

# Three new dames and an OBE on New Year list

Three leading psychologists have been awarded damehoods and one an OBE in the New Year Honours list. They have been recognised for work in cancer services, public health, clinical psychology and for helping those living with an altered appearance.

Professor Dame Lesley Fallowfield, Director of Sussex Health Outcomes Research & Education in Cancer (SHORE-C) (University of Sussex), the professor of psycho-oncology to be awarded a damehood, expressed her



Professor Dame Lesley Fallowfield

delight and surprise at the honour. She told *The Psychologist*: 'It is personally satisfying but more importantly a worthy and fitting tribute to all the amazing patients with cancer who have contributed to the research done by my team SHORE-C at Brighton and Sussex Medical School. I have no idea who were the generous people who felt motivated to nominate me, but I'd like to thank them and the doctors and nurses I've been privileged to work with over the years.'

Til Wykes, Vice Dean of Psychology and Systems Services and Professor of Clinical Psychology and Rehabilitation at King's College London, was awarded her damehood for services to clinical psychology. She said she was proud to be able to include service users in her research at the KCL Service User

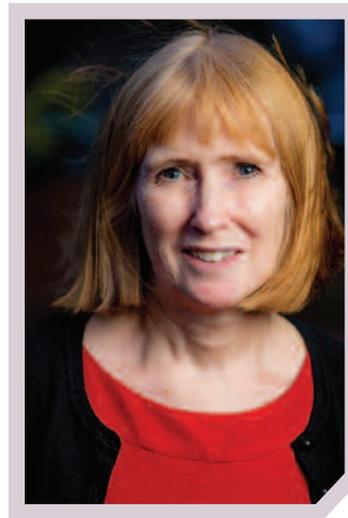
Research Enterprise, and pointed out how generous these people had been with their time.

She added: 'The honour is important. I come from working-class beginnings, not privately educated, not an Oxbridge graduate and not a man, which *The Times* identified as the characteristics of most receiving honours. So this is also an award for women in science. But it is also one of the honours for contributions to mental health, bringing it to the attention of the public and fighting stigma.'

But, Wykes said, there was still much to achieve in terms of finding better treatments, reducing stigma and including service users and their families in services and research. 'We now await the Mental Health Taskforce and hope that the research section is not watered down and that the government will take the mental health research priorities seriously by backing them with hard cash. That will be my next campaign and I hope many others will join me.'

Professor Dame Margaret Whitehead was given her DBE for her work in public health. Her fascinating career has involved research on social and health inequalities and as well as being Head of the Department of Public Health and Policy, Institute of Psychology, Health and Society at the University of Liverpool. She also works for the World Health Organization as head of the Collaborating Centre for Policy Research on the Social Determinants of Health.

After an initial degree in biology and experience in



Professor Dame Til Wykes

Report, only led to the documents achieving worldwide attention and becoming a Penguin non-fiction bestseller (*Inequalities in Health*).

Along with colleague Göran Dahlgren, Whitehead also developed the widely cited and influential Dahlgren-Whitehead model to illustrate determinants of health. She told *The Psychologist*: 'When I found out I was on the list my initial reaction was disbelief followed by being overwhelmed and humbled. But I've had a wonderful response from people and it's slowly sinking in.'

In her future work, Whitehead said, she is hoping to develop ways of evaluating population-wide policies that



Professor Dame Margaret Whitehead

medical, research Whitehead became interested in taking a more whole-person approach and began work looking at populations and wider implications affecting people's health. In the 1980s Whitehead was involved in updating the Black Report – a seminal review of health inequalities in the UK which the Tory government chose not to act on. This, and a similar response to the Whitehead

tackle working and living conditions. She added: 'The University of Liverpool is very supportive of public health, and the city of Liverpool as a whole has a long and proud tradition of action on public health. The whole context of the place is very nurturing for these ideas.'

Awarded an OBE was Professor Nichola Rumsey, Co-Director of the Centre for Appearance Research (CAR) which she founded at the University of the West of England in 1992. The centre has since grown to become the world's largest research group focusing on the role of appearance and body image in people's lives (see [tinyurl.com/visidiff](http://tinyurl.com/visidiff)).

