



What's happening in psychology? E-mail news@thepsychologist.org.uk. We also welcome evidence-based analysis of current events (up to 1500 words). Contact the editor first on jonsut@bps.org.uk. Send reviews of research published in peer-reviewed journals (up to 400 words) to Dr Tom Stafford on tom@idiolect.org.uk. Staff journalist: Dr Christian Jarrett (chrber@bps.org.uk).

MENTAL ILLNESS AND HOMICIDE

ONE in 20 homicides in England and Wales are committed by mental health patients, according to a new report by the National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide and Homicide by People with Mental Illness. The report says that many of these homicides are preventable with improved recognition of risk by mental health services. However, the number of cases is not increasing, and the risk of random killings by mentally ill people has not risen in 30 years. The report also found that suicides by inpatients had fallen over the five-year period of the study.

□ The full report is available via tinyurl.com/lylap7a.

GOVERNMENT ACCUSED

ACADEMICS who have hit the headlines for research that challenges government policies have told *The Times Higher* how they have been subjected to concerted campaigns of 'vilification', have had their work publicly rubbished and have been subjected to repeated personal criticisms. Some said that they had suffered psychological problems and long-term damage to their career after speaking out, with their research funding drying up.

Professor Michael Rutter (Institute of Psychiatry), who criticised the government after advising it over its Sure Start programme for families in disadvantaged areas, said: 'The government definitely doesn't want evidence, although the rhetoric is entirely different.'

YOUNG RESEARCHER AWARD

WE reported in November on three psychology researchers shortlisted for the Times Higher Awards Young Research of the Year. In December one of the three, Danielle Turner of the Department of Experimental Psychology at Cambridge University, was announced as the winner for her work on the cognitive-enhancing effects of the stimulant Modafinil.

Are you sitting on your research data?

THE openness of psychological research has been called into doubt by a group of Dutch psychologists who found just 27 per cent of the study authors they contacted were willing to share access to their data for the sake of reanalysis. Dr Jelte Wicherts and colleagues at the University of Amsterdam contacted the authors of 141 studies published in leading APA journals. After six months and 400 e-mails, the team had access to just 64 out of 249 relevant data sets.

'It's not that we don't trust the researchers,' Wicherts told us, 'rather it's a matter of principle – the availability of data is essential for science. If it's empirical research, anyone should be able to see the data. It would help with meta-analyses and it would really benefit science.' However, writing in the *American Psychologist*, Wicherts' group acknowledged that sharing one's data can be extremely time consuming, often with little or no obvious benefit. 'Like everybody else, researchers are busy people, who generally have better things to do than prepare data files and codebooks for a few nosy psychologists from Amsterdam. Such is the human condition,' they said.

Wicherts and his colleagues contacted authors who had published papers towards the end of 2004 in *Developmental Psychology*; the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*; the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*; or the *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*.

Unlock your data?

The majority of the study authors failed to cooperate despite the fact they had signed up to an APA guideline that stated: 'After research results are published, psychologists do not withhold the data on which their conclusions are based from other competent professionals...' British authors were no more or less cooperative than researchers from other nations, but cooperation was poorest among researchers publishing in *Developmental Psychology*, probably because of their use of large, longitudinal data sets.

Wicherts and colleagues said the situation could be improved if journals adopted a policy of insisting authors submit anonymised data sets following acceptance of their research for publication. Data not used in the published work could be omitted, and dispensation could be requested in the case of proprietary issues. 'It seems to us that, considering the ratio of the benefits achieved in this

manner to the costs involved in terms of extra work, this is a bargain,' they said.

