‘Honey, I shrunk the kids’

Jon Sutton and Aidan Horner on psychologists as parents
...features

'Honey, I shrunk the kids'
Jon Sutton and Aidan Horner speak to the children of psychologists, and the psychologists themselves, about their parenting

Learning from educational neuroscience
Annie Brookman considers the potential benefits and concerns in an ever-growing field

The genetic battle of the sexes
Sofia Deleniv considers the implications of genomic imprinting for social behaviour and mental health

New voices: The 'ugly stepsister' of the eating disorder family
Nancy Tucker draws on the evidence base and personal experience to consider perceptions of bulimia nervosa

...reports

obesity strategy; Wellcome Exhibitions; PsyPAG conference; applied health research; and our editor reports from three days of the Annual Conference of the American Psychological Association
I have literally just put down a magazine article by Robert Epstein, an evidence-based look at 'What Makes a Good Parent'. Soon I will go home, to my two young sons. Might my access to the relevant research, alongside a general background in understanding the minds and behaviour of others, elevate me to 'Dad of the Year' status? I seriously doubt it. Instead, I will blag, botch and bumble my way through just like everybody else.

It’s always good to seek a wider sample though, so Aidan Horner and I thought it would be fun to talk to the children of psychologists, and the psychologists themselves, about whether profession had an impact on parenting (see p.758).

Elsewhere there’s the usual mix of news, views, reviews and more, alongside our online offerings (websites, apps, podcast). We have so many ‘children’ these days, and of course we love them all equally. But it takes a village to raise a child, and we need your contributions more than ever. Please don’t wait to be asked: see our website or drop me a line.

Dr Jon Sutton
Managing Editor @psychmag
Positive light on the spectrum?

I read with interest the letter by Sarah Ashworth and Ruth Tully entitled ‘Adult autism – hidden in forensic settings’ (September 2016). The Autism Act 2009 appeared to have had a significant effect on public awareness, recognising the needs but also abilities of people with ASC (autistic spectrum condition – a preferable term to autistic spectrum disorder, in my opinion). While autism awareness courses run in criminal justice settings are to be welcomed, they can often raise as many questions as they answer – for instance issues around accuracy of diagnosis and the treatment needs that become apparent once ASC has been correctly diagnosed. Many people with ASC who I have worked with have previously been undiagnosed and simply languished in the prison system, their needs unidentified and unmet. Even where ASC has been indicated in medical and other records, diagnoses have sometimes been inconclusive or not based on a recognised assessment methodology. As Ashworth and Tully say, the crucial need for a detailed neurodevelopmental history from a parent, carer or close family member can make this kind of assessment problematic for people managed by criminal justice agencies – although in many cases such information has been usefully accessed.

I have been fortunate to form very productive partnerships with a number of academics and professionals from non-forensic backgrounds (including clinical psychologists specialising in learning disability, speech and language therapists and social workers, as well as trainers with autism and staff from the National Autistic Society) in developing a better understanding of people with ASC who offend. This work included undertaking a prevalence study of ASC in a community offender sample which identified 4.5 per cent of offenders (N = 336) screening positive using a recognised screening tool (the AQ-10). Further analysis where relevant information was available indicated that approximately 2 per cent of these cases met diagnostic thresholds – roughly the expected rate of ASC in a (largely) male population. Although ASC is not thus markedly overrepresented in community forensic population, the challenges presented to criminal justice staff and the person with ASC themselves can be significant, often relating directly to presenting autistic symptoms – e.g. problematic communication skills, lack of perspective-taking abilities and obsessional behaviours.

Constructive professional co-working has led to the development of screening tools and clinical assessment methods to identify ASC in cases managed by the probation service locally, although accessing what are very limited services in the community remains problematic. Such services are primarily geared towards diagnosis and then self-help, although changes...
in legislation covering adult social care have been very helpful in addressing the needs of some offenders with ASC.

