

# Obesity, eating disorders, and the media: An interdisciplinary workshop



## Overview

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The rising global prevalence of obesity and eating disorders can be considered one of the top public health challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. With the large volume of recent scientific research on these conditions, and the increasing number of public health policies directed at their prevention, significant new information concerning obesity and eating disorders is emerging with great frequency. Only a small selection of this new information, however, crosses from the science and policy realms into the public sphere. Here, the news media play a crucial role. Lay concepts regarding the prevention, causation, and management of obesity and eating disorders are now largely informed by news media sources, where health information is communicated to the public with ever-growing immediacy, accessibility, and ubiquity.

Considering the news media's potential influence on people's health behaviours and lifestyle choices, the Unit for Biocultural Variation and Obesity is exploring the rationale and modes of representation guiding the media's reporting on obesity and eating disorders. This workshop aims to establish the state of the science and define best practices in utilizing digital methods to research the news media. Bringing together leading national and international experts on obesity, eating disorders, and media studies, this workshop is the first to offer a comprehensive examination of the media's representations of obesity and eating disorders, as well as the first to explore the application of new digital humanities research methods to this field. It promises to engender innovative and collaborative research, and produce substantial new analyses of the media's role in bridging science and the public.

## Conveners

Professor Stanley Ulijaszek, Dr Karin Eli, Professor David Zeitlyn  
School of Anthropology, University of Oxford

## Time and location

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When: Wednesday 9 November 2011 (9am to 5:30pm)  
Where: St Anne's College, University of Oxford  
Contact: Amy McLennan (0796 456 1208 // [oxfordobesity@gmail.com](mailto:oxfordobesity@gmail.com))

## Recording

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With each speaker's permission, presentations only (not discussions) will be MP3-recorded during the workshop and made available online, on the UBVO website and on iTunesU. Photographs will also be taken for possible use on publicly-accessible websites. If you do not wish to be photographed or recorded, please notify one of the conference organisers.

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## Programme

Time	Event	Speaker
9:00 - 9:30am	Arrival and registration	
9:30 - 10:00	Introduction Obesity, eating disorders, and the media	Stanley Ulijaszek & Karin Eli (University of Oxford)
10:00 - 12:00	<b>Session 1: Eating disorders</b> Eating disorders in the media: the changing nature of UK newspaper reports and a comparison with US media  Dangerous engagements? Exploring pro-anorexia websites and/in the media  Constructing the archetypal anorectic: trends in media representations of eating disordered celebrities  The discursive regulation of 'too fat' and 'too thin' bodies  <i>Discussant</i>	Clive Seale (Queen Mary, University of London)  Anna Lavis (Goldsmiths, University of London)  Paula Saukko (Loughborough University)  Helen Malson (University of the West of England)  <i>Stella Bruzzi</i> (University of Warwick)
12:00 - 1:00pm	<b>Lunch</b> Provided for registered guests and speakers	
1:00 - 3:00	<b>Session 2: Obesity</b> Biological postcards: the popularisation of Barker's hypothesis  Obesity in the US media, 1990-2010  Competing contemporary discourses of obesity  Media representations of UK obesity policy  <i>Discussant</i>	Megan Warin (University of Adelaide)  Natalie Boero (San Jose State University)  Helene Shugart (University of Utah)  Vivienne Parry, OBE (Science writer and broadcaster)  <i>Tanja Schneider</i> (University of Oxford)
3:00 - 3:30	<b>Break</b>	
3:30 - 5:30	<b>Session 3: Data mining</b> Analytical approaches to media representations  Text mining techniques  Prevalence scores: an evolving tool for database analysis  How can we find relevant research more quickly in systematic reviews?  <i>Discussant</i>	David Zeitlyn (University of Oxford)  John McNaught (National Centre for Text Mining [NaCTeM], Manchester)  Daphna Carmeli (University of Haifa, Israel)  James Thomas (University of London)  <i>Annamaria Carusi</i> (University of Oxford)

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## Introduction

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### Obesity, eating disorders, and the media

Stanley Ulijaszek & Karin Eli

*School of Anthropology, University of Oxford*

This workshop will examine the nature of reporting on obesity and eating disorders: what is reported and what is not, and how what is reported *is* reported. Obesity and eating disorders have complex causalities, and as such are subject to multiple, at times conflicting, claims and representations in the realms of science, policy, and public understanding. However, the feedback relationships between scientific research, policy making, and their popularization through media reporting remain poorly understood. This workshop will launch a new approach to understanding these relationships through applying the methodologies of text-mining, database analysis and systematic reviews. In this introductory paper, we will frame the discussion, analysing two case studies of news media reports on recent policy and legal decisions concerning obesity and eating disorders. We will identify the thematic and stylistic traits that characterize these media reports, highlight the representations of science embedded in these reports, and connect them to possible feedback pathways from popularization to scientific research and policy. We will thus suggest a new way of conceptualizing knowledge on obesity and eating disorders as produced by a dynamic, multi-directional triad of science, policy, and the popular news media.

