

THE PRESIDENTS' AWARD FOR DISTINGUISHED CONTRIBUTIONS TO PSYCHOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE 2004

Members of the Society are invited to submit nominations for the Presidents' Award for Distinguished Contributions to Psychological Knowledge. Nominations should be addressed to Lisa Morrison Coulthard, Scientific Officer, at the Society's Leicester office by **1 March 2004**.

The Presidents' Award is given to candidates normally resident in the United Kingdom as a mid-career award. Unlike the Spearman Medal (which is restricted to the first decade of a career as a psychologist) or election to Honorary Fellowship (which usually takes account of a whole career) it is intended as a timely acknowledgement of the achievements of those who are currently engaged in research of outstanding quality.

Grounds for proposing the candidate should be fully stated by the proposer, but a full CV need not be included. This may be requested by the Research Board once a shortlist of possible recipients has been agreed by the Board.

The Presidents' Award carries with it Life Membership of the Society. Recipients are invited to address the Society at its Annual Conference.

Professor Margaret Snowling is the recipient of the Presidents' Award for Distinguished Contributions to Psychological Knowledge 2003.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2004

The AGM of the Society will be held at 4.30pm on **Friday 16 April 2004 during the Annual Conference** in the Great Hall, Sherfield Building at Imperial College London, South Kensington Campus, London SW7 2AZ.

The Open Meeting will commence immediately after the AGM.

Please submit questions for the Open Meeting in advance addressed to the Honorary General Secretary. There will be a posting box available at the Registration Desk at the Annual Conference for this purpose. Deadline for all questions: **Friday 16 April 2004 at 11am**.

Professor Ann Colley, Honorary General Secretary

NEIL O'CONNOR AWARD 2004

A research award in developmental disability

Call for applications

The late Neil O'Connor was one of the UK's foremost experimental psychologists, and a pioneer in applying experimental methods to the study of developmental disabilities. Friends, relatives and former colleagues have contributed to a trust fund that will allow this award to be made annually until the year 2009.

This annual award, a cash prize of £300, plus up to £200 towards attendance at a BPS conference, is for published research on cognitive abnormalities that appear in development and persist throughout life. Such abnormalities may include (but are not confined to) deafness, blindness, learning disabilities, dyslexia, language disorder, aphasia, Williams syndrome, Down's syndrome, autism, Turner's syndrome.

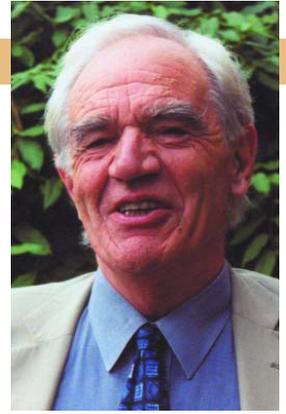
- The publication must be in a peer-refereed journal bearing the date 2002, 2003 or 2004, or be in press (official confirmation of this must be provided).
- The award is aimed primarily at anyone studying for a PhD or who is not more than 10 years post-PhD.
- The candidate must be either the sole author or main author of the paper concerned.
- There is no geographic restriction, but all submissions must be in English.
- The author of the winning paper will be presented with a certificate and issued with an invitation to present a paper on his or her research at the BPS Developmental Psychology Section conference.

Exceptionally, the award may be given to a more senior researcher in a non-tenured position, who may also be retired. In the case of multiple authors, the relative contribution of different authors must be outlined. The prize will be awarded to the main author, and the invitation to speak will be offered to the main author.

Applicants should submit the publication itself, a CV and a current mailing address (four copies). Nominations from senior colleagues are not required, and will be disregarded if submitted.

The BPS has appointed a specialist award subcommittee to adjudicate submissions.

*Applications should be sent to the Chair of the Developmental Psychology Section (Professor David Messer, Department of Psychology, London South Bank University, London SE1 0AA. E-mail: messerdj@lsbu.ac.uk) and must be received no later than **1 April 2004**. Candidates will be notified of the outcome by **31 May 2004**.*



Zander
Wedderburn

Contact Zander Wedderburn
via the Society's Leicester office,
or e-mail: president@bps.org.uk.