Wicherts is currently in talks with editors at the APA and is optimistic that the enforcement of the data-sharing guideline will be strengthened. However, the British Psychological Society doesn't have an explicit guideline on data sharing, and the chair of the Society's Research Board, Professor Dominic Abrams, is unconvinced by the practicability of Wicherts' proposals. Abrams told us the ideal state of affairs would be for research data to be available but that issues of confidentiality, intellectual copyright and the fact that papers often depend on only a fraction of a larger data set, meant this aspiration just wasn't practical. 'I'm doubtful that this is an easy one to solve and that if it is solved in an easy way, then it won't be as helpful as it might be,' he said. *CJ*

Mental Health Bill update

DAVID HARPER (*University of East London*), a member of the Society's Mental Health Act Working Party, on the proposed changes.

THE Queen's Speech in November sparked the publication of the new Mental Health Bill, which is now working its way through the House of Lords, on its way to the House of Commons. It may well receive Royal Assent by the summer, and it has significant implications for psychology and for society.

The bill seeks to introduce a number of amendments to the Mental Health Act 1983. The key proposals are:

- Introducing a simplified single definition of mental disorder (i.e. abolishing the current four separate categories of mental disorder) and having fewer exclusions.
- Removing the 'treatability' test, instead noting that appropriate treatment must be available.
- Introducing supervised community treatment.
- Updating the 'nearest relative' provisions to recognise civil partners and to allow nearest relatives to be changed by the courts.
- Changing professional roles to enable a wider range of professionals to undertake previous roles. The 'responsible clinician' role, with overall responsibility for the care of the person treated compulsorily, will replace that of the 'responsible medical officer'. It will be open to non-medics – including clinical psychologists. Similarly the 'approved mental health professional' role will replace that of the 'approved social worker', and will be opened up to other professions.
- Improved access to review tribunals (meetings at which the treatment order is reviewed, with input from professionals, other experts, service users and their representatives).
- Amending the Capacity Act 2005 to close the gap concerning service users, detained over the long term in healthcare settings, who lack the capacity to give or withhold valid consent.
- Abolishing finite restriction orders made by courts on offenders with

mental health problems. The bill will remove the possibility of restrictions being made for a limited period, so that they may remain in force for as long as the offender's mental health problem poses a risk of harm to others.

The Society has previously expressed reservations about some of these proposed changes. Key issues are:

- That the bill should include a clause noting that, in order to be considered for compulsory treatment, a person needs to be experiencing an impairment in their healthcare decision making as in the Scottish Mental Health Act. This would restrict compulsory treatment to those who are not able, at that moment, to make a decision about consent to health care.
- That the bill should include not only treatment that is appropriate and available but also that which is likely to be of therapeutic benefit to the service user. This would, for example, prevent indefinite detention alone being seen as an appropriate treatment
- That there should be a set of principles (currently listed in the Code of Practice) on the face of the bill (for example that practitioners should pursue the least restrictive alternative to compulsion). It is particularly important that the principle that clinicians must pursue the least restrictive alternative is incorporated into legislation.
- That, if it is to be used, supervised community treatment should apply only to a small delimited group of service users. Moreover, if the criteria for the use of compulsory treatment remain broad and do not include a consideration of whether decision making is impaired, then it is likely that the government will not achieve the decrease in the use of compulsory treatment it has said it wants.

There are a number of other issues that need resolving, and the Society has been actively involved through its membership

of the Mental Health Alliance (an umbrella campaigning group representing 78 organisations including the Society: see www.mentalhealthalliance.org.uk). The Society hopes that the government will be open to further revision of the bill as it passes through Parliament.

The Society's Mental Health Bill Working Party, under the aegis of the Professional Practice Board and chaired by Peter Kinderman, has been active following the publication of the bill. A number of workstreams have been set up: political activity and liaison with the Mental Health Alliance; the Code of Practice; issues of implementation and training (e.g. in relation to the responsible clinician role); and updating professional practice guidelines in the light of any legislative changes.

There was a lobby of Parliament on 28 November at which the Society was represented. Please check the Mental Health Alliance and Professional Practice Board websites (www.bps.org.uk/ppb) for further updates on the progress of the bill. It would also be helpful if members wrote to their MPs to express any concerns they have about the bill. Members might also ask MPs to sign Early Day Motion 75, supportive of the Alliance's position – 80 MPs have already signed it.