**Stanley Ulijaszek** is Professor of Human Ecology and Director, Unit for Biocultural Variation and Obesity, at the University of Oxford, and Vice-Master of St Cross College, Oxford. He is associate editor of *Homo: Journal of Comparative Human Biology*, and book review editor for the *Journal of Biosocial Science*. Among his books are *Nutritional Anthropology* (Smith-Gordon, London, 1993, with S.S. Strickland), *Human Energetics in Biological Anthropology* (Cambridge University Press, 1995); *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Human Growth and Development* (Cambridge University Press, 1998, with F.E. Johnston and M.A. Preece), *Holistic Anthropology* (Berghahn Books, Oxford, 2007, with D. Parkin), and *Human Variation: From Laboratory to Field* (Cambridge University Press, with C.G.N. Mascie-Taylor and A. Yasukouchi).

**Karin Eli** is a postdoctoral researcher at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Oxford. In her doctoral thesis, she analysed processes of selfhood among eating disordered people in Israel. Her current research examines the interaction of socio-environmental and individual factors in narratives of anorexia and bulimia, highlighting the roles of genetic discourses.

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## Session 1: Eating disorders

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### Chair and discussant

Stella Bruzzi  
*University of Warwick*

**Stella Bruzzi** is Professor of Film and Television Studies at the University of Warwick. She has published widely, mainly in the areas of documentary, costume and masculinity and her publications include the books: *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies* (1997); *New Documentary* (2000 and 2006); *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations and Analysis* (co edited with Pamela Church Gibson, 2000); *Bringing Up Daddy: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Post-war Hollywood* (2005); and, *Seven Up* (2006). She has just started a two-year Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship and is researching a monograph on representations of reality and history entitled *Approximation: Documentary, History and the Staging of Reality*.

### Eating disorders in the media: the changing nature of UK newspaper reports and a comparison with US media

Clive Seale  
*Queen Mary, University of London*

Concern has been expressed about the adequacy of media reporting on eating disorders (EDs) and the impact of this on public understanding. I will report an analysis of messages about EDs in UK newspapers, comparing these with US news reports, and show changes over time and between types of newspaper. 3,583 national press news articles were analysed using content and keyword analysis. UK press coverage presents a more realistic clinical picture than US coverage. Profiling people with EDs, popular 'tabloid' newspapers give more details of clinical complications than serious 'broadsheet' newspapers, which focus more on research stories and public health concerns. The association of EDs with young, white, female 'celebrities' is constant over time, but medical views about causation and treatment are more prominent in later years. Popular journalists pursue an entertainment agenda for their reporting of health stories and this study shows both the constraints and public education opportunities provided by this genre.

**Clive Seale** is Professor of Medical Sociology at Queen Mary University of London. He has written a book about the mass media and health (*Media and Health*, Sage 2002) and occasionally does studies of the way in which the mass media represents particular health topics. His other research concerns end-of-life care and communication in health care settings.

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## Dangerous engagements? Exploring pro-anorexia websites and/in the media

