

Brain and Mind – from Concrete to Abstract

»EATING DISORDERS AND THE BRAIN« | FEBRUARY 2ND 2026

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY WORKSHOP BETWEEN MSH AND
ST HILDA'S COLLEGE OXFORD UNIVERSITY

Prof. Sylvane Desrivières

»Anorexia and the Developing Brain:
From Shared Risk to Recovery«

Eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa are often viewed as discrete clinical conditions, yet growing evidence suggests they emerge from shared developmental vulnerabilities long before diagnosis. In this talk, I will draw on large longitudinal population studies and clinical cohorts to show how genetic risk, pubertal development, personality traits, and brain maturation interact across adolescence to shape pathways to disordered eating. I will highlight how distinct eating-behaviour subtypes map onto different trajectories of brain development, and why diagnostic brain findings differ from premorbid risk markers. Finally, I will discuss new evidence suggesting that recovery is a dynamic neurobehavioural process, extending beyond symptom remission.

Sylvane Desrivières is Professor of Biological Psychiatry at the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience at King's College London, and Deputy Lead of the NIHR Maudsley BRC Eating Disorders and Obesity Theme. Her research integrates neuroscience, psychology, and genomics to understand how genetic, psychosocial, and environmental factors shape brain development and confer risk for eating disorders and related mental health problems.

She leads major international longitudinal studies, including the IMAGEN adolescent cohort and the MRC-funded ESTRA clinical eating disorder project, and chairs the ENIGMA Epigenetics Working Group. Her work has shown how brain maturation, emotion regulation, and molecular mechanisms interact across development to influence vulnerability and illness course, and recovery in eating disorders.

TIMETABLE

6:00 pm

Introduction

6:10 pm

»Anorexia and the Developing Brain:
From Shared Risk to Recovery«

Prof. Sylvane Desrivières,
Kings College London (UK)

6:30 pm

»Understanding and treating eating
disorders: A psychological perspective«

Dr. Rebecca Murphy,
University of Oxford (UK)

6:50 pm

Discussion and break

7:30 pm

»Philosophical perspectives
on eating disorders«

Dr. Kathrine Morris,
University of Oxford (UK)

7:45 pm

Discussion

8:00 pm

End of Workshop

Brain and Mind – from Concrete to Abstract

Dr. Rebecca Murphy

»Understanding and treating eating disorders: A psychological perspective«

This talk offers an overview of eating disorders, including common features as well as common myths. It will share current recommended treatments, including Enhanced Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT-E). The session will also signpost sources of further information.

Dr Rebecca Murphy is Clinical Research Director at CREDO, University of Oxford, an Honorary Clinical Psychologist at Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust, and an NIHR Research Fellow. She specialises in Enhanced Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT-E) for eating disorders and leads research to develop and evaluate a digital programme for eating disorders. She also supervises clinicians in implementing CBT-E and delivers CBT-E training internationally.

Dr. Kathrine Morris

»Philosophical perspectives on eating disorders«

Philosophers' discussions of eating disorders tend to come from one or more of three directions: feminist thinkers (starting from the fact that a very large proportion of people diagnosed with eating disorders (or at least anorexia) are women); phenomenologists (exploring the ways in which those diagnosed with eating disorders experience their own bodies, other people, and the world); and philosophers of psychiatry (trying to understand how the minds of those diagnosed with eating disorders work). I will try to say a bit about some well-known works in each of these categories, including thinking about the advantages and limitations of these approaches.

Katherine Morris is a Fellow in Philosophy at Mansfield College, Oxford University. Most of her work has been on Wittgenstein, Descartes and the phenomenologists Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, with some in the area of a phenomenological approach to philosophy of psychiatry. She also holds an M.Phil. in Medical Anthropology and teaches an option, 'Feminist perspectives on the body', for the interdisciplinary Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies M.St. at Oxford.



Next event:

»Movement, Sport and the Brain«

5th of May 2026

