

Little green men and the menstrual cycle

BY CATHERINE HANNA

THE first-ever national postgraduate conference for psychologists was held at the University of Sheffield in 1968. This year the PsyPAG conference returned to Sheffield having enjoyed continued success for over 30 years.

The conference opened on Tuesday morning with a keynote lecture by Professor John Frisby (University of Sheffield). His fascinating and comprehensive review discussed changes and developments in vision research from his PhD in 1967 to the present. In particular, the influence of Marr and the computational approach in researching human vision were discussed – along with the regret that this paradigm is often neglected in current research.

The oral presentations by postgraduates, which followed throughout the conference, reflected the current range of psychological research. All

sessions (on topics as diverse as children and memory; object recognition; social identity, nationality and religion; notions of the self; and cerebral functions) produced high-quality talks and constructive discussion between delegates.

Keynote speaker Dr Chris French (Goldsmiths College) talked on Tuesday afternoon on 'the psychology of alien abductions'. He presented reasons to be sceptical of the claims of those who believe they have been abducted by aliens, and considered why some people believe in the existence of little green men. French utilised phenomena from academic psychology, such as sleep-paralysis and temporal lobe abnormality, in an attempt to present a rational explanation for seemingly bizarre real-world issues.

Wednesday morning commenced with a presentation

by Dr Keith Laws (London Guildhall University) on category-specific disorders. He reviewed neuropsychological evidence relating to specific deficits in the categorisation of animate or inanimate objects. He presented further evidence to suggest that humans possess an innate capacity for processing of animate phenomena.

Special emphasis was placed on the conference poster session, which was judged by Professor Dick Eiser and Dr Chris Spencer (University of Sheffield). The poster prize was won by Katie German (University of Newcastle upon Tyne). Her poster 'Induced motion: Lateral vs. motion in depth' was highly commended by the judges for the presentation of high-quality research in an accessible and informative style.

The conference ended with a presentation from Dr Precilla Choi (Keele University), who gave an informative and entertaining account of her career in menstrual cycle research. She explained that

she had attended PsyPAG conferences as a postgraduate, and was keen 'to give something back to the organisation from which she had gained so much'.

This she achieved – not least by discussing issues relevant to all researchers, regardless of field of study. In particular, Choi highlighted the importance of listening to real people and their experiences outside the experimental laboratory when seeking to understand human behaviour.

All in all, the return of the conference to Sheffield was a great success. The diversity and quality of psychological research and the support of established researchers provided strong encouragement for those of us just starting our research careers.

■ *Catherine Hanna is a postgraduate student at the University of Sheffield.*

Don't forget our Annual Student Writer Competition!
Deadline for entries is Friday 25 January. See p.554 for details.

EAT, DRINK AND BE EDUCATED

Would you like to host the biggest psychology postgraduate gathering of the year? If this appeals, then hosting the PsyPAG 2002 Annual Conference is for you.

You will need: Enthusiasm and support from others in your department.

You will get: Full support and help from the PsyPAG committee, a substantial budget from PsyPAG and superhero status!

Informal bids should be made before **22 October 2001**.

Please send bids or requests for further information to the address below:

Chris Bearman, Department of Psychology, Fylde College
Lancaster University, LA1 4YH

Associate Editor: DANIELA SCHULZE

Articles, cartoons and other contributions for the 'Students' page are most welcome.

Send to: Daniela Schulze, c/o the Society's Leicester office. E-mail: d.schulze@admin.gla.ac.uk