

Building a happier society

An initiative launched in April by Lord Richard Layard and others is on a mission to build a happier society. Action for Happiness, currently part of the Young Foundation, requires its members to make a simple pledge: 'to try to create more happiness in the world around them through the way they approach their lives'. Its website invites people to download a 'happiness action pack', which contains practical tips on being more happy and spreading happiness, including meditating, experiencing gratitude, focusing on your strengths and performing acts of kindness (see www.actionforhappiness.org).

Lord Layard is professor of economics at LSE and was the principle architect of the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies programme. Other members of the Action for Happiness board are: Geoff Mulgan (chief executive of the Young Foundation), Anthony Seldon (headmaster of Wellington College where pupils receive well-being lessons), Nic Marks (founder of the Centre for Well-being at the New Economics Foundation) and Mark Williamson.

Action for Happiness has received endorsement from a number of organisations, including Relate, the Children's Society and the British

Psychological Society. Towards the end of April its website boasted 12,440 members from 105 countries. 'Action for Happiness has a vision where we can all play a role in creating a society which values personal well-being, relationships, and meaningful, purposeful, lives,' said Professor Peter Kinderman, chair of the BPS Division of Clinical Psychology. 'Psychologists are working hard for positive social change and we welcome

University), Ilona Boniwell (UEL), Timothy So, Felicia Huppert (both University of Cambridge Well-being Institute), David Clark (Institute of Psychiatry) and Paul Gilbert (Compassionate Mind Foundation). International advisers include Martin Seligman, the founder of Positive Psychology, and Nobel-winner Daniel Kahneman.

The Action for Happiness launch is timely, coinciding as it does with plans by the Office for National Statistics to measure the UK's well-being for the first time. However, superficially at least, the initiative probably wasn't helped by an interview given by Martin Seligman in April in which he distanced himself from the importance of happiness *per se*: 'What humans want is not just happiness. They want justice, they want meaning,' he told Julian Baggini in *Psychologies* magazine. This view is consistent with the

broader ethos of the Action for Happiness movement, but Seligman explained how he now prefers to use the term 'flourishing' rather than 'happiness' to represent the ultimate aim of positive psychology.

Some psychologists and therapists have voiced reservations about the



and fully support the aims of Action for Happiness.'

Several British Psychological Society members and other psychologists are official advisers to the initiative, including Alex Linley (Centre for Applied Positive Psychology), Cary Cooper (Lancaster

PSI STUDY HIGHLIGHTS REPLICATION PROBLEMS

A team of British psychologists have completed a negative, three-fold replication of a study that caused a splash last year because it appeared to show classic psychological effects working backwards in time. However, the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (JPSP), which published last year's positive result by Daryl Bem, has refused publication of the replication without even sending it out for peer review. The situation highlights the risk of a publication bias existing in

psychology (and other sciences), whereby negative results are far less likely than positive findings to see the light of day.

Stuart Ritchie (University of Edinburgh), Richard Wiseman (University of Hertfordshire) and Christopher French (Goldsmiths College, University of London) focused on the ninth and final of Bem's experiments – the one that produced the largest psi effect. Students completed a memory test and showed superior recall for those words that they went on to study

afterwards. Bem deliberately chose this simple method of testing standard effects backwards, so that replications of any observed psi effects would be straightforward for other labs to perform.

Using Bem's own computer programme and stats methods, Ritchie and his colleagues replicated his memory experiment three times, once each at their respective universities, with three groups of 50 participants. They found no backward psychological effects –

the likelihood of a word being recalled was not related to whether or not time was spent studying it later on.

Chris French told *The Psychologist* that their work had also been rejected without peer review by *Psychological Science* and *Science Brevia*, raising serious issues about the replication process in psychology. 'Psychologists, along with scientists in general, often proclaim that replication is the cornerstone of science. But the truth is that straight replications

project. Former BPS President Ray Miller, for example, said: 'While everyone seems to be claiming a right to happiness, I want to defend the right to be bloody miserable. If people are seriously led to believe that happiness is a continuously attainable state, then they are being misled. Unhappiness becomes pathology and people feel cheated and deprived. They seek a "cure" and believe "someone should do something" to alleviate their suffering. But unhappiness is a natural reaction to some sets of circumstances. Like a pendulum, we will always swing between the two states with dynamic fluctuation only ending when the clock stops. In a more balanced way, we should perhaps be aiming for contentment.'

