

New 'MindEd' site launched

A website designed to extend the skills, knowledge and awareness of professionals and volunteers working directly with children and young people, was launched at a Westminster conference on 25 March.

MindEd – www.minded.org.uk – is funded by the Department of Health and run by a consortium of organisations in the child mental health field that includes the British Psychological Society. It contains over 100 short e-learning sessions, and many more will be added in the coming months.

As well as tackling stigma and giving adults access to information at any time and in any place, the website aims to speed up the time

it takes to identify child mental health problems and put them on the path to the most appropriate treatment.



Professor Shirley Reynolds

The e-learning sessions look at child development, typical presenting problems, diversity and equalities, legal frameworks, and different ways of helping and treating problems. As well as this core curriculum, MindEd is developing a review of the efficacy of different e-therapies and is working to make components of the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies programme for children and young people delivered through higher education institutions available on its website.

MindEd is also updating the Department of Health's Healthy Child programme and Adolescent Health programme in the context of mental health and developing a Healthy School Child programme on

WELLCOME PRIZES

This year's Wellcome Book Prize shortlist includes several books of a psychological nature.

Oliver Sacks, the physician, bestselling author, and professor of neurology at the NYU School of Medicine, is on the list for *Hallucinations*, his consideration of what they tell us about the brain's workings, and how they have influenced art and culture. Read our interview with him on the topic at tinyurl.com/onsu8gr.

Andrew Solomon, who last year gained a PhD in psychology

from the University of Cambridge, is nominated for *Far from the Tree: Parents, Children and the Search for Identity*. 'Sometimes your child – the most familiar person of all – is radically different from you. The saying goes that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. But what happens when it does?' Drawing on interviews with over 300 families, covering subjects including deafness, dwarfs, Down's syndrome, autism, schizophrenia, disability,

prodigies, children born of rape, children convicted of crime and transgender people, Solomon documents 'ordinary people making courageous choices'.

There's also a nomination for Sarah Wise for *Inconvenient People: Lunacy, Liberty and the Mad-Doctors in Victorian England*.

The winner will be announced on 29 April (after we have gone to press).

In other news from the Wellcome Trust, their Science Writing Prize, in association with *The Guardian* and *The Observer*, is now open for applications. The

annual award invites non-professional science writers based in the UK to submit short articles of no more than 800 words that address an area of science in an accessible way. Entries should demonstrate a passion for science and encourage the general public to consider, question and debate the key issues in science and society. The winners will have their work printed in *The Guardian* and *The Observer* and receive a £1000 cash prize. Deadline for entries is 11 May 2014 – see tinyurl.com/69lhhln.

children aged 5–11 for healthcare professionals.

At the launch, Norman Lamb, the Minister for Care and Support, said: ‘Spotting the signs of mental health problems early in children and young people is essential to prevent problems from escalating and continuing into adulthood. That’s why we have invested £3 million in MindEd – so that people working with children, from teachers to dinner ladies and sports coaches to Scout leaders, can recognise when a child needs help and make sure they get it.’

The Society’s President Dr Richard Mallows was present at the event, and said that he was delighted the Society is a partner in the MindEd project: ‘There is increasing demand for a central resource to support professionals and key workers in children’s services to understand the mental well-being of children and young people. The training and information available via the portal is vital to that wider understanding.’

The day included a multiprofessional ‘Big Debate’, with a panel including Chartered Psychologist and Director of the University of Reading’s Charlie Waller Institute, Professor Shirley Reynolds. Dr Duncan Law, a former clinical lead for services for children of our Division of Clinical Psychology, made an interesting intervention from the floor during the big debate. He suggested that, just as all proposed new legislation must have an environmental impact audit, it should have a mental health audit too.