Rumsey has built an international reputation for her research in the field, which started with the completion of her PhD Psychological Problems Associated with Facial Disfigurement in 1983. Since then she has attracted more than £7 million funding to support research on appearance. She also worked as the British Psychological Society's consultant to the Department of Health from 2004 to 2010, is an Honorary Life Member of the South African Burns Society, and an Honorary Life Member of the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons.

She said she was honoured and humbled to receive the award, and added: 'In a world ever more preoccupied with appearance, living with disfigurement can present significant challenges. The contributions of the Centre for Appearance Research in addressing the needs of affected people and their families have been achieved by a team of enthusiastic, hard-working and committed researchers over the past 25 years.'

Rumsey added that she felt privileged and proud to have played a part in the team since its beginnings and added: 'UWE has encouraged CAR to grow and flourish since the establishment of the Centre in 1992. The enthusiasm for CAR's work and pride in the Centre's accomplishments have been crucial to its success.'

Paul Farmer, Chief Executive of Mind, was also named a CBE for services to mental health; and Paul Boyle, former Chief Executive of the ESRC and current Vice Chancellor at the University of Leicester was named a CBE for services to social science. **ER**



**Professor Nichola Rumsey OBE**

## Above and beyond

BBC Radio 4's *All in the Mind* is encouraging nominations of particularly inspirational individuals, groups and professionals for its 2016 awards. Its presenter Claudia Hammond spoke to *The Psychologist* about the 2014 winners, the difficulty of judging this type of award, and the incredible stories of individual support she has encountered throughout the process.

The All in the Mind Awards are split into three categories honouring an individual, professional and group seen as outstanding in supporting people with mental health difficulties. Among the previous winners were Brighton's MindOut, a service run by and for the LGBTQ community, and Steve McDonagh who was nominated by his employee Andrew King for support given to him both in and out of the workplace.

Since the 2014 awards both the three winners and six finalists have continued their work and done even more to support others. Maya, who nominated her mother in the individual category for support she received in her battle with anorexia writes a blog sharing her experiences and said anyone thinking about nominating someone should do it, and added: 'I didn't think for a minute that we'd be at the award ceremony. It's a nice way to say thank you and to recognise what she [Mum] has done for me. It also gives other people the opportunity to recognise it, Mum's friends are always saying how kind she is. It's a good time to step back and say that you've done something good.'



Hammond said while judging the first set of awards many people stood out, but even small acts of kindness seen by people with mental health problems made a massive difference to their lives, she said: 'One person said when she was going through depression her friend left a cup of tea outside her door every morning, even on those days she couldn't get out of bed to drink it she really appreciated the fact her friend never gave up on her. That's one thing that really stands out – people's persistence in trying to help.'

Though judging these awards may seem like a near-impossible task, Hammond said the stories she has encountered have reassured her of the amazing lengths humans will go to in supporting each other. She added: 'It's really hard, you don't want anyone to be the "winner" as such. We try to include all of the nine shortlisted finalists and emphasise the fact that both the nominee and the person who put them forward are winners

as a pair. It's not about people with mental health problems being passive and not helping themselves – it's about rewarding both parties.'

Those nominated, Hammond said, show incredible humility: 'All the nominees said their actions are something anyone would do, which is the same thing heroes always say. But the truth is not everyone would act as they do in these situations – they go above and beyond.'

Author Matt Haig, Kevan Jones MP, Marion Janner, founder of Star Wards, and clinical psychologist Linda Blair will join Hammond on the judging panel. They will be looking for examples of support that showed greater than expected levels of compassion, understanding or practical assistance. **ER**

**I The deadline for nominations is midnight on 31 January 2016 – see [tinyurl.com/aitmaward16](http://tinyurl.com/aitmaward16). Awards will be announced during a ceremony at the Wellcome Collection in London on 27 June 2016**

# A decade of delights

For a decade, the British Psychological Society's Research Digest blog has been sharing the latest peer-reviewed research with an ever-growing, international audience. In its birthday year it pushed 900,000 page views in a month and topped the iTunes social sciences podcast chart with 'PsychCrunch'. This event in London (supported by Psychology Press) gathered 130 of the finest minds, including the researchers and bloggers who have conducted and shared much of that work, to celebrate and to discuss 'Psychology Heaven and Hell'.

