

Mars attracts

Four Russians, a Frenchman and a German emerged from the confines of a metal tube in July, having spent the previous 105 days entombed in isolation in Moscow as practice for a trip to Mars. The resurfacing of the crew marked the successful completion of the first stage of Mars500 – a joint project between the European Space Agency and the Russian Institute for Biomedical Problems. Next year another crew of six will begin a spell of 520 days in the tube, simulating an entire return trip to the Red Planet.

'We have successfully completed our mission,' said crew member Oliver Knickel, a German army engineer. 'This is a big accomplishment that I am very proud of. I hope that the scientific data we have provided over the last months will help to make a mission to Mars possible.'

The isolation chamber that had been the crew's home for so many weeks has a total volume of 550m³ and is made up of a habitable module, a medical module, a landing module (that mimics the craft that will take the crew to and from the Martian surface) and a storage module. Over five thousand candidates applied to take part in this first simulation.

Given the isolation and confinement involved in a trip to Mars, experts have identified psychological factors as among the principal challenges likely to undermine a mission (see 'New horizons:

Taking psychology into space': tinyurl.com/6xjjcf). The Mars500 tests are intended to simulate the psychological pressures that crew members will experience. For example, work rotas that will operate on a Mars trip were enforced, and contact with a mock mission control centre was subjected to a 20-minute delay, as would happen on a real mission.

A number of psychologists from across Europe, Russia and the United States are using the Mars500 simulations as an opportunity to collect data on issues like team cohesion, and the effects of confinement and isolation on stress, mood and sleep. One such psychologist is Professor Gro Sandal at the University of Bergen.

'I just came back from Moscow after interviewing the crew,' Sandal told *The Psychologist*. 'It certainly has been an interesting experiment, although this is

just a preparation for the big Mars500 study that will start next year. My project has involved monitoring the dynamics within the crew, and between the crew and the mission control in different phases of the "mission". Also, we have looked at how crew members individually and as a team deal with different challenges. We will need some time to analyse our data. I guess that by the end of September, I will be able to describe some preliminary results.' CJ

A member of the mock mission control centre observes Oliver Knickel during the Mars500 test

MIKHAIL METZEL/AP/PRESS ASSOCIATION IMAGES

Sexual orientation therapy does not work, say APA

The APA has made a formal declaration that 'therapy' to change a person's sexual orientation does not work. The resolution was adopted formally at their annual convention in Toronto in August, following publication of a task force report that scrutinised 83 relevant studies published between 1960 and 2007 (<http://bit.ly/VSGUu>). The task force chair, Judith Glassgold said: 'Contrary to claims of sexual orientation



change advocates and practitioners, there is insufficient evidence to support the use of psychological interventions to change sexual orientation.' The report said evidence was

equivocal regarding the likely harm caused by attempts to change sexual orientation, but warned that qualitative research suggested that harm was possible. 'Practitioners can assist clients through therapies

that do not attempt to change sexual orientation, but rather involve acceptance, support and identity exploration and development without imposing a specific identity outcome,' Glassgold said.

The news comes after a Wellcome Trust funded survey published earlier this year found that a minority of British psychologists said they would still attempt to change a client's sexual orientation (<http://bit.ly/wYuth>).

Later this year, the British Psychological Society will release their own guidance for psychologists working therapeutically with sexual and gender minority clients, under the auspices of the Professional Practice Board.

CJ

Looking out for child maltreatment

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence has published new guidelines on when to suspect child maltreatment – an issue lent a particular urgency by high-profile tragic cases such as Baby P and Victoria Climbié.

The guidance distinguishes between signs and symptoms that should lead a health professional to 'consider' maltreatment, and those that should prompt 'suspicion' of maltreatment. On encountering an indicator

of maltreatment, professionals are advised to: seek an explanation; record what has been observed; consult, if necessary, with other colleagues or agencies; and if maltreatment is ultimately suspected, to refer the child to social care. All actions and the outcome should be recorded.

