Living, and thinking about it

At the Society's Annual Conference, Daniel Kahneman reflected on the psychological science of well-being

It's comforting to know that even Nobel Prize winners get nervous in front of a crowd. 'I'm feeling a little intimidated', said Professor Daniel Kahneman (Princeton University), opening the Annual Conference with his keynote presentation 'Reflections on the science of well-being'. It's also heartening to know that Nobel Prize winners sometimes get things wrong. Alongside data and theory, Kahneman discussed key moments when his thinking changed, explaining that 'of all the questions I have worked on, there are few topics about which I've changed my mind so often'.

For example, a lukewarm correlation between income and happiness initially persuaded Kahneman that beyond a certain point, money stops making the world go round. 'An embarrassing cognitive error', he admits, and one that probably reflects our eagerness to believe that wealth isn't all it's cracked up to be.

In fact, as economist Angus Deaton showed, money really does make us happy. We just need to apply the right statistical analysis to global data, making use of Weber's law: for example, a $600 increase in salary would make a much bigger difference to someone in Togo than in Switzerland. So using log GDP produces a very high correlation between a country's economic prosperity on the one hand, and 'Ladder of Life' scores of its citizens on the other. The Ladder of Life is a tool used to measure global life satisfaction. Respondents indicate 'where they stand at this time' on a 10-rung ladder, with the top rung representing the best possible life for them, and the bottom rung representing the worst.

Ladder of Life scores have been recorded for more than 140,000 people in 132 countries. Denmark currently tops the world happiness poll, with the average Dane scoring 8 out of 10. But although a country's gross domestic product predicts some aspects of well-

Sohan Patel

The conference took place in Dublin... a good choice as Ireland come fifth on the world happiness poll with a score of 7.8

Going global for net gains

It is estimated that 96 per cent of published studies in developmental psychology feature research that was carried out in industrialised countries; so how can developmental psychology be effectively deployed in a global context? In this compelling talk, Professor Christine Liddell (University of Ulster) argued that developmental psychology does have a key role to play in informing child-health programmes across the world.

Liddell provided the example of insecticide-treated bednets. In malarial zones, children's risk of contracting the disease is significantly reduced if they sleep under one of these bednets. There have recently been large-scale programmes to distribute bednets as widely as possible, with around 150 million distributed worldwide so far. The ideal situation would be that everybody who receives a bednet would adhere to using it. If this were the case, it is estimated that one child's life could be saved for every 10 nets distributed. However, the reality is that there is a low adherence to bednet use, with perhaps one child's life saved per 180 nets distributed. This is still a great outcome, but we have to ask ourselves whether psychologists can play a role in raising adherence to the programme.

The model of choice for interventions such as the bednet scheme is the knowledge, attitudes, behaviour and practice (KABP) model of human behaviour. This operates under the assumption that mass education campaigns and social marketing aimed at improving people's knowledge about disease and effective interventions will result in a positive change in attitudes and behaviour towards these interventions. However, Liddell argued that the KABP's effectiveness is in fact limited; it turns out that a change in knowledge doesn't necessarily mean a change in attitude, behaviour or practice.

Liddell instead argued that Azjen's theory of planned behaviour (TPB) may be a more effective framework to approach the problem of adherence to interventions. The TPB varies from the KABP in that it incorporates the roles of beliefs, subjective norms and perceived control into predicting the likelihood of people changing their behaviour. Liddell argued that beliefs and perceived control may be particularly crucial in a case such as bednet use. Limited levels of perceived control may impact on bednet use because of the difficulty of maintaining them; they are fragile, difficult to use and require considerable maintenance.

Liddell also argued that the KABP neglects to take into account people's

being, it doesn't tell the whole story. Government corruption is a better predictor of 'experienced happiness', measured by asking how often participants found themselves smiling, frowning, feeling frustrated, in pain, and so on, during the previous day.

In Kahneman's hybrid model of well-being, experienced happiness and global life satisfaction have asymmetric effects on one another, which explains why they are imperfectly correlated. Reflecting on our general happiness doesn't affect what we experience day-to-day, but everyday money worries or concerns about our weight stick in memory and bias estimates of global life satisfaction. Referring to this effect as the 'focusing illusion', Kahneman concludes that 'nothing in life matters quite as much as you think it does while you are thinking about it.'

For Kahneman, the path to true happiness is changing attention, not the positive psychology focus of engagement and meaning. '"Meaning" is thoughts about living, it is not living', he said, expertly drawing another distinction that had people thinking and talking for the rest of the conference. Now that's what you expect from a Nobel Prize winner. SH

existing beliefs, and that these can be important when designing interventions. There is a tendency for people in the developed world to believe that traditional beliefs about illness in the developing world are a barrier to learning about the treatment of disease. However, Liddell presented some evidence that this is not the case; in fact, it appears that a belief in agency of any kind (whether supernatural or not) may make people more open to any causal taxonomy, biomedical or otherwise. Liddell argued that being informed by the TPB and actively incorporating existing beliefs, could result in more effective interventions. To return to the insecticide-treated bednets as an example, a relatively minor but potentially effective tactic could be to allow people the option of collecting bednets from their traditional healer. SC

Psychology as an international science

Presidents from national psychology associations across the world joined me, Pam Maras (as BPS President), and Mitchell Fleming (President of the Psychological Society of Ireland) for this roundtable discussion.