To coincide with the website’s launch, the MindEd consortium commissioned a survey of adult knowledge of and attitude towards child mental health problems. Among the findings from the 2105 adults questioned were that 38 per

cent did not know the signs and symptoms to look out for and 51 per cent said they were worried about raising the issue for fear of being mistaken. When it comes to seeking help and advice, 87 said they would talk to their GP if they thought a child had a mental health problem, 55 per cent said they would turn to a family member and 37 per cent to a teacher. Significantly for MindEd, nearly three quarters (72 per cent) said they would use the internet.

Dr Raphael Kelvin, a child psychiatrist and the clinical lead for the MindEd programme, said: ‘Half of all diagnosable mental health conditions start before the age of 14, and 75 per cent

by the age of 21, so identifying children at the earliest opportunity is crucial in setting them on the best path in life. Investing in early intervention is crucial – not doing so comes at a high price for those battling a mental health condition, and also costs the economy vast sums of money in lost education, training, jobs, and often, through crime.

‘It’s clear from these results that there’s still stigma attached to mental health with 51 per cent of adults admitting fear of approaching the issue. It’s also clear that many adults are not confident in being able to spot the signs of ill mental health in children, and many are turning to other adults – family, friends and teachers – for help and advice. So it’s vital that people know what to look out for so they can address the issue before it worsens, and that’s where MindEd can help.’ JONATHAN CALDER



Norman Lamb MP

TOYING WITH PSYCHOLOGY

Psychology students at Coventry University have been showcasing toy designs that they have produced as part of an entrepreneurial challenge. The *Apprentice*-style contest tasked the students with designing a brand new, market-ready children’s toy and then presenting their concepts to a panel of industry judges.

A poster display of the best designs went on public display. Laura Taylor, associate head of Coventry University’s Faculty of Psychology and Behavioural Sciences, said: ‘Developmental psychology – how our thinking and behaviour changes with age – is a major component of our undergraduate degree programmes and we set our students this practical exercise to really test their understanding of this important subject. Not only did the students have to design a brand new children’s toy but they had to present their concept and argue its developmental benefits to our expert judging panel. It was quite a daunting task for them but they rose to the challenge.’

The winning entry was ‘Ocean friends’ by Sophie Barker, a soft toy combination which draws on psychological theories of social, cognitive and motor development in order to assist 6- to 9-month-olds in developing their sense of self, senses, pinching and grasping, and use of both hands. JS



Winning entry – Sophie Barker

Psychiatry journal with an open mind

A new journal, *The Lancet Psychiatry*, launches in May, with the editor telling *The Psychologist*: ‘I am very interested in future research, review, opinion, and essay material by psychologists.’

A message at www.thelancet.com/psychiatry-journal entitled ‘A fresh start for psychiatry’, claims that ‘Our new journal arrives at a pivotal moment in mental health care. Accounts of the distress experienced by people with mental health disorders appear throughout history, often accompanied by descriptions of their terrible mistreatment. Progress, both clinically and in terms of stigma and discrimination, has been slow. We believe,

however, that with the emergence of high-quality evidence and political and social will, things can change rapidly for the better.’

The Lancet Psychiatry describes itself as ‘an independent, international, multidisciplinary general psychiatry journal’ that aims ‘to keep an open mind. Above all, we want a strong evidence base to help people with mental health problems, throughout the life course. We are interested in innovative treatments, novel methods of service delivery, and new ways of thinking about mental illness promoted by social psychiatry. In parallel with this, we will encourage the new wave of biomedical

research that is challenging dogma and pointing out possible future directions for classification and treatment. We will also advocate strongly for the rights of people with mental health disorders, and welcome the voices of service users.'

Editor Niall Boyce told *The Psychologist*: 'We are publishing a paper on the psychology of suicide by Professor Rory O'Connor (Glasgow University) and Professor Matt Nock (Harvard University) in our first issue. On the more psychoanalytic / psychotherapeutic side, we will be running essays in subsequent

issues on the therapeutic process by authors such as Jay Watts and Tania Glyde. I cannot imagine a future for psychiatry that does not involve serious and sustained engagement and collaboration with psychology. *The Lancet Psychiatry* will provide a space in which members of both professions can publish and discuss their views and findings. I hope that this will be to the benefit of those working in mental health care and research, and, more importantly, will help to improve the lives of people with mental health problems.' JS

Who is driving brain research?

