

An erosion of rights and patient care?

The public sector strike on 30 November was supported by several major unions including UNITE, who had 75 per cent support for the strike from those who voted (31 per cent response rate).

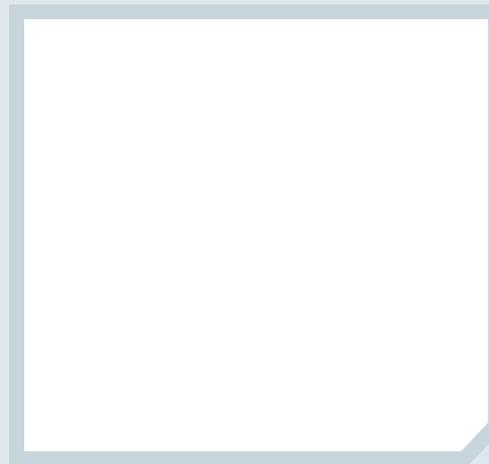
Professional bodies, such as the British Medical Association and Royal College of Nursing, also supported the strike, even if they did not ballot for action on this occasion.

It isn't possible to say exactly what numbers of psychologists voted for the strike, nor how many psychologists turned out on the Day of Action. But many did decide to support the strike because of an ongoing erosion of public services, and now major threats to the terms and conditions of staff. These threats will also jeopardise the future of psychology as a profession, and we already see that there are fewer training places available for people who want to train in applied psychology, reduction of NHS posts and a move to downgrade existing posts. Our profession cannot afford to ignore these threats if we believe psychology has a real contribution to make to Society.

As the economic downturn bites even harder, we are seeing cuts, closures of services and expanding workloads. This hurts local communities at a time when public services are even more important

as a safety net to catch those who will fall below the poverty line. Mental health needs increase during recession and the link between unemployment and suicide is well documented. The public sector is under attack and this will increase the gap between rich and poor. The proposals on cutting pensions are part of this wider picture – staff will work longer, for less, despite having saved throughout their working lives. They will also have to pay an additional 'tax' of just over 50 per cent of their current pension contributions, which will not be going to their pension fund but straight to the treasury towards the 'debt' (see Unite info at tinyurl.com/6ktg2jb).

There is a bigger agenda to try to privatise public services – if staff are cheaper, then this is attractive to private companies. Again, this is a threat to applied psychologists, and to psychology as a



Khadj Rouf with her children and other protestors outside David Cameron's constituency office

Existing data – worth a second look?

Secondary data analysis refers to second-hand analysis of existing data sets; data collected by someone else for some other purpose (e.g. General Lifestyle Survey). Due to limited funding opportunities, many researchers are embracing the practice of secondary data analysis. For example, Emerson and Einfeld (2010) reanalysed the first two waves of data from the UK's Millennium Cohort Study and the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children to explore

emotional and behavioural problems in disabled and non-disabled children. What is more, such practice is encouraged by journals, including the prestigious *British Medical Journal*, which promotes a culture of data sharing (see Groves, 2009).

With the current caps on funding for primary research, it could be argued that there are palpable gains to be made by capitalising upon sources of existing data. Such data have already been collected, thereby negating the

expensive and time-consuming collection methods associated with primary research (e.g. surveys, interviews or video footage). Exploiting secondary data sets could thus prove cost-effective for the lone investigator, small research team or those working on time-limited projects, such as student dissertations. In these times of austerity surely this can only be a good thing?

Yet few researchers possess the complex skills needed to make effective use of

secondary data sets.

Secondary sources can be difficult to locate and access particularly for those with limited research experience. What is more, analysts may not understand the data especially when key variables are missing or only come in aggregate form. The size of the data sets, as regards both the number of variables and respondents involved, can also be difficult to manage. There are further concerns that researchers may misuse secondary sources of data,

Some important questions

discipline. How will we continue to reach the public?

We hope that the government will be prepared to rethink its proposals on public sector pensions. At a time when there are a million unemployed young people, it seems peculiar to ask older people to work for longer, and for many, they will claim a pension at the end of it that will not keep them above the poverty line. As it is now, half of women public service pensioners get less than £4000 per year. This is not the 'gold plating' caricature of certain sections of the media.

What could the British Psychological Society do? Help raise awareness of what is happening to our profession and more widely to public services as part of our commitment to social justice. We should not be afraid to speak out at a time when patient care is under threat, and when the rights of the public sector workforce are being eroded.

