

## IQ – a potent meme

As far as I am aware, the British Psychological Society has never published a document like the American Psychological Association's 1996 Intelligence Task Force Report, made in response to Herrnstein and Murray's *The Bell Curve*. I recently ran two workshop days on 'Uses and abuses of IQ', and one conclusion of the discussions was that it would now be timely and appropriate to do so.

Intelligence, with its attendant intelligence testing, is a concept which is thoroughly psychological. In some ways, it defines our professional identity. It is also an issue cutting right across the Society, being in the domain of no one Division, faculty or special interest group. If the Society accepts the challenge of producing a report, it would be an opportunity for a broad-based involvement of the membership in a project in the social interest.

It seems appropriate, with an issue such as this, that it is the corporate professional

body addressing this issue in a very public way rather than individual practitioners fighting individual battles in their day-to-day contact with other professions. Is it not better that the BPS approaches institutions such as the Law Society, rather than leaving it to lone practitioners. What if we had a situation in this country, as pertains in certain

states in the US, whereby receiving the death penalty is dependent on a person's IQ score? Would it be left to individual psychologists to engage with the state or would our professional body seek to do so?

I also included the study day material in a module for clinical psychology trainees. On my simple survey, everyone thought intelligence a useful concept. However, of both qualified and trainee psychologists, only 30 per cent had heard of the Cattell-Hull-Carroll Theory of Cognitive Abilities, which claims to be

'the most comprehensive and empirically supported psychometric theory of the structure of cognitive and academic abilities to date' (McGrew, 2005). One interpretation is that people do not have much theoretical background when administering IQ tests. To the question 'What is the predictive validity of any of the WAIS scales?' the responses were diverse, reflecting, in my opinion, that there is little concern for what IQ testing is able empirically to predict.

Whether or what the BPS contributed to any national debate about the 11+ would be of interest. However, I do



TIM SAUNDERS

## Delivering the research message

The Research Board read with interest the letter on 'engaging the public in psychology' from Kathryn Buchanan and Lee Saunders (Letters, November 2012), which called for 'a Society-backed online participation website to increase the public's exposure to psychological research in the UK, in addition to providing a supportive environment for academics to



Grasping the opportunity?

conduct their research'.

The Board and the Society's Ethics Committee are

particularly keen to encourage the conduct of high-quality ethical research, and this is reflected in its *Code of Human Research Ethics*, which brings together all previous Society guidance on research ethics. We are also currently in the process of revising and extending the *Guidelines for Conducting Research on the Internet*.

The Board felt that rather than duplicating the work of

a number of existing highly credible web-based recruitment hubs for psychological research (e.g. [www.onlinepsychresearch.co.uk](http://www.onlinepsychresearch.co.uk)), it may be appropriate for the Society to signpost these on its website with the appropriate disclaimers. We would be keen for such sites to ensure that any research listed has undergone appropriate ethics review and is in line with the underlying principles of the Code of Human

contribute

**These pages are central to The Psychologist's role as a forum for discussion and debate, and we welcome your contributions.**

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not permit the publication of every letter received. However, see [www.thepsychologist.org.uk](http://www.thepsychologist.org.uk) to contribute to our discussion forum (members only).

not recall the BPS making any representation about the government policy to ensure that 50 per cent of the population go to university. Given the claim that IQ can predict academic outcome, to achieve this 50 per cent target, it would be predicted that either a percentage would fail, or the standard for passing would have to fall.

I feel that there needs to be some engagement with the general public and the various institutions about the strengths and weaknesses of intelligence testing. There may be better ways in which we can supply the information for decision-making than IQ scores. I feel that we are caught in the expectations of the general public for whom the IQ remains a potent meme, and, rather than attempting to move them on, we collude with them. I would request, therefore, that the Society and its membership take up this issue in order ultimately to improve public policy. I hope raising this issue for discussion and debate amongst the membership is a suitable first step.

