

Sex, death

Associate Editors for Conference reports **KATE CAVANAGH** and **PAUL REDFORD** introduce our coverage of the 2002 Annual Conference.

This year's Annual Conference took the Society to Blackpool, and two hotels on the North Promenade (the Imperial and the Hilton). Over four days 800 delegates grappled with three main conference themes that have concerned human minds for centuries: sexuality, ageing, and aggression, leading one invited speaker to dub it the 'sex, death and war conference'.

Celebrating outstanding contributions to psychological knowledge in Society award and invited lectures, topics included the causes of conflict, the utility (or otherwise!) of the graduate basis for registration, and the application of psychology to both life and work. Many of these will soon appear as full articles in *The Psychologist*. Over the coming pages and next month, we present our coverage of topics, including social inclusion, insomnia in later life, sexual health, the impact of political conflict on children, the psychology curriculum...and even which teachers are likely to have nicknames and how to improve your golf.

Only the lonely

JON SUTTON discovers the impact of rejection at a keynote address by Roy Baumeister.

IMAGINE arriving to participate in an experiment and being asked either to pick a partner to work with or to fill in a personality test. Then the professor pulls you to one side and drops a bombshell. In the first version, you are unable to continue because nobody picked you. In the second, you apparently have a personality profile associated with an imminent life of loneliness. How would you feel? What would you do?

In a series of intriguing studies Professor Roy Baumeister (Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio) investigated the behavioural consequences of rejection. His findings rang true with

this audience, well aware of how contrary we humans can be: rather than redouble efforts to impress, we appear to lash out, cheat, help less, eat more cookies...you name it.

Interestingly, this does not appear to be simply because we're in a stinker of a mood. Baumeister explained that, in these studies, the relationships between rejection behaviour and emotion were inconsistent, erratic and weak. He also found that being rejected makes you stupid: participants who had been told they faced a lonely future scored lower on an IQ test. The effect seemed to occur at the retrieval stage, and Baumeister

suggested that the executive function of the self was somehow impaired.

Baumeister concluded that rejection was deeply threatening to humans, to the extent that it can have profound cognitive and behavioural effects. But as attractive as many audience members appeared to find the prospect of insulting students, as usual you could argue that what the elegant experimental design gained in control it lost in validity. Perhaps the students were simply baffled by this sudden, universal and apparently unwarranted rejection: it would be interesting to see whether real-life incidents that could be rationalised have the same effect.

& war

IN BRIEF

ONCE A CHEATER...

Does prior reputation of a football team influence referees? Marc Jones and colleagues at Staffordshire University found that when refs are informed that a team has a reputation for aggressive and foul play, they are more likely to give red and yellow cards against that team when they committed a foul. unemployment.

SHORT SHRIFT TO LIFE'S PROBLEMS

Short stature has been linked to poorer psychosocial adaptation. But Fiona Ulph and her team at the University of Southampton have now challenged these assumptions through their Wessex Growth Study, which has followed participants from school entry to their current age of 18 to 20. No associations were found between either childhood or adult height and violence, love relationships, alcohol consumption, or unemployment.

IT WAS NOTHING, REALLY

Dawn Watling and Robin Banerjee (University of Sussex) have been investigating the understanding of modesty in 8- to 11-year-old children. They have found that understanding of the social evaluative effect of modesty grows with age, and that children believe modest responses are more appropriate in the presence of peers rather than adults. Understanding of modesty, particularly when with peers, was positively correlated with both sociability and perceived popularity.

OL' BEAKY

Old male secondary school teachers are most likely to have nicknames, according to a study conducted by Ray Crozier (Cardiff University). Although most involved some hostility drawing from physical characteristics (e.g. big nose) the perceived wittiness of the nickname moderated the negative effect of the name.

IN BRIEF

ATYPICAL ANTIPSYCHOTICS

The prescribing of 'atypical' antipsychotics, which often result in less severe side-effects than 'typical' antipsychotic drugs, is frequently associated with service-user choice and information. Whether this finding is an indicator of resource limitation or variation in mental healthcare practice should be the subject of further investigation, according to David Westley (Middlesex University) and colleagues.

COUNTER-INTUITIVE

People who rate themselves as highly intuitive are in fact significantly less accurate at detecting the lies of others from short video clips, according to a study by Paul Seager (University of Central Lancashire) and Richard Wiseman (University of Hertfordshire).