Anna Lavis

*Goldsmiths, University of London*

"Sick," "twisted" and "evil" are all words that have featured in British media coverage of pro-anorexia websites. Much of this coverage has portrayed the websites as spaces replete with danger that 'lure' individuals into anorexia and regard the illness as a lifestyle choice. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork on pro-anorexia websites and in an English eating disorders unit, this paper will explore these representations of pro-anorexia websites *in* the media whilst elucidating wider relationships between the websites *and* the media. Media coverage of pro-anorexia websites often elides discussions of anorexia with debates around size zero and attributes much 'blame' for both of these to the websites and, paradoxically, to 'other' media. In these elisions and attributions, pro-anorexia websites are often imagined to be simply producers of thin bodies, rather than spaces to be (anorexic). This imaginary not only highlights prevalent media conceptualisations of anorexia itself, but also rests on particular media interpretations of the photographic images that pro-anorexia websites frequently borrow from the media. This paper will suggest that not only is the content of these websites, and the meanings participants attribute to that content, often different from media imaginings, but also that such imaginings actually produce the specific paradigm of anorexia on which they rest. Media discussions of pro-anorexia websites, as many anorexic informants pointed out during fieldwork, serve to make anorexia – and by extension pro-anorexia websites - attractive to 'wannarexics' who flock to the sites to find ways to 'become thin'. By concomitantly following these two tangled strands, of media representations and discursive mediations, this paper will draw attention to the nexus of corporeal and constructed anorexia(s) that emerge from the, often mutually-productive, engagements between pro-anorexia websites and the media.

**Anna Lavis** has recently completed a PhD in the anthropology department at Goldsmiths, University of London. Leading to a thesis entitled, *The Boundaries of a Good Anorexic: Exploring Pro-Anorexia on the Internet and in the Clinic*, her research was funded by the ESRC and won the 2010 Radcliffe-Brown Sutasoma award from the Royal Anthropological Institute. She is currently writing up articles from her doctoral research, as well as embarking on an individual project exploring individuals' subjectivities of synaesthesia. Forthcoming work includes a chapter in the volume, *Fat Materialities: From Substance to Experience* (Forth, Leitch & Murray eds.) and also, co-edited with Emma-Jayne Abbots, a book entitled, *Why We Eat, How We Eat: Contemporary Encounters between Foods and Bodies* (2012, Ashgate).

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## Constructing the archetypal anorectic: trends in media representations of eating disordered celebrities

Paula Saukko

*Loughborough University*

This presentation discusses media representations of eating disorders using the coverage of Karen Carpenter and Princess Diana as examples. Karen Carpenter's death resulting from complications of anorexia in 1983 marked the first time when anorexia became a major media topic. The image of Carpenter as the wholesome girl next door was harnessed in the media to render her into an exemplar of the overly compliant anorexic 'goody' girl and her association with the dangers of mass culture, seemingly exemplified by the popular soft-rock of *The Carpenters*. The media sometimes depicted Princess Diana--for example when she publicly revealed her bulimia and her husband's adultery--as a hysteric. However, she was also positively represented as embodying quintessentially feminine traits, such as emotionality, caring (for HIV patients, landmine victims) and fluidity (her changing partners, new lives). The differences in the media coverage of the two celebrities illustrate how eating disorders have, in different historical instances, been mobilised to idealise (i) the classical modern male, autonomous male self, associated with high culture and (ii) the postmodern, emotional, interactive and fluid feminine self. Both of these ideal selves harbour politically progressive and reactionary agendas. However, these media representations also highlight the problematic nature of making eating disorders stand for archetypal ideal selves.

**Paula Saukko** is a Reader in Social Science and Medicine at the Department of Social Sciences, Loughborough University, UK. Her research interests include eating disorders as well as lifestyle diseases, genetic testing and qualitative methodology. She is the author of *The Anorexic Self: A Personal and Political Analysis of a Diagnostic Discourse* (State University of New York Press, 2008) and *Doing Research in Cultural Studies* (Sage, 2003).

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## The discursive regulation of 'too fat' and 'too thin' bodies

Helen Malson

*University of the West of England*

This paper explores the convergences of pathologised 'anorexic' practices with the practices of eating disorder treatment and with those promoted by the current orthodoxies of 'healthy' weight management in the context of an alleged 'obesity epidemic'. The paper draws on a range of interviews conducted with 'in-patients', primarily young women, about their experiences of treatment for an 'eating disorder' in order to explore how current cultural 'knowing' about body weight and weight management produce and regulate the bodies and subjectivities of those deemed 'too fat' or 'too thin'. 'Anorexia', I argue, can be read as enacting par excellence the individualised and hyper-disciplined micro-management of the body advocated by current health orthodoxies. Hence, the neo-liberalisation of health and the intensification of cultural concerns about weight management can be understood both as part of the conditions of possibility of 'anorexic' subjectivities and practices and as an 'anorexification' of normative weight-management which paradoxically, in its intense micro-management of the body, might be understood as an attempt to repudiate 'the organic' that seems 'too' evident in bodies deemed both 'too fat' and 'too thin'.