**Paul Devonshire**

Chichester

#### Reference

McGrew, K.S. (2005). The Cattell-Horn-Carroll theory of cognitive abilities: Past, present, and future. In D.P. Flanagan, J.L. Genshaft & P.L. Harrison (Eds.) *Contemporary intellectual assessment: Theories, tests, and issues* (pp.136–182). New York: Guilford.

#### Research Ethics.

The Society is strongly committed to supporting and disseminating high-quality research – which it does through its numerous award and grant schemes (including the Research Seminars Competition and the Public Engagement Grants scheme). We are also looking to promote psychological science that is impactful (in the REF 2014 sense) via its BPS Impact web portal – any members that wish to receive more information in relation to this project should contact Lisa Morrison-Coulthard (Lisa.MorrisonCoulthard@bps.org.uk).

**Professor Judi Ellis**

Chair, Research Board

## More misleading nomenclature

John Kelly's letter (December 2012) makes a valid point about the practice of clinicians referring to medicines for the treatment of dementia as 'anti-dementia drugs'. His valid point has a broader reach than he acknowledges.

He writes: 'Whereas it might be accepted that antipsychotics and antidepressants are appropriately labelled as they can often help eliminate those particular symptoms...' When writing in a professional capacity I find it increasingly hard to use those terms without parentheses or clumsy phrasing such as 'alleged antidepressants' or 'so-called antipsychotics'.

Kirsch (2009) has demonstrated that while 'antidepressants' seem to work (that's why GPs prescribe them), they work no better than a chalk pill or placebo. Moncrieff (2008) has demonstrated that 'antipsychotics' have

no specific antipsychotic effect but are neurotoxic drugs some of whose effects are useful in the management of seriously disturbed people. The earlier term 'major tranquillisers' is in my opinion more apt.

To paraphrase Kelly's concluding paragraph – As a Society, as Psychologists and as people informed with the evidence, we should of course be helping convey the unbiased truth about medications for depression and psychosis and challenging the use of the 'antidepressant' and 'antipsychotic' labels.

**Dr Michael J. Cliffe**

King's Lynn

#### References

Kirsch, I. (2009). *The emperor's new drugs: Exploding the antidepressant myth*. London: The Bodley Head.  
Moncrieff, J. (2008). *The myth of the chemical cure: A critique of psychiatric drug treatment*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

## Teaching mindfulness or MBCT?

As a multi-faith mindfulness practitioner and teacher, I was troubled by the implications of Marika Lahtinen's letter (December 2012). In spite of being a Buddhist with 15 years experience, she describes that 'a chain of destructive thoughts entered my mind' (emphasis added). I experienced or became aware of a chain of destructive thoughts, would be a more accurate scientific and traditional Buddhist description. There is no need to locate thoughts in the mind, be it metaphorical or spatial. Then she claims that 'The distress took over my body and mind...' Here, contrary to the tenets of CBT and Buddhism, personal responsibility and agency are abandoned, instead of simply saying 'I felt overwhelmed bodily and emotionally'.

I would caution against a regulatory body that would create a them and us mentality in the mindfulness psychology community, which is contrary even to Buddhist principles of the inclusive Community (The Sangha). Mindfulness and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy are not synonymous. The narrow concept popularised by Jon Kabat Zinn is a particular 'brand' for stress reduction attached to Buddhism, but mindfulness is a concept and practice found in all major world religions (from the Vedic Upanishads to Sufi Islam and Christianity). Any attempt to fix mindfulness in the Buddhist mould would

be further evidence of the negative effects of secular globalisation of therapy emanating from the US, without regard for cultural diversity (see Gunaratana, 2012, for a native Buddhist take on mindfulness).