Dr Khadj Rouf

*Consultant Clinical Psychologist
Applied Psychologists Occupational Advisory
Committee, Unite the Union*

Susanne Vosmer's thoughts about hypnosis not yet being part of mainstream psychology (Letters, December 2011) can be connected to the news piece in the same issue about Professor Happé ('Will we ever understand autism?'), in particular that autism represents a different 'cognitive style'. Now link this to the search by the Brain Mind Forum for the most important problems to be solved in neuroscience (also in Letters, December 2011).

The science of the end of the 20th century was perhaps in the closing stages of the longstanding segmentation of everything, in the desperate hope that eventually truth would lie beneath. Hypnosis and autism offer challenges to a segmentation approach to human behaviour because they hint at the possibility that only an accurate, holistic view of how mind and brain operate will advance our knowledge. Sequential information processing systems, where input eventually leads to output, cannot resolve the logical conundrums of 'Where lies free will? Where lies the 'decision'? Where is judgement formed?

Does attention exist as a 'willed' event, or do decisions precede attention; does attention create cognitive style or does cognitive style create attention? So one of the most important questions for

psychology and neuroscience is centred on the very nature of the motivational algorithms, with the systems for attention and decision as interwoven event-laden but holistic emergent phenomena.

The answers may well suggest that hypnosis is a very simple normal extension of attention, motivation and decision making and that autism, for some at least, is a cognitive style where these are simply operating with different weightings as they bring influence in *different directions* to those that occur for most of the time for most people.

And this may explain why people, especially those who have to make big decisions affecting us all, sometimes slip from one pattern that has been successful to another that is pure disaster, or fail to change direction between the core activities when the context changes, so that successful attention weightings trip over to quite absurd patterns of decisions.

I think those looking back from the 22nd century will see us starting on the foundations of a science of psychology, the next 90 years will be interesting indeed. For only now are we beginning to get a hint of the insight we need to create such a science, for most of the rest will be nothing but historical curiosity.

Graham Rawlinson

Chichester

cherry-picking findings to support their arguments.

Undoubtedly, the research question should dictate whether an analyst collects primary or secondary data, not concerns regarding budgets or analytical skills. However, given the current economic climate and widespread availability of data, I wonder whether researchers should exploit secondary sources, providing, of course, they have the necessary skills to do so. Primary data would then only be collected when the data set is unfeasible or lacks the methodological rigour needed to address the proposed problem.

What do fellow psychologists think? Is it worth exploiting secondary sources for psychological

research? And should we ensure our students have the necessary the skills to make effective use of such data?

Joanne Wilson

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References

- Emerson, E. & Einfeld, S. (2010). Emotional and behavioural difficulties in young children with and without developmental delay: A bi-national perspective. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 51(5), 583-593.
- Groves, T. (2009). Managing UK research data for future use. *British Medical Journal*, 338, b1252.

NOTICEBOARD

I We are carrying out research across England to find out **what happens when therapy or counselling makes someone feel worse or 'goes wrong' in some way**. This will help us to develop some practical ways to identify and prevent therapies from failing.

We are seeking to interview 20 clients and 20 therapists who have experienced failed therapies to explore what they would have found helpful in preventing this occurring. If you have experienced therapy as a therapist or client, that you feel has 'gone wrong' or been harmful, we are keen to hear from you.

To take part in the study, you will need to complete a questionnaire. After this, you may be asked to take part in an interview or focus group (although there is no obligation to do so).

If you would like more information, you can visit our website: www.shef.ac.uk/scharr/sections/hsr/mh/mhresearch/adept

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The roots of horror... and why we enjoy

We write with reference to the recent article on 'The lure of horror' (November 2011). In this article it was claimed that 'viewing the content of horror fiction through the prism of evolutionary evidence, it's no surprise that the overriding theme of many tales is that the characters are at risk of being eaten... many horror books and movie classics feature oversized carnivorous predators, including James Herbert's *The Rats*, Shaun Hutson's *Slugs*, *Cat People*, *King Kong* and the *Jaws* franchise'. If the subject of horror films were dictated by a fear of things that would have been likely to eat us during our evolution, surely horror films would be full of lions, tigers and other large predators that genuinely might have eaten us. Gorillas don't eat people, they eat fruit. We are not entirely sure of the diet of slugs, but we are fairly sure that it does not and never has included *Homo sapiens*. Furthermore, great white sharks were not frequently encountered in our environment of evolutionary adaptation.

Forced to consider alternative categories of frightful entities that populate horror fiction, such as vampires, zombies and ghosts, the article explains them with arguments such as 'our



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Postdoctoral Conference Bursary Scheme

The Research Board is delighted to announce the establishment of this new bursary scheme to support the work of postdoctoral researchers and lecturers.