Signs and symptoms to look out for range from obvious physical signs, such as bruising and burns, to signs of neglect, such as ingrained dirtiness, to psychological

signs, such as coercive sexual behaviour in a child.

Andrew Dillon, Chief Executive at NICE, said: 'We want to give healthcare professionals the confidence to recognise the signs of maltreatment and to know when to refer on to a specialist. This guidance does not include recommendations on how to

diagnose, confirm or disprove maltreatment; this should be done by specialists in social care.' **CJ**

[I tinyurl.com/t9q38m](http://tinyurl.com/t9q38m)

Protecting the vulnerable in court

The NSPCC and Nuffield Foundation have published a report that claims too little is being done to meet the needs of child and youth witnesses in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (tinyurl.com/ktmd32). Compiled by independent consultants Joyce Plotnikoff and Richard Woolfson, and involving interviews with more than 180 young witnesses, the report argues that in many trials there is a gap between policy intentions and reality.

For example, government policy states that it is now permissible for young witnesses to make statements by video link, yet only 55 per cent of those interviewed had done so. Government policy has been to fast-track trials involving children and yet the report found that such trials took, on average, two months longer than other cases. Moreover, one fifth of those interviewed said they felt intimidated in the lead-up to a trial; 45 per cent said they'd seen the defendant (for example, an alleged abuser) in the court building, or while entering or leaving; 65 per cent reported problems with comprehension

during the trial, and two thirds were accompanied in court by someone they hadn't met before.

'[F]indings reveal a significant gap between the vision of policy and the reality of many children's experiences,' the report concludes.

Coincidentally, the report was published in the same month that Justice Secretary Jack Straw launched the first-ever specialist mental health courts in

England and Wales. Two pilot courts, in Brighton and Stratford, London, will provide specialist services for offenders with mental health problems or learning disabilities. Andrew Dean, Director of Secure and Forensic Services at Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, said: 'Early detection and treatment of offenders' mental health problems will ensure people who are unwell get the help they need in the right environment; the programme tackles the "revolving door syndrome" that many mentally ill persistent offenders find themselves trapped in.' **CJ**

PREVENTING PTSD

Offering psychological support to anyone and everyone who experiences a trauma, with the aim of preventing the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms, sounds compassionate, but is at best ineffective, and at worst, possibly harmful. That's according to a new Cochrane Review of multiple session psychological interventions for the prevention of PTSD (*Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*: tinyurl.com/memtmc).

Neil Roberts of the Traumatic Stress Service, Cardiff and Vale NHS Trust, and colleagues, identified 11 relevant, randomly controlled studies involving more than 900 participants. Most involved counselling, either delivered face-to-face, in groups, or by telephone, whilst CBT and critical incident stress debriefing were also considered. The intervention had to begin within three months of trauma to be eligible. Traumas ranged from armed robbery to news of one's child having cancer.

The key finding was that immediate outcomes for patients enrolled in these interventions were no better than for controls, and there was some evidence of adverse effects in the short to medium term (three to six months). The findings are consistent with the disappointing results from trials of routine single-session psychological interventions for PTSD prevention. However, once a person develops PTSD, evidence-based treatments are available, including EMDR and trauma-focused CBT.

'We urgently need more research on the most effective ways of giving psychological help to people who suffer traumatic events,' says Roberts. 'Coupled with the results of earlier reviews, our research indicates that there is currently no effective option for early stage prevention of post traumatic stress disorder.' **CJ**

Social norms and excessive drinking

Providing students with realistic feedback about how much they drink in relation to their peers can help reduce alcohol abuse, a Cochrane Review has found (*Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*: tinyurl.com/ms972l). This 'social norms' approach is based on the finding that the majority of students overestimate how much their peers drink – a misperception that can encourage excessive drinking.

In a literature search of material dating

back to 1966, chartered psychologist David Foxcroft and his colleagues at Oxford Brookes University identified 22 relevant, controlled studies involving over 7000 participants. When social norms feedback was delivered as part of an individual face-to-face session or via web feedback, the researchers found it to be more effective, over three to 16 months, than control treatments (usually either no treatment, or an educational leaflet).