HOW TO MOTIVATE A NARCISSIST

Individuals with excessive self-love and desire for admiration (narcissists) significantly outperform others when there is an opportunity for glorifying the self (by telling them that only 25 per cent would succeed in the task). However, when told that 85 per cent of people succeed (so therefore no chance of glory) narcissists performed poorer than others (Roy Baumeister and H.M.Wallace, Case Western Reserve University, USA).

NOVELTY SEEKERS SEEK OUT SWEET DRINKS

In the animal world novelty-seeking animals show high intake of sugary solutions. Sue McHale (Sheffield Hallam University) and colleagues found that this replicated in a human sample. Overall individuals higher on novelty-seeking preferred sweeter drinks. This may be due to differential effects of dopamine, as it seems to be in animals.

Telling it like it is

KATE CAVANAGH gets political with Gordon Marsden, Labour MP for Blackpool South.

GORDON Marsden was invited by the Society's Parliamentary Officer (Judi Ellis, University of Reading) to speak on how psychologists can influence political decision makers in the UK. Taking up the gauntlet, Marsden offered a personal view of what it is like to be an MP. He encouraged us to use our professional skills in approaching members of the House and ministers, and gave a few clues about how to push their buttons.

Describing MPs as a group representing 'all types and conditions of men' Marsden encouraged politically-minded psychologists to do their research. Targeting specific MPs can be made easier by understanding something of the

person we are trying to influence. Recommended reading included Dod's parliamentary biographies. Insight into the backgrounds and life experiences of our MPs



will offer insight into how they tick. Like each constituency, each MP is unique, and finding out their interests and foibles can be a short cut to their diary.

Marsden described the rapid and disorienting process of taking office as 'going back to school'. Once you've got your

locker and coat hanger, learned how to run a small business and recruited your staff, it's straight into learning on the job with an in-tray of enquiries and demands from constituents and lobbyists all in need. It is a tall order: MPs with diverse backgrounds are expected to be part social worker, part judge, part lawyer and part Mother Theresa. MPs have to become experts in minutes, on topics where they have no supporting skills or knowledge.

The policy issues that MPs take up are usually instigated by individual constituents' problems. Marsden explained that those most in need are unlikely to e-mail a sophisticated discussion document or petition to their MP, but will send a simple

A social look at lesbians and gays

VICTORIA CLARKE and **ELIZABETH PEEL** report.

THE Lesbian and Gay Psychology Section collaborated with the Social Psychology Section to present a symposium on 'Lesbian and gay issues: Social psychological perspectives'.

Elena Touroni and Adrian Coyle (University of Surrey) reported the findings of their study of decision making by 18 planned lesbian parents (women who became parents after 'coming out' as lesbian). The study focused both on decision making about having children and decision making about using known or anonymous sperm donors. Women may opt for known donors because they desire control over the process of conception, have concerns about their child's psychological well-being and perceive the

desirability of involving the father in the child's upbringing.

Sonja Ellis (Sheffield Hallam University) analysed debates about lowering age of consent for sex between men to 16, using data from Hansard (the official record of parliamentary debates) and newspaper reports. The study identified a number of arguments used to justify opposition to an equal age of consent, such as the argument that homosexuality and heterosexuality are not morally equivalent. Ellis found that supporters of equality choose to argue back against these claims rather than develop their own positions supporting lesbian and gay human rights.

A second symposium, convened by Celia Kitzinger (University of York), explored

heterosexism and homophobia in a variety of contexts. Kitzinger herself produced a careful and detailed analysis of tape recordings of calls made on behalf of a patient to an emergency doctor. Using conversation analysis, an approach new to lesbian and gay psychology, Kitzinger studied the reproduction of social order and social norms through conversational interaction. She found that calls made by the spouse or parent of a patient went relatively smoothly. The doctor assumed, mostly correctly, that the caller and the patient shared the same home and the caller knew the patient's medical history. When the caller and the patient did not have nuclear

handwritten cry for help to their parliamentary representative with a second class stamp. However, the 'all sorts and conditions of men' can have a symbiotic relationship with 'the experts'.