When I wrote a piece for *The Independent* in mid-2003, I waxed lyrical about psychology as the perfect all-round modern university training, and wonderful for society too. I didn't quite say for Renaissance man and woman, but if we only had a little more art in it I could easily stake that claim too. It is scientific, professionally useful and statistically sound. If you study psychology, you will learn the rudiments of what is known about the brain and human behaviour, the importance of arguing from evidence – statistically tested evidence if possible – and, most importantly, the huge amount that we do not yet know. More research is needed.

The result was an angry letter from an old friend, a geographer, who passionately believes that his discipline is a better fit, even though it was only rivalled by forestry as a chosen route for keen sportsmen in my day. Shortly after, at the launch of a novel set in the Boer war and published by the tiny publishing firm I started when I retired, the author was cogently passionate about the value of history. Well, I am ever so humble at all times, so now freely admit that I might have been biased. You can learn a lot from history.

History is something the BPS has too, of course, and we are about to open officially our new History of Psychology Centre, currently based in the London office at 33 John Street. Friday 13 February 2004 is the chosen day, and I fully expect that the elderly building will creak at the invasion of eminent guests. But if you are interested, please drop a line to Professor Graham Richards, the Director of the Centre. He will also be happy to receive enquiries from people interested in carrying out historical research at the Centre, and to be notified of other historical material that should be lodged with his archive. I know for certain that in the days before anybody from the BPS office came to help with committee minutes, the Division of Occupational Psychology passed on to succeeding secretaries a bulky treasure trove of minutes and documents that has now vanished into the cobwebs of somebody's attic, or even a skip. Some of the small subsystems are still the main curators of their own records.

Making history interesting is not simple. One of my favourite books at one time was George Miller's *Psychology, the Science of Mental Life* (1962), in which he ran trios of chapters on the Ancient Psychologist, an Eminent Modern Psychologist, and the current state of the topic. The development of a topic, mixed with biographical snippets of famous men, made a very good read. But we can certainly learn a lot from history.

Re-reading this, I am slightly appalled by the arrogance of it all. Good literature can also lay a credible claim to humanising us, and helping us to understand the human condition. Over the centuries, authors have written wonderfully about sex and death, and there are few things that have puzzled, troubled and inspired the human race more. The problem for the Eng. Lit. people, in my genuinely humble opinion, is that there are so many bad books, and so little check with reality. There has been a similar problem for psychology over the years, as the media merrily latch on to any eccentric oddball who purports to analyse weird so-called celebrities, or has carried out an offbeat experiment that will tickle their readers. I think we are getting better about this, and the Society's press office and media training days have played a positive and constructive role. We can learn from our past experience – knowing our history should help.

So when I am exuberant about psychology, please don't assume that I am insulting other disciplines. Even accounting has a place in universities, if only for those who have been unsuccessfully searching for mates among actuaries. (If you don't know that bad joke, I'll gladly tell you when we meet.)

The BPS office also made history in December, when a ballot was conducted by ACAS on the recognition of Amicus as a trade union. Exactly half of the staff – 57 – voted in favour of this, with 9 votes against. The Society's chief executive, Barry Brooking, welcomed the result, as we have always taken pride in having good relations with our staff, and worked hard to maintain consultation and good working conditions in a busy and expanding office.

My first research job in South Wales was studying the problems of trade unions in a new works, and I have probably been to more union meetings than most union members. It's a long time ago now, but I vividly remember my impression of the huge amount of good solid supportive work that most union representatives did. Of course, times have changed, and the legal framework too, but I am fully aware of the good work unions can do. We very much look forward to working out a healthy way of working on consultation and negotiation in our office.

Perhaps I should add a note of encouragement to my fellow members to be polite and helpful to office staff, in the same way that the staff are encouraged to be polite and helpful to us. Just occasionally, members blast off at staff, when there are may be something else in our complex systems that should be getting the bullets.

“We can
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News of interest to our readers should be sent to *The Psychologist* on psychologist@bps.org.uk or at the Leicester office. We also welcome lively, informative and evidence-based analysis of current events (up to 1500 words). Contact the editor first on jonsut@bps.org.uk.

CAFÉ SCIENTIFIQUE

THE next 'Café Scientifique Manchester' is 'Time Psychology' with John Wearden on 2 February at 6.30 at the Café Muse, Oxford Rd, Manchester. Book online at www.cafescientifique.man.ac.uk.

