

The University of Hong Kong
Department of Psychology

Departmental Seminar

*From Instinct to Reason: Understanding and Preventing the
Development of Fears and Worries in Young People*

Date: May 6, 2013 (Monday)

Time: 11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Venue: Rm 8.13, 8/F, The Jockey Club Tower, Centennial Campus, HKU

Speaker: Dr. Jennifer Lau
Department of Experimental Psychology
University of Oxford

Fears and worries are common, and can be disabling and costly. On the one hand, fear is as an adaptive emotion-state mediating our responses to danger. On the other hand, for many individuals fears are experienced as excessive and persistent, emerging in situations that are safe rather than threatening. A significant proportion of adults with persistent anxiety problems report that these begin early in life, marking late childhood and adolescence as developmentally-sensitive junctures for studying anxiety-risk but also anxiety-resilience.

In this talk, I will touch on three key questions:

- (i) Why do some young people experience greater levels of fears and worries than others?
- (ii) Why is the transition to adolescence marked as a period of vulnerability for the onset of persistent fears and worries?
- (iii) Is adolescence also a period of exceptional plasticity - and if so, can we challenge early pathological emotional and social development through targeted interventions?

These questions will be addressed through explanations at multiple levels, from genes to the social environment, and through interventions also targeting multiple levels, from neural mechanisms to cognitive biases.