While MPs are seen as 'powerful and influential' in their own right, it may be who they know, not what they know, that counts. While MPs can actively help their own constituents, Marsden explained that the MP's real power, on policy issues at a national level, lies in their physical access to civil servants and their role as an interface with ministers.

The discussion that followed emphasised that psychologists have two roles to play in parliamentary debate, both as the instigators of policy development and change and as a resource for parliamentarians to draw upon in making their decisions.

family ties, these assumptions broke down and the calls often became complicated. Kitzinger's analysis shows that even in mundane calls to a doctor we find the reproduction of social norms such as the privileging of the nuclear family. For lesbian and gay couples and families who have no access to labels such as 'wife' and 'husband', the most everyday tasks will be rather complicated.

These symposia highlighted the popularity of qualitative and critical methods in British lesbian and gay psychology. As Peter Hegarty (Yale University) pointed out, this contrasts sharply with lesbian and gay psychology in the US, which is dominated by more mainstream psychological approaches. British lesbian and gay psychologists have much to contribute.

Reliable testimony?

SIMON J. BIGNELL reports on *Gisli Gudjonsson's Hans Eysenck Memorial Lecture*.

AS a former police officer and leading authority on the psychology of interrogation, suggestibility, confession and legal testimony, Gisli Gudjonsson (Institute of Psychiatry) paid tribute to Eysenck's lifelong contribution to British psychology and spoke of his own work on interrogative suggestibility.

Having worked on controversial legal cases such as the Birmingham Six and the Guildford Four, Gudjonsson outlined a series of studies involving the psychological processes used by interrogators to extract reliable confessions and testimonies. He explained that most people will break down



under interrogation if they are subjected to enough pressure and the interrogator finds out what their weaknesses are.

Interrogations have three essential components: uncertainty, interpersonal trust, and the expectation to give an answer. However, people vary in the degree to which they are susceptible to the suggestions of the interrogator. Gudjonsson has developed a test that resembles a mini

interrogation procedure in order to assess levels of suggestibility under the pressure of interrogation. Consequently, it has been found that the more suggestible a person is the less accurate their information may be.

Police interrogators in America use techniques that rely on playing on people's vulnerabilities, according to Gudjonsson, whereas in Britain the emphasis is on learning from these vulnerabilities in order to secure more reliable information. He added: 'The whole thing with confession evidence is identifying or making sense of how the confession emerged or was obtained.'

Getting your forty winks

SIMON J. BIGNELL hears about sleep and insomnia in later life.

EVERY year the National Health Service spends about £20 million on sleeping pills and every night over one million people will take a sleeping tablet before they go to sleep. Insomnia is among the most common psychological symptoms affecting British adults today, and Professor Kevin Morgan (University of Loughborough) views it as a major public health issue.

There is a steady ageing-related decline in the length, depth and continuity of sleep, explained Morgan: we get more likely to have sleep problems and use sleeping tablets. But there is relatively little research on the psychological treatment of late-life insomnia and age-related changes in sleep quality.

Less sleep may be a characteristic of the general

ageing process, but age-related changes are not sufficient to explain the development of later-life insomnia. Morgan studied a large group of poor sleepers over a period of several years and found that older insomniacs are simply younger insomniacs who grow older with their problems. The best predictors of persistent sleeplessness being low levels of activity, depressed mood and poor health status. These life-long 'graduates' of insomnia are less likely to remit, although those who have fairly new sleeping problems are much more likely to regain satisfactory sleep patterns.

In a study of people with dementia, computerised wristbands were used to measure the sleep onset and duration. These sleep profiles revealed that people with dementia slept frequently in the

day and had interrupted sleep at the night. Data collected from caregivers also revealed patterns of insomnia. For instance, one example was given of a lady who cared for her husband and whose sleep patterns were severely disrupted by those of her spouse. These patterns of disturbed sleep in carers tend to continue even long after the death of their partner.

One way of thinking about insomnia is by contrasting what we actually get from sleep with what we want from sleep. With time what we get from sleep diminishes and is influenced by factors such as our maturation and well-being. However, Morgan explained what we want from sleep may also be influenced by our experience and expectations, for example the false idea that we all need 'eight hours sleep every night'.