Robyn Dean (University of Bristol) went to the Dana Centre on 12 March to find out

The current 'Mind Maps' exhibition at the London Science Museum, supported by the British Psychological Society, presents stories and tools of the past 250 years of psychological research. The Museum's Dana Centre clearly positioned tonight's event, also supported by the BPS, to look at the next 250 years. But while the event may have been entitled 'Who is driving brain research?', the themes of the four individual talks and the following discussion centred more around 'To where is brain research driving?'

Speaking to a packed room, Professor Michael Hausser (UCL) opened the night by introducing some of his work on the neural code and attempts to build from knowledge at the neuronal level to understanding brain circuitry and the behaviour it underlies. Optogenetics is an exciting tool being used in his lab, allowing neuronal activity to be observed by making cells express the light-sensitive chemical channelrhodopsin. This means that light can then be used to activate the cell. The technique is precise enough that individual cells can be targeted, introducing the possibility of manipulating cellular firing patterns. Understandably, Professor Hausser was enthusiastic about the possibility of applying such a method to sensory perception, motor control and memory.

The theme of relating brain and behaviour was continued as Professor Kate Jeffery (UCL) discussed the role of place cells, a discovery in the 1970s which she feels is one of the most revolutionary changes in neuroscience. Place cells have been shown to fire when rats are in a specific location, suggesting a neural representation of space. Along with grid cells, which are thought to encode distances, this suggests we may possess



The talks concluded with a discussion of the 'long bridges' neuroscience had to cross in its future journey

a neural map helping us to navigate the world. Damage to the hippocampus, where such cells can be found, results in topographic disorientation in conditions like Alzheimer's disease.

The importance of studying brain damage and disorders was highlighted by Dr Catherine Loveday (University of Westminster) using the strong analogy of understanding more about the mechanics of cars by studying those which aren't functioning correctly. Contrasting Professor Hausser's focus on one technique applied to several areas, Dr Loveday discussed the use of cognitive profiling in areas ranging from anorexia to



dementia, memory issues and personality. Cognitive profiling involves looking at an individual's strengths and weaknesses on a variety of tasks; allowing such characteristics to build an understanding of brain and thought changes, and therapeutic options.

Dr Bhismadev Chakrabarti (University of Reading) clearly presented the opposing strategy of applying a wide-range of neurological tools to his main focus of empathy and the perception of social cues. These are typically areas of difficulty in autistic spectrum disorder, and individuals don't seem to gain the same reward from social encounters as typically functioning individuals. Dr Chakrabarti has investigated the link between reward and empathy by studying the activity of the dopaminergic (reward) system during moments of maternal bonding, and the effects of blocking the system chemically or surgically. Other methods have included relating neural activation using fMRI to questionnaires on an individual's empathy and recording the movement of facial muscles to mimic photos of faces that were conditioned to be more or less rewarding. The converging evidence has strong implications for reward-based treatments of social behaviour in those with autism.

Across the talks there was a divide between using one psychological tool to tackle several problems and using several methods to examine one area; however, both aimed to 'look under the

bonnet' as Dr Loveday put it. Within this, the importance of relating neural work to observations of behaviour strongly resonated throughout.

If there was a danger of the talks focusing too much on the nature side of the nature-nurture debate, a flurry of questions debating the cultural and ethical aspects of neuroscientific work brought the discussed methods into perspective. Particularly, the speakers all mentioned ecological difficulties in their own work. This ranged from the difficulties in controlling social stimuli without losing the realism of the study to the issues in determining the reason for neuronal firing patterns.