Conference bursaries are available to support UK psychology postdoctoral researchers and lecturers to attend any academic conference, either in the UK or internationally, relevant to the applicants work. Each bursary consists of up to £150 (UK) or £300 (international) to contribute towards the costs of registration and travel to attend the full conference.

There will be two rounds of the scheme in 2012, with submission deadlines on 1 April and 1 October. **Get your applications in now for the April deadline.**

For the full criteria and an application form please contact Carl Bourton at the Society's office carl.bourton@bps.org.uk

Note: For the purposes of the bursary scheme, a postdoctoral research/lecturer is defined as a person who is employed at a UK HEI and is within three years of the completion of their doctoral research degree (i.e. PhD) in psychology.

the emotion

fixation with death and infection', threats that we find very difficult to circumscribe to life in the Pleistocene.

The assertion that there is a 'lack of historical and cultural variance' in horror fiction that is supposed to prove that 'there is such a thing as a human nature', is also patently incorrect. This is but one example of the ease with which enormous cultural and historical variations, easily provable and widely documented in genre studies, are bluntly erased on the basis of an oversimplified and ultimately tautological common trait (all horror fictions are scary).

The 'lure of horror' article is representative of what we term the Standard Biological Science Model (SBSM). The SBSM starts with some observation about human behaviour, such as the content of horror films or male promiscuity; the next move is to construct a narrative about how this may have arisen during human evolution; added credibility is then provided by a reference to a brain study that reveals evidence for the location of the relevant module.

Evolution and the study of the brain have enormous scientific street 'cred'; they are integral to high prestige and well-funded STEM subjects. SBSM theories in psychology bask in reflected glory. However, to challenge particular SBSM theories in psychology is not to challenge the theories with which they are so closely associated. We are sceptical of the evolutionary origin of our fear of King Kong and the giant bunnies in *The Night of the Lepus*, but we do still of course think Darwin had a point.

Dr Paul Morris

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I was surprised to see no reference in the article on 'The lure of horror' to reversal theory.

Reversal theory has a distinctive way of understanding the enjoyment of bad emotions, such as horror, anxiety and disgust. It argues that in the presence of a 'protective frame', which removes consequences from a situation, the hedonic value of arousal is inverted, so that bad emotions become enjoyable in the same degree as they would have been unpleasant in the absence of such a frame. This dynamic is obscured by the fact that, in everyday life, we typically use the same emotion word to describe both the unpleasant and pleasant version of the emotion. In the theory, the supposedly bad emotion that is actually being enjoyed is called a 'parapathic'

emotion (see Michael Apter's book *Danger* published by Oneworld).

Protective frames come in a number of forms, including recognition that what one is observing is fictional or imaginary. This is an intriguing idea that helps to understand many of the paradoxes of emotion in everyday life. The construct is central to my own research into why people enjoy parapathic emotions at work and play (e.g. when working in disturbing professions such as undertakers and oncologists or while watching movies).

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FORUM THE REAL WORLD

What do airplane safety announcements, riots and a girl group on the *X Factor* have in common?

It was the day before the deadline for this column. In these dire days of cuts and pending catastrophe, life seems busier than ever. We hadn't written a word. One of us (Alex) had just returned from a trip, the other (Steve) was just flying down to viva a history PhD on the UK riots of 1980 and 1981. When would we have a moment to draft something? What would it be about?

The plane sat on the tarmac. The safety announcement began. The flight attendants tried to enjoin people, even (especially?) seasoned passengers, to stop talking, to put down their papers and to listen. But to no avail. All around, people pointedly continued to chat and to read. In a scene that is played out on most flights, the message was almost totally ignored. To attend would be a sign of being *ingénu*, of being inexperienced, of being a hick rather than a sophisticated and seasoned traveller. Listening is for the inferior other. It is not for the likes of us.

The flight was uneventful. It took as long and cost as much to get a taxi from the airport to the university. But the trip was worthwhile. The thesis was superb. Using a combination of mathematical modelling, network analysis and oral history (ethnography in our language) it demolished the notion of 'copycat' rioting – as if people take to the streets simply because they see someone else throwing bricks on TV. It showed how riots spread non-randomly, partly through shared subcultural networks and partly when people recognise themselves and their own experience in the rioting of others. If you don't share that, then watching a riot will probably make you more likely to condemn than to join in a riot yourself.