The need for caution when promoting happiness and well-being was also highlighted by new research, coincidentally published online in the same month as the Action for Happiness launch. Andrew Oswald at the University of Warwick and his colleagues claimed to have found that other people's happiness can be a risk factor in suicide (*Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*). The researchers' data showed that Western countries or US states with higher than average well-being levels also tended to have a higher suicide rate. For example, Utah, the US state with the highest average life-satisfaction, has the ninth highest suicide rate; New York, by contrast, is ranked 45th for life satisfaction yet has the lowest suicide rate. 'Discontented people in a happy place may feel particularly harshly treated by life,' the researchers concluded. 'Those dark contrasts may in turn increase the risk of suicide.' CJ

A negative side of positive psychology?

Positive emotions hold a different meaning for people from Asian cultures, according to a new study (*Emotion*: tinyurl.com/6ds424h). Janxin Leu, Jennifer Wang and Kelly Koo at the University of Washington made their claim after surveying the depression symptoms, stress levels and average emotional experience of 330 European Americans, 147 Asian Americans and 156 immigrant Asians (who'd taken residence in the USA at an average age of 11).

For European Americans and Asian Americans (all were born in the USA), the experience of more positive emotions was associated with having fewer depression symptoms. This is consistent with previous work in positive

psychology, which suggests that positive emotions can serve a protective function. By contrast, for immigrant Asians, having more positive emotions was not associated with having fewer depression symptoms. Leu and her team said this makes sense

emotions than do Westerners: a balance of positive and negative emotions is seen as a goal rather than the maximisation of positive emotions.

Another finding was that positive emotions appeared to buffer the link between stress and depression for European Americans but not for Asian Americans or immigrant Asians.

Whilst acknowledging the need for further longitudinal work, Leu and her colleagues said: 'With Asians comprising more than 60 per cent of the global population, these findings suggest the need to proceed

with some caution in our claims about the benefits of positive emotions for everyone.' CJ



given that Asian cultures have a more equivocal relationship with positive



Chris French

are rare,' French said. 'We appreciate that the "top" journals receive far more submissions than they can accept, but we feel that *JPSP* have a certain moral obligation to send replication studies out for proper peer review given the highly controversial nature of Bem's paper, the inevitably high level of media coverage it received, and the fact that it explicitly contained an appeal to psychologists to attempt replications.'

Professor Eliot Smith, the editor of *JPSP* (Attitudes and Social Cognition section) told us that the journal has a long-standing policy of not publishing simple replications. 'This policy is not new and is not unique to this journal,' he said. 'The policy

applies whether the replication is successful or unsuccessful; indeed, I have rejected a paper reporting a successful replication of Bem's work [as well as the negative replication by Ritchie et al.],' Smith added that it would be impractical to suspend the journal's long-standing policy precisely because of the media attention that Bem's work had attracted. 'We would be flooded with such manuscripts and would not have page space for anything else,' he said.

Ritchie and his colleagues

plan to resubmit elsewhere. 'We are glad that at least this episode has opened up the debate on the proper place of replication in the scientific literature,' French said. 'Ironically, parapsychology journals are much more open to publishing replications, failed or otherwise - but then they have very little impact because the mainstream science media simply don't pick up on them!' CJ
I A trial registry for attempts to replicate Bem's study is at www.richardwiseman.com/BemReplications.shtml

MENTAL HEALTH IN GUANTANAMO BAY

Files obtained by Wikileaks reveal the mental health status of Guantanamo Bay detainees, according to an analysis by *The Guardian*. The newspaper claims that almost 100 prisoners were classified by the US army as having a psychiatric diagnosis, including depression, schizophrenia, anxiety, panic attacks and self-harming. Some prisoners apparently suffered neurological damage as a result of suicide attempts. Five prisoners are alleged to have succeeded in killing themselves, but there was no mention in the files that these inmates had mental health problems. '...all have a record of alleged disruptive behaviour and non-compliance [including hunger strikes],' the paper says.