The latter point alludes to a correlational problem of neurological work, namely a specific neuron may fire when engaging in a certain activity without it reflecting cognition in that task. It could represent the rat thinking how dull the experiment was! Interestingly, Professor Hausser presented optogenetics as a causal method of looking at neuronal firing, because replicating known firing patterns could test whether this causes the behaviour.

The talks concluded with a discussion of the 'long bridges' neuroscience had to cross in its future journey. Answers varied significantly with the experts' interests. Dr Chakrabarti focused on the many 'short bridges' of research needed to understand face perception. Dr Loveday discussed the understanding of consciousness, a bridge she feels we may never cross. Professor Hausser suggested that there now aren't enough future directions and a theoretical focus was needed to develop areas of new research. Professor Jeffery followed this, pointing out that there were few theoretical alternatives to the view that memories were stored in the spaces between neurons, an area that may need further investigation.

Interestingly, a final focus was placed on the development of artificial intelligence, a topic audience members were still discussing as they left. Particularly, Dr Chakrabarti suggested that this progression would require a deep understanding of the differences in perception of other people and non-humans. Professor Jeffery agreed that understanding artificial intelligence would mean understanding ourselves. Parallels were even drawn with the new Hollywood movie *Her*, which features a man falling in love with an anthropomorphised operating system. This discussion prompts the conclusion that as neuroscience 'drives' forwards, the line between reality and science fiction may be blurring.

Change of funding direction

The US National Institute of Mental Health, a major funder of research, has announced changes to the way it funds clinical trials.

Writing on his Director's Blog, Thomas Insel says that 'future trials will follow an experimental medicine approach in which interventions serve not only as potential treatments, but as probes to generate information about the mechanisms underlying a disorder. Trial proposals will need to identify a target or mediator; a positive result will require not only that an intervention ameliorated a symptom, but that it had a demonstrable effect on a target, such as a neural pathway implicated in the disorder or a key cognitive operation.'

Insel goes on to explain that 'while experimental medicine has become an accepted approach for drug development, we believe it is equally important for the development of

psychosocial treatments. It offers us a way to understand the mechanisms by which these treatments are leading to clinical change.

Moreover, a subset of the funding announcements will support clinical trials that evaluate the effectiveness or increase the clinical impact of pharmacological, somatic, psychosocial, rehabilitative, and combination interventions.'

A *Nature* editorial on the move said it 'will certainly ruffle feathers. Insel notes that more than half of the trials that the NIMH currently supports would not receive funding under the new requirements, at least not without modifications. For example, a trial that focuses on changes in attention span as a means of testing a behavioural-intervention therapy in children with a broadly

defined disorder such as attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder would not be funded unless researchers could present a controlled way

to study how the therapy takes effect. The NIMH would rather see trials that aim to recruit people with a common trait –

say, hallucinations – regardless of their specific psychiatric diagnosis, treat them with a drug that acts on a specific brain receptor, and measure changes in brain activity.'

The editorial goes on to predict that 'critics will argue that the NIMH has exchanged a difficult problem – treating mental illness – for an even more challenging one, understanding the brain. But the institute's new direction on trials may also aid an effort to free research on mental-health disorders from the limits of existing diagnostic categories.' JS



QUESTIONING SCIENTIFIC MOTIVATION

What motivates you as a scientist and what pressures are you under? What effects are funding, publishing and governance systems having on the production of high quality, ethical scientific research? Is competition in science a good thing?

These are some of the questions being explored in a project led by the Nuffield Council on Bioethics which will gather views and promote debate about the culture of scientific research in the UK. They would like to hear from people involved in all kinds of scientific research in the UK (including psychology), in the public, charitable and private sectors.

See www.surveymonkey.com/s/sci-research-culture

New academicians elected

Several prominent psychologists have become Academicians of the Academy of Social Sciences, following their nomination by the British Psychological Society.