**Helen Malson** is a Reader in Social Psychology in the Centre for Appearance Research at the University of the West of England, Bristol and co-founder of the Gender Studies Research Group at UWE. Her research focuses primarily on feminist post-structuralist analyses of girls' and women's 'eating disordered' subjectivities and practices and on issues in eating disorder interventions. Her publications include *The Thin Woman: Feminism, Post-Structuralism and the Social Psychology of Anorexia Nervosa* (Routledge, 1998) and, with Maree Burns, *Critical Feminist Approaches to Eating Dis/Orders* (Routledge, 2009).

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## Session 2: Obesity

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### Chair and discussant

Tanja Schneider  
*University of Oxford*

**Tanja Schneider** is a Research Fellow at the Institute for Science, Innovation and Society, University of Oxford. Her research examines marketing and advertising practices with a particular interest in how these mobilise specific consumer subjectivities. Based on her PhD research (University of Sydney) on "Marketing food, marketing health: Discursive practices and the formation of the healthy food consumer in Australia" she has published on the role of lifestyle magazines as one important locus for constituting health conscious consumers. Tanja has also examined the role of food labels and health claims on novel food products (e.g., functional foods) and how these tend to delegate responsibility for overseeing new products to consumers, who are asked to continuously consider and assess the qualities of foods when making their choices in the marketplace. Currently she is part of a research collaboration that conducts a comparative study on "Discursive Families: A comparison of magazine advertising in two countries" (funded by The Leverhulme Trust) that explores changes and continuities in visual displays and textual descriptions of the consuming family over a period of 60 years based on material sourced from Good Housekeeping (UK) and The Australian Women's Weekly (AUS).

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## Biological postcards: the popularisation of Barker's hypothesis

Megan Warin  
*University of Adelaide*

What does it mean to say that 'you are what your grandmother ate'? How are representations of scientific discourses about pregnancy, women's reproductive bodies and obesity positioned in the print media? This paper examines how the foetal origins of adult disease, or Barker's hypothesis, has come to represent a particular constellation of discourses that position women as central to popular understandings of obesity. The foetal origins hypothesis is arguably the most significant paradigm shift in reproductive medicine, suggesting that many chronic adult diseases have origins in the intra-uterine environment. The print media has gainfully employed this hypothesis, and in doing so, placed women, and poor mothers in particular, as causal agents in the reproduction of obesity across generations. Such a 'common sense' understanding of obesity means that the health of future generations is compressed into an understanding of women's bodies as both the origin and the future of obesity, in which space and time is collapsed into individual responsibility and maternal risk. Narrowing the foetal origins hypothesis to the interiority of women's bodies means that some women are characterised (in both their reproductive capacity and social roles) in ways that make it seem 'natural' to blame them for obesity transmission across generations. Instead of turning attention to the complex interactions of biocultural environments (and promoting structural changes), the gaze is now penetrating deep into female bodies, where the uterus has become the 'environment' of scrutiny, and foetuses must be protected from maternal appetites.

**Megan Warin** is a social anthropologist whose teaching and research interests coalesce around the gendering of health and illness, the phenomenology of food, bodies and memory, theoretical approaches to embodiment, and public understandings of obesity science. Megan teaches in Gender, Work and Social Inquiry and is a member of the Lifecourse and Intergenerational Health (LIGHt) Research Group, where she has undertaken an ethnographic analysis of gender and class differences in obesity as part of a National Health & Medical Research Council grant. She is also leading a research project that examines how children from disadvantaged backgrounds construct 'food stories'. Megan's more recent obesity work critically examines print media discourses of the politics of blame in obesity discourses (especially in relation to mothers and children), and representations of the fetal origins hypothesis. Megan is a member of the Obesity and Prevention Lifestyle Program (OPAL) Social Sciences Committee (South Australian Health) which is the first arm of the French EPODE obesity prevention program in the southern hemisphere.

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## Obesity in the US media, 1990-2010

Natalie Boero  
*San Jose State University*

The media is central to the construction and dissemination of moral panics, and the current moral panic around obesity is no exception. In this talk I analyze over 750 articles on obesity appearing in *The New York Times* between 1990 and 2011. I use these articles to gauge the state of obesity as a social concern in the United States, looking at the raced, classed, and gendered dimensions of media representations of the obesity epidemic. As I highlight the media as a tool for the spread and perpetuation of moral panic over obesity and also look at the American media's treatment of alternative framings of weight and body size.