The concept of competence underpinning NICE guidelines for MBCT is problematic and risks harming mindfulness-based interventions in practice. Such interventions are not seeking to turn their clients into Buddhists. So why is it deemed that experienced doctoral level psychology practitioners who have trained in workshops and retreats are now in need of a regulatory body to ensure compliance with some benchmark? Also, the contraindications of mindfulness meditation do not appear in the published literature, and a Zen Buddhist abbot has warned against consciously seeking mindfulness. He exhorts that we simply, walk the walk and talk the talk (tinyurl.com/bugcuc).

So, who is competent to teach mindfulness? A cynic might say: Those who can, do! Those who can't, teach!

**Dr Waseem Alladin**

Department of Clinical Psychology  
University of Leicester

#### Reference

Gunaratana, B.H. (2002). *Mindfulness in plain English: 20th anniversary edition*. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications.

## An alarming qualitative experience

I have had the recent and somewhat alarming experience of having the results of the mock Research Excellence Framework (REF) fed back to me during an appraisal process. What emerged during this should be of concern to every member of the Society. In a nutshell I was informed that although I had published several papers in high impact factor journals and the relevant studies were good, well conducted and interesting, they would be graded lower simply because they had employed qualitative research methods. The opinion of the externally appointed assessors was that qualitative research is always graded lower in such exercises and so that was what they were going to do.

That the simple choice of whether to conduct a qualitative or quantitative investigation is somehow deemed to be an indicator of research quality is patently absurd. Clearly this makes a mockery of the REF as any valid attempt to measure quality of research output and strongly suggests it is not fit for purpose. It not only carries serious implications for academic freedom and with it the health of the discipline, but there may very well also be legal issues pertaining to universities making decisions on whether to hire, fire or promote individuals based on the outcome of such judgements. The 1988 Education Reform Act contains the proviso that staff should 'have freedom

within the law to question and test received wisdom, and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions'. We have reached a sorry state in academic life when the mere choice of research method, places one at a career disadvantage. What kind of message does this send to people embarking, or wishing to embark on a career in psychology?

I would hope that this matter could be referred to the Research Board for consideration. I am of the view that the Society ought to make some public statement on this practice. Psychologists acting on the basis of such perverse and biased value judgements are certainly not promoting the discipline of psychology in any favourable manner but actively harming it.

**Name and address supplied**

**Judi Ellis, Chair of the Society's Research Board, replies:** The Research Board of the Society is concerned to read of this assessment of qualitative research. From the very earliest consultations on the REF 2014, and the convening of the sub-panels, the Board has expressed its concerns regarding the fair and appropriate assessment of qualitative research. At a presentation to the Board in 2011, Professor Glyn Humphreys, Chair of the sub-panel for Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience re-assured the Board that *all* outputs will be assessed

in relation to the criteria of significance, originality and rigour. It is intended to recognise the best papers in each area of speciality and papers will be read by subject specialists as much as possible.

Moreover, the REF 2014 Assessment Framework and Guidance on Submissions states (p.4): 'Equity: All types of research and all forms of research output across all disciplines shall be assessed on a fair and equal basis. Panels have been instructed to define criteria and adopt assessment processes that enable them to recognise and treat on an equal footing excellence in research across the spectrum of applied, practice-based, basic and strategic research, wherever that research is conducted; and for identifying excellence in different forms of research endeavour including interdisciplinary and collaborative research, while attaching no greater weight to one form over another.'

We are therefore very concerned to read that qualitative research has been assessed in this way and are unclear on what basis this judgement has been made. We would recommend that this matter be raised with the author's Head of Department and also with the Chair of the sub-panel. The Board would also be keen to know if any other researchers have had similar pre-REF experiences in their institutions.

## Gender delusions?

I read with bemused interest John Radford's comments on the effect of the gender imbalance for psychology as a discipline (Interview, December 2012).

First, he asserts that a 20:80 male:female recruitment has 'moved the focus of the discipline in a "female" direction, making it less balanced'. Putting aside for the moment the question of what a 'female' direction would actually look like in practice (a preponderance of pink textbooks perhaps?), I wonder whether he would equally assert that the gender imbalance in the opposite direction in fields such as maths or engineering moves the focus of those disciplines in a 'male' direction making them less balanced.