A number of recurring global and local themes emerged. For example, the large challenges to society of energy use, health and health disparities were outlined by Alan Kazdin (American Psychological Association) and others. Relatively local issues, such as standards of training in Europe were referred to by Roal Ulrichsen (European Federation of Psychologists' Associations and Danish Psychological Association), who pointed to the EuroPsy diploma as a means of addressing disparities between different EU member countries. Adam Niemczynski (Polish Psychological Association) echoed these issues and described the rapid increase in psychology associations in Poland.

Training and standards were seen as important across the board. Amanda Gordon (Australian Psychological Society) noted an Australian internet leadership programme that made training accessible to psychologists working in remote areas. Relatedly, Saths Cooper (Psychological Society of South Africa) asked whether psychology was addressing majority concerns. He pointed out that in South Africa as in many countries' universities, internships and placement sites tend to be urban, leaving rural areas largely unserved. He also said that large parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America see psychology as an auxiliary subject, and that the feminisation of psychology leads (mostly male) policy makers to belittle psychology.

All of the presidents referred to the need to take account of changing geo-politics of conflict, poverty and health. Discussants agreed that whilst psychologists can provide evidence for human behaviour, we need to be aware of the limitations of psychology in relation to these big ideas. Advances in brain/neuroscience prompted discussion about the dualism of psychology, particularly in terms of the Euro-American knowledge base of science and practice, which it was suggested inevitably resulted in skewed patterns of publication exacerbated by the use of English as the language of psychology. It was agreed that psychology is increasingly seen as an evidence-based science from which psychologists are taking a much broader perspective than in the past to complex issues, leading to better formulations and more comprehensive interventions as well as an emphasis on positive mental health and ways of enhancing human potential.

Several participants focused on the issue of identity and possible fragmenting of the discipline. Alan Kazdin said that psychology needs to be more cohesive and build a stronger identity, even as a 'hub science' interested in anything from molecules to culture. Psychologists need training to meet world challenges, taking on board cultural, ethical and international perspectives.

The session concluded with general agreement on a need for psychology to identify of issues of concern to people, governments, policy makers and funders – not just to psychologists. This roundtable was the first of its kind held by the BPS and is part of a move towards extending our international partnerships, embedding international relations firmly within the governance structure with clear lines of reporting, representation and accountability. A working group will report in the summer on processes and systems for this. PM

ADHD AND SELF-IMAGE

Children with ADHD think more poorly of themselves than those with more specific learning difficulties. In a study by Ger Scanlon and colleagues (National University of Ireland), all participants scored in the normal range on an explicit questionnaire measure of self-esteem. But a more implicit measure, in which children learned to associate their own names with positive (e.g. 'accepted', 'popular') and negative words (e.g. 'faulty', 'useless'), showed that those with attention difficulties had a poorer self-image than children with dyslexia. SH

Inspirational reading

According to American essayist and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'if we encounter a person of rare intellect, we should ask them what books they read'. This symposium did just that, with an impressive assembled panel of developmental psychologists. Their own books have influenced the lives of children, but what influenced them?

First up was Professor Barbara Tizard (Institute of Education), choosing books that reflect her longstanding interest in the individual in a social context. John Bowlby's *Maternal Care and Mental Health* was described as 'an anti-influence', with Tizard clearly disagreeing with the book's conclusions over the critical period for attachment and the exclusive role of the mother. Was the book written to get women, who had been liberated by wartime work, back into the home? Tizard noted dryly that Northern women had for generations been working in the mills, with no apparent North–South divide in psychopathy. However, Tizard noted the positives of Bowlby's work: that he considerably revised his theories over the years, and they led to more humane children's care while dealing a blow to orthodox psychoanalysis.

Tizard also chose *Asylums* by Erving Goffman, for the way it inspired her to apply his concept of controlling, dehumanising 'total institutions' to nurseries. Jerome Bruner, a 'great welder of ideas', got the thumbs up for *The Culture of Education* – 'it reads like a voice from the past, but one I wish was heard more today'. Martin Bulmer's *Social Policy Research* completed Tizard's choices, for showing the importance of an 'appeal to rationality in policy making'.

Professor Susan Golombok (City University) took centre stage next, choosing empirically based 'books you can have confidence in'. She kicked off with Michael Rutter's *Maternal Deprivation Reassessed*, which showed 'how systematic research and careful consideration of empirical literature could really help to separate fact from myth – here, the myths of Bowlby, 'the big bad wolf of psychology'. However, Golombok also chose Bowlby's work, finding a 'force and beauty' to it. 'It is important to read big books and not others' accounts of them', she said.

