

Smother love leads father from reality

Overprotective parents can get you down, and switching off doesn't help.

JON SUTTON

THERE is a fine line between caring for your children and smothering them, and it could mean the difference between a well-adjusted or depressed adult. If your child seeks refuge in a fantasy land, they may just be storing up problems for later. That's the message from a new study by Liz Offen (North Birmingham NHS Trust) and colleagues from the Universities of Birmingham and London.

Patients who experienced auditory hallucinations completed standardised measures of recalled parental behaviours, beliefs about voices, depression and dissociation. Examples of dissociation included 'being in a familiar place but finding it unfamiliar', 'looking at the world through a fog', and being 'so involved in fantasy that it seems real'.

Parental overprotection – but particularly paternal – was positively correlated with dissociation, depression and beliefs about voices being malevolent. However, in a regression analysis dissociation emerged as a 'perfect' mediator of the relationship between paternal overprotection and depression.

One interpretation of the findings suggests that dissociation is used as a means of escaping the psychological conflict inherent in an overprotective family. Dissociation provides an escape from awareness of distressing and confusing emotional states, a safe haven in early life. But the authors argue that 'dissociation may prove less functional in adult life and may tend to break down, leaving individuals vulnerable to depression'.

Offen, L., Thomas, G. & Waller, G. (2003). Dissociation as a mediator of the relationship between recalled parenting and the clinical correlates of auditory hallucinations. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 42, 231–241.

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Here's a sample, by the Digest editor **CHRISTIAN BERESFORD JARRETT**.

LOADS-A-MONEY

Do you dream of untold wealth, fast cars and plasma-screen TVs? Did you know that research suggests people who strive for financial success tend to be less satisfied with their lives?

Carol Nickerson (University of Illinois) and colleagues wondered whether this negative effect would disappear if income were taken into account. Like any other dream, might the goal of financial success be harmful only for those that fail? Humanist psychologists would disagree, arguing that seeking happiness through wealth is destined to fail.

Nickerson and her team had access to the financial aspirations of 12,894 American students when they began university in 1976, together with information on their financial status and levels of life satisfaction collected between 1995 and 1997.

Contrary to the predictions of humanists, Nickerson found that the richer people were, the higher their life satisfaction. And although dreams



of wealth at university predicted subsequent reduced life satisfaction, this relationship disappeared with financial success. Furthermore, the enhanced life satisfaction that came from financial success was unaffected by whether individuals had dreamt of wealth when they were younger.

The message, it seems, is that striving for wealth and failing will make you miserable. Financial success, meanwhile, is likely to make you happier whether you dreamt of it or not.

Nickerson, C., Schwarz, N., Diener, E. & Kahneman, D. (2003). Zeroing in on the dark side of the American Dream. *Psychological Science*, 14, 531–536.

Weblinks: www.blackwellpublishing.com/journals/psci
www.princeton.edu/~psych/PsychSite/fac_kahneman.html

Syllabus advice: Relevant to cognitive behavioural or humanistic approaches to psychological well-being, and modules on perspectives in psychology.

A SNIFF AND A WHIFF

Have you ever struggled to recall the evocative scent of a lost memory – perhaps your mum's best cooking or a girlfriend's perfume? Next time, try sniffing.

New research by Moustafa Bensafi (Helen Wills Neuroscience Institute, University of California, Berkeley) and colleagues found that people sniff when they imagine smells but not when they imagine visual images. And when they were prevented from sniffing, the vividness of the smells people imagined was reduced – that is, sniffing is not just a side-effect, but clearly plays a functional role in the recollection of scents. Furthermore, just as with real smells, people sniffed more when they were asked to imagine a pleasant smell like chocolate, and sniffed less when they recalled an unpleasant smell like urine.

This work reflects similar findings with vision – when people are asked to imagine a visual image, their eyes move as if they were really looking at the object. And if people are prevented from

moving their eyes, the vividness of their visual image is degraded. The authors concluded 'Together, these findings indicate that from a cortical point of view, sensory acquisition (sniffing) and sensory processing (the experience of the smell) are inseparable.'

Bensafi, M., Porter, J., Pouliot, S., Mainland, J., Johnson, B., Zelano, C. et al. (2003). Olfactory motor activity during imagery mimics that during perception. *Nature Neuroscience*, 6, 1142–1144.

Weblink: www.nature.com/neuro

Syllabus advice: This study shows how imagination is linked to real sensory experience and is therefore broadly relevant to topics on perception (e.g. see AQA spec A (A2) section on 'perceptual processes', part of the 'Cognitive' module; and the AQA spec B (AS) section on visual 'perception', part of the 'Cognitive Psychology' module).