Elsewhere, developments in understanding ASC in a forensic population have had very positive results – in particular being able to reconsider the risks and needs presented by an individual once they have been accurately diagnosed. However, sometimes prisoners serving Indeterminate Sentences for Public Protection or life sentences have been refused progression through the prison system due, for example, to an observed lack of (victim) empathy or problematic social presentation in groupwork treatment by assessing psychologists. In certain cases a subsequent diagnosis shows their presentation reflects expected symptoms of ASC rather than antisocial attitudes or hostility. I have known prisoners incarcerated for more than 10 years when I would expect them to be released in less than half that time, if assessment reports had taken into account the eventual ASC diagnosis and altered the formulation to understand both their original offending and subsequent presentation in custody.

However, even with an accurate diagnosis, further complications arise when considering the management of such individuals and where it might best be delivered. Unfortunately, people who exhibit extreme ASC symptoms can still be very dangerous and particularly resistant to behavioural change or treatment. The government’s Transforming Care agenda is to be welcomed in moving people with learning disabilities and autism out of hospitals and out into properly supported settings in the community; however, such facilities often do not yet properly exist. Fewer, not more, specialist hospital placements are expected to be provided for the more severely disturbed offenders with ASC. I hope that the developments which have taken place in this field will lead to a greater focus on awareness raising and wide-scale screening and accurate assessment and diagnosis of offenders with ASC throughout correctional agencies in order to make sure that their needs are better met by psychologists and other professionals working with them.

Andrew Bates
Registered Forensic Psychologist
National Probation Service

My daughter has been in a prison hospital now for 25 years! She is one of Simon Baron-Cohen’s ‘lost generation’ (The Lancet, November, 2015). Her symptoms in the late 1980s were not ‘classic’ autism. Her excessive interest in the police led her into systematic episodes of shoplifting because she enjoyed being picked up and interviewed by the police. When social services became involved, she was a vulnerable young girl and easily manipulated by peers into a life of crime with more socially adeptteenagers. Social services, of course, blamed the parents, even though the evidence points to her behaviour worsening after they became involved. From that time on our voice was not heard! My daughter ended up being moved from a social services placement to a prison and then to a secure hospital. She has received different diagnoses over time, and only recently has her autism been recognised. However, the treatment she receives continues to rely on high levels of medication to manage her anxiety and meltdowns rather than supporting her autistic characteristics.

Her crimes are far less severe than the population she is placed with, and the lack of understanding of autism by her forensic team results in mismanagement of her behaviour and condition. It is definitely time for change. My daughter has been waiting far too long, and I fear the process is moving too slowly to save her from spending the rest of her life in a high-secure prison hospital. The deliberate ignorance by the forensic services over the years has a lot to answer for – autism should be an integral part of the training of professionals involved in forensics, and more especially psychiatrists.

Name and address supplied

Dr David Murphy
Broadmoor High Secure Psychiatric Hospital, and Autism Diagnostic Research Centre, Southampton

For too long the world of forensics has ignored the plight of many adults with ASD, who find themselves at odds with the law. High-profile cases such as hacking into government computers are picked up by the media and highlight how such crimes are motivated by an individual’s rigid and excessive interest in a favourite pastime. I am in the unfortunate position of being a mother of an adult with ASD who has been incarcerated. The lack of support and understanding of my daughter’s ASD has no doubt led her to develop mental health issues. Her secure environment ignores the fact that she is easily upset by a failure in routine; she is expected to manage the daily echoes of the corridors and screams of the other patients; her meltdowns are dealt with harshly with increases in medication.
Bruner remembered

There must be many of us who remember the excitement that surrounded Jerome Bruner (see Obituary, September 2016) and his team’s work in Oxford in the 1970s. I recall lecture rooms packed, and a buzz when a new paper was circulating as a preprint. At the time I was a newly qualified clinical psychologist, at the Park Hospital in Oxford, working with young children who had been maltreated. And Bruner’s work on early social communicative and language threw immediate light on how we might look at the social interactions of the children we were working with.

Bruner wanted to bring to life the study of the social-communicative contexts of the child’s developmental transition to language use. He saw that parents and preverbal children used games like ‘peek-a-boo’ in ways that might be regarded as supporting the acquisition of language. As Michael Tomasello wrote in his 2003 book Constructing a Language: ‘And young children seem to learn almost all their earliest language in cultural routines of one sort or another. Social interactional routines such as feeding, diaper changing, bathing, interactive games, book reading, car trips, and a host of other activities constitute the formats – joint attentional frames – within which children acquire their earliest linguistic symbols’.