Opening the evening, Dr Jon Sutton (Managing Editor) explained that he and the Digest Editor Dr Christian Jarrett had wanted to showcase the wonderful diversity of the psychology research featured on the blog over the years, with something that is fundamental to us as human beings. 'Tonight is not about religious concepts of heaven and hell, it's about one story, the oldest: light versus dark.' Beyond the individual, the night was also about our discipline. Recent years have seen an increasing internal struggle, with psychology shining a self-critical light on its own theory, research and practice. Research fraud and involvement in torture have dragged our beloved subject towards hell; many psychologists, some of them in the assembled audience, have tried to pull us back towards the light via a self-critical approach to our methods and ways of reporting our findings. 'But perhaps we're still liable to temptation, seduction, by alluring results and conclusions,' Sutton said. 'It's an uneasy time for psychology. It seems to me that not a week passes without a headline questioning whether we can really trust what we find.'

After describing the richly layered personal traits that made the evening's guest speakers instant choices, Sutton introduced Dr Christian Jarrett. 'Just look at that angelic face! But then, in the words of the film *The Usual Suspects*, "the greatest trick the devil ever pulled was to convince the world he didn't exist".' The evening was to follow the structure of the thousands of journal articles Jarrett has digested over the years, with him picking up the 'Method' of being a science writer.

He began with a 'confession' – his envy of the fantastic Mind Hacks had inspired him 10 years ago to turn the Research Digest e-mail newsletter (launched in 2003) into a blog. Moving on to his own heaven and hell, he gave cautionary tales of Digest items going all

round the world's media. Jarrett's own 'twist' can end up being the hook for the coverage: 'Suddenly my imagination becomes scientific fact!' His own 'hell' was internet trolls; 'heaven' the dedication and ingenuity of psychology researchers. 'I gave up conducting psychology research because it is frankly too difficult: that's why I write about it instead! So I would like to pay tribute to psychological scientists – without them there wouldn't be a Research Digest.'

One of those psychologists, Professor Andy Field (University of Sussex), took the baton to discuss 'Results: Is Psychology Damned to Hell?' Null hypothesis significance testing came under fire as Field's personal hell: 'It tells us nothing about importance because  $p$  depends upon sample size; it provides no evidence about the null (or alternative) hypothesis; and it encourages all-or-nothing thinking' (nicely illustrated by the despair of researchers seeing ' $p > .05$ ' results churning out of SPSS). 'Psychology heaven, in terms of getting a professorship, is doing lots of really large studies – you'll get significant effects regardless of the actual importance of what you're looking at'. Professor Field also pointed to other assumptions about our data that should, but very rarely do, lead to the adoption of robust methods of analysis.

Using Ioannidis' idea of 'Positive Predictive Value' – the post-study probability that a significant finding reflects a true relationship – Field then showed that psychology is vulnerable to 'dodgy' findings. A number of exploratory effects are often tested; research designs usually have considerable flexibility, in that there are often a number of different methods that can be used to measure an effect; sample sizes and effect sizes are often small; research may well be on 'hot topics'; and academic prejudices can play a part. Replication is clearly key to trustworthy science, but Field questioned whether researchers' attitudes around this are currently rather self-serving and defensive.

So is psychology damned to hell? Professor Uta Frith (University College London) looked to reassure in a 'Discussion' that would 'integrate, interpret, imagine and improve'. Replication was again a key focus: 'We all know that the purpose of running an experiment is to discover what



experiment you should have done!'

