

‘Nullus Anxietas’?

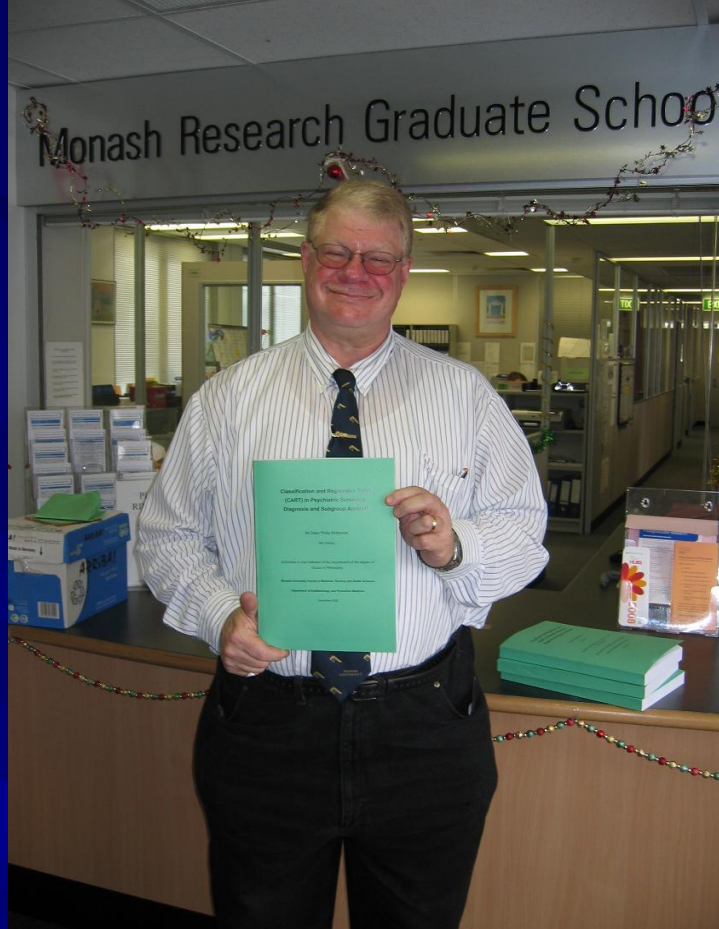
No worries?

*Suggestions* for finishing the  
**PhD**

Dean McKenzie BA(Psych)(Hons) PhD  
2009

*Once in one's life, for one  
mortal moment, one must  
make a grab for immortality,  
if not, one has not lived*

**Sylvester Stallone**



*Submitted my PhD thesis, 22 December 2008, graduated 2009*

**Ad Astra per Aspera: from the mud to the stars?**

# Horses for Courses

Some suggestions / observations for finishing **PhD**, (*some of which are based upon 'what I'd do next time'*) that may be of assistance, even if only to help you in working out what is right *for you*

# Beginnings

(Obvious, but rarely done?) plan and timeline, revise, adapt, improvise

Lots of time management books around, (*but who has the time to read them?*)

Read the Literature widely, **greatest** (classics, original sources) as well as **latest**, study key references closely, including theory/background, which will help flesh out the discussion

*'Pareto principle'* 80% of the results from 20% of the causes, **but which 20%?**



# Linearity : Continuity

Help the poor reader (reviewers are usually tired, fierce, possibly inebriated) by foreshadowing, introducing what each part is about, linking/segueing from one segment to the next

Get someone else to read it, for flow/continuity/consistence/spelling, before the **Last Days**

*and now for some Psych, but no Stats, well just a graph.....*

# Nonlinearity : The Yerkes-Dodson Law

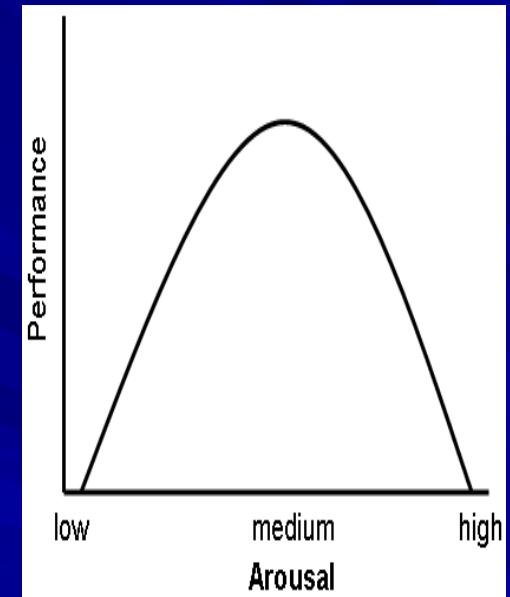
(Yerkes and Dodson 1908)