APS CONFERENCE

THE Australian Psychological Society will hold its 39th Annual Conference at Darling Harbour Convention Centre, Sydney, from 29 September to 3 October 2004. The conference theme is 'Psychological science in action'. The organisers hope to attract 'basic and applied researchers from Australia and overseas'.

☐ To find out more, go to the conference website via www.psychology.com.au.

SCIENCE WRITER AWARDS

IF you are 28 or under with a passion for communicating your subject, you could win a trip to the US in the annual *Daily Telegraph* science writer awards. See www.science-writer.co.uk for details – closing date is 30 April.

APA PRESIDENT 2005

RONALD Levant, Dean and Professor at the Center for Psychological Studies at Nova Southeastern University, has been elected President of the American Psychological Association. He will replace Diane Halpern in 2005.

DRAFT GAMBLING BILL

JANUARY saw Professor Mark Griffiths (Nottingham Trent University) and Professor Jim Orford (University of Birmingham) giving evidence to the Joint Committee on the Draft Gambling Bill. They suggested research programmes into protective and risk factors for problem gambling, and trials of treatment. They also called for the Department of Health to get more involved in this potentially growing public health problem.

Suicide rates down, but up in prison

THE first report from the government's National Suicide Prevention Strategy for England has shown a sustained fall in the number of suicides. But rates among young men and those in institutions such as psychiatric hospitals and prisons remain worryingly high.

Figures from the National Institute for Mental Health in England showed that the suicide rate fell slightly from 9.2 per 100,000 people in 1995–1997 to 8.9 per 100,000 in 2000–2002. But the Howard League for Penal Reform have pointed to high rates of suicide in prisons, including a record number of women taking their own lives (14 in 2003) despite relatively stable average prison population levels.

Anne Carpenter, a clinical and forensic psychologist based at the Douglas Inch Centre in Glasgow, pointed to the importance of tackling self-harm in suicide prevention strategies. 'Some of these suicides may well have been accidental. Rates of self-harm are always very high in women's prisons, but my clinical impression whilst

JESS HUND (REPORT@DIGITAL.CO.UK)

a visiting psychologist at Cornton Vale was that such rates actually fell when suicides were peaking. Interventions need to show women that what may stem from an expression of emotional distress can quickly become lethal.'

Psychologists also need to be involved in the prompt identification of those at risk. Carpenter notes that one third of the prisoners who killed themselves in 2003 were on remand, and says that such women 'often have several of the main risk factors for suicide: they are unemployed, separated from their families, and may be using drugs'. He added: 'Psychologists need to

get to these women quickly and offer them extra support.' ☐ See tinyurl.com/2hd97 for the Department of Health's National Suicide Prevention Strategy's Annual Report.

NATIONAL HONOURS

In the New Year's Honours list three psychologists received honours. **Joan Irene Harbison**, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, becomes a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire for services to equal opportunities; **Professor Charles Walter Desforges** (University of Exeter) is made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for services to education; and **Professor David Philip Farrington** (Institute of Criminology, Cambridge) is made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for services to criminology.

WEBSITES

www.mathematicalbrain.com

Professor Brian Butterworth's page, including media coverage and presentations

www.24hourmuseum.org.uk

A gateway to over 2500 UK museums, galleries and heritage attractions

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

Working memory and children's learning

KATE CAVANAGH reports from a joint BPS/British Academy lecture held in London on 3 December.

WORKING memory, Professor Gathercole (University of Durham) argued in this lecture, is both a gateway to and potential constraint upon learning in the classroom. This 'brief, limited and fragile mental workspace' increases steadily in capacity through childhood, but a large degree of individual variation is evident. In an average class of 30 seven-year-olds, three children will have the working memory capacity of 10- or 11-year-olds, whilst three will only match the capacity of the average four-year-old.

Underlining working memory's importance, Gathercole described research finding strong relationships between both verbal and non-verbal working memory and scholastic attainment at ages 11 and 14, with non-verbal working memory being especially strongly associated with attainment in maths and science. A study of younger children found that verbal working

memory and school-entrance baseline assessments at age four independently predicted scholastic attainment at age seven. Gathercole argued that whilst baseline assessments tell us what children already know, working memory measures may tell us about their capacity to learn.

