

# Annual Conference 2005

*Well over a thousand delegates gathered at the University of Manchester campus for this year's Annual Conference. The three days were packed with every conceivable aspect of psychology over 30 symposia, 112 individual papers and 123 poster presentations across 15 parallel sessions.*

*This was the first of the 'Quinquennial' conferences, a large event every five years involving more subsystems. It was also the last in the current format: Cardiff 2006 will see fewer parallel sessions over fewer days, with the emphasis placed on high-quality invited symposia, high-profile poster sessions and papers. As Angela Clow (Chair, Standing Conference Committee) puts it, 'We want to give people what they want!' She would welcome suggestions for keynote speakers and symposia topics for 2006.*

*Many of the award lectures will appear as articles in due course, but for now enjoy the first part of our coverage.*

*Simon Bignell and Sandie Cleland (Associate Editors, Conferences)*

TONY DALE

## In search of intelligent education

Robert J. Sternberg opened the conference. **SANDIE CLELAND** was there.

**I**N this compelling talk Robert Sternberg (Yale University) argued that traditional approaches to education favour students with good analytical skills over students with good creative and practical skills. There is much evidence to suggest that this discriminates against students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and that skilled students miss out on opportunities because they do not match a somewhat limited view of what constitutes 'intelligence'.

Sternberg presented his triarchic theory of successful intelligence, which takes into

account not just analytical intelligence, but also creative intelligence (that relating to novel tasks and situations) and practical intelligence (that relating to concrete everyday tasks and situations). There is a lot of research to suggest that students who are taught triarchically (i.e. taking all of these into account and teaching to complement the student's strengths and weaknesses) outperform those taught conventionally. In addition, the ethnic-group differences observed when using conventional teaching methods are substantially reduced through using

a triarchic approach.

Just one example of the work of Sternberg and colleagues is 'Project Rainbow', which aimed to improve the validity of admissions-testing procedures for colleges. They developed a battery of tests to assess all three aspects of successful intelligence. Analytical skills were assessed using traditional methods, but new methods were developed to assess creative and practical skills. For example, to assess creative skills, students might be presented with a number of pictures, and be asked to provide a short story that

## IN BRIEF

Your average imprisoned criminal isn't traditionally viewed as having the sharpest intellect, but it appears it may not be a lack of ability to put themselves in another's shoes that has put them inside. A study by Nigel Beail and Proctor (Barnsley Learning Disability Service and University of Sheffield) has found that offenders performed significantly better than matched non-offenders on second-order 'theory of mind', emotional recognition and description of emotion tasks. This echoes similarly counterintuitive findings by others with school bullies.

Feeling lonely (as opposed to living alone) is associated with poorer cognitive function at the age of 80, even taking into account prior mental ability. That's according to a longitudinal cohort study by Alan Gow and colleagues at the University of Edinburgh. The researchers acknowledge that it is not possible to infer causality from this data.

Children who wear glasses or have a history of eye patches were around 35 per cent more likely to be victims of physical or verbal bullying, in a study by Jeremy Horwood and the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (University of Bristol). The researchers called for opticians to be aware of the risks of bullying, and for strategies to be discussed to reduce vulnerability.

In the UK there has been a recent shift in eyewitness identification methods from using live identity parades to video identification. Tim Valentine (Goldsmiths College) found that strict sequential line-up instructions are not effective in video identification, but that presentation of moving images rather than a single still image did provide protection against mistaken identification.

Students attending 'old' universities rate themselves as more intelligent than students attending 'young' universities, and male students rate themselves as more intelligent than female students. That's according to a study by Lance Workman (Bath Spa College), which also found that self-ratings of intelligence have declined in recent years.

would link the different pictures. To assess practical skills, they might be presented with a movie depicting a situation from normal college life (e.g. asking for a letter of recommendation from a professor who does not recognise the student) and be asked how they would cope with this situation. Sternberg and colleagues found that combining the SAT (the traditional standardised means of college admissions testing in the US) with the Analytic, Creative and Practical scores from the new tests provided a much better prediction of how well students would perform at college than the SAT scores alone. Perhaps most importantly, the bias against black, Hispanic and Native American students found with SAT scores was greatly reduced with the new assessment methods.