Many of the toddlers we were working with didn’t have easy access to the playful formats and consistent joint attentional frames Bruner was describing.

Looking back, Bruner’s work brought new light on early language development through an extraordinary mix of philosophy (Wittgenstein and J.L. Austin), ethology (methods and ideas), and a more fully human developmental social psychology of infancy.

For practitioners needing a developmental and social framework for their work, and inspiration for integrative work, Bruner was always there. Peter Appleton

Doctorate in Clinical Psychology Course
Essex University

Explicit terminology

I was a member of the British Psychological Society group chaired by Dr Macpherson which drafted the guidelines Access to Sexually Explicit Illegal Material for the Purpose of Assessment, Intervention and Research.

The publication of this document was announced in The Psychologist (July 2016) under the headline ‘Extreme pornography guidelines’, which is unfortunate for two reasons.

Firstly, Part 5, sections 63 to 67 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 make it an offence to possess pornographic images that depict acts which threaten a person’s life; acts which result in or are likely to result in serious injury to a person’s anus, breasts or genitals; bestiality; or necrophilia. Only images meeting these criteria are extreme pornography. Thus ‘extreme pornography’ is a very specific legal term corresponding to material that represents only a fraction of the sexually explicit material that the Society’s guidance is intended to cover.

Secondly, the term ‘pornography’ itself is also hopelessly encumbered with conflicting and unscientific associations of legitimacy, exploitation and normative activity. It persists in use partly because of the very wide adaption in lay communication and, ironically, use in the law. It would be preferable if the Society avoided and deprecated its use (unless referring to the law, or lay use of the terminology) and adopted the terminology of the guidance itself – ‘sexually explicit material’.

David Glasgow
i-psych.co.uk
Clinicians with mental health difficulties

A letter was published in the December 2015 issue entitled ‘Patient and professional’ from an unnamed psychological wellbeing practitioner who talked about her experience of borderline personality disorder. I am surprised by the lack of reaction to this: it seems to me that mental health services can only be improved by professionals being more open and willing to share similar experiences. I am not talking about self-disclosure in therapy but asking for more general discussion of personal psychological difficulties. Or perhaps I am mistaken and those who practice in the field are immune to such things? The results reported from the British Psychological Society and New Savoy Partnership survey – ‘46% of psychological professionals said that they felt depressed and 49.5% reported feeling they were a failure’ (April 2015) – suggests not. Yet in the last few months, I have found only a handful of references to these problems and rarely from an individual perspective.

I confess I have an ulterior motive in asking people to speak up: I myself am looking for encouragement. How realistic it is for somebody who has spent several years struggling with depression to continue to harbour a desire to work in the field of clinical psychology? Well-meaning people, anxious to prevent further discouragement say, ‘But your experiences give you a better understanding!’ Perhaps. But I want to hear it from the clinicians themselves. One may achieve greater compassion and empathy for others through one’s own psychological difficulties, but I want to know if that is enough to help others overcome theirs, in a professional context. Are there mental health practitioners out there who have always had to fight the urge to hide under their desk when they arrive in work each morning? Even if not, I would still like to hear more of people talking openly about their own mental health in forums such as The Psychologist. Leading by example ought to be an effective way of combating stigma around seeking support for psychological distress.

Name and address supplied

read discuss contribute at www.thepsychologist.org.uk

NOTICEBOARD

Researchers in the School of Psychology at the University of Surrey are currently conducting a study looking at ways to help employees improve their work-related thoughts, feelings and wellbeing. If you are in full-time employment and are interested in taking part in the study, please go to http://surveys.fahs.surrey.ac.uk/expressive_screening for more information and to complete a brief screening questionnaire (five minutes) to see if you are eligible to take part in the main study, or contact me.

Evie Michailidis
Chief Investigator
michailidis@surrey.ac.uk

School skirts – a gender issue?

School uniform and interpretation and implementation of uniform policy is a scorching topic at breakfast tables, in staff rooms, for high street fashion stores’ buyers and feminist campaigners (see Laura Bates’ 2016 book Girl Up). I have discussed the subject many times with students, parents, teachers, in surveys and at home; and Madeleine Pownall’s letter (‘School skirt bans’, August 2016) still managed to extend my thinking.