In a study looking at the prevalence of working memory difficulties in children with special educational needs, Gathercole and colleagues found that poor central executive and phonological loop functioning was 50 times more likely to be found in children with specific language impairment than the general population. This leads to the conclusion that poor working memory is both a necessary and sufficient condition for specific language impairment.

In a study observing three Year 1 children with poor working memory in the classroom, Gathercole and colleagues identified a number of situations where

children's failures may be due to problems of memory. Frequently observed failures included forgetting instructions, especially where a string of elements is required (e.g. put your worksheets on the green table and your arrow cards in the packet, put your pencil away and come and sit on the carpet), forgetting recent events (e.g. content of morning storytime after lunch), place-keeping errors in complex tasks (such as copying text from the blackboard) and failures to meet simultaneous processing and storage demands (e.g. counting the words in a sentence, detecting missing numbers in a sequence).

Gathercole argued that classroom teaching for children with poor working memory might be improved by identifying and minimising working-memory-loaded activities, for example by breaking tasks down, repeating instructions and providing external aids to help children keep track.

London Lectures



At the beginning of December the Society offered the London Lectures for the third time. As last year, they were staged at Kensington Town Hall, and again sold out well before the day.

Five leading figures from across the realm of psychology were tasked with talking in an accessible way about the leading edge of research in their field, and 850 A-level and undergraduate students were there to hear them.

The feedback forms indicated a generally high level of satisfaction. As ever, some aspects of the organisation were open to improvement, and we will be addressing those for next year. Also next year we hope to meet some of the unmet demand: not by increasing the venue size in London, but by offering the lectures in Scotland as well.

Bruce Napier, Chair, Standing Conference Committee

Professor Dave Perrett – report by
Laura Baxter (third-year undergraduate,
University of Leicester)

THE London Lectures included a variety of talks ranging from the educational to the entertaining. However, I think one lecture included both these aspects to a greater extent than any other – Professor Dave Perrett’s talk on the psychology of faces.

This lecture was an ideal start to the day, informative without being too taxing at 10 o’clock in the morning! The human face seems to evoke interest in most people, whether they have an interest in psychology or not, and the issue of facial attractiveness also has particular day-to-day significance.

It appears that faces are identified by their differences from the ‘average’ face.

PERCEPTION LAB, UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS

Computer-averaging software can produce useful stimuli for face-recognition research

Caricaturing enhances these differences, and it was fascinating to see that people are faster to name a caricature of Hugh Grant, and students of art history recognise a computer-generated caricature Botticelli faster than the real thing.

The amount of information about a person that we can glean from their face is quite astounding, and the curious findings kept on coming: women who liked the smell of a pheromone that affects sexual receptivity in pigs tended to prefer images of faces that had been made more masculine using computer technology; skin appearance and level of immune response were important factors in attractiveness; people born to young parents are highly discriminating

about the presence of lines and wrinkles; and most people are better than chance at judging whether someone is extravert or introvert from facial appearance alone.

It was interesting to see how psychologists can collaborate with others, such as computer scientists, to produce stimulating research. Perrett clearly finds it fascinating – just as well, as even he admitted that the practical applications are limited. Overall, this talk was engaging and informative and was part of a worthwhile day at the London Lectures.

Professor Bob Rafal – report by Julie Smith (third-year undergraduate, King Alfred’s College, Winchester)

PROFESSOR Bob Rafal is working to unravel the very nature of human consciousness. Rafal’s work focuses on hemispatial neglect – a syndrome where patients suffering brain damage to the parietal lobe are unaware of objects on the opposite edge of their visual field.

Since we are aware of only a small fraction of the information processed by our senses, we have to question whether this information is simply ‘lost’ before it can be attended to, or whether it is extracted and represented in the brain outside of our awareness. Rafal’s experiments, using simple bedside examinations, have found that not only are the features of an unattended object

WEBLINKS

Dave Perrett:

<http://perception.st-and.ac.uk>

Bob Rafal:

www.psychology.bangor.ac.uk/~robert_rafal

Kathy Sylva:

www.edstud.ox.ac.uk/research/fell.html

Richard Wiseman:

www.luckfactor.co.uk

Stephen Reicher:

psy.st-andrews.ac.uk/people/lect/sdr.shtml

processed, but its identity is encoded. In other words we can 'see' the images even if we are not consciously aware, and the images 'affect' our processing.