In fact, finding the unexpected is Professor Frith's idea of psychology heaven. Quoting William Blake's 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell', she said 'Without Contraries is no progression'. A cautionary proverb for psychologists was perhaps there in Blake's line, 'I have always found that Angels have the vanity to speak of themselves as the only wise; this they do with a confident insolence sprouting from systematic reasoning.' The key, Professor Frith said, is to always ask 'Why?' when you are conducting a replication – a failed attempt to replicate can still push our understanding forward.

Using examples from the Research Digest, Professor Frith gave 'heavenly' examples of when folk psychology appeared to be overturned. 'Consigned to hell' were 'blaming parents', 'ignoring genetic evidence', 'conducting fMRI studies just because you can', and 'atheoretical research which is just fishing'.

Professor Frith concluded with a call for more 'slow science' ('test more subjects, do more trials, be more careful'), and for science communication to educate and build trust in psychology. Returning one last time to the 'heaven and hell' theme, she advised: 'We need to always see two sides – this is the way to understand the mind... We need the big picture, and we need to go underneath into deep thought.'

Dr Sutton concluded by thanking the assembled audience for helping the Research Digest to grow over the years, and encouraging others to blog: 'it is important to engage with the public and communicate science, so give it a go!'

**Visit the Research Digest blog**  
[www.bps.org.uk/digest](http://www.bps.org.uk/digest) and join 37,000 subscribers to the free fortnightly e-mail <http://digest.bps.org.uk/p/our-email.html>. See also our preview of the event <https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/psychology-heaven-and-hell> which includes links to the speakers and to more 'heavenly' and 'hellish' psychology. Follow @ResearchDigest on Twitter.

# Call to join societies network

University psychology societies may be an overlooked, yet excellent place for breeding ideas, peer-support and valuable experiences for the future. One head of such a society is hoping to form a network of similar groups across the UK.

The President of the University of Derby's psychology society, Keith Flint, said he has seen the group move from strength to strength during its first year of existence and has since become the second largest society at the university. Given that success, he is hoping to form a network of all psychology societies across all the UK universities.

Flint told *The Psychologist* that the Derby society runs

workshops for its members to help them through university and expand their skill sets, including courses in public speaking, networking and revision techniques. He added: 'We've also managed to arrange for members to visit Broadmoor Hospital. We'll be given a tour of the grounds, speak to members of staff, hear from psychologists that work there and find out what it's like to work there.'

Despite being set to graduate this year, Flint is hoping to form this national network of psychology societies before that time. He said: 'We want to unite all psychology students across the country to give students more opportunities and experiences both during their time at

university and when they graduate.'

As well as helping members to meet like-minded individuals, this large network could even lead to eventual working relationships in research or other areas of the discipline, Flint said. On a practical level, he added, it would allow students who wanted to go on to postgraduate studies at other institutions to speak to students at those universities to find out what their studying experiences were like.

Flint, who is hoping to pursue postgraduate study in psychology and eventually a career in the area, said he thought societies like this encourage students to actively pursue and interest in the

topic, which in turn helps their career progression. He added: 'University psychology societies consist of the next generation of psychologists, some of whom may one day make a massive breakthrough in the field of psychology and advance the subject into the future. Which is why these societies are so important, not only to the students in them but also to the area of psychology as a whole.'

**ER** | If you run or are a member of a university-based psychology society and would like to join Flint's network e-mail him on [psychology.soc@udsu.org.uk](mailto:psychology.soc@udsu.org.uk). And why not share with us the contribution your psychology society makes – e-mail [psychologist@bps.org.uk](mailto:psychologist@bps.org.uk) or tweet us @psychmag.



## PSYCHOLOGIST TO HEAD CIPD

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development have announced Professor Sir Cary Cooper CBE as their new President. The Board of the CIPD, the professional body for human resources and people development, nominated Sir Cary, an Honorary Fellow of the BPS, for the role to support its mission to champion better work and working lives by promoting the importance of good people management and development.