Golombok's other choices reflected her interest in sex differences and feminism. Maccoby and Jacklin's *The Psychology of Sex Differences* represented 'a painstaking approach to analysing research', and Money and Ehrhardt's *Man*

WINNING HEARTS

This year's winner of the Society's Award for Promoting Equality of Opportunity, Adrian Webster (Lambeth Hospital), works to improve the acceptability and accessibility of mental health care services for black and ethnic minority clients. 'I am a white male', began Webster, 'and the fact that I work in this area arouses curiosity in many people... But inequalities are the responsibility of everyone.'

The hallmark of Webster's approach has been to consult with diverse local communities about their needs and desires, and tailor treatments accordingly. Webster contrasted his bottom-up approach, where the goal is 'winning hearts', with the top-down approach of the last two decades, where practitioners merely follow government initiatives. This can lead to practitioners merely 'ticking boxes' and viewing guidelines as obstacles to their 'real work'. Using a more nuanced and tailored approach can benefit everyone – practitioners as well as clients. **AM**

MAKING A SOCIODRAMA OUT OF A CRISIS

'Okay folks. See that chair? Imagine it's the BPS conference. Where are you in relation to the conference this week? Go and stand there.' Ron Wiener (MPV/SAM) dumps a chair in the middle of Conference Room 1, and eyes us expectantly. Has he lost the plot? Why no, he's just facilitating 'An introduction to sociodrama and action methods'. He is ably assisted here by Marc Adams (Marc Adams Associates), an occupational psychologist who specialises in helping organisations deal with issues of equality and diversity. The 'chair' exercise was one of several workshop activities enthusiastically tackled by a group of delegates on the final morning of the conference.

Sociodrama was developed by Jacob Moreno (1889–1974), a Viennese psychiatrist associated with role theory, group psychotherapy, and sociometry. Used worldwide to develop creativity and productivity, sociodrama encourages participants to the think about the ways in which the various components of a social system might impact on one another. For example, a group of managers might enact a thorny employment issue, with different members taking on not only the roles of the protagonists in that situation, but also the unseen pressures and unspoken voices that might be affecting their behaviours. Speaking aloud thoughts and beliefs that are usually hidden helps to bring tensions and difficulties to the surface, so that they can be explored safely in a group. Ultimately, the aim is to help teams and organisations solve problems and develop greater interpersonal understanding.

Back to the 'BPS chair'. Having arranged ourselves around it like planets orbiting the sun, Ron asks each of us why we're standing where we're standing. Anything to say to the chair-cum-conference-organisers? Comments include 'This conference is dry and boring!', 'Why all the experimental psychology?' and 'It's so clique-y. I'd like to get more involved but I don't know how'.

Somewhat unexpectedly, the sociodrama kicks in for real. One of our group really is a member of the BPS Conference Committee, and she responds to the comments with admirable composure. The group listens respectfully, and some express an interest in helping to organise future events. Suddenly we see the power of the participatory workshop format. Instead of 'Death by PowerPoint', we have actually experienced sociodrama in action. The group agrees that the hands-on, learning-by-doing approach has been like a breath of fresh air. Here's hoping for more of this kind of thing at the next year's conference in Brighton. **SH** *and Woman, Boy and Girl* showed the intriguing mix of social and biological effects on gender role behaviour. Golombok's final choice was in fact a magazine article, from *Spare Rib* in 1976. Its call from Action for Lesbian Parents for an independent psychologist to do research on lesbian parenting started Golombok on a path of research that she still follows. By coincidence, a newspaper article that very day reported that Ireland is unlikely to allow same-sex joint adoptive parents.

Professor Helen Haste (University of Bath) was absent through illness, but her choices were outlined, including a children's book from 1937. Eve Garnett's *The Family from One End Street* gave Haste an insight into a different social class world, and showed the importance of children as active creators of their own environment.

Finally Professor Michael Lamb (University of Cambridge), describing himself as an 'accidental psychologist', began his selections with Alan Payton's *Cry the Beloved Country*, 'an eloquent and moving account of the damage wrought by racism in South Africa'. Lamb grew up there, and used to bump into Payton on walks while there was a banning order restricting him from group meetings.

Lamb's next choice was Paul Samuelson's *Economics*, which 'clearly explains the forest without getting lost in the trees'. Charnov and Orians' *Optimal Foraging Theory*, a book never actually published but now available for download, got the nod for its 'more adaptive and flexible view of human behaviour'. And finally that man Bowlby again, for *Attachment and Loss*: the 'first multi-level analysis of behaviour', and one 'that psychology has seldom achieved in subsequent work'.

Perhaps that was the one cloud amongst plenty of silver lining in a fascinating session: where are the modern era books to influence the next generation? **JS**

Big deal or no deal

The lights dim. Background music swells to a menacing crescendo. Tension in the studio is almost palpable as an old-fashioned telephone rings... TV game show *Deal or No Deal* is a pleasant enough way to kill 45 minutes before dinner, but can it tell us anything interesting about the psychology of decision making?