Professor Mick Cooper, Professor Susan Gathercole, Professor Owen Hargie, Professor Glynis Murphy, Professor Rory O'Connor, and Professor Alison Wearden were all successful.

Professor O'Connor said: 'Although I am broadly interested in a range of health outcomes, most of my research over the past 20 years has focused on applying psychological theory to understanding the complex pathways to self-harm and suicide. I am delighted to receive this award from the Academy, and I hope the conferment raises the profile

of research into suicide and self-harm in the UK and beyond. Unlike other major causes of death, like stroke and cancer, research into suicide continues to be chronically underfunded. In addition to our theoretical work on the psychological mechanisms underpinning suicide risk, we are also working on developing new innovative psychological interventions to help those who are vulnerable.'

Owen Hargie is Professor in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Ulster, Jordanstown and a member of the 'Peace, Conflict & Equality' Research Group within the Psychology Research Institute at Ulster.



Professor Rory O'Connor

His main research interests over a long career have been in the fields of organisational communication, interpersonal behaviour, health

communication and most recently cross-cultural relationships in Northern Ireland. He is currently working on a research project funded by the Northern Ireland Government into social exclusion and sport in Northern Ireland (www.socsci.ulster.ac.uk/comms/sesni/). This will examine how and in what ways a range of groups across Northern Ireland feel excluded from participating in sports, including religious groups, ethnic minority groups, people with a disability, those of lower socio-economic status, older people, females, and the LGBT community.

Professor Hargie said: 'I am honoured both to be conferred with the award of Academician, and to have been nominated for the Award

BPS/POST



HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT
PARLIAMENTARY OFFICE OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Postgraduate Award

The Award provides an opportunity for a postgraduate psychologist to be seconded to the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST), to assist in providing objective briefing material for MPs and Peers on a psychological topic.

POST is an office of the two Houses of Parliament (Commons and Lords), charged with providing balanced and objective analysis of science and technology based issues relevant to Parliament.

Award: Three-month secondment to POST. An allowance of £5,000 will be provided to fund the secondment.

Eligibility: All postgraduate students registered for a higher degree by research (PhD or MPhil) in their second or third year of full-time study (or part-time equivalent) at the time of application.

How to apply: Produce a concise (no more than two sides A4, typed) summary of any aspect of psychological research that the applicant considers and shows to be relevant to public policy, including an explanation of why parliamentarians should be interested in this topic.

For further details and an application form please contact Liz Beech, at liz.beech@bps.org.uk.

Closing date for applications: 31 August 2014



The British
Psychological Society

by the Society. In a sense this is dual recognition by two prestigious bodies. It is very gratifying to have one's research recognised as having had major significance for the wider community, outside of academia.'

For the past decade, Professor Mick Cooper has led research on the outcomes and process of school-based counselling in the UK, and has been involved in the evaluation and development of person-centred, existential and relational approaches to counselling and psychotherapy. In recent years Professor Cooper has worked with Professor John McLeod (University of Abertay) to develop a 'pluralistic' approach to psychological practice, which aims to personalise therapy to the particular client's goals and preferences. He says: 'For me, being an Academician is an acknowledgment of the work that counselling psychologists are doing to develop a deeper understanding of human relationships and psychological processes, and the ways in which greater well-being can be facilitated. I am very grateful to the Division of Counselling Psychology for putting me forward for this award.'

Professor Cooper is currently working as National Advisor for Counselling for the Children and Young People's Improving Access to Psychological Therapies programme, and is continuing to work on the development of a pluralistic approach. 'We are developing an increasing knowledge of effective psychological interventions, but we still need to know more about how to integrate this with service users' individual preferences and needs. A tailored therapeutic approach may offer the best opportunity to reduce dropout and help clients achieve their personal goals.'