With examples like Project Rainbow (among others), Sternberg argued convincingly that we need to reinvent education. Teaching that emphasises memory and verbal skills does not benefit all students. Analytical skills may be the easiest to assess, but they do not provide the best predictor of how well a student will perform in the future. Not only are talented students missing out, but institutions are failing to select the best candidates. Change of this kind may not be easy, indeed there may be a degree of resistance from people in power who themselves have benefited from traditional approaches to education, but a rethink is in the best interests of society as well as students: there can be no benefit in losing the talent of promising individuals.

# Ups and downs in bipolar disorder

JULIE MORGAN reports on a talk from Professor Richard Bentall (University of Manchester).

**D**O you remember an occasion when you felt good and bad at the same time? This may seem like a contradiction, but, as Richard Bentall explained, recognising the co-existence of euphoria and depression may be the key to understanding the nature of mania in bipolar disorder.

Bentall takes us back to that murky world of early psychoanalysis and Karl Abraham's (1911) manic-defence hypothesis, to help clear up some of the misconceptions surrounding this elusive disorder. First and foremost, that mania and depression are not opposite poles of an emotional spectrum with bipolar patients flitting between the two states, but that mania arises from the patient's attempt to avoid depressive mood.

Sounds straightforward enough so far, but what mechanisms are actually involved in avoiding depression and how does this eventually lead to mania? Bentall believes the answer lies in how patients evaluate

themselves; in other words, their self-esteem. It seems that the self-esteem of bipolar patients tends to fluctuate between extremely positive and negative evaluations of the self; and, importantly, these changes may be linked to the way in which bipolar patients respond to their depressed mood.

To test this idea, Bentall and his much-praised postgraduate students, used a technique known as 'experience sampling'. Pre-selected students were given a watch and a diary and asked to record their reaction to the day's events whenever the watch beeped, a technique that involves a certain amount of trust in the student. They found that students who score highly on measures of hypomania not only showed greater fluctuations in their self-esteem but also showed a greater tendency to use the type of response styles that are commonly used in reaction to depressed mood.

These response strategies include ruminating about feelings, trying to work through and solve problems, using

distraction strategies, and, in the more exotic cases, indulging in risk-taking activities. But Bentall doesn't merely believe that this is a correlational relationship. He argues that these response styles may be driving the fluctuations in self-esteem. Bipolar patients may adopt dysfunctional strategies to regulate these shifts in self-esteem.

An important point was raised at the end of this talk, eliciting murmurs of agreement from the audience. Children of bipolar patients are at very high risk for developing the disorder, and around 50 per cent of these children experience the affective symptoms associated with manic depression. Bentall questioned what the implications of his findings were for intervention strategies aimed at preventing development of the disorder in high-risk populations. Addressing the excessive use of dysfunctional coping strategies in prevention programmes, however ethically controversial this may seem, could be the key.

## PARLIAMENT AND POLITICS

SANDIE CLELAND reports on a symposium.

**W**HEN you consider the impact of the government on our daily lives, it is perhaps surprising that psychologists show little professional interest in politics or politicians. This symposium redressed the balance via an insight into the potential of psychologists to have an impact on the political process, from selection of a politician, through the electoral process, to government.

Sharon Loivette and Helen Wilkin (with Jo Silvester, Goldsmiths College) presented an overview of the first competency-based selection process for political roles. Working with the Conservative Party, they identified the skills required in a political candidate

(e.g. good communication skills, leadership and motivation) and worked these into an extensive assessment exercise. One of the most striking findings was that there were no gender differences in performance. Only 18 per cent of MPs are female – clearly this lack of female MPs is not because women cannot do the job. Despite this, Sarah Childs (Bristol University) found that female MPs feel their approach to politics is considered less legitimate and less effective than that of males.

The UK government is pushing towards e-voting, despite its being more expensive than 'paper and pencil' voting. In the 2004 US elections e-voting was used in less than 33 per cent of electoral districts; however, it

accounted for more than 55 per cent of reported problems. Louise Ferguson (Digital Habitats) argued that there has been a shocking lack of research into the usability of e-voting systems. She suggested that psychologists working in human-computer interaction are well placed to address the usability problems.