For those with more discerning tastes in early-evening entertainment, here's a quick run-down of the show. *Deal or No Deal* is a game based entirely on luck, in which every player is a winner. Contestants choose one sealed box from 22 at the start of the game, with each box containing a cash prize between 1p and £250,000. The 21 unselected boxes are opened one-by-one, and after every three boxes, a mysterious 'Banker' phones to offer the contestant a cash settlement. They can accept the Banker's offer, or gamble that the value of their box is higher and keep playing. Even if the contestant 'deals', the game continues to its bitter end, with the contents of all 22 boxes (plus the Banker's hypothetical deals) being revealed along the way. This little trick helps the game fill an appointed slot in the schedule, and cranks up the tension as contestants find out exactly what they could have won.

Professor Peter Ayton and Meri Pesola (City University) gave blow-by-blow descriptions of a show to 115 internet participants, who were asked to rate how happy each of 10 contestants would feel at the end of their game. Unsurprisingly, perceived happiness was strongly linked to how much money the contestant actually won. But this effect was mediated by the events of the game. For example, contestants who dealt too late (walking away with a lower amount than had previously been offered) were rated as less happy than those who dealt too soon (where they accepted a prize lower than a subsequent 'offer').

Ayton speculated that this is because events of the past are more concrete and psychologically real than those of the hypothetical future. 'Dealt too late' contestants know for sure that they could have gone home with a bigger prize. Those who dealt too soon can convince themselves that a subsequent offer might not have come about if they'd played the game differently. **SH**

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

'Who do you think you are?' That was the response Jill Arnold (Nottingham Trent University) received on saying she wanted to study psychology, and it also informed her talk here. According to Arnold, we rarely step back and look at who we are. Receiving the Society's Award for Excellence in the Teaching of Psychology, she called on the audience to re-examine their sense of professional identity as multifunctional psychologists.

Encouraging reflective practice, Arnold called on teachers of psychology to challenge and change their students, or risk losing the psychological community that we have now. Inquiry is and should be unsettling, she said – students sometimes say 'please don't make me think', but that's exactly what must be done, enabling the student to own and engage with the material.

Arnold also encouraged teachers to retain their curiosity. Even after a career teaching psychology across the board, she says she is always learning, and would like to sit in on her colleagues' teaching modules!

According to Arnold, another challenge is for women: to stay true to their values in a system riven with sexism and racism. A shocking example from a Hans Eysenck lecture, which led to Arnold walking out, illustrated her point.

It was a bold and individual talk, and perhaps that was Arnold's main point: we must be bold enough for reflection. **JS**

Avoiding the auto pilot

Millions of pounds are spent in flat countries putting bends in motorways where they aren't needed. They are just to activate the brain on long boring trips; otherwise, people just drive off them. Our brains rapidly habituate to frequent stimuli and cease to activate the neural processes associated with conscious attention; the result is 'auto pilot'. Professor Ian Robertson (Trinity College, Dublin) has spent a career looking at the privileged role attention plays in our everyday lives, our thoughts, feelings, traits, goals, behaviour, and especially self-awareness. In Robertson's words, just as it is possible to suddenly become aware of a smudge on a window that one is looking through, so it is possible to become aware of some facet of self – state, trait, goals or behaviour – in the midst of an activity.

By using fMRI brain imaging techniques, Robertson explained, we have come to find out more about the functional role that specific regions of the brain occupy. The dorsolateral prefrontal cortex is the last area to develop in the human brain and the last to develop in evolution. It is the region activated in change blindness – 'the basis of all magic', says Robertson – the region responsible for sustained attention, and it is important in self-assessment. The neural processes of conscious attention are not fully developed until the early twenties: this could explain high car insurance premiums in young drivers!

Children with ADHD show marked deficits in sustained attention as well as impaired insight and arousal. These children fail to realise that they are making errors, and the more they fail, the greater the discrepancy between self-ratings and reality. There appear to be two systems in the brain relating to this: a conscious error system and an unconscious system. In children with ADHD, it is the conscious system that is impaired, often preventing the children from self-correcting.

In his keynote talk, Robertson outlined some approaches to modifying these states of deficient self-awareness, including mindfulness training, goal management training and arousal-modifying techniques. The good news is that techniques such as meditation can eliminate the age effects of sustained attention impairments. Most importantly, awareness of these factors can save lives. For example, by using a simple alert set at random intervals we are able to keep people attentive and from driving off the side of motorways during long uneventful trips. Because we are using external alerts, we do not need internal ones and so cognitive resources are freed up. SB

FIT FOR LIFE?

Have you ever started going to the gym and given up after a while? Well, you won't be alone, as around 80 per cent of people give up on exercise programmes within one year. This might mean many new customers for the local gym but the problem of inactivity has serious health consequences and financial implications. The World Health Organization estimates that 60 per cent of people are inactive, and suggest that just 30 minutes a day of moderate exercise on most days is all that is needed to maintain a healthy heart.

