



How will AI change psychology?

In the second of a two-part series looking at the psychology of our responses to artificial intelligence (AI), **Matt Jarvis** discuss the possible impact of AI on psychology itself

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In the last Update, I talked about the impact of artificial intelligence on our lives and how psychology can help us understand this. In this follow-up I'm going to discuss the possible impact of AI on psychology itself. Any discussion of AI must be tempered by the knowledge that the field is changing so fast that we don't really know what the future will bring. It is interesting — and perhaps a bit scary — to look at the possibilities, though.

AI in psychology research

However interested psychologists are in the topic area we are researching, there's no getting away from the fact that some parts of the research process might be considered somewhat tedious. When you get to be a professor you might be able to employ an undergraduate to enter your data on a spreadsheet, run the statistical analysis and think of some

interesting graphs to display your results. For the time being, though, you're much more likely to be the person doing those things. And if statistical analysis is time-consuming and even, dare I say, boring, qualitative analysis, for example thematic analysis of text, is much more so. However, through natural language processing (NLP), AI can save you a lot of hours that you'd never get back if you had spent them on this kind of task.

For that matter, AI will write your whole research paper if you like, but as a researcher you probably won't find that intellectually satisfying. Of course, using generative AI like ChatGPT to produce draft sections might save you time. AI can aid research in other ways. One time-consuming task as a researcher is keeping up to date with what other researchers are doing in your field. AI can automate this as well, delivering you regular summaries of the most relevant

books, journal articles and conference papers. And of course, AI can analyse data that humans would find very difficult, for example subtle changes of facial expression.

AI in clinical psychology

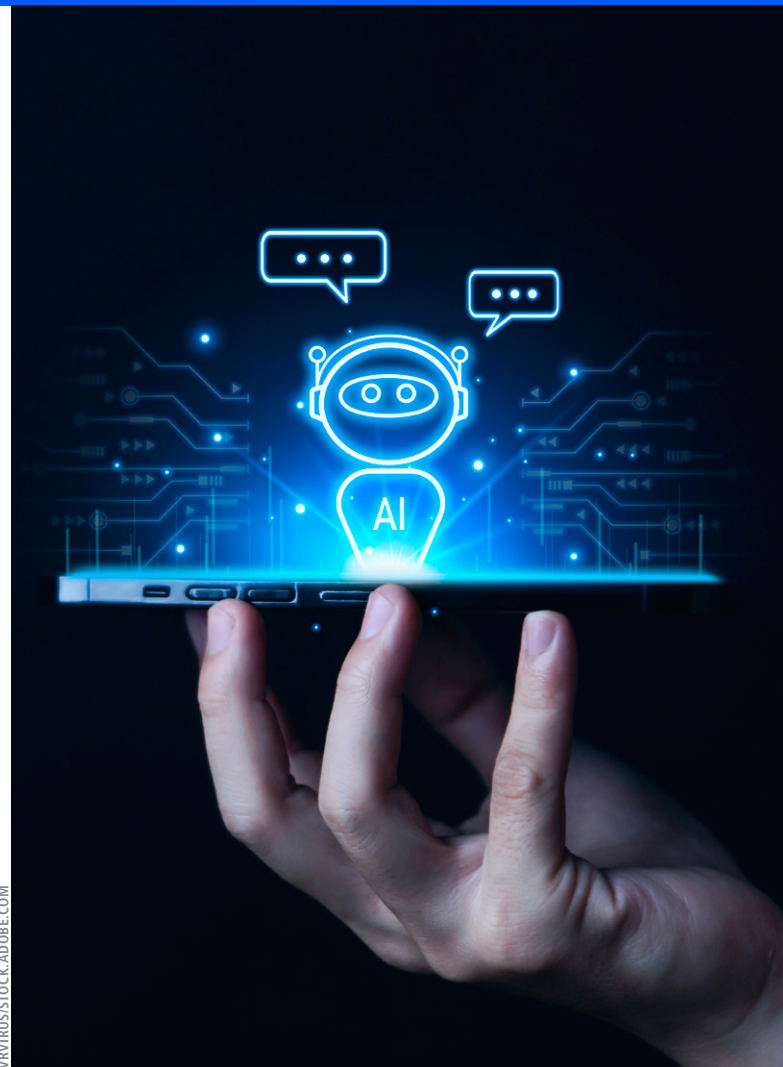
The changes AI is making to the life of academic psychologists are mirrored in applied psychology. For example, while more vulnerable people with more complex sets of symptoms will probably always need a human therapist, some therapeutic processes can be carried out by AI. An example is Wysa (www.wysa.com), which delivers cognitive behavioural therapy for chronic pain.

AI can also be used to keep detailed clinical records, recording and transcribing therapy sessions. This is not only time consuming; AI can also alert therapists to mistakes and safeguarding issues, for example if a therapist has failed to adequately check the welfare of a patient at risk of self-harm.

Practical and ethical issues

So, it appears that, for now and in some ways, AI may be making psychologists' lives easier. However, that's a lot of conditionals for one sentence. Any use of AI raises issues around data protection, and, unless psychologists are familiar with the training the AI has been put through, it runs the risk of introducing bias and error into processes. The future may bring more serious problems (you've seen *The Terminator*, right?). It all depends on what directions future AI development takes.

Even assuming that the Terminator thing doesn't happen, there are some disadvantages and pitfalls in the use of AI in psychology. Not having to do your own stats probably sounds appealing, but there may be downsides. If you aren't familiar with statistical analysis you may fail to spot errors or misinterpretations. Perhaps more importantly, if AI can do a lot of a psychologist's work you may not be needed at all. This isn't unique to psychology — AI will change the whole world of work in unpredictable ways in the next few years.



Activities

- 1 Mind the Graph (mindthegraph.com) is an AI designed to help you easily make informative graphs. It has (limited) free access. If you have some data collected from a class practical session sign up for a free account and try it.
- 2 AI is controversial, so it lends itself to a good debate. Organise one and argue about whether it is likely to be a help or a hindrance to a future career in psychology.

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