WEBSITES

tinyurl.com/lyx7oh7

Enhancing the employability of psychology graduates – a report from the Higher Education Academy Psychology Network

www.rcpsych.ac.uk/pressparliament/podcasts.aspx

Royal College of Psychiatrists podcasts

If you come across a website that you think would be of interest to our readers, let us know on psychologist@bps.org.uk.

FROM THE DIGEST

CHRISTIAN JARRETT with a taster from the Society's free Research Digest service.

SOLVING cryptic crosswords impairs our subsequent ability to recognise faces, a finding that has obvious practical implications for the kind of activities eye-witnesses get up to prior to an identity parade.

In a study published in *Perception* (see tinyurl.com/lymfzv), Michael Lewis at Cardiff University presented 60 students with 14 faces, one at a time, for three seconds. Some of the students then read a passage of a Dan Brown book for five minutes, others performed a Sudoku puzzle during this time, some completed a simple crossword, while others worked on a cryptic crossword. The students were then presented with a further 28 faces and they had to identify the original faces among these. During this identification phase, the participants also continued with their allotted puzzle/reading for 30 seconds between the presentation of each face.

The students working on the cryptic crossword performed significantly worse at the face recognition task than all the other participants (68 per cent accuracy compared with 80 per cent for simple crossword, 76 per cent for reading and 79 per cent for Sudoku). Relative to chance performance, Lewis said this represented a 40 per cent reduction in performance for the cryptic crossword participants relative to the others.

The finding is consistent with other research showing face recognition is impaired after reading the small letters of Navon stimuli – these are images in which a large letter or symbol is composed of many tiny repeats of a different letter or symbol (tinyurl.com/t2e7s).

Lewis speculated that both Navon stimuli and cryptic crosswords involve the suppression of obvious, irrelevant information – the large letter in the first case, or the literal meaning of a word in the latter case – and that this process could have a negative impact on face recognition. 'This observation, however, does not explain how such suppression has such a detrimental effect on face recognition', he said.

□ For much more from the Digest, and to subscribe, see the Digest blog at www.bps-research-digest.blogspot.com.

The great parenting experiment...

FROM *Supernanny* to *Little Angels*, the TV schedules seem to be jammed with parenting programmes. Now a new report funded by the Home Office's Respect Task Force claims one such programme – the ITV series *Driving Mum and Dad Mad* – was beneficial not only to the parents featured in the show, but also to the parents who watched it at home.

Clinical psychologist Dr Rachel Calam of the University of Manchester and Professor Matt Sanders, developer of the Triple P-Positive Parenting Programme upon whose principles the ITV show was based, recruited 465 parents who watched the six-part series back in the spring of 2005. The show featured five families enrolled on a programme that promotes positive relationships between parents and children, and helps parents develop practical management strategies for coping with emotional and behavioural problems in children.

Calam and Sanders found that after watching the series, the parents reported significant improvements in their parenting compared with before, as well as significant improvements in their children's behaviour. For example, the parents reported being more positive with their children and feeling less emotionally distressed. Meanwhile, of those children judged by their parents to have severe behavioural problems before the programme, afterwards 40 per cent had reportedly improved to the extent their behaviour fell into the 'normal' range on the measures used.

As well as watching the TV show, some of the parent participants were also supported by an online resource and with structured self-help, and they reported even greater benefits than the other parents. However, on a less positive note, the parents with the highest levels of dysfunction and lowest confidence in their parenting were the least likely to complete the study. The study's results are currently under peer review.

Professor Sanders told the press: 'The improvements associated with watching the

series were maintained after six months, and it is extremely encouraging to see that so many parents benefited from it. Our findings indicate that the media can be used constructively to provide parenting information and advice in an entertaining way, and can bring real positive outcomes to both parents and children'.