On the path to fitness, people often seek help from specialists such as personal trainers. Dr Chris Shields (Acadia University, Canada) looked at self-regulation and the perception of other's beliefs in one's own efficacy over a 10-week cardiac rehabilitation programme. He found that the degree to which we feel confident in our instructor's competency is important, but this may ultimately lead to dependence on them and reduce self-reliance, which is critical for long-term positive outcomes.

Similarly, Dr Kathleen Martin-Ginis and her colleagues at McMaster University in Canada examined the effects of self-regulatory depletion in relation to exercise motivation. They tested a model that could offer one explanation for the widespread lack of adherence to fitness programmes. 'Baumeister's limited strength model' suggests that self-control is a finite, renewable cognitive resource that is drained when people try to regulate their emotions, thoughts or behaviours. They showed that people who are mentally exhausted after a complex thinking task are considerably less likely to intend to take part in exercise.

Ultimately, it seems the factors that predict exercise adherence are youth, higher self-efficacy, and less reliance on the trainer. The take home message might be that we should not expect to succeed in demanding exercise programmes if other areas of our lives are placing too much of a strain on us. A holistic approach to physical exercise could provide the greatest chance of achieving physical fitness goals. SB

Spotlight on autism

From the early days of autism research, studies have reported differences in attention. One idea is that autism involves a more focused spotlight of attention, with enhanced processing within the spotlight and reduced processing outside. Others propose that autism involves more general impairments of attention, with difficulties in disengaging and shifting.

Dr Chris Ashwin (University of Essex and University of Cambridge) asked people with autism to spot changes in pairs of pictures with a white screen 'flicker' presented briefly between them. The results revealed intact or even superior detection mechanisms in people with autism when changes occurred within the spotlight of attention. However, they were more likely to miss changes outside the focus of attention than non-autistic people were.

New work by Professor Peter Mitchell (University of Nottingham) suggested that high-functioning individuals with autism are often surprisingly attentive to some visual cues, including those signalled by the eyes of others.

Mixed feelings about mixed methods

The rise of mixed-methods research – usually taken to mean the combining of qualitative and quantitative methodologies – has delighted Professor Alan Bryman, a sociologist at the University of Leicester who has been writing on the subject for more than 20 years. Indeed, Bryman's review of papers published across five subject areas between 1994 and 2003, revealed a burgeoning enterprise: 232 mixed-methods studies, with three times as many published in 2003 relative to 1994. And yet Bryman is concerned.

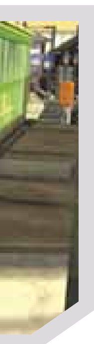
The literature review, together with interviews Bryman conducted with researchers, shows that the majority of mixed-methods papers fail to integrate their qualitative and quantitative approaches. Bryman also fears that mixed methods are being seen mistakenly as a cynical fast-track to funding.

'We need a greater emphasis on the writing of mixed methods,' Bryman concluded, 'not just the doing.' He added that there was a need to reflect on exemplary mixed-methods papers, such as the 2004 study by University of East Anglia researchers into the UK foot and mouth crisis (tinyurl.com/2oeoyu). 'They did a terrific job of bringing their research findings together,' he said.

Earlier, Professor Paul Flowers of Glasgow Caledonian University showed how qualitative research can be used to enhance its quantitative cousin. His own qualitative research looking at safe-sex practices among gay men uncovered tales of self-sacrifice and love, which were a far cry from the dry theories of quantitative psychology, such as the theory of planned behaviour. In this way, qualitative research can highlight the episodic, developmental factors that longitudinal quantitative research has so far neglected. The immediate, emotional nature of qualitative research also gives a voice to research participants – a pertinent issue given contemporary policy moves towards giving greater recognition to the views of service users.

James Good at Durham University and Professor Steven Brown at Kent State University gave a guided tour of perhaps the ultimate mixed method – Q-methodology – which is still relatively unknown in the UK. Developed by William Stephenson in the early part of the 20th century, Q-methodology involves applying quantitative methods to the study of people's subjective opinions. Participants are asked to arrange the views of others on a given topic, according to how closely they agree with them. Patterns of agreement across multiple participants can then be factor analysed, thus revealing key areas of disagreement or overlap in opinion. By looking for correlations between participants, based on their views, the technique represents an inverse of the more typical use of factor analysis, which is to seek correlations not between participants, but between variables across a sample of participants.

The Q-method can help untangle the knots of real-world disagreement. Brown gave the example of a study that looked at views on large carnivore conservation held by park rangers and environmentalists – rival groups who had actually faced each other in court (tinyurl.com/5545ve). The Q-method identified the key areas of dispute between the groups but also highlighted areas of common ground, helping pave the way towards reconciliation. CJ



Although people with autism took longer to orient to a face, they too were directed to an object by a person's gaze. These findings could have implications for existing theories and how we view the social impairments seen in autism.