WELSH AGEING STUDY

A clinical psychologist at Bangor University is to lead a major new longitudinal five-year study of ageing. Professor Bob Woods and his collaborators will be studying five thousand people aged over 65 who are resident in Anglesey and South Gwynedd, Neath and Port Talbot. The aim of the £3.3 million project, funded by the ESRC and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, is to look at the social and psychological factors associated with ageing and how people cope. 'An important aspect of the project is the ability to compare the results with those of the survey conducted in the mid 1990s to see how older people's networks of social relationships have changed in the face of the major changes in families and society over this time period,' Woods said.

See <http://cfaswales.bangor.ac.uk>

The study has close links with partner projects in England, see www.cfas.ac.uk

IAPT PLANS FOR THE YOUNG

The Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) programme has released fresh details about its plans for a strand tailored for children and young people aged under 18. The project has government backing and is due to start this year or next, with an initial focus on anxiety and depressive disorders and conduct disorder, using CBT and parenting programmes. Staff will train to an agreed national curriculum for best evidence-based (NICE approved) treatments. The selection of sites for phase one will be competitive – an announcement about the bidding process is due imminently.

See <http://tinyurl.com/6fxw8hs>

Test motivation and IQ

The fact that IQ test performance is a strong predictor of outcomes later in life, including career success and longevity, is well established. However, a new study led by Angela Duckworth at the University of Pennsylvania argues the predictive power of IQ tests isn't all about intelligence. IQ tests also measure motivation, Duckworth and her colleagues claim, and motivation is independently predictive of various life outcomes (*PNAS*: tinyurl.com/634kdgc).

The researchers first performed a meta-analysis of 46 studies that had compared IQ test performance with and without incentives. This data, together involving more than 2000 people, showed that financial and other incentives made a large difference to performance, especially to lower IQ scorers.

Next, Duckworth's team focused on videos taken of hundreds of boys performing an IQ test at age 12 in the 1980s. These clips were analysed for signs of motivation, or lack of it, and the boys were followed up years later, once they were in their twenties. These

investigations revealed that the link between earlier IQ and later life outcomes was significantly reduced once earlier motivation levels were taken into account, especially for non-academic outcomes such as crime and employment.

'[T]est motivation may be a serious confound in studies including participants who are below-average in IQ and who lack external incentives to perform at their maximal potential,' the researchers warned. However, they also conceded that their findings should be kept in perspective. IQ test performance remained predictive of later outcomes, even after motivation was controlled for, and it was a stronger predictive factor than motivation.

'Our conclusions may come as no surprise to psychologists who administer intelligence tests themselves,' Duckworth and her colleagues concluded. 'Where the problem lies, in our view, is in the interpretation of IQ scores by economists, sociologists, and research psychologists who have not witnessed variation in test motivation first hand.' **CJ**

Grandparents and contact following divorce

Agreements allowing grandparents access to their grandchildren after parents split up are being proposed in a review of the law in England and Wales. The family justice review will suggest 'parenting agreements' that 'reinforce the importance of a relationship with grandparents', although the review's recommendations stop short of giving them any legal right of access. Report author David Norgrove said the law was 'too blunt an instrument' and giving grandparents such rights could damage the children involved.

Psychologist Dr Linda Drew, from the Center for Vital Longevity at the University of Texas at Dallas, has researched the experiences of UK grandparents following divorce. She told *The Psychologist*: 'The opportunity to regain contact through the courts has gone well for many families in America and could be beneficial for many UK families. Intergenerational family relationships are an interactive and important part of societies' future and need to be continually fostered. In the

most difficult of situations, family mediation through a third party – a trusted family member or friend, religious leader, or a family mediation service – would be the recommended first choice for a resolution to benefit all three generations.'

Dr Drew points out that grandparents value their contact with grandchildren, grieve at the loss, and worry about their grandchildren. 'In my research, one of the grandparents who had lost contact with their grandchildren said: "Our grandchildren loved being with us and we took great pleasure in teaching them and having fun also, and for us and the children to be deprived of this mutual pleasure is bewildering, for us. We worry, also about the lesson the children are learning from this sudden, forced separation."'

A public consultation on these proposals is now under way, while the review will make its final recommendations in the autumn. **JS**
I See tinyurl.com/6cqdl84

The Academy meets academia

The Oscar-winning English actor Colin Firth has co-authored a neuroimaging paper on the contrasting brain structure of liberals and conservatives (*Current Biology*: tinyurl.com/5t6sww8). Firth's



Colin Firth

collaboration with Ryota Kanai and Geraint Rees at UCL's Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience stems from his guest editorship of the BBC Radio 4 *Today* programme in December 2010. The BBC science correspondent Tom Feilden is also listed as a co-author.