Alison Wearden is Professor of Health Psychology at the University of Manchester and Director of the Manchester Centre for Health Psychology. Her research focuses on the management of long-term conditions, particularly chronic fatigue syndrome, and on interpersonal factors and health. Over the coming years, she intends to bring these two interests together to develop a generic family-based fatigue intervention, which could benefit people living with many different long-term conditions. Professor Wearden said: 'I am delighted to have my work recognised by the award of Academician in the Social Sciences and to see my name in the members' list alongside that of many illustrious colleagues.'

Professor Glynis Murphy is Professor of Clinical Psychology and Disability, and

Co-Director of the Tizard Centre, University of Kent. Her principal research interests are in the field of challenging behaviour and learning disabilities. Her current and recently completed studies include: the effectiveness of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) for people with learning disabilities who have committed sex offences; screening for people with learning disabilities in prison; the effectiveness of social care for ex-offenders with learning disabilities; and (with Dr Peter Langdon) the effectiveness of CBT for people with Asperger's



Professor Alison Wearden

syndrome and social anxiety. She said: 'I am delighted to be elected to the Academy of Social Sciences. Its values of inclusivity, independence, transparency, intellectual rigour and sound ethics are values I have held all my working life. My efforts over the last 40 years have been to improve the lives of people with learning disabilities, and I plan to continue to strive to do this. I very much look forward to contributing to the Academy.'

Professor Susan Gathercole is Unit Director and Programme leader of the Memory and Perception group at the MRC Cognition and Brain Sciences Unit at the University of Cambridge. Much of her research focuses on children with developmental disorders in memory, attention, language, and learning.

Other psychologists honoured (although not nominated by the British Psychological Society) were Revd Canon Professor Leslie Francis (University of Warwick) and Professor Bob Woods (University of Bangor), both Chartered Psychologists and Fellows of the Society; and Professor Denise Rousseau (Carnegie Mellon University, USA). JS

FUNDING NEWS

The **Wellcome Trust** is accepting applications for the following schemes:

The **Research Training Fellowship scheme** is open to clinical psychology students who wish to develop a long-term career in academic medicine. Fellowships are normally for two to three years, and are encouraged from candidates who wish to undertake substantial training in a high-quality research unit or facility towards a PhD or MD qualification. Applications should be received by 7 July 2014. tinyurl.com/p39u5xo

The **Intermediate Clinical Fellowship scheme** is open to clinical psychology students who have had outstanding start to their research career. Fellowships are for up to four or five years and will enable successful candidates to continue their research interests at a postdoctoral level. Submit a preliminary application by 6 May. tinyurl.com/oh69qqg

The **Feminist Review Trust** invites applications for its **research grants from feminist scholars**. The award is designed to support activities such as hard-to-fund projects; pump-priming activities; interventionist projects that support feminist values; training and development projects and one-off events. The maximum award amount is £1000 – next deadline is 31 May. tinyurl.com/cgs68v

The **Experimental Psychology Society** invites applications from its members for its **research workshop grants** and **grants for study visits**. Closing date is 1 June 2014.

Up to £3500 per research workshop grant is available to contribute towards travel and other basic costs. tinyurl.com/238gvk4

Grants for study visits are worth up to £2000 to cover costs of travel and accommodation. These study visits enable postgraduates and postdoctoral researchers in experimental psychology to visit another institution to develop their research skills. Applicants should be registered for a PhD or have obtained their PhD within the last five years. tinyurl.com/ozpzyw6

info

For BPS awards and grant schemes, see www.bps.org.uk/awards&grants. Funding bodies should e-mail news to Emma Smith on emma.smith@bps.org.uk for possible inclusion

An 'incredibly' bad idea?

When you've done something good, or performed a task well, it feels great to get some praise for it. And parents and teachers, especially in Western cultures, are encouraged to dole out praise to children in an increasingly generous manner. A drawing might not just be 'good', it might be 'incredible'. That song wasn't just 'beautiful', it was 'epic'. Such praise is often given with the best intentions, particularly in the belief that positive feedback, especially for children who don't have much

faith in themselves, might help to raise their self-esteem. But does it work?