There was another positive sign, in a DVD-based intervention from Professor Simon Baron-Cohen (Autism Research Centre) and Chris Ashwin. The 'Transporters' is a series of animated stories centred on toy vehicles, such as trains, trams and cars, with actors' emotional expressions superimposed on them (www.bps.org.uk/trans). After four weeks of using the DVD parents reported that their autistic children were as good as other children at defining emotions and attending to other people's faces, skills that children with autism generally find problematic. As with all the research presented at the symposium, this was conducted with those at the less severe end of the autistic spectrum. However, the hope is that research with those with less obvious symptoms may lead to new interventions across the board. SB

PSYCHOLOGY AND THE IRISH

Psychology is a relatively new profession in Ireland, according to Professor Emeritus Desmond Swan (University College Dublin). Up to the middle of the 20th century, the discipline was perceived rather narrowly as a science of education, and the first psychology departments didn't open until the 1950s.

The Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI), of which Swan is a former President, was established in 1969, amidst a mood of optimism and rapid growth of the profession. Today, Swan said, psychology is thriving and the PSI now has around 2500 members. However, there are serious shortfalls in training. There are only four courses in clinical psychology, and one in educational (founded by Swan). In contrast to Britain, psychology is not taught in Irish schools. However, just like their British counterparts, Irish psychologists are currently grappling with the issue of statutory regulation.

In its brief history in Ireland, psychology has had some less than noble chapters. For example, Hans Eysenck didn't help Anglo-Irish relations in the 1970s when he claimed that, like 'American Negroes', the average IQ of the Irish is 'far below comparable English samples'. Meanwhile, in the late 1950s and 1960s psychologists attacked the compulsory teaching of the Irish language, claiming wrongly that poor English ability in Ireland (relative to UK norms) was caused by time spent learning Irish.

However, psychology has also made many constructive contributions to society, Swan said, especially in schooling (fighting the introduction of school league tables), helping with bereavement, and in influencing the strategies that led to the political agreement in Northern Ireland. CJ

Living with a killer

Cancer is one of the UK's biggest killers, with one in three of us expected to develop some form of the disease by age 75. The Dublin conference was an ideal opportunity for the Irish Psycho-Oncology Group to showcase their research on applying psychology to cancer care.

Professor Robin Davidson (Northern Ireland Cancer Centre) opened the symposium with a lively discussion of complementary therapies. Which patients choose them, and why? Users of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) were compared with patients who had only conventional cancer treatments. CAM-use was not predicted by the severity or spread or a patient's disease, nor by levels of optimism, distress or psychopathology.

However, CAM-users tended to have a stronger fighting spirit and an internal locus of control. 81 per cent reported that they chose a complementary therapy for relaxation, with only 6 per cent using it to try to prolong life. A separate qualitative study confirmed that relaxation and reward are common reasons for CAM-use, along with feelings of empowerment at a time when medical treatments can make patients feel passive and dependent.

Dr Rachel Holland described how models of trauma and dissociation are being used to develop services at Belfast City Hospital, while Dr Sonya Collier (St James's Hospital, Dublin) discussed CBT for anxiety disorders. For cancer survivors, living with uncertainty can be a significant cause of distress. Collier described several cases of 'Damocles syndrome', where previously successful, resilient people became fearful and anxious, refusing to return to work or pick up their social lives even after receiving the all-clear.

Fearing that their disease may return is not entirely unreasonable, so Collier adapts the usual CBT techniques to focus on reducing patients' health-related preoccupations. In one exercise, she asks clients to imagine several fictional characters. Some take each day as it comes, while others worry obsessively about their health. When asked to choose, every client surveyed so far (over 150 to date) has said they would prefer to be the character who lives for today but whose cancer returns after five years, rather than a compulsive worrier who lives healthily into old age but checks themselves daily for physical symptoms. This simple but effective exercise is often picked out by clients as a turning point when they look back at their course of treatment for anxiety.

Ursula Courtney's presentation focused on her 'two favourite subjects', men and sex. With colleagues at the ARC Cancer Support Centre in Dublin (www.arccancersupport.ie), Courtney has developed services for two groups of men: those with prostate cancer, and partners of women with breast cancer. Psycho-educational groups meet for two hours a week. The first hour involves information-giving and presentations from cancer experts, while the second hour is set aside for group discussion. Sex has been a common theme in all groups, with carers and sufferers alike finding it difficult to discuss intimacy with their partners. But at the end of a four-week programme, all but one of the 121 participants to date have reported an improved relationship with their partner, as well as reduced fear and anxiety, and a better understanding of health-related information. **SH**

Children and trauma

Received wisdom has it that children are extremely resilient creatures that can withstand many trials and tribulations. Moving to a new country they easily learn the new language and culture. After experiencing quite traumatic and difficult events, they can just bounce back. But this view is wrong, according to Professor William Yule's (Institute of Psychiatry) keynote address.