Surely, to throw off gendered conventional school traditions and minimise false gender binaries is the way forward? Schools must celebrate difference and diversity without oppression and discrimination.

The subject of school uniform is a great way to engage young people in discussion of sexism, sexuality, and the mythical existence of sex and gender binaries. It often concludes with a utopian vision of access for all pupils and teaching staff to wonderfully cool skirts.

Dr Julie Alderson
University Hospitals Bristol NHS FT
**PRESIDENT’S LETTER**

Students embarking on a career in psychology have made a wise choice. On a purely practical level, the study of psychology gives us tangible transferable skills. The scientific method is, of course, a huge advantage in a world of conflicting claims, misleading messages and complex decisions... despite some politicians’ recent, and regrettable, scepticism of experts. Because human behaviour is subject to multiple interacting influences, we need to use mathematical, statistical, methods to tease out the relationships, and these numerical skills are hugely valuable. Academic scholarship, learning from the wisdom of earlier generations, is a key skill. And I would argue that psychologists tend to develop significant skills in balancing and comparing differing opinions on human behaviour, because of the variety of approaches available. We also have to write, in intelligible prose, to explain our findings. This combination of scientific, numerate, literate skills gives our students a fantastic start.

But psychology is also attractive because of its humanism and day-to-day relevance. Our subject matter is the stuff of life. It is inherently interesting. And this is reflected in my role as President of the British Psychological Society. My in-tray for this month includes all the predictable regular business (including our relationship with the statutory regulator, the Health and Care Professions Council), as well as preparation for the forthcoming political party conferences (the BPS, like many charities, takes the opportunity to discuss issues of science, education and professional activity with our politicians at their annual conferences). This year, we are preparing a briefing paper on psychological aspects of decision making under conditions of stress and uncertainty. We are also beginning what will no doubt be a long series of meetings with colleagues about the consequences of our exit from the European Union. I am particularly pleased that the BPS is a leading partner with the National Guidelines Alliance, responsible for clinical guideline development in healthcare. Similarly, I am delighted to see the BPS leading on the establishment, with many colleague organisations, of the Personality Disorder Commission, whose remit includes (importantly for me personally), a critical examination of both the terminology and the validity of the diagnosis itself. I am equally delighted that BPS colleagues are in partnership with colleagues in other professional bodies and with Health Education England to promote the use of multi-professional, co-produced, formulation in our professional practice, as well as to develop clear standards of proficiency in this skill.

By now, people may have some feel for my views on these matters. But it’s really important to me to get an impression as to whether the stance of the Society in respect to these issues reflects the views of members. I need to know what you think about our relationship with HCPC and the forthcoming government consultation on healthcare regulation. What should we be saying to our politicians – and more specifically, what can psychological research contribute to their work? What should we be lobbying for in regards to the clinical guidelines that are so important for commissioning and delivering healthcare? What do members think about the diagnosis of so-called ‘personality disorder’? Are we confident that ‘formulation’ as practised by psychologists is a distinctive and valuable contribution?

On all these issues and more, please get in touch via www.bps.org.uk/blog/presidential or e-mail PresidentsOffice@bps.org.uk. Or e-mail PresidentsOffice@bps.org.uk or follow us on Twitter: @geterkinderman.

**Peter Kinderman** is President of the British Psychological Society. Contact him at PresidentsOffice@bps.org.uk or follow us on Twitter: @geterkinderman.

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**Mandatory reporting of sexual abuse**

There is currently a government consultation ‘Reporting and Acting on Child Abuse and Neglect’. This will affect psychologists, who are regulated by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).

Everyone agrees that children must be kept safe, and mandatory reporting seems the obvious way to achieve this. Yet it carries the risk of unintended consequences. I have, as chair of the Specialist Treatment Organisation for the Prevention of Sexual Offending (StopSO), written a comprehensive report, discussing the benefits and risks (see www.stopso.org.uk/mandatory-reporting).