Professor Cooper, who will hold the presidency for an initial tenure of three years, commented: 'The fast changing nature of work means there's never been a more crucial time for organisations to put wellbeing at the heart of their culture. The CIPD has long championed how employee wellbeing is key to building high-performing, productive workplaces, and I'm delighted to be given the chance to work with the CIPD and its members to move this important agenda forward. Understanding the future of work and the workplace and the role of the HR and L&D professions is key to the strategic agenda for the CIPD, and I look forward to engaging in this wider debate with the CIPD and the communities it supports and engages with.'

**JS** | To read more about Professor Sir Cary Cooper, see <http://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-28/november-2015/be-brave-psychology-needs-you> and <http://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-23/edition-9/one-one-cary-cooper>

# 5 minutes with...

Dr Noreen Tehrani

Noreen Tehrani, the Chair Elect of the British Psychological Society's Crisis, Disaster and Trauma Psychology Section (launched just over a year ago) is passionate about making sure that people and organisations exposed to traumatic events get the best possible guidance, support and interventions to help them understand how traumatic events affect communities, organisations and individuals. Whilst a small minority of people exposed to traumatic incidents develop post-trauma disorders, the provision of a supportive initial response can reduce distress and provide opportunities to build future resilience and post-trauma growth.



I found papers by Atle Dyregrov and Jeff Mitchell from which I created and introduced an organisational programme of trauma support. What I found particularly rewarding was the speed with which early trauma interventions reduced trauma symptoms.

## Has the scientific approach to trauma changed in recent years?

The rapid advances in our understanding of the biological basis of trauma has been highly influential in increasing our understanding of the nature of traumatic stress. The discovery that trauma changes the operation of the neuro-endocrine system helped in the understanding of hyperarousal symptoms. Neuroimaging has started to map the brain structures and pathways involved in trauma responses. This has provided an insight into many trauma responses, including showing how changes to the corpus callosum and prefrontal cortex of traumatised children predicts developmental problems.

Over the past 10 years there has been a rapid increase in trauma interventions, leading to robust debate on the nature of evidence. The role of randomised controlled trials and the place of other forms of evidence is being examined, with the growing recognition of the importance of looking for clinically significant findings when working with trauma.

## Is there a risk that psychologists can do more harm than good tackling trauma?

In my experience there are two kinds of harm caused by psychologists working with traumatised clients. The first is by omission where a lack of recognition of the presence of the trauma results in the psychologist adopting an ineffective therapeutic model. Typically, clients become disillusioned when they see no reduction in their symptoms and as a result may refuse appropriate treatments when offered. The second type of harm occurs when the psychologist fails to follow one or more of the fundamental rules of working with traumatised clients, which include:

- l recognising of the importance of social support;

- l providing for psycho-education;
- l giving opportunities to make sense of the trauma story;
- l building self-calming skills;
- l showing respect and sensitivity to personal, cultural and social differences; and
- l offering ongoing support.

## Why are you particularly interested in secondary trauma?

Most of my work is in organisations, some of my clients are directly involved in dealing with disasters or exposed to serious physical or psychological abuse. However, many experience their trauma through engaging with primary victims of trauma as a rescuer, paramedic, law enforcer, advocate, teacher or humanitarian worker. The development of secondary trauma or compassion fatigue through vicarious experience is well established and requires organisations where there is a high level of risk of traumatic exposure to identify those workers particularly vulnerable. There is a need to ensure they are screened, educated and supported in developing essential resilience capacities. Psychologists working with trauma are also vulnerable, and I have recently contributed a chapter to a book on supervision for trauma psychologists, which sets out what good trauma supervision involves.

## What are your hopes for the Crisis, Disaster and Trauma Psychology Section?

As a very new and highly ambitious section of the BPS we would like to encourage psychologists from other Divisions and Sections to work with us to provide answers to some of the most difficult questions that the world faces today including: How can we support traumatised refugees and victims of war? Which early trauma interventions work best? What can we do to help victims of historic child abuse? Should psychologists be part of emergency planning? Is EMDR better than TF-CBT in treating trauma?

We cannot solve these problems on our own, so we decided to offer a series of trauma workshops as part of the professional development programme in the hope that others would join us to take part in this important work – see [www.bps.org.uk/events/introduction-trauma](http://www.bps.org.uk/events/introduction-trauma).