'We know that social norms have a powerful impact on thought and behaviour, so changing people's perceptions about what is normal can really help. Most of the effects lasted for a few months, but some lasted over a year, particularly for the web-based feedback,' said lead author Maria Moreira.

By contrast, social normative feedback delivered via group sessions or in the mail, was no more effective than control interventions. It's possible that a group session with high-risk drinkers creates a subcultural social norm that counteracts any benefits of normative feedback about peers more generally.

One study found evidence for the effectiveness of social-norms-based advertising campaigns, but the same research group failed to replicate this finding in a second study.

Moreira's team cautioned that their conclusions were based on a narrow evidence base and in many cases the outcome variables used to gauge effectiveness varied between studies. Moreover, social norms feedback given in individual face-to-face sessions was often part of a motivational interview, thus making it difficult to attribute effectiveness directly to the feedback. To date there has been no direct comparison between feedback offered face-to-face versus via the internet. **CJ**

FROM THE RESEARCH DIGEST...

A smile goes a long way

Audiences differ. Talk to one person and your words are welcomed by a smile and nod of acknowledgment. Speak to another, less winsome listener and your words are confronted by a frown and folded arms. According to Camiel Beukeboom, these different responses systematically alter your use of language. Speak to a positive listener and you'll likely use more abstractions and subjective impressions, whilst if you talk to a negative listener you'll probably find yourself sheltering in the security of objective facts and concrete details.

Beukeboom had 57 undergraduate students watch an eight minute film about a kiosk owner, and then asked them to take their time and describe the film as fully as possible to two other participants. In actuality, these listeners were research assistants and for half the participants they assumed a positive listening style – smiling, nodding and maintaining an open bodily position – whilst for the other participants they assumed a negative listening style – frowning and unsmiling.

Participants describing the film to positive listeners used more abstractions, describing aspects of the film that can't be seen, such as a character's thoughts and emotions, and also included more of their own opinions. Writing in the *European Journal of Social Psychology* (see tinyurl.com/nsohje), Beukeboom said this is because we interpret the smiles and nods of a positive listener as a sign of agreement and understanding, encouraging us to provide a more interpretative account. By contrast, negative listeners provoke in the speaker a more cautious and descriptive thinking style.

'Consider what this means,' Beukeboom said. 'By merely smiling or frowning a listener could influence how a speaker reports information and how it is subsequently remembered, and possibly passed on. In, for instance, witness interrogations, job interviews, politics, or psychotherapy, a simple smile or frown could potentially have a large impact.'



PAUL CARTER/REPORTAGE.CO.UK

This item originally appeared in the Society's free Research Digest – now number 21 in the influential Wikio ratings of worldwide science blogs! For more and to sign up, see www.researchdigest.org.uk/blog, where you will also find links to the new Facebook and Twitter presences.

MORE PROFESSIONS TO COME UNDER HPC

The Health Professions Council (HPC) has launched a consultation on the statutory regulation of psychotherapists and counsellors. HPC's Chief Executive, Marc Seale commented: 'We strongly believe that the regulation of psychotherapy and counselling is necessary for the protection of members of the public... It will, for the first time, create a legal framework which will allow for the removal of rogues and charlatans from practising and potentially harming the public.'

The consultation will close on 16 October, after which the HPC will make its formal recommendations to the Secretary of State for Health.

To download the consultation, see tinyurl.com/lzumb3

Publishing prior to thesis completion

Doctoral students find it beneficial to publish in peer-reviewed journals prior to completing their thesis, a survey has found (*Higher Education Review*, 41(3), 2009). James Hartley at Keele University and Lucy Betts at Nottingham Trent University surveyed a largely non-random sample of 58 students, the majority of them in the social sciences. Of the 32 students who had published in journal articles prior to thesis completion, all said they would recommend that other doctoral candidates do the same. The down-side appeared to be a slight delay to the thesis, with those who'd published in journals taking an average of four months longer to complete their thesis. 'Engaging with the review process prior to the viva examination is an invaluable experience. Peer review provides an opportunity to amend thesis material, enhances the quality of the thesis content, and facilitates critical thinking for future work,' one student said.

