



A History of the Society for Applied Research in Memory and Cognition



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To contribute to the 2015 Conference Retrospective, we chronicled the 22-year history of the Society for Applied Research in Memory and Cognition (SARMAC). Throughout the 70s, 80s, and early 90s, there was no society dedicated to applied cognitive work. That changed in 1994, when researchers at the third iteration of the Practical Aspects of Memory conference agreed to establish SARMAC. Since then, SARMAC membership has grown tenfold and its conferences have traveled the globe. Recently, the society established this very journal for the dissemination of applied research in memory and cognition. SARMAC has a promising future marked by increased student involvement, the announcement of *JARMAC*'s inaugural impact factor, and a visit to Australia for the society's 2017 conference.

General Audience Summary

Founded in 1994, the Society for Applied Research in Memory and Cognition (SARMAC) is an organization dedicated to promoting and showcasing the best applied cognitive research. In this article, we have recorded the society's 22-year history by outlining the need for SARMAC based on the state of the applied cognitive field at the time, and how SARMAC has grown since its creation. We conducted interviews with some of SARMAC's past and present prominent members, reviewed publications (including those resulting from SARMAC's predecessor, the Practical Aspects of Memory conferences), and compilations of SARMAC's own archived membership and conference records. Together, our research shows that SARMAC was formed to support a diverse and rapidly growing community of applied cognitive researchers. SARMAC has excelled in meeting this goal; as evidenced by its diverse and committed membership, extremely successful biennial conferences, an influential new journal (*JARMAC*), and ambitious plans for the future. Simply put, the state of the society is strong.

Keywords: SARMAC, *JARMAC*, Applied, Memory, Cognition, History

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The Society for Applied Research in Memory and Cognition (SARMAC) was founded in 1994 for the purposes of creating a professional home to promote the emerging field of applied cognitive psychology. Despite its 22-year existence, the history of the society has been largely undocumented. In this paper, we first chronicle SARMAC's beginnings as an outgrowth of the Practical Aspects of Memory conferences. Next, we provide an account of how SARMAC has grown by reviewing the past conferences, including the research topics addressed at each, and the membership of the society over the past two decades. Finally, we close with a look to the future of SARMAC. The information contained in this article is derived from a collection of personal interviews, records kept by SARMAC, and publications; that is, it is based on a combination of assorted documents and memory, rather than a thoroughly recorded historical account. Accordingly, it is worth mentioning something that will be familiar to many cognitive psychologists: the reconstructive nature of this history will likely contain minor departures from reality. Nonetheless, we believe this account of SARMAC's history might interest anyone with an enthusiasm for applied cognitive psychology.

Establishment

In 1978, the University of Cardiff hosted the International Conference on Practical Aspects of Memory (PAM). PAM was the first conference dedicated to applied memory research (D. Read, personal communication, January 18, 2016), a topic that was only beginning to reach the forefront of psychology (Hoffman & Deffenbacher, 1992; Neisser, 1982; Pezdek, Deffenbacher, Lam, & Hoffman, 2006). At this first meeting, Ulrich Neisser began the conference with his famous complaint that "If X is an interesting or socially important aspect of memory, then psychologists have hardly ever studied X" (Neisser, 1978, p. 2). Over the course of the conference, researchers attempted to challenge Neisser's statement by presenting work on the topics of memory aids, the effects of stress on memory, individual differences in memory, educational applications, and clinical implications of memory (Gruneberg, Morris, & Sykes, 1978, 1988). Nearly a decade later, PAM II was held in 1987 at the University of Wales, Swansea. The growth of the applied memory field was evident: The number of presented papers doubled that of PAM I. Papers addressed 24 different topics, including adult and child witnesses, metamemory, ecological perspectives, neurological memory deficits, drugs and memory, dyslexia, student learning, clinical considerations for memory, and general educational implications (Gruneberg et al., 1988). Indeed, in his closing address, Neisser declared that his experience at the PAM II conference was "...like being a child turned loose in a candy store; on every side there has been something ecologically delicious" (p. 545). The seeds for a new society were sown at PAM II; it was here that members began to discuss the fact that the small and infrequent conferences did not sufficiently bring together a rapidly growing community of researchers.

In 1994, the University of Maryland hosted PAM III, which included 320 papers and posters (Payne & Conrad, 1997).

The paper topics included mood-congruent memory, timing of autobiographical memories, laypeople's beliefs about memory, individual differences in memory ability, clinical applications of memory, collaborative memory, prospective memory, eye-witness testimony, and memory for faces (Herrmann, McEvoy, Hertzog, Hertel, & Johnson, 1994; Payne & Conrad, 1997). The overarching goal of the PAM conferences was for psychologists to apply knowledge of memory and appropriate research methodologies to explain real-world phenomena, and to discuss methods for solving problems for real-world practitioners in memory-related fields (Gruneberg et al., 1978). Indeed, these PAM meetings were held during a period when, according to Michael Togliola (a founding member of SARMAC and former Executive Director), "basic cognitive research had much to offer that was not being sufficiently tapped" (personal communication, December 18, 2015). Don Read, another founding member, notes the "...separation between those primarily interested in application of research as compared to those primarily interested in answering basic questions about cognition and memory" (personal communication, December 20, 2015).

The PAM conferences also highlighted some of the differences within the applied memory field. One growing trend was the everyday-memory movement. The primary aim of this approach was to examine real-world functions of memory—as Neisser (1978) had suggested—through more naturalistic, ecologically valid paradigms instead of lab-based manipulations (Ericsson & Simon, 1980). In the preface for their collection of papers from PAM III, Payne and Conrad (1997) suggested that PAM I and II sparked a growth in the field of research on everyday memory and that texts from the first two PAM meetings had a major impact on the field. But many scientists had reservations about what the everyday-memory movement offered, particularly Banaji and Crowder. In a provocative and influential paper in the *American Psychologist*, Banaji and Crowder (1989) proffered that researchers should be extremely wary of sacrificing experimental control for ecological validity. They proposed a 2 × 2 array for research designs, with high- and low-generalizability on one axis, and high- and low-ecological validity of method on the other axis. They reasoned that the ideal research would be high on both axes; conversely, researchers would avoid designing research that is low on both metrics. When faced with the remaining two cells, however, Banaji and Crowder preferred a study high in generalizability with low ecologically valid or "contrived" methods to a study with high ecologically valid method and low generalizability. They argued that when a researcher sacrifices experimental control in favor of studying memory in an everyday context, little is contributed to our general understanding of memory. Banaji and Crowder's (1989) criticism of everyday memory initiated a heated discussion, and led to a number of rebuttals published over the next several years (e.g., Baddeley, 1993; Bruce, 1991; Ceci & Bronfenbrenner, 1991; Conway, 1991; Gruneberg, Morris, & Sykes, 1991; Loftus, 1991; Roediger, 1991), including Klatzky's (1991) "Let's Be Friends." Although respondents agreed that Banaji and Crowder (1989) had minimized the importance of everyday-memory research, they disagreed amongst themselves on how to strike an appropriate balance between the

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