Keep up with the latest research in psychology at [www.bps.org.uk/digest](http://www.bps.org.uk/digest) and by following @ResearchDigest on Twitter

# Diverse and colourful

Ella Rhodes reports from the annual Psychology4Graduates event organised by the BPS

At Friends House in London recent or near-graduates of psychology came to hear talks about the many, varied and sometimes surprising routes into working in the field. The seven excellent speakers inspired the audience with tales of a Jedi mother, rejecting a yuppie lifestyle in favour of helping others and how fashion psychology could impact society.

James Randall-James, co-chair of the British Psychological Society's Division of Clinical Psychology's Pre-Qualifications Group, and fellow member of the group Steph Minchin, both University of Hertfordshire clinical psychology PhD students, gave a fascinating talk on the best ways into the field as well as general careers advice. They pointed out the areas in which clinical psychologists may work and the sorts of problems they focus on in therapy and conversations with clients. They spoke about the varied ways in which clients are assessed, including clinical interviews, psychometric tests, neurocognitive tests and clinical observations, as well as the various interventions in which they are trained. Throughout the talk they told the audience of their personal career paths and emphasised the importance for those wishing to embark on a career in clinical psychology to gain as much experience in their chosen area as possible before applying to a PhD course.

Psychologist, organisational consultant, executive coach and former NBA basketball player John Amaechi OBE [see <https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/way-we-are-all-either-jedi-or-sith>], held the rapt audience with his wonderful talk about his route into psychology with an atmospheric portrait of his mother. He said as a young boy he would accompany his mother, who worked as a GP, on house visits. He said of these visits to grieving relatives or those with very sick family members: 'People would yell and cry, but she would let them talk and say what they needed to say and would cut through the clutter in the air... Suddenly the tension would drop and although they knew everything was not going to be OK they felt like they could cope in that moment, and I found that amazing.' After seeing the first *Star Wars* film and witnessing Obi-Wan Kenobi's way with people, he came to the sudden realisation that his own mother might just be a Jedi. He added: 'What brought me to psychology was seeing the impact that, what I can now see as mindful attention and purposeful focus, can have.'

Amaechi later began to study psychology while playing basketball in San Diego and went on to do a master's degree in marriage and family therapy. He now runs Amaechi Performance Systems, working with some of the top businesses in the world. Though Amaechi said his own relationship with academic research had been 'tenuous' so far, he emphasised that future research needs to capture the true diversity of the world and not leave important questions unasked. In giving the gathered graduates tips for success, which he said felt 'far too bold', he stressed the need to question the status quo, and not simply accept well-established ways of working. Amaechi also drew attention to the value of mindfulness in the workplace – particularly from a leadership point of view. He said the world was full of disproportionately powerful people and added one of the most important roles he had was to make these giants of industry realise they are giants, which will hopefully lead them to be more aware of the potential harm they can commit – even unintentionally – and the potential good they can do with that power.

Prolific psychology writer Rob Yeung then gave a great general talk about how psychology graduates can stand out in a competitive environment. He emphasised the importance of giving an appearance of confidence, competence and charisma during interviews and in working life as a whole. Yeung bravely used his own mistakes in the working world as a basis for his advice – he pointed out that after working in a large management consultancy he moved to a smaller firm and immediately tried to enforce all he had learned at this larger business on the smaller one. This, needless to say, did not go down very well with his new employers. He said: 'When you're in a new position, focus on fitting in and being helpful.' He then gave some examples of research into job interviews to help graduates in their job hunting and emphasised the importance of having composure and speaking fluently, suggesting that graduates use the 'three Ps' before an interview: prepare, practice and perform. He also gave a handy tip for a quick fix to boosting confidence – he said some research had found that if interviewees spent five minutes writing about a time they felt they had power and influence, they performed better at mock job interviews.