Having passed the selection stage and voting process, what can a new MP expect from life in government? Ashley Weinberg (Salford University) found that new MPs suffer from elevated stress levels; 30 per cent of them experience high levels of psychological strain. Although stress levels do eventually decrease to normal levels, this remains worrying – do we want stressed people deciding

whether our country goes to war? Parliamentary working practices do not help, and Parliament seems resistant to change. This is the case even with a high number of new MPs, as in the months following the 1997 election. Michael Rush (Exeter University) found that MPs are socialised into their role by their party and by the House of Commons itself. Richard Kwiatkowski (Cranfield University) identified a number of factors contributing to resistance to change (e.g. power of tradition), and suggested that psychologists could play an important part in improving working conditions for MPs.

These talks covered a broad range of topics; but the recurring theme was the role of psychologists in the political process. When a politician's decision can affect the lives of millions, the importance of this role cannot be underestimated.

# Knowing me, knowing you

JON SUTTON reports as Neil Macrae explores the social brain.

IS Britney Spears nothing more than a pop-up toaster? It might not be the first question you would expect social cognition researchers to address as they get their hands on expensive functional brain imaging equipment, but in this fascinating talk Professor Neil Macrae (University of Aberdeen) showed why it's an important one.

Macrae ran through a wealth of converging evidence – behavioural, patient and imaging – investigating whether social cognition comes with 'something extra' in the brain. Thanks to 250,000 years of social and cultural evolution, we have species-unique cognitive skills in terms of our sense of self and others. But can this social competence be explained simply by the general cognitive processes involved in perception, language, memory and attention?

The first clues came from Elliot, a patient who damaged his orbito-frontal cortex and medial prefrontal cortex (MPC). He was fine on non-social tasks, but his life became a disaster through all kinds of bad decisions. So is this area the key to knowing about people?

Up popped Britney, to show that she caused activity in different areas of the brain from the toaster. Abstract person knowledge seemed to be represented in the superior temporal sulcus and the MPC – a 'social cognition network'? The next experiment showed that the same areas were implicated in 'theory of mind' reasoning, allowing people to answer such questions as 'Could Mary be sensitive?' and 'Could a kiwi be fickle?'

But does the MPC handle the processing of psychological states generally, not just for people? And does it deal with any kind of decision about people? To find out, Macrae used imaging while asking people questions about the psychological and physical characteristics of people and dogs. There was just as much MPC activation when thinking about the psychological characteristics of dogs as there was with people – a footprint of anthropomorphism perhaps?

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**Britney Spears – As far as the brain goes, is she nothing more than a toaster?**

Next up for the MPC was a role in successful recall. By going back and looking at the pattern of activation during

encoding of items that were subsequently remembered, as opposed to forgotten, Macrae showed that our trusty friend the MPC was at work again. And in yet another experiment, the MPC was most active when making mental state judgements about a person the participant had judged as similar to themselves – support for the 'simulation' theory of how we put ourselves in others' shoes.

Macrae concluded that some aspects of social cognition are subserved by unique mental processes: knowledge about mental agents, and the encoding of socially relevant information. Macrae suggested that the dorsal area of the MPC may be particularly important here. Some social-cognition processes may draw on self-referential thought, and this may involve the ventral area. More of this type of innovative, quality experimentation will surely go a long way towards solving the puzzle of the social brain.

## 'Were you duped like Deirdre?'

CHRIS ASKEW on using soap operas to reach inaccessible groups.

THE headline of this piece also accompanied an article in the *Manchester Evening Post* that Christine Kirkman (University of Bolton) used to recruit participants for research into the psychopathic personality. The article was a reference to a storyline in which *Coronation Street* character Deirdre Rashid was deceived and manipulated by the TV soap's fictional psychopath, John Lindsay. Kirkman told the conference that many women contacted her with experiences similar to Deirdre's after recognising similarities between their ex-partners and Lindsay. These correspondences were then used to build a picture of the psychopathic personality.

The three main characteristics of the

men were 'superficial charm and good intelligence', 'pathological lying' (reported by all the women!), and the 'antisocial pursuit of power'. Kirkman argued that similar research in the past has almost exclusively used prisoners, whilst non-offenders have remained an 'inaccessible group'. However, unidentified psychopathic individuals may cause a great deal of damage to other people's lives. A poignant example was given by one of the women in the study who described how she was 'punched through the glass doors of a large cabinet'.

In this unique exploratory study Kirkman has shown how TV soaps can be used to reach otherwise unreachable groups within society.