Professor Radford then goes on to suggest that Psychology as a title should be abandoned entirely as 'it is seen as mainly suitable for women'. What exactly is implied by this? That a subject seen as mainly suitable for women is by such an association derogated, discredited and marginalised? No special expertise in feminist theory is required to recognise that subjects seen as mainly suitable for men suffer no such disgrace. Thank goodness Psychology wasn't renamed 'Behavioural Sciences' when I was choosing my degree course as this might have scared

me off with all its associated maleness and threat of intellectual rigour and books with long words and few pictures in them.

If anyone is interested in further reading on some of these issues, might I suggest Cordelia Fine's excellent book *Delusions of Gender* (2010, Norton). It has no pictures in it but several highly amusing anecdotes to keep readers of both genders engaged.

Yours, in quiet despair,  
**Dr Pamela Jacobsen**  
London



**Young woman chooses book with no pictures!**

## Post-traumatic over-optimism?

The article by Professor Stephen Joseph about the psychology of post-traumatic growth (November, 2012) is fascinating and inspiring. The title is from Nietzsche's assertion: 'that which does not kill us makes us stronger'. Nietzsche believed that not everything that hurts may be bad, and fulfilment is attained if one responds wisely to difficulties that would otherwise destroy the person (de Botton, 2000). The concept of post-traumatic growth instils hope for those who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and is also heartening for the people who are involved in their care as well as management.

It is certainly true that there can be significant and positive changes in some people after their traumatic experiences. For example, people may stop taking life for granted, start appreciating the importance of today, and may develop the capacity to enjoy simple things over and over again. There may be, likewise, improvement in their relationships. However, it is essential that we guard ourselves against becoming over-optimistic about the theory of post-traumatic growth. We need to remind ourselves that after exposure to traumatic stressors, about 20–30 per cent of people will develop PTSD (Adshad, 2000).

PTSD is a serious mental illness that leads to significant morbidity or mortality. Moreover, a significant number of people with PTSD have comorbid depression, anxiety disorders, somatisation and substance misuse. There is evidence that people who develop PTSD have experienced other psychiatric disorders in the past. One study (Kessler et al., 1995) found that 88.3 per cent of men with PTSD and 79 per

cent of women with the disorder had a lifetime diagnosis of another psychiatric illness. PTSD with comorbid psychiatric disorders is usually more severe and chronic, and the treatment may be particularly difficult.

Many people with complex PTSD fail to respond to cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) or eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR) and may, in addition, need other interventions. As mentioned, PTSD can take a chronic course. In the National Comorbidity Survey, the median time to remission was 36 months with treatment, and 64 months without treatment. Some people exhibited PTSD symptoms for up to 10 years (Kessler et al., 1995). Finally, some people with PTSD may even pose risk of suicide or violence.

While the field of post-traumatic growth should be welcomed and explored further, it is equally imperative to be acutely aware of the serious nature of PTSD, and the fact that not all people having traumatic experiences will demonstrate post-traumatic growth.

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- Adshad, G. (2000). Psychological therapies for post-traumatic stress disorder. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 177, 144–148.
- de Botton, A. (2000). *The consolations of philosophy*. London: Penguin Books.
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## FORUM PSYCHOLOGY AT WORK

New year, new start; que sera, sera. Traditionally this is the time of year for reflection and resolutions. Thoughts turn to job changes as well as new approaches in our personal lives. The economy continues to be challenging and it is more critical than ever to think creatively about employability, particularly in terms of the impact we can have on the employability of others. The government drive away from dependency on benefits, including the revamp of jobseeker's allowance, may put more responsibility onto the individual and their capability to know themselves. Individual differences in job search and the ability to seek employment therefore come to the fore.