Yule presented evidence that some traumatic events can have profound and long-lasting influences on children. For example, in 1966 a major landslide in Aberfan, Wales killed over a hundred children, most of whom were between 7 and 10 years old. The small number who survived were tested for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) 33 years later. Nearly a third of those tested had PTSD three decades after the original event, showing that children do not always 'bounce back'.

PTSD in children is seen not only after large-scale disasters. Studies of children who have been in a traffic accident, show that 1 in 3 children suffer from PTSD. Yet little is in place to help such children. Yule argued that cognitive behavioural therapy can be very useful in reducing PTSD. In fact, most children respond to just symptom monitoring for single incidence traumas.

Yule also stressed the need for nations to be prepared for large-scale disasters (e.g. as terrorism), such as was recommended by *The Lancet* in 2004. Interventions would consist of reducing arousal, helping the person create a narrative of the event, helping increase self-empowerment within the individual and screening for extremely traumatised individuals who require additional help. This would mean that every national organisation would have to have a structure in place to deal with trauma. Moreover, Yule argued that all psychologists should have at least minimal training in disaster and crisis so that they know what not to do, as well as what to do. **AM**

The big question

These days much government policy places emphasis on the right of people with intellectual impairments to make everyday choices about their own lives. However, no policy document offers suggestions about how caregivers should best ask questions of those they care for. In his keynote talk to the Qualitative Methods in Psychology Section, Professor Charles Antaki (Loughborough University) addressed this question and in doing so outlined the use of an exciting research technique called conversational analysis. As Antaki says, 'The method is good at getting to the action, a way of getting a handle on that movement.'

Essentially, this is a way of extracting how people talk with each other, and how the organisation of their talk makes things happen in their worlds, to tell us about people's dealings with each other, and how everyday decisions are made by them. The technique is not new; conversational analysis has been in use for over 40 years whilst the technology and methods have been improved continually. Nowadays researchers use a camcorder to record the sounds and images of everyday language interactions in the settings they naturally occur. The sequence of turns in language is analysed, and typically, small representative samples are extracted for comment. The flow of a conversational exchange can be mapped and the interaction recorded as Person A opens a space for Person B to fill, so each affects each other in an interaction.

In British care homes, staff use a variety of questioning styles to elicit choices from the people with intellectual impairments they care for. These range from simple two-choice options, such as 'Do you want semolina or fruit for dessert?' to more complex multiple-item choices and open questions, such as 'What do you want for dessert?' Themes develop within the data. Repeated questions, for example, imply that answers need changing. Tonality and prosody place emphasis on one choice over another and the order or timing of choices is variable depending on the intentions of the speaker or the responses received.

By using these techniques, a rich data set can be obtained from the details of people's interactions with each other. Additionally, the use of video has allowed researchers to include paralinguistic or non-verbal communicative gestures or actions in the conversational analysis. The segments of speech used go into detail about the structure of conversation and the implications of the conversational exchange. The context in which the language is used is the key to the added benefit that this method can provide over more traditional methods, such as questionnaires or interviews. SB

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

'Remember to keep hold of the complimentary shower cap provided by hotels,' Professor Pam Maras said in her Presidential Address, 'it makes an ideal cover for cheese boards.' But that's not all the former President learned on her tour of Society Branches over the last year. Maras also discovered that people really love psychology and how important it is that we take psychology to society.

In her own work Maras has recently shown that social identity is central to adolescents' academic achievement. For example, one study showed that children with difficulties at school identified less with their family and school and more with their peers than children without difficulties.

Another study looked at the UK government's Aimhigher project to encourage more people into higher education. Data from 3570 children across 13 schools showed that identification with school dipped significantly at Year 10 relative to Year 9, before rising again at Year 12. Crucially, for the Aimhigher programme, attitudes to university were found to correlate with attitudes to school. And promisingly for Aimhigher, children exposed to this scheme showed a reduced dip in identification with school at Year 10.

Maras said her longitudinal work has made an important contribution by showing that social identity changes over time, but that future research is needed to untangle the extent to which social identity affects or is affected by other factors. CJ

YOUR REPORTERS, AND WEB EXTRA

These reports were brought to you by Simon Bignell, Sandie Cleland, Sarah Haywood, Christian Jarrett, Asifa Majid, Pam Maras, Paul Redford and Jon Sutton.

For more reports, including talks on Improving Access to Psychological Therapies, the Fire and Rescue Service, and ethics in qualitative research, see the html version at www.thepsychologist.org.uk

Crystal ball gazing

Most of us will be receiving this magazine because at some point we have completed a GBR psychology degree (or Qualifying Exam). The structure of this degree (cognitive, developmental, social, etc.) has not fundamentally changed for 50 years (although hopefully the content will have been updated). Yet psychology, and the higher education landscape, has changed considerably: numbers of students taking psychology degrees, and numbers of degree course providers, have risen exponentially; more students now complete pre-degree psychology courses (A-Level, GCSE); funding has changed; everyone's expectations have changed – students, parents, the government; there are more postgraduate courses; the spread and diversity of psychology (or psychologies) has grown; and the internet has arrived; to name but a few. All in all, the picture is somewhat different now. So what should we do? What is the future of the psychology degree? Catriona Morrison chaired a roundtable discussion to address some of these issues and possible futures.

