

This month 'Research in brief' picks up the European psychology baton with a selection of research about, or carried out in, mainland Europe.

research

Only the lonely

How different nations cope with loneliness. **NEL MARTIN**

WHILE psychologists have often looked at the micro-explanations for coping with loneliness (such as the individual's personality), few have examined macro-explanations (such as cultural differences).

To see whether culture exerted a significant effect on coping with loneliness, Ami Rokash and colleagues from the Canadian Institute for the Study and Treatment of Psychosocial Stress and Gazi University, Turkey, asked 1164 Turkish, Canadian and Argentinian participants to complete a coping-with-*loneliness* questionnaire.

The questionnaire comprised six subscales and included measures of coping that involved reflection and acceptance of loneliness, actively participating in organised activities or receiving professional help, re-establishing social networks, using alcohol or drugs, practising a faith and increasing general activity.

The researchers found that Canadians were significantly more likely to adopt a greater number of coping strategies than were the other cultures. They scored highest on all six subscales. While no sex differences were found in the Canadian and Turkish samples, Argentinian women were more likely than men to use coping strategies that involved developing faith and developing a sense of self by becoming involved in organised social activities. The authors also draw attention to distinctions



that have been made between organic communities (where members regard community to be more important than the individual) and the atomistic society (which stresses individual achievement). Turkey is a country that exemplifies the former – its members rely heavily on each other and have a strong sense of belonging. Close family ties are maintained and protected.

The authors conclude: '...it appears that cultural background clearly affects the strategies used in coping with loneliness.' They suggest that 'in light of growing awareness that research conducted in Western cultures does not necessarily represent the psychology of non-Western populations, the three populations that were compared in this study could also be compared to those of a Third-World country'.

Rokash, A., Bacanlı, H., & Rambaran, G. (2000). Coping with loneliness: A cross-cultural comparison. *European Psychologist*, 5, 302–311.

EYE REMEMBER IT WELL

Eye movements affect the vividness of your emotional memories. **NEL MARTIN**

CAN eye movement reduce trauma? Eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR) has shown that people retrieving traumatic events while making 10–20 lateral eye movements, experienced less trauma than did those who simply reported the traumatic event without eye movement (see article on EMDR on p.361). Students who either looked at a computer screen, tapped their fingers or followed a symbol across a computer screen with their eyes also reported significantly less vivid imagery of autobiographical events in the eye movement condition; images were most vivid in the control condition. The results suggest that visuospatial working memory is disrupted by eye movement, reducing

the vividness of the recollection. However, EMDR suggests that *future* recollections of the event should also be less vivid.

To test this hypothesis, Marcel van den Hout and colleagues at Maastricht University had 60 healthy volunteers recall either positive or negative memories. Participants rated the emotionality and vividness of the memories and recalled these events while either making rapid eye movements, finger tapping or undertaking no task. Participants recalled the event a further time and rated its vividness and emotionality. Compared with the control and finger-tapping conditions, eye movement was associated with a significant reduction in vividness in the future recollection of memories. Eye movement also affected the

emotional quality of the memories: positive memories became less positive and negative memories became less negative, an interaction not previously reported.

While the working memory explanation fits nicely the pattern of data reported during eye movement, it does not explain why future recollection of memories after eye movement becomes less vivid. The authors tentatively suggest that 'it may be that eye movements reduce emotionality of memories and that reduced emotionality defuels vividness'.

van den Hout, M., Muris, P., Salemink, E., & Kindt, M. (2001). Autobiographical memories become less vivid and emotional after eye movements. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 40, 121–130.

Knowing me knowing you

The Portuguese are model integrators. **JON SUTTON**

WITH the concept of 'European Union' comes a steady flow of people across national boundaries. It is vital to learn lessons from the past concerning how migrant groups have integrated into their new culture: have they kept their own group identity, and what is their view of the outgroup?

Ana Guinote (Instituto Superior de Ciências do Trabalho e da Empresa, Lisbon, Portugal) investigated such attitudes in Portuguese immigrants who moved to Germany after 1964 to satisfy Germany's post-war thirst for labour. Previous research had suggested that whereas members of a majority perceive the outgroup as more homogeneous than the ingroup, members of a minority tend to perceive the ingroup as more homogeneous than the outgroup. A motivational account



How does the outgroup look in?

had suggested that being in a minority poses a threat to members' self-esteem, which will lead them to emphasise their positive social identity and increase solidarity with the ingroup.