Echoing the theme of this edition of *The Psychologist*, there is much that psychology can add to the appreciation of individual differences. First thoughts gravitate towards psychometrics and measurement of individual differences. This is clearly important and there is a wealth of data, research and tools to support employability. Yet this is only a start point – there is much more that psychological research and intervention can provide. The situation is complex with the interplay of core competencies with motivation, attitudes and self-awareness, as well as opportunities, training and the 'luck' of being that successful person, in the right place at the right time.

In the employability space, psychology can encourage people to understand what makes them unique, how they can develop and what they can offer an employer. Self-insight is invaluable; what are their strengths, do they know their weak points and areas for development. Are they open to critical appraisal, feedback and taking personal responsibility for their own development within a self-managed career approach? In addition it is important to appreciate the individual's value systems and how this influences their occupational decisions. Discussions with leading psychologists in the employment arena highlight that these are key factors in determining and future proofing of an individual's employability. Essentially, a core factor is just how aware the individual is about what makes them unique.

Expanding on the interplay between the individual and others in a work context, the psychological concept of stereotype threat is useful in exploring motivation and opportunities. Stereotype threat – the fear of playing up to a negative judgement about a group to which you belong – often leads to impaired performance on that task. For example, research shows that women and minority ethnic individuals do worse on tasks (e.g. maths tests) if they believe they will be judged negatively based on their gender/ethnic group. Research also suggests an impact on seeking and using feedback. For example, Loriann Roberson and colleagues showed in 2003 that those who experienced stereotype threat were more likely to dismiss feedback they received, to doubt its accuracy, and to question the motivations of the feedback source. Whilst more research is needed on the implications of this psychological phenomenon, it does highlight important interplay between the individual and their work colleagues and the need to take into account stereotypes and misperceptions.

Employability is complex; individuals need to focus on their self-awareness, motivation, positive attitudes and an understanding of their interplay with others. People must be proactive to seek and seize opportunities, enhance their marketability, build on strengths and develop their weaknesses. But more than this they need a clear focus on what interests (and excites) them, to look at the whole package. The question is how do we best tackle this challenge? So use this new year wisely, build on our psychology knowledge and get that new start leading to success and beyond.

**Hazel Stevenson** is non-executive director at Saville Consulting and Vice Chair of the Division of Occupational Psychology. Share your views by e-mailing [psychologist@bps.org.uk](mailto:psychologist@bps.org.uk).

# BPS production release consent agreements

As a keynote speaker at the imminent 2013 BPS Division of Occupational Psychology Annual Conference, imagine my shock when I was invited to sign my consent to the following agreement.

I hereby grant The British Psychological Society ("Society") the irrevocable right, in perpetuity, to use any filmed footage and/or soundtrack taken of me in connection with the production, distribution and exploitation of the media of the Division of Occupational Psychology Annual Conference 2013, to edit, delete, alter and amend the footage in any manner and to juxtapose the footage with any other material. This grant of rights includes the right to use my image, voice or other sound effects produced by me contained in the footage without restriction of any kind or nature whatsoever. The media and/or footage may be exploited

throughout the world, in perpetuity and in any and all media now or devised in the future without any payment to me. The Society has no obligation to use the footage in any media.

I do hereby release and forever discharge the Society of, from and against all actions, causes of action, claims, suits, judgements and demands which may be made against the Society by virtue of my appearance, in any manner whatsoever, in the Division of Occupational Psychology Annual Conference 2013.

I find it incomprehensible that a society that prides itself on promoting adherence to the highest ethical and professional standards, could expect anyone to allow themselves to agree to such a one-sided deal, in which the resulting output might

be used in any way that the 'Society' deemed appropriate, while the liability for any ensuing consequences would rest solely with the person(s) whose work was to be thus featured. Needless to say, my consent was not forthcoming and the event will be neither filmed nor audio-recorded!