StopSO aims to reduce child sexual abuse by working with the perpetrators. Prevention is better than cure for everyone, especially the potential victims. So far, StopSO has had 288 requests for help in three years. Our biggest concern about mandatory reporting, is that potential (and actual) perpetrators will not feel safe enough to come forward. Surprisingly, the reoffending rate for sexual crime is very low. In June 2013 government figures put it at 12.1 per cent (tinyurl.com/hm3vch5). For a serious violent and or serious sexual crime it was 0.4%. We need to focus on stopping perpetrators before they commit the first crime, or early in their offending history. Almost 40 per cent of those approaching StopSO have never come to the attention of the authorities. We fear that if mandatory reporting includes psychologists this figure will drop. When mandatory reporting began in Baltimore, USA, the self-referrals of sex abusers decreased from 73 to 0 (Berlin et al., 1991).

If clinical psychologists were excluded from a mandatory duty to report, they could still report wherever necessary, but at their discretion. Some clients approach StopSO requesting therapy for ‘low-level’ sexual offending (e.g. low-level child abuse images) that they have recently stopped. StopSO suggests that in these cases the most effective child protection may be for the psychologist to have a proportionate response, working with the client and monitoring the dynamic risk on an ongoing basis, rather than automatically reporting them.

Please read the StopSO report and think carefully about the unintended consequences before filling in the government consultation (deadline 13 October).

Juliet Grayson

UCKP Registered Psychotherapist

**Reference**


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**MORE ONLINE...**

...including Steve Flatt with some fundamental questions about the role of psychology and psychologists, and Andrew James Clements arguing for increased open access to BPS publications.

See [www.thepsychologist.org.uk/debates](http://www.thepsychologist.org.uk/debates)
Is your religion making you ill?

Yeni Adewoye's article ‘Having faith in mind’ (April 2016) and Abby Midgely's advice to seek ‘biblical’ counselling (Letters, July 2016) has prompted me to give another perspective.

I was indoctrinated into the Christian religion from babyhood, but I never, managed to get it – the ‘belief’ thing. I spent many years trying very hard to believe, everyone around me seemingly having no problem in doing so. The resulting cognitive dissonance caused me to become depressed to the point of suicidal thoughts several times throughout my life. My church's response was to say that there was some kind of block put on my 'relationship with God' because I (or my parents – the 'sins of the fathers') had committed some 'sin' which separated me from 'God'. Other explanations for my disbelief and non-acceptance of doctrine were that I was 'possessed of a demon' or even being 'controlled by the devil'! The kinder people suggested I 'hand my depression over to Jesus' to deal with… which, since I didn't believe he was available to hear me, struck me as somewhat absurd!

Every Sunday, church reiterated and (continues to reiterate today) that only those who believe will 'inherit the kingdom' and be 'rewarded in heaven with eternal life'. I then read Richard Dawkins' The God Delusion. It was the most liberating experience of my life. Someone had actually dared to question religion, something I had never been able to contemplate before. This freed me from my guilt. I realised compassion, empathy, altruism and kindness are not dependent upon belief in a god and that what one does in this life is what matters, not what one believes.

I trained as a psychiatric nurse and witnessed many instances of delusions and hallucinations disappearing once medication and a safe non-threatening environment had taken effect. I also witnessed friends who were children of believers and church leaders who, finding themselves unable to take up the family religion were emotionally blackmailed and socially restrained (any contact with outside groups of non-believers was disallowed), their alcoholism or drug addiction, depression, anxiety disorders and schizophrenia being attributed to religious causes. 'Treatments' included – casting-out of demons, begging forgiveness, laying-on of hands, prayer and spiritual healing, right here, in 21st-century England, in a church near you. Sufferers are also pressured not to seek non-Christian intervention.

It struck me that religious belief is indeed (as Mr Dawkins called it) some kind of 'delusional' state. I have read that brain structure, active neural networks and their functioning differs in believers and non-believers. Believers essentially operate under an alternative reality to non-believers.

To anyone who was born with, or who has acquired a brain physically incapable of ‘belief’ or ‘faith’, I suggest that abandoning religion altogether and seeking help from trained professionals in the real world is a far healthier solution.

Helen McDowall
Third-year mature student
Chichester
A new government child obesity strategy, centred around a levy for high-sugar drinks, has been criticised for not doing enough to tackle the issue. We spoke to three psychologists about what had been missed, what better approaches there could be and what impact the existing strategy could have.