**Natalie Boero** is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at San Jose State University in San Jose, California. She received her PhD in 2006 from the University of California at Berkeley. Her first book, *Killer Fat: Media, Medicine, Morals and the American 'Obesity Epidemic'* is forthcoming from Rutgers University Press in summer, 2012.

## Competing contemporary discourses of obesity

Helene Shugart  
*University of Utah*

I am interested in identifying and assessing the primary public discourses of obesity that are currently in mainstream mediated circulation in the United States and, increasingly, globally. My premise for this project is that "official" discourses of obesity, or those articulated by institutional and regulatory entities, are highly incompatible with emergent, resonant cultural discourses, which themselves vary markedly from one another depending on venue. This may explain why public health campaigns and initiatives geared toward redressing obesity have been largely unsuccessful to date. I engage in close analysis of these multiple discourses in order to identify their respective key rhetorical features and characterisations and, especially, their points of divergence in relation to each other. I seek to understand the genesis and implications of these discourses and their disjunctures to the end of making practical recommendations regarding public health efforts to redress the contemporary "obesity epidemic."

**Helene A. Shugart** (PhD, Ohio State University, 1994) is a professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Utah. Her expertise lies at the intersection of rhetorical, media, and cultural studies. Her most recent work examines public discourses about health and how they are produced, negotiated, and circulated in various contexts. Her work has appeared in journals such as *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, *Feminist Media Studies*, *Health Communication*, *Communication Theory*, *Communication, Culture, and Critique*, *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, and *Quarterly Journal of Speech*.

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## Media representations of UK obesity policy

Vivienne Parry, OBE

*Science writer and broadcaster*

**Vivienne Parry** is a writer and broadcaster who has contributed to the Times, Guardian, Mail on Sunday, and Radio 4, among other media outlets. Her most recent book, *The Truth about Hormones*, was shortlisted for the 2006 Aventis Science Prize. She works extensively across government, particularly with the Chief Scientific Officer and Chief Scientist at the Department of Health, as well as the Government Office of Science Foresight projects and DIUS (now BIS). In addition, Vivienne Parry works with numerous science and innovation organisations (including the Royal Society, NESTA, the Technology Strategy Board, and most of the research councils) and industry (including Unilever and AstraZeneca) as media facilitator and filmmaker. Her work has been recognised by the award of the OBE in the New Years Honours List 2011 for 'services to the public understanding of science'. She is Vice Chairman of Council at UCL, serves on the council of the MRC, serves on the board of the Science Media Centre and the Cheltenham Science Festival, and is a member of the Joint Committee on Vaccines and Immunisation.

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## Session 3: Data mining

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### Chair and discussant

Annamaria Carusi  
*University of Oxford*

**Annamaria Carusi** studies social and philosophical aspects of computational technologies for research in science, social science and humanities. Her recent work has focused on ethics, trust and social epistemology as applied to data sharing and re-use, computational visualisations and imaging, modelling and simulation. She is currently completing the first phase of research on the use of computational simulations in biology. She has recently co-edited a special issue of *Information, Communication and Society* on Law and Ethics in e-Social Science, and is currently co-editing a special issue of *Interdisciplinary Science Review* on Computational Picturing, and an anthology, to be published by Routledge, on the same topic. She has a dual background in critical theory and philosophy.

### Analytical approaches to media representations

David Zeitlyn  
*University of Oxford*

In this overview of the session, I will sketch the broad picture of feedback cycles between research and policy and their dissemination by the media. I will consider ways in which text mining can be used to track and analyse how the media report on research and policy, and how these reports, in turn, inform the public's understanding.

**David Zeitlyn** is a social anthropologist who has been conducting research in Cameroon since 1985. He has been actively involved in studying the use of information and communication technologies in academic research, as well as the ways in which data on social networks can be used to illuminate people's engagement with museum objects and archives.