Generally, medium level of arousal is generally optimum for task performance, simpler tasks need higher arousal (persistence)

High level of arousal can lead to functional fixedness or cognitive inflexibility/stereotypy, 'everything looks like a nail', (if due to stress) or 'thought racing', (lots of thoughts all at once)

Low level of arousal can also lead to inflexibility (depression/tiredness) , unless due to calmness

(Y-D looks at magnitude, not valence (positive, negative) of arousal)



# Stay on the powerband

Try to write during your optimum arousal, else add refs or sleep (low -), go for walk (high +), generate ideas during low + (calmness) or high +

OR

Write by night (less distraction, free flowing) and edit and perform statistical analyses by day (more focused)

OR

Vice versa

OR ?? (depending on individual patterns/personality/time and type of day/ caffeine intake)

**Try and write on most days (have at least one day off)**

**avoid 'burnouts', *Luceo Non Uro* 'Shine Don't Burn'**



# PhD Stress

Chronic stress is a well-known risk factor for ....depression, bipolar disorder, ..and anxiety disorders.

In healthy subjects, it disrupts creativity, flexible problem solving, working memory, and other PFC(prefrontal cortex)-dependent processes.

(effects on PFC 'largely' reversible after one month following stress cessation)

MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) study by Liston et al, 2009

# It's Midnight : Go Home!

Stress causes reduced energy and motivation

A 'little' stress may be ok, too much can lead to 'burnout' and demoralization (feelings of powerlessness, hopelessness, and pessimism), if environmental demands outstrip ability / resources

Pessimism is strongly associated with depression, even though it is not an 'official' symptom of depression (McKenzie et al, in press)

Demoralization, related to *acedia* or *accidie* (emptiness), one of the original **Eight** Cardinal ('Deadly') sins

Demoralization found in soldiers in hostile and unfamiliar environments, refugees and immigrants, hospital patients, persons undergoing psychological therapy *and PhD students ?????*

# The Sunset Clause (sleep on it)

*‘Extra work on unsolved problems may lead to more improvement if the new work is delayed rather than undertaken immediately after initial solution attempts. We hypothesize that fixation...may develop during initial solution attempts and persist’*

Smith & Blankenship, 1991

# Getting through the PhD

Spend time with others, including other postgrads,  
as well as families & friends

Walk / Ride a Bicycle / Go to the Gym

Smell the roses / do some gardening / go to an art  
gallery / old & new movies

Give yourself regular rewards

Ensure sustainable and doable load

Allow time for finishing (may be more of a jog trot  
canter rather than a gallop run like hell, but  
allow for a good 'dash' at the end)

# Life after PhD

Celebrate (be careful about anti-climax)

Rest (one month?)

Renew

Get a Job? **A real one?** even only for a while?



# PhD: the Sequel : **Post Doc** ?

Think *now yes now* about where to do  
PostDoc research : start finding out about  
potential places / supervisors

Scholarship expires on submission, PostDoc  
funding can take 6 months, investigate  
bridging funding, investigate 'top-up' /costs

Remember, when stressed/tired from PhD,  
may be difficult to consider alternatives

***le caveat emptor***

# Nullius in Verba

Motto of Royal Society (1663)

‘Empirical evidence worth more than words’

Ask different people, get alternative  
viewpoints, **find out what's right for you**

# Magnum Opus

*Fight the good fight, keep the faith,  
(and if possible)*

*finish the race*

# FELICITER! GOOD LUCK!

Thanks to my PhD supervisors!

**Fellow PostGrads**

Wife, Family and Friends