The UK-wide sugar tax will come into effect in April 2018, and drinks with more than 5g of sugar per 100ml will face a levy, while a higher tax will be placed on drinks with more than 8g per 100ml. Manufacturers have until that date to reduce the sugar content of their products, and money raised from the eventual levy will be put towards breakfast and sports clubs for children.

The strategy also recommends children get an hour of physical activity per day, half in school and half at home. Many have said the strategy lacks power and gently ‘suggests’ or ‘promotes’ where changes should be more stringent in the face of a population where up to a third of children are overweight or obese.

Chair in Biological Psychology and Health Behaviour at the University of Liverpool, Jason Halford, said he was particularly concerned about the strategy’s focus on sugar. He explained: ‘Both sugar and fat in the diet contribute to energy density, which in turn drives obesity in a twofold way. These types of food have weaker impact on appetite regulation and are also very palatable… both things drive increased consumption.’

Other than the tax, Professor Halford added, the strategy relies largely on many voluntary aspects, an approach that is largely seen to have failed in the previous responsibility deal. This approach, introduced by the Department of Health in early 2011, asked food manufacturers to pledge to cut salt, fat and sugar content from foods: many believe it has done little to change eating habits.

Halford added: ‘The new strategy said nothing about the promotion of high fat and sugar foods to children, which surprised me after the work of the Department of Health and Public Health England on the effects of marketing. This wasn’t referred to at all. My impression is that it’s been culled.’

Despite the health benefits of exercise, which the government encourages in its plans, Halford said a more efficient way to combat weight was first to focus on over-eating. He added: ‘I’m not denying the many health and psychological benefits of exercise in any way, but getting people to eat less food has a greater impact on weight. You have to do a lot of exercise to work off one unhealthy snack. It’s an easier intervention to focus on energy in than energy out.’

Lou Atkinson, a health psychology researcher from Coventry University, who shared many of the concerns that the strategy didn’t go far enough, suggested our battle against obesity should start from an even earlier point – in utero. Atkinson also pointed to the strategy’s lack of two key pieces of evidence put forward by Public Health England, which encouraged the government to tackle both advertising of junk foods to children and price promotions of unhealthy foods in supermarkets.

Atkinson told us she was positive about the sugar levy but nervous that the government’s approach did not go far enough: ‘If you look at tobacco, alcohol and the carrier bag tax, there’s good evidence that financial interventions affect people’s behaviour in terms of choices they make and benefits to their health. Although the sugar tax is mostly untested, small trials on a city level show reasonably good results, but it’s unproven at a national level. There’s a good chance it will work, but unfortunately price promotions and the voluntary nature of the changes the government are pushing for, in terms of reducing sugar content, or reformulating recipes, might wipe out any benefit we get from the levy,’ she said.

Atkinson pointed to a lack of help for

Sugar levy leaves bitter taste

Professor Jason Halford
parents in the new strategy, and said many have a lack of self-efficacy and confidence in restricting their children’s diets and resisting the urge to give in to tantrums and pester power where unhealthy foods are concerned.

Much of Atkinson’s work focuses on pregnancy and a child’s early years, and she suggested that earlier interventions could also have been included by the government. Evidence has shown that babies born to mothers who had a high BMI at the start of pregnancy, or those who gain too much weight during pregnancy, are more likely to have a high birthweight and become overweight or obese later in life. Awareness raising of this, and support for women to make healthy choices during pregnancy, could be valuable in giving children the best start in life. Atkinson added: ‘Even in women who begin pregnancy with a healthy lifestyle, that lifestyle can get worse during pregnancy due to a number of perfectly understandable reasons, such as feeling nauseous, tired, and a relaxation of the social pressure to have a desirable body shape. Making healthy choices during pregnancy can be even more difficult than doing it outside of pregnancy, and yet it’s so clearly linked to the trajectory of the offspring weight and health as they go through later life. The strategy has missed a trick there in providing support to mothers during this time.’

Professor in Health Psychology Jane Ogden (University of Surrey) said she was surprised the government hadn’t fully acknowledged obesity as being a societal and environmental problem as much as an individual issue. News of the sugar tax (tinyurl.com/hlajdk7), she said, had given people the impression that the government would do more from a societal point of view. She added: ‘I thought they’d start tackling the food industry, advertising and marketing, and take a higher-level approach. There’d been murmurings about that before the policy came out, but it looks like at the last minute they changed their minds and decided to push the responsibility back down to the individual.’