IN BRIEF

SO HARD TO SAY
GOODBYE

A study of 28 reception class children and 55 caregivers by Amanda Potter and Mike Eslea (University of Central Lancashire) suggests that schools can reduce the distress experienced by new pupils on their first day at school by limiting the time that parents have to say 'goodbye' to their children (see www.uclan.ac.uk/facs/science/psychol/bully/blackpool2.pdf).

'HER BEHAVIOUR WAS
UNDIGNIFIED'

Individuals who are high in 'benevolent sexism' appear to assign blame to acquaintance rape victims, who they view as violating traditional gender role expectations (Garcia Tendayi Viki and Dominic Abrams, University of Kent at Canterbury).

ORGAN TRANSPLANT

Kidney transplants now frequently involve donations from relatives. But psychological factors have been under-investigated, and it is unclear how family dynamics are affected. Now Alison Tweed and colleagues at the Leicester General Hospital have found that a living-related donor transplant group had significantly higher depression scores than those who had received a kidney from a dead donor.

KEEP A LOW PROFILE

A field study during Euro 2000 found that the supporters' crowding together was perceived by the Belgian police as a manifestation of hooliganism. As a result the Belgian police increased the visibility of their interventions, which in turn appeared to lead to higher rates of hooliganism. Otto Adang (Dutch Police Academy) and Clifford Stott (University of Liverpool) suggest that major incidents of football 'hooliganism' are the result of a complex intergroup interaction.

Are you in or out?

RICHARD CRISP and DOMINIC ABRAMS report on symposia about social inclusion.

THIS seminar, under the auspices of the ESRC/Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences, aimed to develop a closer link between social psychological research and policy formulation by bringing together academic researchers and policy makers.

An important outcome from the meeting was a heightened awareness that social psychologists have a large and reliable body of theory and research that bears directly on the processes underlying phenomena associated with social exclusion, and that understanding these processes will help in deciding how to develop strategic interventions. So far, UK policy makers have not had their attention drawn to this substantial body of research. Future seminars in the series will address the implications of research for policy in connection with social problems such as racism and immigration.

The first symposium examined how social inclusion and exclusion may be imposed on people, how they may choose to exclude themselves, and the consequences of being excluded on behaviour. Dominic Abrams (University of Kent at Canterbury) reported how football fans may be more tolerant of ingroup fans who display fanatical extremism than those who show fair-mindedness, but exactly the opposite reactions apply to the supporters of opposing teams. A fair-minded outgroup supporter is favoured over a fair-minded ingroup supporter. This fits with research showing that reactions to deviant behaviour depend not only on the magnitude of the deviance but also on whether it validates or undermines ingroup norms.

Mark van Vugt (University of Southampton) then

described his research showing that people's willingness to remain within groups is affected by the style of the group leader. In both laboratory and field settings the evidence shows that people choose to leave the group when leaders adopt an autocratic style, but not when they adopt laissez-faire and democratic styles. This is because autocratic leaders pose threats to the sense of personal welfare, autonomy and dignity. Moreover, autocratic leaders threaten the group's survival



Roy Baumeister

precisely because the members are more likely to leave.

Roy Baumeister (Case Western Reserve University, Ohio) then presented a major review of his research on the consequences of being excluded. Based on his proposition that people have a fundamental need to belong, a series of over 20 studies examined the serious consequences of social exclusion (see 'Only the lonely', p.300).

Governmental input to the symposium came in the form of Zoe Ashmore's account of the Home Office Policy Action Team's efforts to reduce antisocial behaviour. This included the questions of how to define antisocial behaviour, and understanding why it happens. Of particular interest were questions of the measurement of such behaviour, which is largely based on the British Crime

Surveys, and how to link what we know from social psychological research to the specific questions that will determine effective practice.

The second symposium covered identity, inclusion and conflict. Prejudice, discrimination and intergroup conflict remain pervasive social problems. Psychologists are increasingly playing a role in attempts to understand and attenuate their consequences, and enhance efforts towards social inclusion and a progressively egalitarian society. Social identity and the self-inclusive or 'ingroup' (versus the self-exclusive 'outgroup') nature of affiliation to social categories ('us' versus 'them') is a key element in recent theoretical and empirical advances being made on this front. This symposium considered new developments from a variety of perspectives that enhance our understanding of, and efforts to promote, social inclusion.