However, *The Psychologist* put it to Professor Sanders that the study was weakened by the lack of a control group and by the lack of any objective measures of the parents' and children's behavioural changes. He told us that for practical reasons the study was not intended to be a typical randomly controlled trial. 'It is better to think of it as a natural experiment in real time assessing the impact of an

event (screening of a TV series) that we as experimenters have no direct control over. It is a study more in the genre of a large-scale public health intervention that in this case targets parenting.'

Regarding the lack of any objective measures, he told us: 'As this was a web based study, with parents drawn from throughout the UK it was not possible to collect independent observational data or teacher reports'. However Sanders said previous trials had found parents' reports correlated with independent observations.

The researchers are currently recruiting participants to watch the second series of *Driving Mum and Dad Mad*. CJ

□ For more information see www.greatparentingexperiment.net. TV show homepage: tinyurl.com/v2rvrt Home Office Respect Task Force: www.respect.gov.uk.

SALLY LANCASTER/PHOTOFUSION

...but supernannies won't be psychologists

THE Home Office has announced a £4 million scheme to fund dozens of parenting experts across 77 regions of the country in a drive to help reduce antisocial behaviour. The media, including the BBC and *The Guardian*, have reported the experts will be predominantly psychologists, but in a call to the Home Office, *The Psychologist* was told anyone will be free to apply for the positions once they are advertised. 'Anyone can apply for the role, but we won't be employing psychologists – the role is far more general than that and won't be psychological in nature,' they said. 'We'll be running job adverts in due course and anyone who is an expert in parenting and meets the job requirements will be free to apply.'

Beverley Hughes

Dr Carol Burniston, a consultant clinical child psychologist and Clinical Lead for Wakefield's Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), told us she'd been surprised to see media reports that 77 psychologists were being proposed to fill

the posts, and that this clarification therefore makes sense. 'Our CAMHS strategy works in a multi-agency way and we do not feel that clinical child psychologists have a monopoly on parenting. Courses are run and individual programmes are provided by social workers, family centre staff, mental health workers, health visitors etc. The key issues are that programmes that are delivered should be evidence based, properly evaluated and delivered according to best practice guidelines', Dr Burniston said.

At the launch of the scheme, the Children, Young People and Families Minister Beverley Hughes said: 'Ineffective and chaotic parenting has a hugely negative impact on the lives of children and young people and on our communities. A minority of parents fail to set any boundaries and allow their children to drift into antisocial behaviour that is a danger to themselves and a menace to those around them. We want to give these parents the help and support they need.'

CJ

Easing amputees' pain

MANY people who undergo an amputation experience phantom limb pain (PLP). The condition can persist for many years, and is very difficult to treat. Now scientists at the University of Manchester are using 3D computer graphics to ease the pain.

A virtual reality system, created by the university's School of Computer Science, gives the illusion that a person's amputated limb is still there. By putting on a headset, patients see themselves with two limbs and can use their remaining physical limb to control the movements of a computer-generated limb. Previous research has found that when a person's brain is tricked into believing they can see and move a phantom limb, pain can decrease.

An initial small-scale project has produced startling results, with four out of

the five patients in the study – including one who has suffered from PLP for 40 years – reporting improvement in their pain. Some improvements were almost immediate.

Project leader, Dr Craig Murray of the University of Manchester's School of Psychological Sciences, said: 'One patient felt that the fingers of her amputated hand were continually clenched into her palm, which was very painful for her. However, after just one session using the virtual system she began to feel movement in her fingers and the pain began to ease.'

The research team hopes to include a larger number of patients in their future work in order to identify those most likely to benefit from the virtual reality system they have developed.

PD-H

FROM THE DIGEST

CHRISTIAN JARRETT with a taster from the Society's free Research Digest service.

WE normally associate leadership with a confident, assertive speaking style. But according to Alison Fragale at the University of North Carolina, when it comes to tasks or organisations that require a cooperative style of working, people look for leadership from those with doubt and hesitation in their voice.