For the radio show, Firth commissioned Rees to scan the brains of Conservative politician Alan Duncan and Labour's Stephen Pound. Rees and Kanai then extended the study by surveying the political attitudes of 90 participants who'd previously had their brains scanned. Those with more liberal attitudes were found to have thicker tissue in the anterior cingulate whereas those with more conservative attitudes had a bigger right amygdala. No other brain differences emerged.

These main findings were replicated with a separate sample of 20 further

participants. The researchers estimated that they could use a person's brain structure to predict their political leanings with 72 per cent accuracy.

So, is the study any good? We asked New York University

Professor John Jost, one of the world's leading authorities in political psychology. 'Yes, I do think that it is a useful contribution,' he told us, 'because it builds on and extends previous work in social, personality, and political psychology as well as previous findings with respect to neurocognitive functioning, all of which suggests that there are fairly basic differences in orientations toward uncertainty and threat that co-vary with left-right political orientation.'

However, Jost cautioned, as did the study authors, that the dynamics of cause and effect are yet to be established – does brain structure shape people's political attitudes or does holding certain attitudes shape the brain, or both? 'In that sense,' Jost said, 'it will probably be several years before we understand the full meaning of these results. In the meantime, the field of "political neuroscience" could do worse than having Colin Firth as a scientific ambassador.'

Firth is not the only Oscar-winning actor to have taken part in a psychology study. Natalie Portman, a psychology graduate and former research assistant at Harvard, co-authored a study in 2002 under her real name Natalie Hershlag. The study was an investigation of the neural correlates of object permanence in infants (*NeuroImage*: tinyurl.com/3clle3). CJ

RESEARCH FUNDING NEWS

Complex Adaptive Systems: Applying New Thinking to Counter-Terrorism. The Centre for Defence Enterprise has issued a call for proposals to find new ways of looking at complex problems in counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency. The call seeks innovative approaches to strengthen the ability of decision makers to detect, recognise and predict strategic shocks/extreme events, and assess the impact of uncertainty on decisions and choices. Multidisciplinary methods and ideas from a broad spectrum of sciences are welcomed. The closing date for proposals is 21 June 2011.

tinyurl.com/5vscszw

Funding is available from a joint call by the ESRC, HEFCE and the British Academy to facilitate **quantitative methods (QM) curriculum development** across the UK social science community. The call has two schemes within it; the **Curriculum Innovation Scheme** for the development of teaching resources, curriculum change and student development and; the QM-specific special round of the **Researcher Development Initiative** to train QM teachers. Funding of up to £100k is available per proposal. The closing date for proposals is 12 July 2011.

tinyurl.com/6ft29tw

The Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations offers Endeavour Postgraduate Awards to provide **financial assistance for postgraduate students** to undertake a postgraduate qualification at master's or PhD level in any field of study in Australia. For a copy of the full guidelines on the Endeavour programme please see the website. The closing date for applications is 30 June 2011.

tinyurl.com/439nva2

The Nuffield Foundation has funding available to support research and development in education in the following areas:

- ▮ **Foundations for learning:** funds proposals that will improve understanding about language, learning and development in early childhood (birth to eight years of age). This includes home, family and school environments, and the needs of different groups of children who might be considered disadvantaged.
 - ▮ **Mathematics education:** supports research into the learning and teaching of maths in early years and primary education; the role of curriculum and qualifications; and statistical literacy in young people and the population at large.
 - ▮ **Secondary education transitions:** in particular examining the dip in achievement and motivation that take place in the move to secondary school; subject and qualification choices; and understanding 'NEET' and possible interventions.
 - ▮ **Student parent and women's education:** particularly pilot projects aimed at improving opportunities for parent to access further and higher education, including student support; course organisation and timetabling; and isolation from the social aspects of student life.
- The Nuffield Foundation operates a two-stage application process, for full details of how to apply please see the Guide for Applicants 2011. The remaining closing dates for outline submission in 2011 are 8 July and 4 November.

www.nuffieldfoundation.org/education-0

info

For more, see www.bps.org.uk/funds
Funding bodies should e-mail news to Elizabeth Beech on elibee@bps.org.uk for possible inclusion