time we held both pre- and post-conference workshops. On the Friday morning Dr Helen Stallman, from the University of Queensland, presented a clinically focussed workshop on Triple P interventions to promote positive outcomes for children following divorce. In the afternoon Dr Mike Smithson, from The Australian National University, presented a research focussed workshop looking at coping with the problem of dependent data by using multi-level modelling. Highly successful post-conference workshops were also held in Brisbane (with Phil Shaver) and Adelaide (with Jeff Simpson).

After a brief pause to catch our breathe planning for our 2008 conference is already under way. Look out for more information about it on our website.

Ross Wilkinson
5 - The Psychology of Relationships Research Award

And The Psychology of Relationships Thesis Award 2008

The APS Interest Group on the Psychology of Relationships is calling for nominations for two research awards. The awards are intended to promote the development of research regarding relationship education and/or therapy within the discipline of psychology.

Thesis Award Nominees should have completed their higher degree (Masters, Professional Doctorate or PhD) within one year of nominating. Research Award Nominees should have been involved in research and/or practice in the area of relationships for at least five years.

For both awards applications will be judged on scientific merit and the contribution to theory and/or practice in the field of the psychology of relationships. Nominees should be a member of, or have applied for membership of, the APS. Nominations may be made by the individual or by a colleague.

Nominations close: 29 August 2008

For more information, including information regarding the nomination process and the required supporting documentation, please contact:

Dr Ross Wilkinson
Psychology of Relationships Interest Group Convener,
School of Psychology, Building 39, Australian National University,
ACT 0200
email: Ross.Wilkinson@anu.edu.au

6 - ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Minutes of Annual General Meeting of the Australian Psychological Society Psychology of Relationships Interest Group held on Sunday, 11\textsuperscript{th} November, 2007 at Australian Catholic University, St. Patrick’s Campus, Victoria parade, Fitzroy

\textbf{PRESENT}: Terry Bowles, Barry Fallon, Julie Fitness, Ross Wilkinson, Lisa Eisen, Alex West, Torrey Orton, Gery Karantzas, Neil Welch, Marita McCabe, Jeanne Strahan, Anita Black, Alana Howells, Melanie Zimmer-Gembeck, Kylie Murphy

\textbf{APOLOGIES}: Zoe Pearce

- Previous minutes were accepted, moved by Neil Welch, seconded by Marita McCabe.

\textbf{EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE REPORTS}

1. Chair’s Report – Terry Bowles

- The report of the chair was tabled. Terry announced that this would be his last report as chair. He thanked the committee for their tireless work and special thanks were given to Barry’s contribution at the APS level attributing our prominence to his work at the national level. Terry noted that this last term has been a period of consolidation and
reformulation for the interest group. He reported that the interest group was in good financial status, was prominent and stable within the APS and the interest group maintained high membership with the incorporation of more practitioners while keeping a strong research base. Terry flagged that the group is generating international associates and networks, but was disappointed that our impact was not being felt at a policy level as we were not being consulted by the APS or other groups.

2. Secretary’s Report – Julie Fitness

- Julie reported that while the newsletter was still being produced the frequency of issuing the newsletter had decreased as little to report. She suggested that it may be worth having less newsletter per year to have more to report in each issue and encouraged to send things to the incoming newsletter editor.

3. Treasurer’s Report – Neil Welch

- Treasurer’s report was tabled. Neil reported that our current financial status saw the interest group with a balance of $2,500.00 with this figure to possible rise with the deposit of final conference registrations. Neil and Terry noticed a discrepancy in membership numbers which Terry will follow up as this has implications for the funding allocation to the interest group.

4. Website Manager’s Report – Ross Wilkinson

- Ross reported that the APS has a new website system for management and upload of material, but support from the APS has been limited making the process for regular updating very challenging. Ross will try to link the proceedings back to the website given the new management system.