Fifty-four participants read one of two descriptions of a company – one version emphasised that the company prized the ability to work independently; by contrast, the other stressed the need for staff to work cooperatively. The participants then read one of two versions of a transcript of a telephone call made by an employee, 'Richard', at that company. In one version he spoke with confidence and without hesitation (e.g. 'I know. I need the results of the Xerox project to help guide us. Why haven't we received them yet?'); in the other version he spoke with hesitation and qualification 'I know. I'm not really sure, but I think we really need the results of the Xerox project to help guide us. I totally don't want to be a pain or anything, but do you know why haven't we received them yet?').

As you might expect, participants who read that the company valued people's ability to work alone, were more likely to recommend Richard for a high status promotion if they'd read the telephone transcript in which he had spoken assertively and without hesitation. More surprisingly, among the participants who read that the company cherished cooperation among staff, those who read the transcript in which Richard spoke with doubt and hesitation were more likely to recommend him for promotion than were the participants who read the transcript in which he was assertive and confident. The explanation for this probably lies in the fact the participants who read the 'hesitant' transcript rated Richard as more likeable and tolerant than the participants who read the 'confident' transcript.

In the paper (published in *Organizational Behaviour and Human Decision Processes*: see www.unc.edu/~fragales/FragaleOBHDP.pdf), Fragale concluded that whereas many people have argued for a language of success – 'an assertive manner of speaking that has been shown to improve an individual's status position' – the current findings suggest this may be an oversimplification, and in fact 'multiple languages may lead to status attainment'.

□ For much more from the Digest, and to subscribe, see the Digest blog at www.bps-research-digest.blogspot.com.

Money makes people selfish

A SERIES of experiments published in the journal *Science* have shown that merely thinking about or looking at money changes the way people behave, causing them to be more selfish and self-sufficient.

Participants first rearranged several jumbled lists of words to form sentences. Some participants were given word lists that led to neutral sentences (e.g. 'it is cold outside'), whereas other participants were given words that led to money-related sentences (e.g. 'a high-paying salary'). Next, they all attempted to solve a difficult geometric puzzle. Those participants who had completed the money-related

sentences worked significantly longer on the puzzle before asking for help (average of 314 seconds), compared with the participants who'd completed neutral sentences (average of 186 seconds – no different from controls who didn't complete the earlier sentence task).

In another experiment, participants were again primed with either the neutral or money-related descrambling task. Afterwards they were

asked to sit individually in a room to complete some irrelevant questionnaires. They were soon joined by an assistant of the researchers who was pretending to be another research participant, confused by the questionnaires. The participants primed by the money-related sentences spent only half as much time helping the confused person compared with the participants who'd completed the neutral sentences.

Further experiments showed participants who left with more money after a Monopoly game helped pick up fewer pencils dropped by a passer-by; participants primed with money-related sentences gave less money to charity; and

participants placed in front of a money-themed computer screen-saver chose to sit further away from another participant they were due to chat with.

Kathleen Vohs at the Carlson School of Management and colleagues, who completed the research, said their findings helped explain why historically, people have tended to view money as good and evil. 'As countries and cultures developed, money may have allowed people to acquire goods and services that enabled the pursuit of cherished goals, which in turn diminished reliance on friends and family,' they said. 'In this way, money enhanced individualism but diminished communal motivations.'

CJ

Teaching new tricks

It's an old party trick – ask someone to pat their head with one hand, while rubbing their stomach in circular motions with the other, and the chances are they'll be surprised at how difficult it is. According to David Rosenbaum, director

of Penn State's Laboratory for Cognition and Action, this is because our brain treats the job of each hand as a separate task, and so keeps switching attention between the two, compromising performance. However, working with his colleagues Amanda Dawson and John Challis, Rosenbaum has shown that if control is passed away from 'us', to our sense of touch, we can easily perform independent movements with each hand.