Recent research by Eddie Brummelman and colleagues has tried to shed light on this question. In three studies, they looked at how adults dish out praise to children in both an experimental and naturalistic setting, and how children with varying levels of self-esteem take it. Their results

suggest that overly positive praise might not have the intended effect for children who have low self-esteem.

In the first experiment Brummelman's team asked a group of adults to read short descriptions of hypothetical children, described as either having high or low self-esteem. People were told about something that the child had done – say, solving a maths problem, or performing a song. After reading through the description, they were asked to write down any praise that they might give the child. Brummelman's team found that about a quarter of the praise was overly positive (e.g. 'that sounded magnificent!'), and that people were more likely to give more extremely positive praise to the children who had low self-esteem.

The researchers then tried to replicate these findings in a more naturalistic setting, by observing how parents interacted with their children (7–11 years old) when giving them a series of maths exercises at home. Brummelman and colleagues found a similar result to their laboratory experiment – about a quarter of the time, praise was overly inflated, and children who had lower self-esteem were given more inflated praise than those who had higher self-esteem.

In order to figure out whether this actually mattered or not, in the final experiment Brummelman's team looked at how being given praise impacted on one particular aspect of children's behaviour – challenge seeking. Two hundred and forty children first completed a questionnaire to assess their level of self-esteem, and then were asked to draw a copy of van Gogh's *Wild Roses*. The children were told that a professional painter would then assess their drawing, and tell them what he thought of it. In reality, the painter didn't exist, and children were simply given inflated praise, non-inflated praise, or no praise at all. Afterwards, the children were shown four complex and four easy pictures, and asked to have a go at reproducing some of them. Critically, they were told that if they picked the difficult picture, they might make a lot of mistakes, but they might also learn lots. In other words, the number of difficult pictures the children chose to draw was taken as a measure of challenge seeking.

Brummelman's team found that if children with lower self-esteem had been given overly inflated praise, they were less inclined to seek a challenge in the second task – they would go for easy drawings over the harder ones, and therefore miss out on the chance for a new learning experience. On the other hand, children with high self-esteem were more likely to seek a challenge after being given inflated praise. Interestingly, the only difference between the inflated and non-inflated praise was a single word – *incredibly* ('you made an incredibly beautiful drawing!' versus 'you made a beautiful drawing!').

What the study doesn't tell us is why children with low-esteem might avoid challenges in these circumstances. The authors suggest that inflated praise might set the bar very high for children in the future, and so inadvertently activates a self-protection mechanism in those with low self-esteem – although they acknowledge that they didn't actually measure this in the study.

At any rate, the finding builds on a number of experiments conducted in recent years showing that positive praise isn't necessarily good for all children in all circumstances. For children with low self-esteem, although we might feel the need to shower them in adulation, this might end up having precisely the opposite effect. Even words like *incredibly* can end up having a huge unintended impact – so when you're telling children they've done a great job, choose your words wisely.

I Post written by guest host Dr Pete Etchells, Lecturer in Psychology at Bath Spa University and Science Blog Co-ordinator for *The Guardian*



In *Psychological Science*



Never the earner, always the bride

In *Social Forces*

Married men who have a more traditional 'breadwinner role' at home tend to have more negative views on women in the workplace, according to a series of studies led by Sreedhari Desai.

Using data from US national surveys, the researchers found that men in more 'traditional' marriages, where the wife was not employed, showed some discomfort with a gender-mixed workplace, being more likely to disagree with statements such as 'If a mother chooses to work, it doesn't hurt the child'. A second dataset, from a 2002 survey, suggested that traditionalists were less likely to see their workplace as running smoothly when it had a higher composition of women.

Turning to experimental work, Desai's team showed that compared with those in a dual-earning marriage, traditionally married undergraduate students rated recruitment literature intended to attract job applicants as less effective when it contained cues of high female involvement in the company, such as all-female (vs. all-male) recruiter names and an equal-opportunity reference.