Back home, at last – a taxi, a bus, a flight, another bus and a drive – and no good for anything but a mindless evening. The *X Factor* is on the TV. What determines which act gets through? Let us first discard the absurd notion that it has much to do with contestants' ability to sing. After all, a rather discordant girl group (Little Mix) remain in the last four out of the tens of thousands who originally auditioned. They might even have won by the time you read this. As much time is spent on constructing a narrative about the contestants as hearing them sing, connecting them to the audience, displaying their emotions so we empathise with them. Perhaps those viewers who are young girls (a large proportion of those who vote) see individual girl singers as individual competition to be brought down, but see a group of ordinary girls as reflecting a shared collective identity.

So what do airplane safety announcements, riots, and the success of Little Mix all have in common? They are all about *social influence*. What is more, they all show that social influence is bound up with *social identity*. Who and what do we listen to? To those who we see as sharing our identity and to that which affirms our identity. When there are multiple voices clamouring for our attention, for our support or for our votes, who do we heed? Those who are most successfully represented as being one of us and one with us. This is true of the most trivial of phenomena, but also the most consequential.

This is a lesson that both of us learned from John Turner (who supervised both of our PhDs). John died in August and his death is a huge loss to us personally, but also to psychology. However, his influence endures.

Steve Reicher is at the University of St Andrews. **Alex Haslam** is at the University of Exeter. Share your views on this and other 'real world' psychological issues – e-mail psychologist@bps.org.uk. An archive of columns can be found at www.bbcprisonstudy.org.

Rioting and non-rioting cities

The Society and *The Psychologist* have done much to collate hypotheses as to what produced the recent riots in English cities.

A recent play by Gillian Slovo performed in London dramatises her account that it is the frustration of – mostly unemployed – black people that underlies much of the violence. Andreas Whittam Smith in *The Independent* focuses on the jealousy generated by the increasing gulf between rich and poor. There are several such one-dimensional explanations on offer

by powerful social commentators, but they may be difficult to harness into the more complex picture that

most likely exists. Thus some rioters were employed, white, and some of them appear not to be very clear as to why they

did take part.

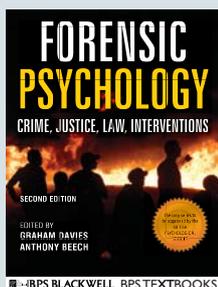
One of the ways in which to establish why there were riots is to look for situations where, though one might well have expected them, there were not riots. Two such 'control locations' are Glasgow/Strathclyde, and Middlesbrough. As to the first, there are many reasons why a Scottish society, however beset with areas of severe poverty, may have left the English to their current disruptions. In Middlesbrough, however, there are both deprivation and a shared English context with the other rioting cities. Two circumstances may, however, characterise Middlesbrough and be a part



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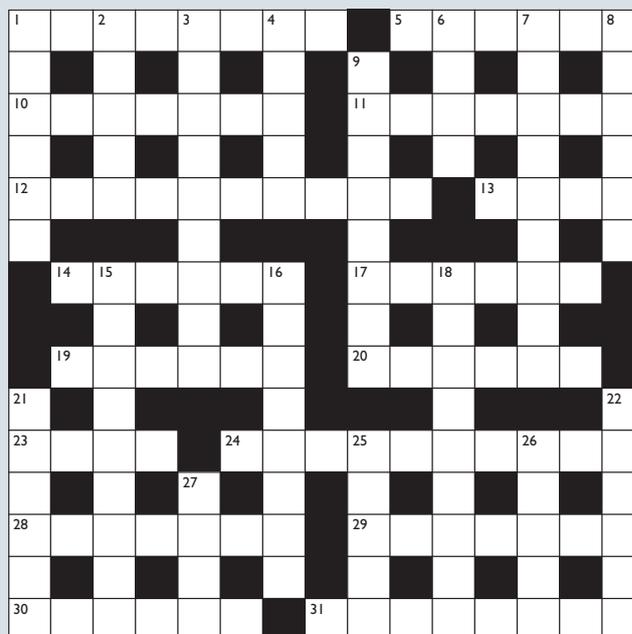
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no 61



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of the reason why eruptions did not occur there. One is that the visibility of affluence is perhaps less flaunting there than it is in the cities that did riot; and the second is that the city is known to have a tough policing regime, which has already reduced urban violence.

I just offer these observations as a contribution to the discussion and studies that will no doubt be under way, and hope that not just the rioting, but also the strains that cause it, can be dealt with so they do not recur.