For example, patients presented with an image of a broken window, a 'guilty' boy hiding and a girl being blamed feel an injustice is taking place, even though they report not 'seeing' the boy. The degree to which attention to a stimulus in one half of the visual field affects attention to a second stimulus in the other half is determined by whether they require the same response – regardless of whether they have the same visual features, or even the same semantics.

Using fMRI scans, Rafal examined possible neurological explorations of this phenomenon. This fascinating area of study begins to satisfy our need for a deeper understanding of the intricate workings of the human mind.

Professor Kathy Sylva – report by Jon Sutton (Editor, *The Psychologist*)

Common with a lot of developmental psychologists, Professor Kathy Sylva showed a hint of 'motherese' in her delivery: no bad thing for a lecture hall of students impatiently awaiting lunch. They got an enthusiastic talk presenting a range of practical findings and some important points about different research methods.

Sylva described how a teacher who had been headbutted in the stomach turned to Vygotsky in search of a way for young children to learn through planned interaction with adults, rather than free play. A lengthy longitudinal study in the USA found that the intervention group went on to get better high-school grades, were less likely to be arrested, and had

higher earnings. Don't ask me how the economists worked this out, but for every dollar invested over seven were returned.

Drawing on a quasi-experiment next, Sylva showed that a town with a birth-to-school parent education and support programme produced children with better verbal comprehension, vocabulary and early number concepts than did a town without such a programme.

Lastly, the large DfES-backed 'Effective Provision of Pre-school Education' project assessed 3000 children randomly drawn from 141 pre-school centres all over the country. Pre-school experience, compared with none, enhanced children's development. At the start of the study, a third of the children were 'at risk' of special educational needs in either intellectual or social behavioural development. This figure was down to 20 per cent at the end. Rather depressingly for me, but perhaps predictably, girls did better on every single outcome right down to the age of three.

Professor Richard Wiseman – report by Jon Sutton

If only more psychologists were failed magicians, putting on events like the London Lectures would be a doddle. Professor Richard Wiseman was in town with tricks and gags aplenty, and the audience loved it.

Behind the smooth delivery there's an interest in what makes people lucky that draws together strands from several areas of psychology (notably attention and attribution theory). It all boils down to four simple strategies for becoming a 'lucky' person:

1. Maximise your chance opportunities. Self-described lucky people network better, adopt a relaxed attitude to life and are more open to new experiences.
2. Listen to lucky hunches. Lucky people even take steps to boost their intuitive abilities by, for example, meditating and clearing their mind of other thoughts.
3. Expect good fortune. Lucky people persist in the face of failure, and shape their interactions with others in a positive way.
4. Turn bad luck into good. If you are caught up in an armed robbery in a bank and shot in the arm, have you been lucky or unlucky? Lucky people don't dwell on ill fortune, they are more likely to imagine how things could have been worse.

Wiseman is even putting these principles to work in a 'luck school'. Based on the applause he got at the end of the talk, I think he's found some new students.

Professor Steve Reicher – report by Man Cheung Chung (University of Plymouth)

PROFESSOR Stephen Reicher's lecture aimed to revisit a classic ethically controversial psychology experiment; namely, Zimbardo's Stanford Prison experiment. He challenged Zimbardo's claim that in groups, people lose their capacity for judgement and helplessly adopt the role of tyrannical guards or the role of prisoners.

Reicher opened with a review of Zimbardo's experiment. He then described

BBC

The Experiment

his BBC prison study *The Experiment*, broadcast as four one-hour documentaries. Viewers might not have realised that it had taken Reicher and Alex Haslam nine months to obtain ethics approval.

In the experiment 15 men selected from 500 applicants were divided into prisoners and guards in a specially designed setting. They were monitored continuously for over 10 days using behavioural observation, and physiological and psychological measures. The results of the study basically concluded that groups are important for psychological well-being and social justice. Contrary to Zimbardo's claim, tyranny does not result as much from groups and power as from the failure of groups and the refusal to exercise power responsibly. It is only with insecurity and impermeable boundaries between groups that intergroup conflict spreads. The lecture was well received and some interesting questions were asked.

A longitudinal study in the USA found benefits from planned interaction with adults