## IN BRIEF

Excessive alcohol use has a detrimental effect upon selective aspects of everyday memory in both adults and teenagers, according to two studies led by Thomas Heffernan (Northumbria University).

Individuals with either very low or very high insight into their schizophrenia were more satisfied with their social support than those with medium levels of insight, according to Suzanne Kaiser (University of Manchester).

An internal health locus of control was positively correlated with breast and testicular self-examination in women and men, according to a study by Penelope List and colleagues (Keele University). Women were found to be more anxious about breast than bowel cancer, and also more anxious about breast cancer than men were about testicular cancer.

Relationships developed via online dating services progress more quickly than those developed via chatrooms, according to a study by Monica Whitty (Queen's University Belfast). In addition, people who were honest about themselves went on to have more successful relationships than those who presented an 'ideal' self.

Events experienced during war that affirm communal identity are less traumatic than those that are interpreted as a violation of norms, according to a study of Kosovo Albanians by Blerina Kellezi (St Andrew's University). People who had the former experience were also more likely to make use of social support resources.

Patients are increasingly going online to find health information. Elaine Brohan (University of Surrey) found that GPs cope well with this, adopting flexible position in dealing with such patients. However, GPs did report feeling that patients who used the net did not trust them.

It has been suggested that there are two types of paranoia – 'good me' and 'bad me' – relating to beliefs about deservedness of persecution. A study by Sara Melo (University of Manchester) found that patients' perceptions of deservedness varied across time, suggesting that 'good me' and 'bad me' may reflect stages of the same dynamic process.

# The age of acquisition

PADRAIC MONAGHAN reports on a vibrant area.

COUNTERINTUITIVELY, the objects, names and memories we first learn and store are easier to access and process than those learned much later and experienced more recently. This phenomenon is termed the 'age of acquisition' (AoA) effect, and it has attracted considerable interest over the last 30 years. Viv Moore (Goldsmiths College) and Catriona Morrison (University of Leeds) organised a symposium to bring together 18 talks by researchers from the UK, France and the US to discuss contemporary research on this topic.

There has been much recent interest in the view that AoA provides insight into fundamental principles of the cognitive systems of storage and processing of stimuli. Providing a detailed exploration and explanation of such effects requires an effective description of the structure of the memory system itself, in particular the dynamic shaping of the system that takes place across time. Furthermore, AoA effects, if fundamental to cognition, may be observed across many fields of cognition, for a variety of stimulus types and tasks. Michael Lewis (Cardiff University) specified this intense interest in AoA effects, by identifying more than 350 papers published in the area in the last 30 years by 657 different researchers.

As chair and discussant, Ken Gilhooly (University of Paisley) identified three key themes from the talks in the symposium:

- Are AoA effects anything more than frequency effects? Events that were experienced earlier may be repeated more often than those that were experienced later. Patrick Bonin (Université de Blaise Pascal), Marc Brysbaert (Royal Holloway), Barbara Juhasz (University of Massachusetts, Amherst) and Philip

Smith (University of Reading) debated this issue, suggesting that AoA effects are distinct from frequency effects, but that the two may operate in tandem.

- How wide-ranging are AoA effects? AoA effects can be found across several languages (Ilhan Raman, University of Middlesex), in autobiographical memory (Catriona Morrison), in normal and dyslexic readers (Jamie Smith-Spark, Cancer Research UK) and for participants of various ages (Viv Moore). However, particular experience matters, with girls and boys learning words at very different ages (Elaine Funnell, Royal Holloway), and AoA effects may be greater for naming objects than actions (Jackie Masterson, University of Essex).
- How might AoA effects work? Andy Ellis and Padraic Monaghan (University of York) presented a computational model of reading indicating that early experience takes advantage of greater flexibility in representing information. Kevin Dent and Jon Catling (University of Birmingham) found that AoA effects seemed to be located in mappings between pictures, words, and meanings, rather than within the representations themselves. Furthermore, these AoA effects were greater for unpredictable or uncorrelated mappings, such as between pictures and names in contrast to between written and spoken forms of words.

The symposium highlighted the fruitful range of AoA research and pointed towards future directions in further specifying the mechanisms of early experience in cognitive processing, and expanding the search for AoA effects across different areas of psychology.