One important theme to emerge was the notion that implicit (i.e. automatic and pre-conscious 'intuitions' about groups) as well as explicit processes are key in attempts to understand, and attenuate, social exclusion. BPS Doctoral Award winner Richard Crisp's (University of Birmingham) work demonstrated that fundamental information-processing biases in social perception have important implications for the implementation of strategies to reduce negative outgroup stereotypes. Similarly Spearman Medal winner Greg Maio (University of Cardiff) revealed that perceivers with 'ambivalent' attitudes towards ethnic minorities show a 'backlash' effect following exposure to anti-racist advertisements, not only in

terms of explicit beliefs, but also in terms of underlying pre-conscious attitudes.

A second key theme was the importance of social identity processes for efforts to enhance social inclusion. Julie Christian (University of Birmingham) demonstrated how an attitudinal model of homeless people's intention to use support services was influenced by social identity concerns. An important finding from this work was that homeless people's identification with services, attitudes towards formal authority, and norms all predicted behaviour.

Similarly, Jolanda Jetten (University of Exeter) presented work indicating that social norms operate on a social psychological (group) level, and that they are not necessarily only societally and consensually based. A cross-cultural study of individualist (US) and collectivist (Indonesia) countries revealed that high identification (i.e. strong group affiliation) to a group norm paradoxically leads

to less group-oriented attitudes when that norm is individualist in nature. That high identification does not invariably lead to categorical thought (but is dependent on the nature of the group norm) has important implications for understanding how identity shapes the social perception of intergroup relations.

Finally, the application of diverse theoretical work into social psychological processes was extensively discussed (the collected papers examined processes with groups that ranged from age to nationality to ethnicity). In particular Ed

Cairns (University of Ulster) presented research examining the application of identity motives in attempts at understanding intergroup relations in Northern Ireland. In several large-scale surveys, Cairns found a positive relationship between the extent to which people positively evaluated those in their own group and the extent to which they positively evaluated other groups. This implies that conciliation strategies need to work not only at increasing outgroup evaluations (which may also correspondingly increase ingroup evaluations),

but also at reducing the relative ingroup favouring distinction between conflicting groups.

On this issue the final paper by Miles Hewstone from the University of Oxford (completing a hat-trick of Society Award winners as recipient of the Presidents' Award) reviewed general laboratory and applied work in the field of intergroup relations. He argued that in contrast to previous trends, there should be increased efforts to link laboratory and field studies to real policy issues regarding social inclusion and exclusion. By using convergent means to investigate the psychological processes underlying intergroup bias and integrating work in a diverse range of fields, social scientists may be better placed to help policy makers in attempts to devise successful intervention strategies to enhance and promote an egalitarian and inclusive society.

□ For more information see www.social-inclusion.org.uk

Not to be sneezed at

MARK WETHERELL reports on how psychological factors impact on the body's immune response.

WHILE commonly held up as paragons of health and fitness, professional athletes in fact experience many coughs and colds following exercise – especially following training for endurance events such as marathons. Mike Gleeson (University of Birmingham) explained how three factors contribute to this increased susceptibility to illness.

First, the very nature of exercise (running around with your mouth open) and the lifestyle of the elite athlete (more foreign travel) increase exposure to infections. Second, intensive exercise training has been shown to reduce a range

of immune parameters that protect against infection. Finally, the psychological stress that accompanies chronic training and competition further escalates the negative effects of professional athleticism on health.

One of the active ingredients in the deleterious impact of psychological stress on physical health might be its role in depleting levels of secretory immunoglobulin-A (S-IgA). S-IgA is the first line of defence against infections such as coughs and colds. In the main, acute stress (for example, giving a short presentation) temporarily increases levels of S-IgA. Chronic stress however, such

as that experienced by caregivers, results in lowered levels of S-IgA and subsequent increases in the frequencies of ill health.

Matt Bristow (Anglia Polytechnic University) presented a collection of studies assessing the effects of both stress and relaxation on S-IgA. The findings indicated that massage and relaxation might protect against illness by increasing immune protection. These stress ameliorators can increase levels of S-IgA. Research is required to investigate whether chronic increases in S-IgA could result in permanently reduced susceptibility to illness.