The government, however, Ogden added, is in a tricky position: ‘It’s a political position between being a nanny state, being involved and interventionist and being more libertarian, or traditionally right-wing,’ she said. Although on the surface obesity may seem like a simple thing to tackle, it goes much deeper than individual choice, Ogden said: ‘It’s all about messaging; eating behaviour and exercise are individual behaviours and individuals do have to make choices and take control of their own behaviour. But you have to acknowledge that the environment you live in can make it very difficult to make those choices.’

Ogden pointed to a recent debates about obesity being a problem of both genetics and society, rather than the individual. ‘It’s a really complicated issue, because what you tell people can sometimes be very different to how you have to treat them. You need to send the message that obesity is a problem for the individual to encourage them to make healthy choices, whilst at the same time you also have to behave as if it’s a social problem and tackle obesity at an environmental level,’ she added.

According to Ogden, ‘the environment needs to be changed in order for it to be easier to make healthier choices. For activity, this could be about providing cycle paths, better street lighting, or about public transport, schools increasing the numbers of hours of activity every day, or letting children do classes outside, just to be more physical. One of the bits of evidence I always find compelling is the dangers of being sedentary, and there’s a need to make people aware of that. There also needs to be a focus on creating an environment where it’s easier to be more active. It doesn’t have to be about expensive gyms or swimming pools, just encouraging people to walk more or cycle more by making the environment better. And for eating behaviour it has to take the form of tackling portion sizes, food prices and marketing.’

‘You can read the government’s strategy in full at tinyurl.com/h4pawkv

YEARS OF BEDLAM

A new exhibition of the Wellcome Collection, ‘Bedlam: The Asylum and Beyond’, will explore how the experience of mental illness and notions of madness have been shaped over centuries, and imagine what the future might hold. Emphasising the lived experiences of individuals, the exhibition will feature over 150 objects and archival materials, including patient art from Adolf Wölfli, and Richard Dadd, alongside works by contemporary artists, including Eva Koťátková and Shana Moulton.

‘Bedlam’ will trace the rise and fall of the asylum and how it has reflected the changing attitudes of the society around it, from the early days of the Bethlem Hospital to the modern post-asylum. Visitors will encounter scenes from successive incarnations of Bethlem, as well as other models of care from elsewhere in the UK and Europe.

The exhibition will open with a large-scale installation, Asylum, by artist Eva Koťátková. This 2014 work was inspired by conversations with psychiatric patients and features live performers, evoking the tensions between protection and restraint that thread throughout the exhibition. Visitors will also be introduced to the alternative model of care offered by the town of Geel, Belgium, where sufferers in the Middle Ages were taken in by local families and became ‘boarders’, part of the community, a tradition that continues to this day (see our ‘Looking back’: tinyurl.com/hjhvwwk).

‘Bedlam’ will run at the Wellcome Collection until Sunday 15 January. A parallel exhibition curated by Sam Curtis, ‘Reclaiming Asylum’, will be held at the Bethlem Gallery, from Wednesday 21 September to Friday 11 November.
Dynamic research from PsyPAG

The 31st annual Psychology Postgraduate Affairs Group (PsyPAG) conference was held at the University of York this year, bringing together talks from both seasoned academics and postgraduate psychology students. Health Psychology PhD student (City University London) and PsyPAG Vice Chair Ryc Aquino, The Psychologist Editor Dr Jon Sutton and journalist Ella Rhodes were there to report on the three-day event.

This year’s conference kicked off with PsyPAG Chair Emma Norris welcoming the 150 delegates, followed by an inspiring talk by Professor Quentin Summerfield (Head of Psychology, University of York). He emphasised the importance of embracing research impact, as well as the diversity that the field offers – we should all, he said, strive to strengthen this.

Professor Alan Baddeley (University of York) gave the first keynote, entitled ‘Confessions of a Door Bore’, which explored not only his love of doors, but also his extensive research on human memory inspired by this. The morning parallel sessions followed, covering a range of areas: relationships; health, and social and cognitive psychology.

Dr Harriet Over (also University of York) presented a keynote on social motivation in young children on the first afternoon, which demonstrated that when children were shown videos depicting ostracism, they then went on to draw themselves closer to their friends as compared to when they watched videos that did not depict ostracism.