Participants closed their eyes and with their hands attempted to track the path of two discs. One hand followed the path of a disc that moved in a circle, with the other hand tracking a disc moving in a square. Performing these

movements independently with each hand would normally be extremely difficult, but in fact the tracking task was completed with ease. Participants maintained their touch on the discs lightly – if they exerted too much pressure the task stopped, so there was no way their hands were simply being dragged around by the discs.

Rosenbaum explained: 'We created a situation where each hand simply reacts to the

motion of the object being felt, so in effect we bypassed the high-level cognitive system.

The excellent performance displayed by our participants took no training whatsoever. Using haptics, we managed to get into the motor system through the backdoor.' The researchers hope the findings, published in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, can be adapted to help people with coordination problems. CJ

Magnetic button used by subjects to perform haptic tracing experiment



The
British
Psychological
Society

The **Appointments** **Memorandum** is changing

From March, the *Appointments Memorandum* will become *Psychologist Appointments*. The new A4, full colour publication will allow bigger, brighter job ads and editorial features covering all aspects of employment and career development.

In addition, the website will be relaunched at www.psychapp.co.uk, cementing its reputation as the best place to search for jobs in psychology. Sign up for e-mail or RSS alerts, advertise your vacancy online and more.

For advertising details please call the Advertising Team on 0116 252 9550 or e-mail: psychapp@bps.org.uk

Déjà vu – the eyes don't have it

A POPULAR explanation for déjà vu – the erroneous sensation that a novel experience has happened before – has been thrown into doubt by Akira O'Connor and Chris Moulin at the University of Leeds.

The optical pathway delay theory for déjà vu argues that the sensation is caused by visual signals from the two eyes failing to synchronise, thus triggering a mistaken sense of familiarity with the scene when the later signal arrives milliseconds after the first. But now O'Connor and Moulin

have documented the case of MT, a 25-year-old healthy blind man who occasionally experiences déjà vu in much the same way that sighted people do.

Writing in the journal *Brain and Cognition*, the researchers said: 'This case-report serves to challenge optical pathway delay theory, which does not appear capable of explaining the occurrence of déjà vu in the blind.' O'Connor and Moulin favour a memory-based explanation for déjà vu based on dysfunctional activation in the temporal lobe. CJ

USELESS AND WRONG

TORTURE isn't just morally wrong, it's also ineffective. That was the message issued by psychologists and former interrogators following a joint meeting held by Georgetown University and the pressure group Psychologists for Social Responsibility in November.

'Torture is based on outmoded behaviourist ideas. Threats may change overt behaviour, but it is naive to assume that threats make a person tell the truth', said Fathali Moghaddam, Professor of Psychology at Georgetown.

The group said innocent victims of torture were likely to lie just to save themselves from further suffering, while those people who actually have useful information are likely to be trained in how to alter the information they give away. A former senior military interrogator who wished to remain anonymous told the press: 'With torture, we cannot know if we are getting a truthful response or a response to end torture.' CJ

Seeking enlightenment

JON SUTTON reports from the Society's London Lectures, a one-day event aimed largely at A-level students.

IT'S not every day in psychology that you get to hear tales of Ugandan forests, the weighing of beard clippings, lobotomobiles, the Thames Barrier, and police interrogation. As an introduction to the weird and wonderful world of psychology, the London Lectures were educational and inspiring.

Kicking off the day in front of the assembled audience of 750 students and their teachers, Professor Tom Troscianko (University of Bristol) addressed the question of why humans have colour vision. Being colour blind myself, I quickly learnt that in the Kibale forest of Uganda I would not be dining on the delicious red fruit. Troscianko and his team went there with their specially developed camera, shinned up some trees and took photos of said fruit. It turned out that the red/green system does not get distracted by shadow – suggesting that the extra cone that primates have for red/green vision may have evolved for fruit finding. Birds apparently see a bigger contrast between the fruit and the surrounding foliage, but they are more easily fooled by changes in lighting across the day.