Like relaxation and massage,

other positive psychological events can also protect against illness through the increasing of immune protection. Gleeson reported a study of Manchester United players throughout the football season. He found that, regardless of exercise intensity, higher levels of S-IgA were observed during those periods when the team was performing well. This provides evidence of the influence of psychological factors, in this case positive mood and reductions in stress, on immune parameters and subsequent health status.

□ For more information see www.bps.org.uk/sub-syst/psybio/index.cfm

IN BRIEF**NOT FOR THE YOUNG?**

What makes people drop out from NHS cognitive-behavioural therapy sessions? Fergal Jones and K. Carraretto (University of Surrey) found that out of a whole host of predictors (e.g. primary presenting problem, distance from the clinic, time between referral and first appointment) only age predicted drop-out from sessions. Younger clients were more likely to drop out of CBT services for adults than older clients.

TEACHER BURN-OUT

In a study of Greek primary school teachers Constantinos Kokkinos (Cyprus Pedagogical Institute) and A. Davazoflou (Democritus University of Thrace) found that burned-out teachers were more likely to perceive disruptive behaviours as more serious in comparison to their non-burned-out counterparts.

BACKLASH IN ANTI-RACISM CAMPAIGNS

Individuals who are ambivalent in their attitudes towards other ethnic groups may be negatively affected by anti-racism messages. Greg Maio (Cardiff University) and colleagues found that although non-ambivalent individuals' attitudes may be positively influenced by anti-racism literature, this effect is reversed among ambivalent individuals.

PUT THE KETTLE ON

Although previous research suggests that children as young as four can understand the persuasive intention of adverts, Caroline Oates and colleagues from the University of Sheffield found that it was only at 10 years old that children really began to understand the desire of advertising companies to get you to buy their products. Children of six and eight years old saw TV adverts as being opportunities for the viewers and presenters to have a break.

Repairing the destruction

JULIE MORGAN reports on a symposium on children, war and political conflict.

FEW of us know what it is like to live in a political war zone, let alone comprehend the scale of the impact conflict can have on people's lives. Although there appears to be a multitude of interventions to reconstruct communities affected by political violence do they actually make a difference?

Despite the long-term effects of political conflict on a community, children appear to be surprisingly resilient to the violence that surrounds them during warfare. Children often adopt coping strategies to deal with war-related stress.

Carola Eyber's (Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford) research into the impact of war on adolescents in Angola revealed that children readily use distraction strategies. They may ensure that they are with friends rather than being alone; work within the economy; and use religion as a means of intervention. Eyber stressed that although as many as 71 per cent of the adolescents they interviewed would have qualified for the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, the use of coping strategies showed resilience rather than dysfunction.

Although these children have demonstrated their defiance in a potentially traumatising environment the intervention of humanitarian agencies still plays a notable role. Alison Strang (Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh) stressed that external agencies, such as the International Rescue Committee and the Save the Children Fund, can help to restore the community. However, the loss of families, homes and possessions cannot be restored.

But communities affected by political violence are far

from passive receptors of this violence. Strang adheres to the view that these communities are constantly responding by using their resources to fight back against the effects of war. For example, a community's social ecology and the relations between people can actually be strengthened by war. Humanitarian agencies can then intervene by appraising the perceived needs of the community for development.

Psychosocial intervention aims to reconstruct a community devastated by political violence. But what happens when the community does not move forward? This point was made by Ed Cairns (University of Ulster) who emphasised that since the 1995 peace process there has been little change in political conflict in Northern Ireland. In this case it seems that something or someone is preventing these communities from moving forward. But what? Strang pointed out that despite the efforts of humanitarian agencies, communities are difficult to reconstruct when injustice and a basic lack of human rights continues to exist within a country.

However, it is not only the political and economic status of a community that can hold back optimism for the future. Cairns demonstrated that parents can contribute to the hostility and conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. For example, our newspapers were only recently splashed with reports that Catholic children were being attacked on their way to school. Cairns made the point that parents of these children were offered alternative routes to school but some chose not to take them. Cairns also indicates that integrated schools are virtually nonexistent in Northern Ireland, and parents actually prefer to send their children to segregated schools.

Since adults are invariably seen by children to be the role models of society it is unsurprising that political conflict can continue, even with psychosocial intervention. It is also clear to see why the audience of this symposium were questioning what children's expectations for the future could be. In the case of the studies reviewed here the words of Edwin Starr still ring true: 'War – huh – what is it good for? Absolutely nothing.'