Other findings to emerge included the observation that research published by a student during their PhD was more likely to cite the doctoral supervisor as a co-author and more likely to be published in a higher-impact journal, than research published after thesis completion. **CJ**

ART FOR FREUD'S SAKE

A new exhibition, 'Einfall: Beyond Spontaneity', runs from 16 September to 4 October at the Freud Museum in London.

The Freudian concept of *freier Einfall*, or free association, relates to notions and ideas that arise spontaneously in the mind, apparently unrelated to a person's conscious thoughts, but which may have a hidden, unconscious significance. This is one of the key foundations of Freudian psychoanalysis; the idea that even the most trivial thoughts are deeply meaningful in an analytical context.

Eighteen masters students at the Royal College of Art have been invited to make new work, through installation, sculpture and a performance piece. The exhibition reveals highly personal and original visual responses to the rich history and material embodied in the Freud Museum.

I The exhibition is open Wednesdays to Sundays 12 noon-5pm and costs £5 to get in (£3 concessions).

RESEARCH FUNDING NEWS

The ESRC has announced a forthcoming funding opportunity. They wish to create a major new research group to conduct research into **subjective well-being**. Provisional topics are:

- I Work, family and community
- I Growing up and lifelong well-being
- I Mental and physical health and well-being
- I Environmental sustainability and subjective well-being
- I Place and subjective well-being methodology

Funding will come from a coalition of government departments and authorities. The research call has yet to be made but interest can be registered at wellbeing@esrc.ac.uk.

I tinyurl.com/nelmwt

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has a call for proposals to carry out research on **young people who do not drink or drink little**. The research will be used to help the Foundation identify what actions or interventions are most likely to have an impact on drinking cultures and patterns in the UK. £70,000 is available to fund a single project. The closing date for applications is 29 September 2009.

I tinyurl.com/ngpb3v

The Department of Health and Human Services (US) has a call for research into the mechanisms underlying the links between **psychosocial stress, ageing, the brain and the body** (R01). Standard application dates apply, 5 October, 5 February and 5 June.

I tinyurl.com/mj6sjf

The National Institute for Health Research, Evaluation, Trials and Studies Coordinating Centre under their **Health Technology Assessment Programme** is seeking research proposals on the following topics that may be of interest to psychologists:

- 09/70 Interventions to reduce the fear of falling in the elderly
- 09/71 Family-based interventions for young people who misuse alcohol and/or other substances
- 09/76 Case finding for depression in vulnerable adolescents
- 09/80 Physical activity programmes for individuals with dementia
- 09/81 Self-managed therapy packages for obsessive-compulsive disorder.

The deadline for application is 2 October 2009.

I tinyurl.com/mpc6ln

The Centre for Ageing Research and Development in Ireland has funding available via their Collaborative Ageing Research Grant Programme. This is to support ground-breaking studies that bring together different perspectives, sectors and disciplines across the island of Ireland to **improve the lives of older people**. The closing date for applications is 2 October 2009.

I tinyurl.com/mqds2z

The Sir Halley Stewart Trust has funding available for **social and educational research**. They welcome applications for research, feasibility and pilot studies or development projects. They wish to support innovative projects which seek to resolve conflict, promote reconciliation and reconnect family members; help people move beyond disadvantage; and address the needs of the vulnerable or exploited. Grants are usually given in the form of a salary. Applications can be made at any time.

I tinyurl.com/mchls9

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

Provocative reporting

Ceri Parsons on a strange recent case

At the recent Division of Forensic Psychology conference, Sophia Shaw from the University of Leicester presented research exploring men's attitudes towards coercing women into sex. As part of the conference process, Shaw's research was picked up by the Society's PR team. The press release 'Promiscuous men more likely to rape' generated interest from the *Daily Telegraph*.