- Ross thanked Barry and the volunteers for their tremendous work in assisting with the organisation and for providing another excellent conference at ACU. Ross thanked Gery for his work in securing and managing the schedules for the keynote speakers. Ross also thanked Zoe for her excellent work as proceedings editor. Ross reported that negotiations with IARR to hold the joint conference commenced 18 months ago. The IARR supported the idea after receipt of a proposal but could not provide financial support. Thus the ideal target for conference participants was 120 and the realistic target was 100 delegates. At last count, the figure was just over 100. Participants included Australasia, the US and Brazil, however we didn’t seem to attract participants from Europe.


- Zoe sent her apologies. Terry gratefully acknowledged her tremendous work. A total of 17 papers were published in the 2007 edition of the conference proceedings.

GENERAL BUSINESS

- Barry reported on feedback regarding the conference. He noted a lot of positive feedback, but Lisa reported from the practice forum that some members were disappointed with lack of resources such as books and other materials. It was mentioned in the practice forum that workshops on clinical work with couples would be good to run. A number of clinicians noted that the conference was not what they expected, but thought the conference was extremely valuable for them.
• Terry suggests that we many need to look at our aims and objectives of whether we are meeting the needs of members or to address things if we are not. Barry mentioned about putting some a note in the next newsletter canvassing people about what they want.

• Marita encouraged that the committee think about moving the conference if not for the coming year then for the following year with a move away from Melbourne.

• Ross suggested the conference be held at ACU for 2008, but that discussions of the 2008 conference should also include about planning to move the conference for 2009. Barry kindly agreed to be the conference co-ordinator again, however a chair will need to be decided. Ross noted that the first task of the new committee should be to identify a chair. He also proposed that the first meeting of the new IG committee should include the old committee to discuss the move for the 2009 conference and discuss feedback about the 2007 conference and planning for 2008. The dates for the 2008 conference at ACU are November 15th-16th.

**INTEREST GROUP ELECTIONS**

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<td>Ross Wilkinson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>Gery Karantzas</td>
<td>Elected unopposed</td>
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<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>Neil Welch</td>
<td>Elected unopposed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Website Manager</td>
<td>Melanie Zimmer-Gembeck</td>
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<tr>
<td>State Activities Co-ordinator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newsletter Editor</td>
<td>Torrey Orton</td>
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<td>Committee Members</td>
<td>Zoe Pearce</td>
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• Meeting closed with thanks 6.05pm, November 11th, 2007.
7. **Teleconference minutes – Dec. 13th, 2007**

Minutes of the final teleconference for 2007 of the

**Australian Psychological Society Psychology of Relationships Interest Group**

held on 13th of December, 3.30 - 4:30pm.

**PRESENT:** Zoe Pearce, Terry Bowles, Barry Fallon, Ross Wilkinson, Torrey Orton, Neil Welch, Kylie Murphy (minutes)

**APOLOGIES:** Lisa Eisen, Gery Karantzas, Melanie Zimmer-Gembeck, Alex West

**ISSUES ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES:**

Barry Fallon had been omitted from previous minutes – elected as Committee Member for 2008.

Acknowledgement and thanks were extended to Terry Bowles for his wonderful work as Chair til now.

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE REPORTS**

8. **Chair’s Report, IARR/IG Conference 2007 – RW**

- Ross referred to the report he prepared for the IG and IARR newsletter (attached) on our 7th Annual Conference. The Committee agreed that the attendance of 100 participants, given the target of 120, was pleasing. Ross could not provide an update re financial status—October figures are the latest posted—and expected that the financial outcome of the conference would not be known until Jan/Feb or later. **Ross requested an invoice from ACU ASAP.**

- Ross noted that the research-oriented workshop was not so profitable as other sessions, but this was not a reason to shy away from offering similar sessions in the future.

9. **Extra Conference Activities for Speakers – GK, NW, ZP**

- Gerry, earlier, submitted a written summary of the activities offered at Deakin, noting the success of these. Neil reported similar success in Adelaide: A number of attendees expressed an interest in ongoing/regular meetings, triggered by Jeff Simpson’s talk. However, Neil was disappointed that a number of registrants failed to attend and other interested individuals missed out on a place. Re the Queensland session, Zoe reported that she had received emails requesting information about upcoming IG events, following Phil Shaver’s presentation but, like Neil, she was disappointed about the attendance rate of those who booked places: 15 of the 40 people who missed out on a place could have been accommodated if notice had been given by the 15 (of 80) registrants who failed to attend. Torrey commented that underpricing of the sessions might have contributed to the drop-out rate, because the real value on offer was not reflected in the cost to participants. **This question could be revisited prior to next year’s activities.** All three
written reports are attached. Thanks were extended to Zoe and Neil (and Gerry in his absence) for their successful efforts in promoting Relationships research.