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## Text mining techniques

John McNaught

*National Centre for Text Mining [NaCTeM], Manchester*

This talk will start off with a gentle introduction to text mining, discussing motivations, challenges and the state of the art. It will then focus on a number of applications/case studies to demonstrate how text mining techniques have been deployed by the National Centre for Text Mining to aid various communities, in close collaboration with researchers from those communities. Text mining comprises a wide range of tasks and processes, and is not monolithic (as is often mistakenly thought). Although finding new knowledge from old is its high-level goal, on the way it can be concerned with words, terms, phrases, 'named entities' (persons, locations, genes, chemical compounds), attributes of or relations between entities, and facts or events involving all the foregoing. Moreover, it is increasingly concerned not only with extracting an event of interest to the researcher but also with extracting meta-knowledge about that event: is this a suggestion, a speculation, a confident assertion, etc. Work on analysing opinions will also be discussed, of particular relevance in a media-oriented perspective.

**John McNaught** is Deputy Director of the JISC-sponsored National Centre for Text Mining, and an academic member of staff of the School of Computer Science, University of Manchester, which hosts the Centre. He has worked in the area of natural language processing since 1979, following earlier studies in modern languages and theoretical linguistics. Since the mid-1990s he has been working mainly in information extraction and text mining, with emphasis on processing the special languages of various disciplines to provide practical resources, tools and services. He has been involved in numerous collaborative EC and RC-funded research projects, and in projects for industry. A major current project involvement is within UK PubMed Central, helping to provide text mining based semantic search services over a large-scale full-text archive.

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## Prevalence scores: an evolving tool for database analysis

Daphna Carmeli

*University of Haifa, Israel*

This paper will describe the evolution of a method for the systematic analysis of large databases. The starting point is a basic assessment of the number of entries in which a specific term plays a substantial role. Having established this initial figure, one can move on to estimate the relative frequency of juxtaposing specific terms by each other. The resulting proportions, entitled *Prevalence Scores*, provide a tool for a more nuanced depiction of the contexts in which the terms at hand are mentioned. These scores can also serve as a platform for several types of rankings that further refine the emerging profile of the allusion to the scrutinized terms within the analysed database.

The application of the method will be illustrated through an analysis of the biomedical literature's reference to 569 population groups in the context of genetics. On the basis of population scores, genetic scores and mutation scores that were calculated for each group, a trend could be identified, showing that some populations – primarily, 'population isolates' as well as Mediterranean and Muslim populations – were being studied in genetic contexts far more intensively than others. The two latter sub-categories stood out as exceptionally prominent in the potentially more sensitive context of mutation related research. Also over-represented in this last context was the Jewish population.

The paper ends with an overview of the method's main advantages and limitations.

**Daphna Birenbaum-Carmeli** is a medical anthropologist in the Faculty of Social Welfare and Health Sciences at the University of Haifa, Israel. Her main research interest is the intersection of health, technology and politics, primarily in contexts of women's health and reproductive technologies.

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## How can we find relevant research more quickly in systematic reviews?

James Thomas  
*University of London*

Searching electronic sources (databases, websites etc) is an essential part of any strategy to find research. Systematic reviews usually aim to find as much relevant research as possible and so highly *sensitive* searches are conducted. By their nature, sensitive searches retrieve more irrelevant material than relevant, but this is unavoidable if the aim is to be as comprehensive as possible. As more research is published and more journals are established (a phenomenon known as the 'information explosion'), the number of irrelevant studies that electronic searches retrieve has increased.

It is becoming common for reviewers to 'screen' through thousands of titles and abstracts manually in order to identify the few tens (or hundreds) of studies that are relevant to the review. This means that it is difficult for reviews to be conducted quickly enough to meet some urgent policy timescales. It is therefore important that we develop methods to expedite the identification of relevant research.

This paper describes an early trial and evaluation of using *text mining* technologies to speed up the screening process. Broadly speaking, text mining is defined as the process of discovering knowledge and structure from unstructured data (text). In the context of finding research for inclusion in a review, the knowledge and structure we are interested in uncovering is whether a given study (described by a title and abstract) is relevant to our review. Two technologies are discussed: automatic term recognition and automatic classification, and we conclude that while further methodological research is needed, these technologies can expedite the discovery of relevant research.

**James Thomas** is a Reader in Social Policy, Assistant Director of SSRU and Associate Director of the EPPI-Centre at the Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, London. He directs the EPPI-Centre's Reviews Facility for the Department of Health, England, and undertakes systematic reviews across a range of policy areas. He has specialized in developing methods for research synthesis, in particular for qualitative and mixed methods reviews and in using emerging information technologies in research. He leads a module on synthesis and critical appraisal on the EPPI-Centre's MSc in Evidence for Public Policy and Practice and development on the Centre's in-house reviewing software, EPPI-Reviewer.