George Kitsaras, the BPS's 50,000th member, recently started a job as an Assistant Psychologist for Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Trust. He spoke about his career path moving from Greece to study for a MSc in clinical psychology at the University of Reading. Kitsaras gave a great summary of his role in Birmingham on a medium-secure men's unit and outlined some of the benefits of graduate BPS membership. He advised the graduates who wanted to pursue clinical psychology careers that they should be prepared for a potentially long road to qualification and should aim to get as much work experience as possible in the field.

Dr Carolyn Mair was next to speak about her extremely varied career path, which now sees her leading the only course in the world that looks into the role of psychology in fashion [see [tinyurl.com/jfnqzkc](http://tinyurl.com/jfnqzkc)]. Mair's first role was as a graphic designer and she came to psychology in her late 30s, completing a degree in psychology and computing at Bournemouth and later an MSc at Portsmouth. Her new course at the London School of Fashion looks at how psychology impacts the fashion industry and the people who buy into the industry. She said she hopes that her students can take away a greater understanding of psychology from the course and apply this to the dilemmas facing the world of fashion, including questions around eating disorders and sustainability. 'It's not about a person's ability to cite a certain paper but it's much more about the bigger picture and looking at, and tackling, the issues that are out there. That's why psychology degrees are so valuable – they give you the skills to contribute to society.'

Finally, BPS President Jamie Hacker Hughes spoke about his extraordinary career path from wannabe maxillofacial surgeon to army officer, high-flying IT salesman and marketing director, to taking a 90 per cent salary drop to become a psychiatric nursing assistant at the Maudsley Hospital. After qualifying as a clinical psychologist he was appointed Head of Defence Clinical Psychology in 2007 and the following year became Defence Consultant Advisor in Psychology to the MoD.

All in all, a day that was as diverse and colourful as the discipline it was encouraging the audience to enter. Well worth keeping an eye out for next year's event. **ER**



# Psychology on the edge

Online magazine *The Edge* has again drawn on a diverse range of the world's sharpest minds to answer its annual question, this year: 'What do you consider the most interesting recent [science] news? And what makes it important?' We have drawn together some of the most interesting and topical answers given by psychologists.

## Psychology in crisis

Perhaps unsurprisingly many psychologists chose the reproducibility crisis, and other concerns around the practices of some academics and journals in psychology, as their choice for the most interesting recent news in science. Psychology researcher and author Judith Rich Harris pointed to papers published in 2011 and 2012 that raised some initial doubts over findings in psychology – both published in *Psychological Science*.

What Harris described as 'the final punch' for the topic came last year when *Science* published work finding only 36 per cent of almost 100 studies in the top three psychology journals could be replicated. She suggested two reasons for the decline of truth in scientific research, writing: 'First, research is no longer something people do for fun, because they're curious. It has become something that people are required to do if they want a career in the academic world... People are doing research for the wrong reasons: not to satisfy their curiosity but to satisfy their ambitions.' She suggests people should not be rewarded on the basis of how much they publish.

Second, Harris suggested the vetting of research papers had also gone awry and wrote: 'I propose that this job [vetting

papers] should be performed by paid experts – accredited specialists in the analysis of research. Perhaps this could provide an alternative path into academia for people who don't particularly enjoy the nitty-gritty of doing research but who love ferreting out the flaws and virtues in the research of others.'

Professor of Psychology at Yale University, Paul Bloom, also touched on the topic and said some of the most interesting science news had been about science itself, referring to psychology as 'patient zero' with its well-publicised cases of fraud and concerns around psychology experiments and analyses of results. He said that although there was a lot to complain about regarding how this story was handled by the mainstream media, with psychology being singled out where a problem exists in other fields, it was still a significant story and good could come of it. He concluded: 'A serious public discussion of what scientists are doing wrong and how they can do better will not only lead to better science, it will help advance scientific understanding more generally.'

Ellen Winner, a psychologist at Boston College, said despite the 'jarring' findings in the *Science* paper mentioned above, the implications on psychological science would result in better practices in journals and universities. She pointed to the fact that many journals will now not accept single studies with small sample sizes and *p* values just below .05. She added: 'Because new policies will result in fewer publications per researcher, universities will have to change their hiring, tenure and rewards systems, and granting and award-giving agencies will have to do so

too. We will need to stop the lazy practice of counting publications and citations and instead read critically for quality.' Winner concluded that, although a sea change takes time, it would result in the reporting of findings that are more likely to be true rather than urban myths, which in turn would lead to a better reputation for the field and a better understanding of human nature.