**Gerard P. Hodgkinson**  
Warwick Business School  
University of Warwick

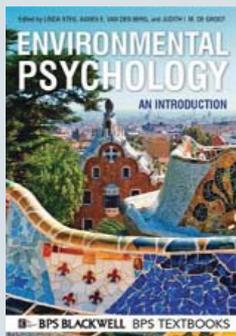
**Mike Laffan, Director of Corporate Services, replies:** I can assure you this is a fairly standard, commonly used release consent agreement, but as is often the way with legalese it can be rather disconcerting on closer scrutiny! We will be seeking advice over a suitable alternative.

## prize crossword

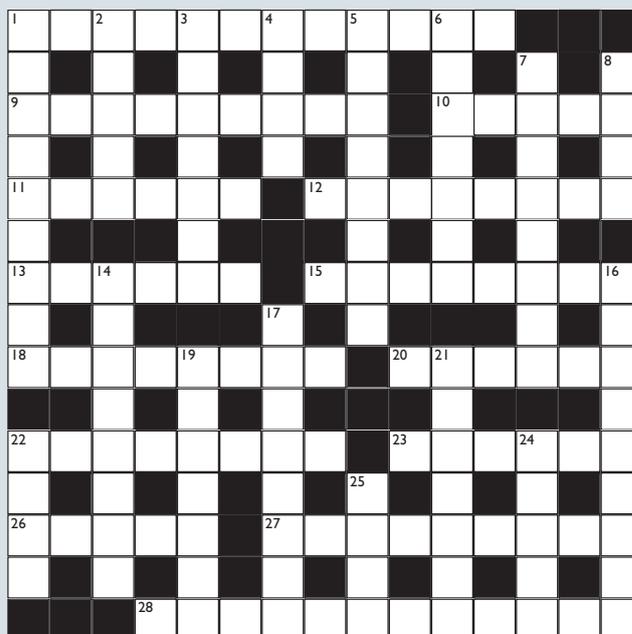
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no 67



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Send your entry (photocopies accepted) marked 'prize crossword', to the Leicester office (see inside front cover) **deadline 10 february 2013. Winner of prize crossword no 66** Robert Taylor, Edinburgh

**no 66 solution** **Across** 1 Standard, 5 Patrol, 10 Phantom, 11 Nemesis, 12 Inhibition, 13 Info, 14 Figure, 17 Cha-cha, 19 Stadia, 20 Drills, 23 Earl, 24 Fluoxetine, 28 Tuition, 29 Avarice, 30 Reward, 31 Asperger. **Down** 1 Sophia, 2 Abash, 3 Duty-bound, 4 Remit, 6 Acme, 7 Rosenthal, 8 Lesson, 9 Invoiced, 15 Interview, 16 Enabling, 18 Aliterate, 21 Mentor, 22 Veneer, 25 Orals, 26 Icing, 27 Tier.

## Multidisciplinary perspectives on climate change

Psychologists can begin to better understand climate change and make effective change in human behaviour by working across disciplines. As part of a multidisciplinary team, I work with experts in waste management, geography and pollution control, both in the UK and India. This multidisciplinary approach has provided greater insights into the complex challenges inherent within the human–environment interface.

Currently two projects have been undertaken across disciplines in India and the

UK: Human cognition and behaviour that negatively impacts upon the environment; and Policies and practices that effect the environment and have negative consequence for health. Insights from several different perspectives have allowed inroads that psychology alone cannot provide. I would encourage others to consider this

**Dr Sindy Banga**  
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### across

- 1 Returning from Alps, I'd stick with unconscious defence mechanism (12)
- 9 Sleep in location east of Eden (4,2,3)
- 10 Monster fish (5)
- 11 Speech names leading components in serotonin and monoamine (6)
- 12 Repetition of one hypnotic state without experimenter, initially (8)
- 13 Elaborate mineral source contains bronze on reflection (6)
- 15 Loyal supporter's beginning to accept law-breaking (8)
- 18 Gaoler is embarrassed by harem (8)
- 20 Doctor to hide, we hear, his alternative personality (6)
- 22 Procedure making advantage to pass (8)
- 23 Singers heard with lots of paper (6)
- 26 Forecast without PR law (5)
- 27 Firm intend wild dog to move around freely (4,3,2)
- 28 Show me second lines in selective remembrance (6,6)