Guinote asked Portuguese people in both Portugal and Germany open-ended

questions such as 'What are Portuguese/Germans like?' in one-hour interviews. She found that being in a minority affected perceived outgroup variability (Portuguese migrants made more statements such as 'some of them are..., but others are...') but not perceived ingroup variability. Guinote proposes that the Portuguese follow a strategy of integration, saying 'yes' to the original culture but also 'yes' to peaceful inter-ethnic relations. 'Portuguese seem to integrate into their guest society,' she says. 'As an attempt to increase control and predictability...migrants and other dependent minorities might be particularly attentive to out-group information.'

Guinote, A. (2001). The perception of group variability in a non-minority and a minority context: When adaptation leads to out-group differentiation. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 40, 117–132.

There's a whole world out there

Only 6 per cent of studies published in psychiatry journals are non-European or American. **NEIL MARTIN**

THE debate surrounding the culture-specific or culture-free nature of mental health problems has led many psychiatrists to argue that much of the research published in journals is too exclusively Western focused. In a survey of papers submitted to six prestigious psychiatry journals over a three-year period, for example, Vikram Patel and Athula Sumathipala from the Institute of Psychiatry, London, have reported that only 6 per cent ($N = 173$) of papers came from areas outside Europe and America. This 6 per cent represents 90 per cent of the world's population.

The journals they selected were *British Journal of Psychiatry*, *American Journal of Psychiatry*, *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, *Psychological Medicine*, *Archives of General Psychiatry* and *Schizophrenia Bulletin*. Three of the journals were published in Western Europe and three were from North America. *Acta* published the greatest percentage of articles from the rest of the world (RoW) whereas *Archives* published the lowest (1.3 per cent). European journals were more likely to publish articles from the RoW.

KATE GREY

A realistic representation of the world?

The authors attribute the poor acceptance rate to various factors: shortage of trained researchers and funding, limited opportunities for training and research, perception of irrelevance by journal editors or reviewers, poor quality of papers submitted and poor use of English. They argue that 'the present state of the origin of psychiatric literature is limiting the growth of the subject itself'.

To remedy the Euro-American

imbalance, they recommend raising skills in the RoW, disregarding style or language problems as reasons for article rejection, and publishing a high-quality journal with specific RoW orientation. This, they say, 'might contribute to the growth of psychiatry as a relevant international public health discipline'.

Patel, V., & Sumathipala, A. (2001). International representation in psychiatric literature. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 178, 406–409.

Manipulating mental space

Blind women show poor visuospatial memory. **NEIL MARTIN**

VISUOSPATIAL working memory (VSWM) is thought to store and process visuospatial information and generate mental images. Although blind people can carry out tasks involving visuospatial manipulation adequately, their performance is usually worse than that of their sighted counterparts. Men consistently perform better than women, but it is unclear how the two factors (sightedness and gender) interact in terms of the strategies used.

A study by T. Vecchi from the University

of Pavia, Italy, compared male and female sighted and blind people's performance on a VSWM task. Participants were presented with a block of eight cubes (called a matrix) and were blindfolded (so both groups were effectively blind). Two or three target cubes were covered in sandpaper. The first task involved remembering the matrix of cubes they touched, using the targets as a guide. They then followed a series of three or six statements describing the movement of one of the cubes to an end position, keeping the journey of the cube in mind and pointing to the end position in a blank matrix (with no sandpapered cubes). The final task involved pointing to the position previously occupied by the targets. Memory for positions was described as a passive task; following the sequence of movement was described as an active task.

Sighted participants performed better than blind participants, and men were better than women in identifying the

end position of the target cube and remembering the original position of the cubes. However, an interaction between sex, sight and active/passive task showed that the performance of blind women was poorer in the active task. The blind women performed least well when they followed six statements. The more complex the task, the poorer was the performance of women in general and blind women in particular.

'Blind female participants showed a selectively poor performance in the active tasks,' the author suggests, because of 'the additive factors of a different system organisation (blindness-related effect) and inefficient strategies (gender-related effect)'. This detrimental effect of blindness, the author posits, may be due to reduced processing speed.

Vecchi, T. (2001). Visuo-spatial processing in congenitally blind people: Is there a gender-related preference? *Personality and Individual Differences*, 30, 1361–1370.

Associate Editor : NEIL MARTIN

Please send reviews (up to 400 words) of papers published in peer-reviewed journals (or at proof stage) – including a copy of the paper – to: Dr G. Neil Martin, School of Social Science, Middlesex University, Queensway, Enfield EN3 4SF. Fax: 020 8362 5343; e-mail: n.martin@mdx.ac.uk.

Further submission details are on p.391