J.M. Wober PhD

London NW3

CLARIFICATION

Many thanks to the Division of Health Psychology for their contributions to the December special feature, in particular to the coordinating team of Maggie Donovan-Hall, Alison Wearden, Neil Coulson and Angel Chater, whose contributions played a vital role in bringing the edition together.

obituary

Tom Troscianko (1953–2011)

Tom Troscianko, Professor of Psychology, interdisciplinary vision researcher, inspiring teaching and colleague died on 16 November on his way to give a lecture in Mainz, Germany.

Tom came to Bristol in 1978 to work with Richard Gregory on human hearing and vision as a postdoctoral researcher. He left Bristol only briefly (between 2000 and 2002) to take a Chair at Sussex University before returning to Bristol as Professor of Psychology.

For Tom research had to be exciting, challenging and most of all fun. The questions he asked were often novel and surprising, and his approach to answering these questions was always full of his enormous sense of adventure. Tom's core scientific interest was to understand how the properties of the natural environment map on to how the brain is organised. This central question led his work in a broad range of directions. A key topic was the perception of colour. He asked and provided an answer to the hard question in this area: Why do humans have a particular pattern of sensitivity to different wavelengths? This led him to Uganda to study the visual properties of the rain forest environment in which monkeys foraged for food, and to explore the wavelength sensitivities of other species in the laboratory in collaboration with biologists in Bristol.

He also worked for many years with members of the Engineering Faculty to explore how knowledge of human vision could help with the design of artificial vision systems, or improve machine systems intended to be viewed by humans. His commitment to interdisciplinary working led him to found the Bristol Vision Institute (www.bristol.ac.uk/vision-institute), which brought together researchers interested in seeing from all the faculties. Tom did a great deal for the wider vision community beyond Bristol. He had a very long association with the academic journal *Perception* and served as one of the chief editors for many years. He was also an active committee member of the UK Applied Vision Association (AVA) and helping to organise many of their meetings.

For Tom there was no divide between work and life; he loved being an academic and it was a central part of his life. For those who worked with Tom, this quickly led to friendship and spending more time with him. Tom was quite rightly renowned for the parties that were often held at his home in Bristol, where one was as likely to meet a Fellow of the Royal Society as one of his students. The music was often loud, there was great food and the alcohol flowed. All were drawn to these events by Tom's ability to bring people together and have fun.

Tom loved to travel and he often combined this with his work. A trip to an international research conference often became an overland adventure full of debate, discussion and ideas by train, boat, motorbike or bicycle. Tom's command of so many European languages went alongside a deep understanding and love of different cultures – he was the perfect guide.

This love of life and the pursuit of knowledge inevitably spilled over into his teaching. Tom talked to his students as equals, listened to what they had to say and tried to understand each and every one of them as an individual. For so many of us, Tom was an inspiring and compelling teacher, mentor and life-long friend.

Iain Gilchrist

University of Bristol



across

- 1 Test appeal accepted by my principles (8)
- 5 Thorndike stated its law as a result (6)
- 10 Lowest note reached with hesitation (7)
- 11 Mandarin, say, in John Searle's room? (7)
- 12 I don't need to ask if it's so grandiloquent (10)
- 13 Stake returned to mount (4)
- 14 Info contained in woman's schedule (6)
- 17 Degree to which the French initially modified old asylum (6)
- 19 Serviceman not requiring one means of joining (6)
- 20 Offending emergency room's tirade (6)
- 23 Kind character (4)
- 24 Understanding me when looking back at fallacy, sort of (10)
- 28 Small amount of flier between points (7)
- 29 Word popular and current in stations (7)
- 30 Seasonal affective disorder study to cause depression (6)
- 31 Licence to ride? (4,4)

down

- 1 Recollection of Ebbinghaus's study? (6)
- 2 Roam pastureland (5)
- 3 With melon, dopa's restored and sent up (9)
- 4 Times office worker before one (5)
- 6 Thwart with sword (4)
- 7 It may affect computer user's European agreement over transport (3,6)
- 8 Parent working drill into skull (6)
- 9 Move hurriedly to make message unintelligible (8)
- 15 Set object in collective intelligence (5,4)
- 16 I'm taken in by a friend which causes ill-feeling (8)
- 18 One not fancied in nightmare's cryptic definition? (4,5)
- 21 Reserve silicon on board in period of inactivity (6)
- 22 Fighting lawsuit (6)
- 25 Doctor later gives change (5)
- 26 Psychologist at last showing ritual to be unoriginal (5)
- 27 Monster therefore arising (4)