- Terry raised concerns about ultimate inequities that can arise between universities that host conference and extra-conference activities. It appears that the APS might have gained more promotional benefit from the Melbourne conference than did ACU, but this probably isn’t the case for those universities that hosted the extra-conference activities. Policy questions around this could be considered prior to next year’s conference.

- Zoe reported that she is in the process of obtaining ISBN for the Proceedings, for their inclusion in Vic and Qld public libraries and university libraries across Australia. Zoe expressed a preference that requests be made for electronic copies rather than for hard copies, as the former is cheaper and more environmentally responsible. Ross pointed out that the Proceedings would also be available free-of-charge direct from the APS/IG website (when Melanie can begin work on web management). It is still unclear how/whether this should effect the ‘price’ ($15.00) listed inside the cover of the 2007 Proceedings. This question could be considered prior to the publication of next year’s Proceedings.

11. Newsletter Coordination Report – TO
- Torrey expressed a view that regular publication times should be posted on the website, accompanied by APS website alerts, and that direct (e)mail-outs should occur, to encourage newsletter input by a wider range of people: Newsletter content could be increased and diversified to include reports on events, regular columns, etc. With the support of the Committee, Torrey offered to drive this process. It was agreed that Torrey would correspond with Zoe, Neil and Ross during the 2nd/3rd week of Jan.

12. Treasurer’s Report - NW
- Neil reported that member numbers are ‘apparently’ going down, but that this depends on what time of year the numbers are counted; this is perplexing. Terry commented that ‘numbers’ should not be a driving force for us, as we are primarily an academic group much like a College (with some practitioner interest). Ross pointed out that, as funding is dependent on numbers, it is important that the size of our membership be recorded accurately. Zoe suggested that, given many APS members do not know that the PoRIG exists, we should decide on a mechanism by which we might promote awareness of the IG and, thus, maximise membership uptake. A strategy could be decided on and tried in the future.

13. State Activities Coordinator
- No-one is currently in this role: Ross encouraged members to consider.
14. Web management – RW

- Ross said that he plans to send out material to Melanie for when she returns from holiday.

15. 2008 Conference Committee

- Zoe offered to be Proceedings Editor again. (Thanks Zoe.) Ross suggested that we take registration responsibility from APS, and pay a graduate student instead, at a presumably much lower cost. Ross offered to be Conference Chair, on the proviso that he receives some funds to buy administrative support (e.g., 25 hours @ $40/hour – but a more precise costing/budget could be prepared by Conference Committee, and put to General Committee, at a later date). Committee agreed, in principle, to making necessary funds available. (Thanks Ross.)
- 2008 Conference Organising Committee was constituted: Ross (as Chair), Zoe, Torrey, Barry (as Coordinator), Gerry, and Kylie.

16. Planning for 2009 Conference

- Discussion postponed.

17. Ideas for other activities in 2008

- Discussion postponed.

18. Award advertisement text

- Ross encouraged Committee members to look out for potential nominees: Suggestions are invited at any time.
- Current text for advertisement needed to be agreed on ASAP for publication. Ross requested immediate feedback if any problems were foreseen.
- Zoe suggested the inclusion of a Practice award to complement the existing Research awards. Ross responded that, while it was too late to include a third award for 2008, this was a possibility for the future. Terry pointed out that such an addition would need to be ratified by the Board. Action could be pursued to this end during 2008, for 2009.

OTHER BUSINESS

- Re proposal to begin a Journal, Terry reported that his investigations have been promising, but approval of the Board is still needed. (Thanks Terry.)
- Meeting closed with thanks at 3.30pm, December, 13th, 2007.