### down

- 1 Sound lies out of misconceptions (9)
- 2 Thus managed to come up with detection system (5)
- 3 Beware sentry (7)
- 4 Inclination to hypocrisy (4)
- 5 Settle taking time to reflect (8)
- 6 Person with innate gift, note (7)
- 7 Leap over a set of lines on border (8)
- 8 Prompt left in piece of evidence (4)
- 14 Scar is no product of drugged stupor (8)
- 16 Giant fib? (4,5)
- 17 I covered errant former partner (8)
- 19 Heretic to strain over idiosyncrasy (7)
- 21 European gold coin, European school (7)
- 22 Look equal (4)
- 24 Wireless bill invested in port (5)
- 25 Fomenter to conceal sign (4)

## THE PSYCHOLOGIST HITS 25 – WHAT HAS IT DONE FOR YOU?

Apart from the seemingly endless supply of tutorial talking points, I have twice been inspired by *The Psychologist* to explore topics I might not otherwise have known about. The first instance was an article by Esther Burkitt (October 2004) on drawing conclusions from children's drawings. The second instance was an article by Justin Park and Mark Shaller (November 2009) on the behavioural immune system. Both of these articles have led to third-year student projects of various kinds, three conference presentations (one of which was an invited poster at an international conference where Professors David Perrett and Robin Dunbar both gave me a hi-five!) and two full journal submissions (one submitted and one almost ready to go).

I also got my first single-authored publication (a book review) in *The Psychologist* (April 2006, p.229). It was a really great thing to do because it (a) was good writing practice, (b) good for the CV, (c) I got a free book and (d) it was nice to see my name in print. Consequently, I now recommend that all my PhD students get reviewing books in their first year (and most of them have).

I think that what I like about the *The Psychologist* is that even when there's a clear theme, you never quite know what it's going to give you or where it's going to lead. As a case in point, I was thinking about Pipes (see, Ciarán O'Keeffe's recent 'Looking back: The ghost in the living room', October 2012) and it reminded me of a Paul Daniels Halloween Magic TV special, where it ended without knowing if Paul was dead or alive. Does anyone else remember that?

I have a tutorial in a few minutes on ghosts and being sceptical. Guess where the inspiration came for that?

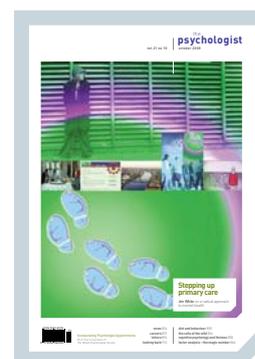
**Andrew Dunn**  
Nottingham Trent University

In July 2009, while I was still working as a newspaper journalist and halfway through a conversion MSc in psychology, I came across an article from the previous year's *Psychologist* written by Dr Jim White of the Glasgow STEPS Team. In it, he discussed the work of his team and proposed some fascinating, radical ideas about how primary-care psychological therapies could be improved. It was eye-opening, stimulating stuff, so much so that I dropped him a line out of the blue to see if there was any scope for volunteering, shadowing or even just coming in for a quick meeting to find out more about his work.

To cut a very long story short, reading that article and making contact with Jim put me on the path to where I am today, as a doctoral trainee on the University of Edinburgh Clinical Psychology programme. Not only that, but it allowed to me to meet and later work with some inspiring, brilliant people who have become true friends. Would it be overstating things to say that reading *The Psychologist* changed my life? I don't think so.

Thank you – here's to the next 25 years!

**Simon Stuart**  
Trainee Clinical Psychologist  
NHS Lothian



Life changer