The next experiment found managers just as susceptible; traditionally married managers were less likely to recommend a fictional candidate for an MBA programme if they were a woman. Interestingly, dual earners as a group gave higher ratings to the female than the male applicant.

Returning to survey data, the researchers were able to gather data across two data



How does stress affect your public speaking?

In *Biological Psychology*

points of the British Household Panel Survey. In 1991 304 men were surveyed prior to marriage, and then in 1993 following marriage, using the same scale as study one used on attitude to women in the workplace. These attitudes didn't predict the marriage structure men ended up in, but the type of marriage did affect subsequent attitudes to women at work, with a traditional set-up leading to less sympathy for women being represented in the workplace.

So why might marriage be shaping these attitudes? Status construction theory suggests that we tend to use our own social conditions to extrapolate how the world works. If every day you engage in work duties while your wife focuses on home life, not only are you incentivised to believe that this is a sensible division of labour, but increasingly it will seem true to you, as your differential experiences give you more work-related resources such as contacts, knowledge and influence.

The researchers conclude that attention could be given to 'the challenging psychological position that men in traditional marriages face when alternating between their two daily realities', and find ways to illustrate to these people that their personal life decisions may be driving their workplace attitudes, possibly in an unconscious fashion.

By Alex Fradera, for the Occupational Digest (see www.occdigest.org.uk)

Having to give a talk or a speech in front of a large group of people is one of the scariest things we might find ourselves having to do. Ideally we want to give a flawless, well-rehearsed delivery, and getting too stressed is often linked to becoming – literally – lost for words. But is there any actual evidence for this link?

Tony Buchanan and colleagues have recently investigated what sort of aspects of speech and language are affected in stressful versus non-stressful situations. They asked 91 people to participate in a social-stress test, in which they had five minutes to prepare a speech, and then immediately deliver it. In the stressful condition, they had to imagine that they had been accused of shoplifting, and had to prepare a defence that they would deliver to the 'store manager' (an experimenter). Immediately after the speech, they were given a difficult mental arithmetic task. In the non-stressful condition, people spent five minutes preparing a summary of a travel article, which they then had to read aloud to camera. Immediately after, they completed a much simpler arithmetic task.

Buchanan's team measured levels of the stress hormone cortisol in samples of saliva taken before the test, plus 10 and 30 minutes afterwards. They also measured heart rate, the speed at which people spoke during their speech, as well as the number of pauses and the number of 'nonfluencies' – words like *um*, *er* and *hmm*.

The stressful speech condition seemed to increase stress levels – the measures of heart rate and cortisol levels showed an increase in this condition compared to the non-stressful situation. However, some of the speech variables that the researchers looked at didn't seem to be affected in the way that you might expect. Regardless of the stress condition, the speed at which people talked during their speech didn't differ. Strangely, the number of nonfluencies was higher for the non-stressful speech than in the stressful one. The only detrimental thing that stress seemed to have an effect on was pause time – as they progressed through their speech, people tended to stop increasingly more often in the stressful condition as opposed to the non-stressful condition.

Buchanan and his colleagues acknowledge the limitations of their study – as it's correlational in nature, we can't

say for sure whether increases in cortisol levels cause a greater number of pauses in speech production, or whether noticing that you're pausing more often in the task causes your cortisol levels to increase.

That being said, it seems like pause time is important, because it is thought to be an indication of lexical retrieval processes – if more thought is required for a certain part of a speech, or harder words need to be used, you're more likely to stop for a moment before saying them. In stressful situations, these retrieval processes take a longer time, and so you're more prone to pausing. So this study seems like an interesting step forward in understanding specifically how stress affects different aspects of speech production – you might even say it gives us pause for thought.

I Post written by guest host Dr Pete Etchells (Bath Spa University and *The Guardian*)



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