## The rise of interdisciplinary approaches and big data

Moving away from the somewhat marred past of psychology and onto a seemingly, cautiously bright future from Adam Alter, Assistant Professor of Marketing at Stern School of Business (New York University). He pointed to the huge rise in interdisciplinary research as some of the most interesting science news recently. Alter wrote that while social scientists, particularly psychologists, used to examine individuals through a zoom lens, with the growth of academics from varied fields working together, we are garnering an increasingly 'wide-angle lens' view of the world. He wrote that another benefit of this type of project was encouraging academics to adopt a wider view within their own fields and added: 'Many prominent papers published this year [2015] also include brain imaging data (a telephoto zoom lens), and data from social media sites and large scale economic panels (wide-angle lenses).'

Alter also points to researchers who have begun to complement 'big data' analyses with 'zoomed-in' physiological measures such as eye tracking and brain imaging analyses. He concluded: 'The big

news here is not just that scientists are borrowing from other disciplines, but also that their borrowing has turned over richer, broader answers to a growing range of scientific questions.'

### Why we should fear the fear of unlikely threats

Professor of Psychology David G. Myers (Hope College) and his German colleague Gerd Gigerenzer (see December 2015 issue) both gave answers around a similar theme – how our unwarranted fears of terrorism when compared with more immediate threats, can be far more damaging than we might first expect. Myers wrote that recent surveys have shown we are much less fearful of greater, everyday threats, than of terrorism.

He asked why we fear flying when the drive to the airport is the most dangerous part of a trip. He wrote: 'Underlying our exaggerated fears is the "availability heuristic": We fear what's readily available in memory. Vivid, cognitively available images... distort our judgements of risk.' Myers added that we hardly notice the half-million children who quietly die from rotavirus per year: 'Bill Gates once

observed – the equivalent of four 747s full of children every day.'

Myers pointed out that 'news-fed, cognitively available images' make us overly fearful of tiny risks – which may go some way to explaining why an estimated \$500 million is spent per U.S. terrorist death, compared to \$10,000 per cancer death. He concluded, chillingly, with a quote from Media researcher George Gerbner's 1981 words to a congressional subcommittee: 'Fearful people are more dependent, more easily manipulated and controlled, more susceptible to deceptively simple, strong, tough measures and hard-line postures.'

Gigerenzer, Director of the Center for Adaptive Behaviour and Cognition (Max Planck Institute for Human Development) similarly pointed to statistics that each year more Americans die from lightning than terrorism, and increasingly are more likely to die from preventable medical errors in hospitals – unnecessary deaths have risen from an estimated 98,000 in 1999 to 440,000 annually.

He explained this fear of what, in all likelihood, will not kill us: 'It is called a fear of dread risks. This fear is elicited by a situation in which many people die

within a short time.' He pointed to striking figures that following 9/11 many Americans avoided flying and drove their cars instead resulting in around 1600 deaths from car accidents – more than the number killed the four hijacked planes.

Gigerenzer referred to this as Osama Bin Laden's second strike and wrote: 'Although billions have been poured into Homeland Security and similar institutions to prevent the first strike of terrorists, almost no funding has been provided to prevent the second strike.' He concluded that making the public more aware of how terrorists exploit people's fears could save lives and added: 'It could also open people's eyes to the fact that some politicians and other interest groups work on keeping our dread risk fear aflame to nudge us into accepting personal surveillance and restriction of our democratic liberties.'

Many other psychologists contributed, including Steven Pinker, Tania Lombrozo, John Tooby, Lisa Feldman Barrett, Bruce Hood, Nicholas Humphrey, Kurt Gray, June Gruber, Abigail Marsh and Diana Deutsch (see <http://edge.org/annual-questions>). **ER**



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