## Expanding the mind

**CHRISTIAN JARRETT** reports from a symposium 'Theory of mind: Cross-cultural and transpersonal perspectives'.

If you're a contemporary Western psychologist, then to you 'theory of mind' (ToM) probably refers to the inherent ability most of us have to think about and recognise the thoughts, feelings and intentions of others. But speakers at this symposium were interested in what people think the human mind is, and how this varies around the world. So, for example, Jorge Ferrer (California Institute of Integral Studies), citing the book *The Absent Body* by Drew Leder, described how so many people in the West have become mentally detached from their bodies, living their lives entirely 'in their heads'. To Ferrer, this is sad, because the mind is embodied and we should do everything we can – like Zen mediation or t'ai chi – to cultivate a fuller union between our mind and body.

Similarly, you might think the different emotions you experience – happiness, fear, and so on – are universal. But according to Anthony Marcel's model (described by Michael Beaton in the former's absence), our emotional experiences depend on the verbal, culturally defined categories we've

learned, much as is found with colours and the ability to perceive certain vocal sounds. Consider *accidie*, the medieval English emotional concept lying somewhere between sloth and depression, or *amae*, recognised in Japanese as the comfort of others' presence.

But then again, perhaps Westerners are not as reductionist as some might think. Analysing the beliefs of 250 undergraduates, Adam Zeman (University of Edinburgh) found an inherent contradiction: while 81 per cent thought consciousness depends on the brain, 67 per cent thought the mind and brain were separate and 70 per cent believed in spiritual life after death.

Isabel Clarke (Royal South Hants Hospital) said a broader view of the mind has clinical implications. Such thinking is already responsible for a 'third wave' of cognitive therapies, including the 'mindfulness' technique – simply noting, rather than being overtaken by, the internal dialogue that maintains the moment-by-moment experience of the self. Be warned,

though, Clarke said she's known cases of too much mindfulness leading to psychosis!

To Chris Sinha (University of Portsmouth), not only is the mind embodied, it is out there in things. 'Language and artefacts are vehicles for the construction of virtual worlds', he said. Just consider the cognition anchored in things like calendars and rulers, or how we describe 'fictive motion' in sentences like 'the tunnel goes from Dover to Calais' as we form a representation of the act of moving through the tunnel.

And according to Les Lancaster (Liverpool John Moores University), where neuroscience now treads, mystical thinking has already been. Take evidence for the ubiquity of illusion in our sense of agency and perception – the Koran described such 'ego-less' phenomena centuries ago: 'When I [Allah] love my servant... I become the hearing with which he hears, the seeing with which he sees, the hand with which he grasps, the feet with which he walks, the tongue with which he speaks.'

## Frubbles and wibbles

**ILONA BONIWELL** on the vocabulary of multiple relationships.

Do you know who are the metamours? Ethical sluts? What about frubbling? The paper 'Constructing a new language of relationships for polyamory' by Meg Barker (London South Bank University) and Ani Richie (Southampton Institute) was both character and vocabulary building. Ever imagined honestly and openly sharing your loved one with someone else? This is not about cheating or philandering, but about a relationship philosophy that 'recognises people's capacity to share and multiply their love in honest and consensual ways'. If upon hearing the word multiply, the notion of swinging springs to mind, don't get confused – swinging is about recreational sex, whereas polyamory is about relationships.

Whilst everyone knows that relationships are not easy, sustaining multiple intimate relationships is potentially

more gratifying but even harder. Not only because of the number of people involved, having to find time and energy, working out all the mechanics of who, where and how, but also because of the lack of language appropriate to this relationship philosophy. The paper, which was based on the analysis of texts and discourses of the members of polyamorous community on the web, discussed the invention of a new vocabulary that describes behaviour and experiences of 'polys'.

Using our everyday language, how would you call 'the other', or the partner of the person you are in a relationship with? Try this new word, 'metamour', for size. And how would you explain that you are a little bit jealous but this is not something to be taken very seriously? Saying: 'I am feeling wibbly, I can use a few extra hugs', means the person is really OK, but a little bit insecure. Feeling 'frubbly', on the other hand, refers to an experience unimaginable within the monogamous paradigm – the feeling of being happy about your partner's other relationships.

If a social-constructionist approach is anything to go by, and cultural vocabularies really enable or constrain our experience of emotions, then a few years down the road we might find ourselves experiencing feelings we didn't know existed and involved in relationships beyond our wildest monogamous dreams.