Numbers were a common concern. Ray Crozier (UEA) thought that the only major change of note concerning the psychology degree as it stands is the growth in numbers of students taking it. We need to consider how to deal with these large numbers. Moreover, what these students come with has also changed. Almost 100,000 students take pre-degree psychology, and Simon Green (Birkbeck) warned that we need to be sure that these courses do not put off prospective degree students, although at present this does not seem to be the case. However, Green argued that the change in pre-degree psychology was one of the biggest issues that HE institutions need to consider. Although almost 50 per cent of our undergraduates now arrive with some pre-degree psychology qualification, for the most part we treat them all the same regardless of background, rather than accommodating their differing levels of knowledge, skills and expectations. Furthermore, with pre-degree psychology now being treated as a science subject (being taught by science teachers and with an associated reduction in coursework), we need to consider what this means in terms of the skills and abilities that our students arrive with. Consequently, argued Green, the BPS and HE psychology need to get involved in pre-degree psychology.

But what about content? The topics that psychology covers are not uniquely psychological, suggested Crozier. Many other disciplines cover similar areas (e.g. crime, health, mental health) and we need to ensure that our students are aware of the different disciplinary perspectives on these areas.

This concern was echoed by David Fryer (Sterling) who argued that we need to ensure that our students have a broader understanding in terms of the philosophical, epistemological and ideological underpinnings of our discipline, not just the 'facts'. Moreover, argued Fryer, we should be more inclusive in the delivery of the degree drawing from a wider spread of people, such as service users. Martin Conway (Leeds) also suggested we need to consider what our students are learning, but focused on the skills that they leave with and on understanding not just what we want our students to get out of their degree, but also what our students want from their degree.

But what are the drivers for change in the psychology degree? Richard Latto (Psychology of Education Board) argued that the current increase in subgroups within psychology is one of the major threats to the unified psychology degree. Conway even went as far to suggest that the current growth in neuroscience may eventually swallow much of what we now consider as psychology. Funding is also a major issue. The change in funding alters the focus and expectations of all the stakeholders in higher education. Moreover, Conway argued, given the likely end to the cap on fees in 2010, we will move to a more US version of HE, with some institutions charging substantially more than others.

When the discussion was opened to the floor, other concerns were made, such as the potential problems with a US system in the UK, the need to consider the New Ways of Working within the undergraduate degree, and the government's push for foundation degrees. Although Conway suggested that the undergraduate BPS degree is in good shape and hoped that the future was more of the same, it seems likely that this will not be the case. **PR**

BILL CARR, 10 KING ROAD, IPSWICH

Asked to provide a fictitious address on the spot, the chances are you'll take cognitive short-cuts, drawing on a mix of your past and present residences, as well as the addresses of friends and relatives. According to Jason Roach of Huddersfield University, this means that when people give false addresses to the police, it's likely they are unwittingly giving clues away as to their real address. This is a potentially important issue considering that serious criminals often give false addresses after coming into contact with police after being stopped for a minor offence.

Roach gave 142 psychology undergraduates 10 seconds to dream up a fictitious address that would prevent the police from tracking them down. Seventy per cent gave false postcodes that don't exist – an error that with a simple database check should immediately flag up real-life liars to the police. Of the students who gave false postcodes that do exist, these were often near to their own postcode, or if far away, they often belonged to an overseas friend or relative. Fictitious street names and house numbers also tended to reflect a mixture of students' old addresses or the addresses of friends or family. **CJ**

CHAIR OF THE STANDING CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

Call for nominations

Nominations are invited for Chair of the Standing Conference Committee to serve from August 2008, when the current Chair, Patrick Leman, will step down.

The Standing Conference Committee is responsible for the organisation and promotion of the Society's Annual Conference and the Student Lectures. It is an important sub-committee of the Research Board, and the new Chair will also serve as a member on this Board.

The new Chair will come from a senior academic or practice background and will be committed and sympathetic to the aims and objectives of the Society. Experience of Society affairs and of chairing committees more widely is also essential, as is a high profile within the psychological community. The ability to liaise with other parts of the Society, and with the psychological community in general will also be an essential requirement. It is also important that the candidate is able to provide the time commitment required to discharge the duties of the post.

For information about the roles and responsibilities of the post, please contact the Chair of the Standing Conference Committee, Patrick Leman, at patrick.leman@rhul.ac.uk.

Further information about the Standing Conference Committee, its full terms of reference, a statement of interest form, and details of the administrative support available for the post holder can be obtained from Ruth Raven (Conference and Events Manager) at ruth.raven@bps.org.uk or by telephone on 0116 252 9555.

NOMINATIONS

Nominations should be sent marked 'Strictly private and confidential' and for the attention of Ruth Raven, Conferences and Events Manager, at the Society's Leicester office. Closing date: 1 July 2008