Troscianko then described how a chance encounter with some garish 14th-century art led him to wonder how psychology could be brought to bear on lighting in art galleries. He made a digital scan of Duccio's *The Annunciation*, complete with gold leaf made using 14th-century techniques. When the print was adjusted to appear candlelit, as originally intended, eye movements were more likely to be towards the hand of the Virgin Mary. Her gesture is considered by art historians to show a state of

mind somewhere between disquiet and reflection (I imagine I would respond in much the same way if an angel came to tell me I would bear the son of God). A more illuminating finding would be hard to imagine. Next he will be telling us that there is a small region of the brain that responds only to glow. Ah, apparently there is: the fusiform gyrus.

From the Virgin Mary to contraception with the next talk – Dr Daryl O'Connor (University of Leeds) with a report on his WHO-funded research into the likely effects of the male pill. After an entertaining diversion into the study of beard growth in relation to the resumption of sexual activity, O'Connor showed that giving men extra testosterone over an eight-week period actually had little impact. There was a slight increase in anger and hostility,

but O'Connor thought this was not clinically or pathologically significant.

Looking next at the effect of testosterone on cognitive ability, O'Connor demonstrated how it actually made men worse at a visuospatial task and better at a verbal fluency test. This was contrary to the expectations, drawn from the research on gender differences in cognitive ability, but O'Connor thought this was due to the body converting more of the extra testosterone into oestradiol.

Combating the post-prandial dip was Professor Richard Bentall (University of Manchester). Lunches had barely settled before he was regaling the audience with tales of Walter Freeman's 1940s 'lobotomobile'. You don't want to know. Suffice to say that apparently 'patients' tears cleaned out the wound'.

As usual, Bentall spoke

with passion and authority, reeling off fascinating and worrying facts. In the northwest of England, one quarter of patients are getting over 1000mg per day of medication: the suggested effective maximum is 300mg. More than a tenth of the general population have had hallucinations that meet all the relevant diagnostic criteria. If you are going to have a diagnosis of schizophrenia, it's best to have it in Nairobi, where your chances of complete recovery are about 50 per cent.

Bentall's main contribution is to reassure psychiatrists and psychologists alike that they are not going to fall into some kind of philosophical abyss if they abandon diagnostic classification. Produce a theory of all the symptoms and there is no schizophrenia left to explain. And psychologists are making good progress towards this, for example in showing that paranoid patients attribute negative events to external, global and stable causes and positive events to internal, global and stable causes (largely because they often suffer from low self-esteem and are trying to feel better about themselves). Bentall feels there is a poverty of ideas, not just resources. Psychologists are doing their best to counteract this. For example, if paranoid patients are often reporting that people are whispering when they enter a room, could it be that paranoia is more common in those with a history of hearing problems? Yes, according to research by van Ost.

That kind of insight would have impressed the next speaker, Professor Tom Ormerod (Lancaster University). His examples of

insight problems – looking for a change in conceptual understanding that allows a solution – led to many ‘aha’ moments, whether the topic was protecting London from rising sea levels, or solving the nine-dot problem that spawned the phrase ‘Think outside the box’. Ormerod’s insight was that we underrate failure – people only expand their options when they run out of moves that maximise progress. The implications for teaching were considerable – good teachers allow failure, give reasons for that failure and then provide prompts at a time when the learner is receptive to new ideas.

Ormerod concluded that hints aren’t particularly effective on insight problems, that we don’t spontaneously transfer prior knowledge to a similar situation, and that we are not routinely creative. But with good reason – there is simply too much ‘outside the box’ to think about it at the start. He ended with a research question, maybe one for all those student projects: Does solving a lot of these insight problems actually help you to think more creatively in the real world?