What should we be teaching?

CAROL MCGUINNESS reports on the *Division of Teachers and Researchers of Psychology* symposium.

ONE of the most striking conclusions from this symposium was the degree of agreement on what constitutes core knowledge for a psychology curriculum at various levels.

In the past few years three reviews of psychology curricula have been conducted, either as part of general national curriculum reviews or more locally within the Society itself. Phil Banyard (Nottingham Trent University) provided an overview of current A/AS qualifications, Peter Bannister (Manchester Metropolitan University) reported on the work of the Psychology Subject Benchmarking Group and Pam Maras (University of Greenwich) explained how the Society's own Qualifying Examination was reviewed.

There may be variations in the names of five core areas identified across the three levels of curricula but they are essentially

the same – biological, cognitive, developmental, individual differences and social. There was also agreement that a psychology curriculum should have a research methods component, that students should have opportunities to gain hands-on experience of research and reporting projects – even at A/AS-level.

On the one hand, this level of agreement augurs well as it permits first-year undergraduate curriculum designers to build on what students already know. Increasingly, first-year undergraduate psychology is populated by students who have some previous psychology qualification. (Indeed, Phil Banyard reported a massive expansion in the numbers of students studying A- and AS-level psychology in the last few years.)

On the other hand, very soon after the symposium was finished, Professor Tony Gale delivered his address as recipient of

the Award for Distinguished Contribution to the Teaching of Psychology. He starkly reminded us that the consensus gained about the core areas may be at the cost of innovation and diversity in curriculum design. (See next month's *Psychologist* for an article based on Tony Gale's lecture.)

Perhaps we should look beyond the mere description of the core areas to how a curriculum is designed and delivered, and to the pedagogies which sustain a curriculum. Until recently higher education did not express a deep concern about these matters. The final paper in the symposium by Nick Hammond, of Psychology Learning and Teaching Subject Network (LTSN) explained how this may be changing. He described how LTSN is supporting psychology teaching and learning, and particularly its emphasis on innovation in curriculum design and pedagogy through funding mini-projects.

Imagine all you golfers... It's easy if you try

SIAN WILLIAMS learns how to improve her sporting prowess at a series of talks on cognition and performance.

WINNING imagery in preparation for a sporting event is a much-used technique and imaging success is linked to actual success in many sports. Dave Smith (Chester College) presented research investigating how different types of imagery affect golf performance. Traditional written imagery scripts were tested against video-guided imagery and audio-guided imagery. The traditional method was found to be significantly less beneficial to subsequent golf performance than the video and audio methods. Smith proposes that the effect could be explained by the 'real-time' nature of video and audio versions. For imagery to have maximum benefit we must be able to put ourselves 'into' the image: more difficult when the image does not run in real time.

Whilst we can use imagery to enhance our performance

there is the tendency for some people to think that they will perform considerably better than they actually do. Kelly Jones (Manchester Metropolitan University) looked at this tendency in relation to individual differences in anxiety. The study found that repressors (people who report low anxiety but show the physiological signs of a high anxiety individual) were more unrealistically optimistic about their future performance than high-anxiety individuals. According to the literature high-anxiety individuals are generally pessimistic about their future performance. How

justified this self-prediction is in terms of their actual performance might depend on the situation.

High-anxious individuals are thought to perform less well in stressful situations. Mark Wilson tested this with golfers and found that when the shot to be played was tricky, high-anxious individuals behaved differently from low-trait anxiety individuals. In stressful situations the high-anxiety individual expends

more cognitive effort despite declining performance.

The research currently being carried out in Manchester has both theoretical and practical applications. The application of the principles of cognitive psychology to the world of sports performance replicates what has been shown in the lab and promises to show how we can improve our sporting performance. Perhaps we could put these techniques to the test this month on our tennis players.

Dominic Abrams is at the University of Kent at Canterbury

Simon Bignell is at the University of Essex

Victoria Clarke is at Loughborough University

Richard Crisp is at the University of Birmingham

Carol McGuinness is at Queen's University Belfast

Julie Morgan is at the University of Sussex

Elizabeth Peel is at Loughborough University

Mark Wetherell is at the University of Plymouth

Sian Williams is at the University of Sussex