# Minority report

**CHRISTIAN JARRETT** on efforts to improve the higher education experience of minority groups.

**M**OST applied psychologists are white and female, yet government policy is for practitioners to match the demographics of the people they serve as closely as possible. Furthermore, by 2010 the government wants 50 per cent of the population to attend university, and is especially keen for more people from socially and economically excluded groups to graduate. In response, the Society published a report last year that included recommendations for how to widen access to psychology. This sounds good, but evidence is showing that completion rates are worryingly low among students from a minority background. That is, while steps are being taken to get more people from underrepresented groups to go to university, apparently little is being done to ensure the quality of their experience once they get there.

It's in that context that speakers at the symposium 'Widening participation and social exclusion' presented evidence for what people from minority groups – including mature students, gay people, and people of Afro-Caribbean and South Asian origin – said about their experience of studying psychology. All the speakers were members of the University of Westminster's Widening Participation Study Group.

**Chris Askew is at the University of Sussex**

**Ilona Boniwell is at the Open University**

**Fatima Covacha is at the Open University**

**Sandie Cleland is at the University of York**

**Christian Jarrett is staff journalist for *The Psychologist***

**Joanne Lawson is at the University of Sussex**

**Padraic Monaghan is at the University of York**

**Julie Morgan is at the University of Sussex**

**Jon Sutton is editor of *The Psychologist***

Della Drees and colleagues surveyed 110 first-year psychology students at the start of the academic year and then again at the year's end. A key finding was that while mature students reported being more satisfied overall with their psychology course compared with young students, they also showed a disproportionate drop in their satisfaction from the beginning of the year to the end. Mature students also expressed more financial concerns. Meanwhile, those students who were the first in their family to attend university expressed more academic ambition than other students.

Ian Hodges said little is known about the experience of gay men in psychology. In an effort to find out, he and Carol Pearson have so far conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 gay male psychology students aged 21 to 45. Using grounded theory principles they found four emerging themes. Firstly, the men said they hadn't gone into psychology with the expectation they would learn about sexual issues. Secondly, they reported feeling excluded. Some felt the curriculum was homophobic, and several thought that coverage of homosexual issues should be embedded in the curriculum rather than being 'bolted on'. Thirdly, the students talked about their coping strategies – they said they had to be careful what they said about sexuality, and although they could be 'out', it was not easy and they had to be selective about which other students and staff they were open with. Finally, the participants said their sexuality meant they

had to clearly separate their personal and student lives. In response to these findings, Hodges said it was time psychology fully recognised homosexuality as a normal form of sexual expression, and that procedures and policies should be implemented that would enable more inclusive teaching and training.

What about the experience of gay women? Sue Smith and Carol Pearson have so far interviewed eight white lesbian psychology students from four universities. The women reported feeling positive about the effect of studying psychology on their career development and personal achievement, but they felt marginalised on their course. Fellow heterosexual female students expressed curiosity or homophobia, while discomfort among male members of staff was also apparent. Like the gay male students reported earlier, these participants also criticised the psychology curriculum, which they felt to be androcentric and heterocentric. One interviewee said: 'I mean it is all so male dominated and you know, why are we as women and I as a lesbian listening to men lecture about age-old research that bears no relevance to anybody, let alone lesbians? I mean it really is quite insulting.'

Sanjay Jobanputra concluded the symposium by presenting a qualitative analysis of interviews with 14 black psychology students, five of Afro-Caribbean origin and nine originating from the Indian subcontinent. Most reported enjoying psychology, yet pain and shock at

some of the material on the psychology course were also felt. This led the students to 'disconnect' from much of what they experienced. 'The way things are taught, you would think all the psychologists in the world were white,' one student said. Another added: 'For instance, some magazines like *The Psychologist* magazine

– that Rushton chap [known for his controversial work on racial differences] put an article in there. I really couldn't understand why that was in there'.

Jobanputra concluded that too much emphasis was being placed on diversity, and not enough on inclusivity – how to treat people once they were at university.

## CBT dissected

JOANNE LAWSON reports from the M.B. Shapiro Award Lecture.

**T**URNING theory into therapy is a perennial problem for clinical psychologists, and never more so than when the theory comes from non-clinical research. With that in mind, Chris Brewin's talk gave an impressive and heartening vision of how mainstream academic psychology can inform therapeutic practice.

Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) is widely and successfully used to treat a variety of psychological problems. The underlying philosophy is that we are rational beings, acting on the basis of our conscious thoughts and knowledge, and that changing those thoughts and knowledge can change our feelings and behaviour. Whether you agree with this or not, CBT undeniably works. And if it ain't broke, why fix it? What Professor Brewin showed was that it doesn't have to be broke to benefit from a little tinkering.

Firstly, we aren't always rational. If rationality ruled our worlds, then no one would play the lottery. Secondly, mainstream psychology now recognises

lots of different memory and knowledge systems, not all of which are open to introspection and manipulation. You may say you know how to ride a bike, but can you tell me how you ride a bike? Thirdly, if therapy is a re-educational process, changing our representations of ourselves and the world, how can we explain the frequency of patients' relapse? Theoretical research on learning has increasingly concluded that learning new representations does not involve unlearning the old representations. Rather, old and new representations compete with one another. When patients relapse, it could be that old dysfunctional representations have received a boost in activation, or the new, more functional, representations may have been temporarily blocked.

Brewin proposed that CBT can be reformulated in line with these insights. The way we think about ourselves is influenced by much more than our verbalisable thoughts. Autobiographical memory and self-perception reside in images, hypothetical scenarios and vivid sensory memories of particular incidents as much as they reside in conscious knowledge about what has actually happened in our lives. Multiple memory systems and knowledge stores allow for the possibility of multiple self-representations. We may be familiar with having 'ideal' and 'true' selves; taking this further, Brewin mentioned the helpfulness of bringing out the concept of a 'feared self' when working with patients with obsessive compulsive disorder, who may fear a reckless and negligent version of themselves.

The notion of multiple competing memory systems means that therapy can focus on harnessing and activating helpful representations at the expense of unhelpful ones. Therapy can try to create strong links

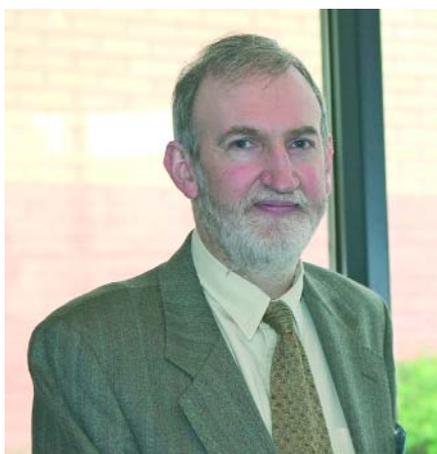
## IN THE CHILD'S BEST INTEREST

FATIMA P. COVACHA reports on how language has major implications for lesbian and gay foster parents.

PSYCHOLOGICAL models heavily influence decisions about foster-care placements in Australia. The most established one is developmentalism, which emphasises that the adult controls and determines the child's pathway to maturity. And as Damien Riggs (University of Adelaide) further demonstrated, heterosexual parenting is honoured as the only valid form of parenting. This heterosexism is clearly given legal force both in the Children's Protection Act 1993 and the Family and Community Services Act 1972. When explaining their abilities as good foster parents, gay and lesbian couples also have to adopt a psychological language that privileges heterosexual couples (marriage, parent, family, etc.). Gay men may be discriminated against, and gay and lesbian couples are often seen as 'last resort' foster parents. As the foster-care crisis prevails, however, Riggs calls for a need to look away from psychological accounts and narrow models of the family. Instead, we need to develop an agenda that puts gay and lesbian parents on an equal footing with heterosexual parents. Lastly, Riggs says we also need to prioritise gay and lesbian accounts of parenting, and give children themselves a voice in deciding what they believe to be in their own best interests.

between these helpful representations and the current context so that they come to dominate one's thinking. Brewin contrasted this 'constructive' approach to CBT to the traditional 'rationalist' approach – building up the internal opposition to unhelpful self-representations rather than trying to use rationality to defeat them.

Listening to Brewin's exposition of these ideas was rather like watching a master surgeon at work: CBT was cut open; the underlying theoretical assumptions were taken out and reassessed in the light of current psychological theories; some bits were taken away and some were added; and finally CBT was sewn back together, hopefully to wake up fitter and stronger, and ready to get back to work.



Chris Brewin