

# For better, for worse

Married women are less likely to be killed by their partners than are cohabiting women. **JANE L. IRELAND**

**R**ESearch generally suggests that married women are less likely to be killed by their husbands than are cohabiting women by their partners. Married women in their early twenties are at greater risk of uxoricide (middle-age is a risk factor for cohabiting women). In one of the first national-level analyses of the risk of uxoricide as a function of the type of relationship (the first in the US) Todd Shackelford from Florida Atlantic University analysed more than 400,000 homicides committed between 1976 and 1994.

Women in cohabiting relationships were nine times as likely to be killed than were married women. Cohabiting women aged between 35 and 44 were most likely to be murdered; for married women this age was much lower (less than 25 years).

Differences in ages between partners also appeared to be an important factor: women in both groups were found to be at a greater risk of uxoricide if they were markedly older or younger than their partner or husband. Women whose partners were significantly different to them in age were up to four times more likely to be murdered.

Shackelford suggests that men who know or suspect that their relationship is coming to an end may take extreme action to ensure that it continues, or that their partner does not go on to develop another relationship. Such extreme actions can include aggression, possibly leading to murder. Since cohabiting relationships are more likely to terminate than marital ones, Shackelford suggests that men in

cohabiting relationships may be hypersensitive to this and may therefore have a lower threshold to suspecting relationship break-up, resulting in more frequent acts of aggression towards their partner.

Shackelford also suggests how cohabiting relationships for women may be more dangerous since they co-occur with other predictors of murder, such as low income and youth.

Shackelford, T.K. (2001). Cohabitation, marriage and murder: Woman-killing by male romantic partners. *Aggressive Behavior*, 27, 284–291.

■ Dr Jane L. Ireland is with the Personality Disorder Unit, Ashworth Hospital Authority, and the Psychology Department, University of Central Lancashire.

## Culture at work

Blue-collar workers' satisfaction with their work environment may be culture-bound. **MARGARET J. SCOTT MYERS**

**T**HE People's Republic of China now encompasses heavily Western-influenced Hong Kong. Despite the handover of Hong Kong to China from the UK, their recent histories have resulted in workforces with different environmental conditions and organisational commitment, providing a natural set of circumstances for comparison. Ian Donald and Oi-Ling Siu from the University of Liverpool and Lingnan University, Hong Kong, took advantage of this unique natural setting to examine the impact of these different circumstances on stress at work.

White- and blue-collar workers in Hong Kong and a group of blue-collar workers in China assessed how they regarded their work's environmental conditions, organisational commitment, job satisfaction, mental well-being and physical well-being. Although the research would ideally have included Chinese white-collar workers, surveying these workers would have been too sensitive as they are generally employed by the state.

Donald and Siu showed that environmental factors, such as ventilation, illumination and freedom to move round at work, were positively related to job satisfaction and perceptions of personal



mental health and physical well-being. But to their surprise, these relationships were stronger for the Hong Kong white-collar and Chinese blue-collar groups than for the Hong Kong blue-collar group.

Organisational commitment was found to be a significant predictor of health outcomes, and also a moderator between some of the environmental conditions and health.

The authors draw the conclusion that while there is a connection between environmental conditions and health, the context of the work moderates these relationships. As communist China and Hong Kong continue to co-exist as one, it will be fascinating to learn how their workers respond to changing politics and culture.

Donald, I., & Siu, O-L. (in press). Moderating the stress impact of environmental conditions: The effect of organizational commitment in Hong Kong and China. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*.

■ Dr Margaret J. Scott Myers is a Chartered Psychologist from Wirral, Cheshire.

# Primed and ready to judge

New findings highlight the evolutionary role of priming in memory. **GARY BRASE**

**P**ERSONALITY judgement tasks have long fuelled a debate about how human memory works. Personality judgements about oneself seem to involve semantic memory (using conclusions that are already abstracted from any specific events, e.g. 'I am generally introverted'); whereas the same judgements about other people tend to call on episodic memory (using specific events to reach a decision, e.g. 'I remember when X was very sociable at a party'). The debate is largely about the relationship between these two memory systems.

Stanley Klein and his colleagues at the

University of California at Santa Barbara have examined how the nature of the information that is being retrieved from memory actually appears to trigger different decision rules regarding what pieces of semantic and episodic information are primed for subsequent retrieval.

They looked at personality trait judgements and followed those judgements with requests for further information, looking at how long it took for people to provide that further information. For example, a subject may have been asked 'How well does 'intelligent' describe you?' and then after deciding upon a response

asked either 'Think of a specific incident in which you were intelligent' or 'Think of a specific incident in which you were not intelligent'.

The process of deciding whether a trait describes oneself made people faster at remembering inconsistent episodes, but not trait-consistent episodes. This pattern occurred regardless of how descriptive the personality trait was, although more descriptive traits produced stronger effects. The same effect happened when people were asked about the personality traits of their mother, but only for highly descriptive personality traits. Decisions about just moderately descriptive traits for one's mother primed trait-consistent episodes.

Klein and colleagues argue that these results indicate that priming in memory is an evolved adaptation designed to bring to the fore of the mind information likely to be required by a current decision task. According to this account, when an abstracted trait judgement already exists (as with one's own traits) it is used to provide the initial response, and trait-inconsistent episodes are used for placing 'scope-limits' on the generalisability of the abstracted judgement. When no abstracted trait judgement exists, trait-consistent episodes are primed because of their role in forming and supporting the personality trait judgement. This view, along with the empirical data presented to support it, is particularly noteworthy in that it directly counters the idea that priming effects are merely byproducts of spreading neural activation that serve no designed purpose.

Klein, S. B., Cosmides, L., Tooby, J., & Chance, S. (in press). Decisions and the evolution of memory: Multiple systems, multiple functions. *Psychological Review*.

■ Gary Brase is Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Sunderland.

## Associate Editor: G. 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.615.

# Laughing matters

Song-like laughs are better liked than unvoiced ones. **NEIL MARTIN**

**E**XPERIENCE suggests that we find some laughs more attractive than others. Braying, snorting laughs tend to have us scuttling behind the crudités, but light giggles have us offering glasses of pink champagne. A study by Jo-Anne Bachorowski and Michael Owren of Vandebilt and Cornell Universities has found that non-voiced laughs such as grunts, snorts and pants are indeed out – but voiced, song-like laughs are in.

They asked 128 participants to listen to 50 voiced and 50 non-voiced laughs and rate the laughs according to how pleasant they found them and how others would find them. Participants also

rated the 'sexiness' of the laugher and how much they would like to meet the laugher. The voiced laughs were significantly more liked than were unvoiced laughs. Responses to the latter were consistently negative, and especially so when the snorting, grunting or panting laughers were women.

'Based on these results', say the authors, 'we argue that laughers use the acoustic features of their vocalizations to shape listener affect.'

Bachorowski, J.-A., & Owren, M. J. (2001). Not all laughs are alike: Voiced but not unvoiced laughter readily elicits positive affect. *Psychological Science*, 12, 252–257.