Their reporter interviewed Miss Shaw and published an account of the research in the paper on 23 June under the headline 'Women who dress provocatively more likely to be raped, claim scientists'. It went on to say that 'Women who drink alcohol, wear short skirts and are outgoing are more likely to be raped, claim scientists at the University of Leicester.' Overall Miss Shaw's findings

had no evidence that women who are provocatively dressed or drunk were more likely to be raped, and this was grossly misrepresented by the *Telegraph*. The article presented the very powerful and unpalatable view that 'science' shows it is women who are to blame for rape.

After reading the *Telegraph* article, the press office contacted Miss Shaw to clarify what had happened and to seek her view on the article. Miss Shaw was upset that her research had been misrepresented by the *Daily Telegraph* in order to apparently fit stereotypical attitudes about rape.

After consulting with Miss Shaw and

her university the Society complained to the *Daily Telegraph* requesting a retraction and removal of the online article. At the same time the *Guardian's* Bad Science columnist Ben Goldacre took up the mantle of challenging the *Telegraph's* reporting and on 4 July commented that 'since I started sniffing around, and Sophia complained, the *Telegraph* have

quietly changed the online copy of the article'.

However, Goldacre omitted from his column that the Society's press office had helped him gather together the necessary information for his piece and were as unhappy with the published news story as he was. He also went onto unfairly portray the Society's press office as wolves in sheep's clothing: 'Repeatedly, unpublished work – often of a highly speculative and eye-catching nature – is shepherded into newspapers by the press officers of the British Psychological Society, and other organisations.'

These comments imply that our PR team are mavericks. They are not. Researchers work with the press office to agree any release before it is made public. Miss Shaw's research was no exception. The PR team are professionals who work with the policies developed by the Society in conjunction with the Media and Press Committee. This Committee is populated by experienced psychologists, who

represent the range of areas of psychology and who pass comment upon the implications of releasing research. As a critical psychologist, I am always attuned to the fact that psychology research is not carried out in a vacuum. What gets picked up for reporting and how it gets reported can work to maintain the status quo, such as in this case where research findings have been manipulated by the press to maintain commonsense views. In my eyes Goldacre can stand charged with exactly the same offence as the *Telegraph*, that of misrepresenting the facts of the case all in the name of a good news story.

Since the initial complaint there has been an exchange of letters resulting in the *Daily Telegraph* agreeing to remove the article from the website and publish a freestanding correction in print and online stating:

British Psychological Society: Miss Sophia Shaw

Owing to an editing error our report "Women who dress provocatively more likely to be raped, claim scientists" (June 23) wrongly stated that research presented at the recent BPS conference by Sophia Shaw found that women who drink alcohol are more likely to be raped. In fact the research found the opposite. We apologise for our error.

While this doesn't detract from the fact that information was erroneously published in the first instance, it does admit that a mistake has been made, and Miss Shaw is happy with this outcome.

Miss Shaw said: 'I was really shocked by the actions and attitude of *The Daily Telegraph*. The press release that was issued by the Society was approved by me and focused on the real findings of my research. I really appreciated the support given by the PR team and I'm grateful that they have been successful in getting the *Daily Telegraph* to remove the online article and get an apology in print.'

Later in July in Bad Science, Goldacre reported on research findings from the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* discussing whether revenge is ever good for you. I echo Goldacre's sentiment that 'If the results of this experiment stand, turning the other cheek has an element of selfishness to it...if you are ever forced into an act of revenge, you can comfort yourself with the thought that this is a selfless act' (Goldacre, Bad Science, 11 July 2009). I want to make it clear that in no way are my comments a reprisal against Goldacre. I just wanted to make sure that readers of *The Psychologist* got the other side of the story.



The study actually found that men chose to opt out of a hypothetical situation much sooner if the woman was intoxicated

contribute

The Media page is co-ordinated by the Society's Press Committee, with the aim of promoting and

discussing psychology in the media. If you would like to contribute, please contact the 'Media' page

coordinating editor, Fiona Jones (Chair, Press Committee), on f.a.jones@leeds.ac.uk