Finally, Professor Ray Bull (University of Leicester) gave an insight into an ever-popular area: psychologists’ work with the police. He explained how, up until the mid-1980s, police forces had no substantial guidance on interview techniques and were very suspicious of ‘outside’ researchers, who seemed to do little other than criticise police. The main goal was to try to ‘break down’ a non-cooperative suspect. Not only had psychological work shown that some of the coercive recommended procedures could lead to false confessions, but research suggested that most police interviews were in fact short and surprisingly amiable

discussions. Over a third of suspects admitted culpability right from the off, and in only 1.5 per cent of a large sample of interviews did suspects change their story due to the persuasive skills of the interviewer.

With Bull’s input, a new training course was introduced for all police officers. Bull was then asked to identify skills gaps, and found that even interviewers viewed as skilled were not very good at using pauses and silences; avoiding using closed questions; showing flexibility, empathy and compassion. Bull speculated that this was because such aspects occur infrequently in everyday conversation, perhaps particularly among males?

In further research, Bull and colleagues have looked at a randomly selected sample of 80 more recent interviews from the archives. Police officers never minimised the offence, used intimidation or made out that the situation was futile. There were still too many leading questions, but generally the results were a feather in psychology’s cap, given the involvement of forensic psychologists in changing training procedures over a number of years. And it’s good news for justice too – research from Sweden suggests, albeit with plenty of methodological caveats, that convicted and jailed criminals who reported perceiving humanitarian attitudes from their interviewers were more likely to have admitted to their crime at interview.

Overall, the day was full of intriguing methodology, useful application, and inspiration from unexpected quarters. As a showcase of psychology past and present it was a huge success, and I have no doubt it will persuade some of those in the audience to take the next step on that career path.

RESEARCH FUNDING NEWS

The MRC have issued a Highlight Notice for the **Cognitive Systems Foresight Project**. The project has already supported many interdisciplinary research projects, but as the cognitive systems field develops, many more may be needed. To facilitate research, the Wellcome Trust and research councils will jointly consider funding interdisciplinary proposals in this area. The deadline for expressions of interest is 19 January 2007.

☐ For further details see the MRC website:

www.mrc.ac.uk/ApplyingforaGrant/HighlightNotices/CognitiveSystems/MRC003056

The BUPA Foundation research theme for 2007 is **New Roles for Health Professionals in Addressing Public Health**. Up to £750,000 of funding is available to health professionals to support studies that provide significant health gain through **innovative approaches to delivering health care**. This may include new approaches extending the roles of health professionals working alone, or with other professionals, within and beyond the NHS. The closing date for applications is 14 February 2007.

☐ For further details see the BUPA Foundation website:

www.bupafoundation.com/asp/specialist/index.asp

The International Psychoanalytical Association have funding of up to £5000 available to support **research into any area of psychoanalysis**. The closing date for applications is 1 March 2007.

☐ For further details on how to apply see their website: www.ipa.org.uk/default.aspx

The Fulbright Commission are offering **Distinguished Scholar Awards** to enable outstanding professionals or academics to undertake lecturing, research or professional development in the USA for up to a year. Awards are for £15,000 and would be given for the 2007/8 academic year. Applications for visits that would support collaborative innovation of international significance are of particular interest. The closing date for applications is 2 March 2007.

☐ For further details see the Commission’s website:

www.fulbright.co.uk/awards/uk/scholars/scholarawards.html

The Epilepsy Foundation, based in the USA, is part of a consortium of organisations involved in the Partnership for Paediatric Epilepsy Research. The consortium aims to support novel, investigator-initiated studies which emphasise paediatric epilepsies, and specifically focus on increasing knowledge of causes and promoting innovative treatment approaches for epilepsies that begin in infancy and childhood. Both clinical and basic projects will be considered.

Funding of up to \$100,000 is available. US citizenship is not required for application but research will have to be conducted in the USA. The closing date for applications is 30 August 2007.

☐ Further details see www.epilepsyfoundation.org/research/grants.cfm

For a list of current funding opportunities go to www.bps.org.uk/funds

Funding bodies should e-mail news to Elizabeth Beech on elibee@bps.org.uk for possible inclusion.