Parallel sessions included presentations on risk-taking, and in a series of workshops and symposiums to close the day Emma Norris and Tommy Van Steen led a systematic review workshop. Dr David Ellis led ‘The Dynamic Researcher’, imparting advice on securing one’s first academic post.

On the second day Professor Daryl O’Connor (University of Leeds), who takes on a fairly punishing conference schedule himself, began his keynote with the Japanese concepts of karoshi (death from overwork) and karajitsu (suicide from overwork). Closer to home, the figures are alarming: there were a quarter of a million new UK cases of work-related stress in 2015, and 23.2 million working days lost due to work-related ill-health or workplace injury. Work-related stress, depression and anxiety accounted for over nine million of these.

This is not a new problem, but there is increasing evidence to indicate that stress affects health both directly through autonomic and neuroendocrine responses and indirectly through health-related behaviours. Diet is a major factor in cardiovascular disease risk, and so health psychologist O’Connor has been looking into the effect of daily hassles and eating style on eating behaviour.

The traditional view is that stress will inhibit appetite and food intake, but the picture is actually more nuanced – we seem to consume fewer main meals, less veg, more high-fat snacks, and more high-sugar snacks on days when stressors are encountered. O’Connor highlighted a possible glucocorticoid mechanism behind this: those who release more cortisol in response to stress increase their high-fat snack intake even more when they encounter daily stressors. With colleagues, he developed a low-cost, easy to deliver intervention based on Gollwitzer’s idea of ‘implementation intentions’, and ‘if-then plans’. Participants chose a healthy snack alternative, linked it with a stressful situation, and visualised themselves acting out the plans. Unlike the control group, they did not significantly increase unhealthy snack intake on days when stressors occurred.

O’Connor then considered cortisol in relation to both chronic stress and suicidal behaviour. Cortisol is linked to various cognitive and emotional factors that are directly implicated in suicidal behaviour. In a review of the existing literature, he showed that hyperactivity in the hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal axis is predictive of suicidal behaviour in patient samples, but in studies where the average age is greater than 40 the association completely flips so that low cortisol predicts suicidal behaviour. O’Connor said this was consistent with Bruce McEwen’s notion of allostatic load; that is, ‘wear and tear’ on the stress response system. He finds that cortisol reactivity predicts suicidal ideation one month later. ‘Some people are less equipped psychologically to cope with daily stressors,’ O’Connor concludes. ‘Psychological interventions are required to enable stress-protected, healthy lives.’

Also on the second day of the conference, we heard from Charlotte Wesson (University of Lincoln) about her research with users of dating app Tinder. Males who were higher on a measure of ‘sexual risk’ were faster at swiping right (to accept a potential match); the opposite was seen for women. People who were higher risk did meet up with more people on Tinder.

Rebecca McCartan (University of Strathclyde) used the Implicit Association Test with drivers, to find that the ‘positive dimension’ of explicit attitudes is important in dictating speeding behaviour. Behaviour change interventions should target these, for example questioning whether speeding really does get you to your destination quicker. And Alice Sanderson (Abertystwyth University) had an interesting take on multimodal aspects of teaching and learning, recording 11 sessions of musical theatre rehearsals over a five-week period. Students shifted between talking and non-verbal gestures, with gestures often used to complete questions (e.g. Do you want the note [point higher]?). Whilst we are living in a golden age of face-perception research, said Professor Andy Young (University of York) in his keynote address on the closing day of the PsyPAG conference, not everything is perfect. He spoke about the data-driven approach he has begun to use in his research on the psychology of human face perception and why data-driven approaches can have wide applicability.

He pointed out that while he would be
‘saying some unpleasant things’ about the way psychology research is often carried out, he has used many of the methods he was critical of. Young said while the standard method advocated by textbooks as the gold standard in the field requires researchers to find a question, formulate a hypothesis and devise a test that isolates the causal factor in that hypothesis, it may not be the best way to add to scientific knowledge in psychology.

A famous paper by Newell in 1973 pointed out that by asking binary questions about phenomena, for example whether something is nature or nurture, the answers to these questions become increasingly complicated. Young said: ‘We end up saying “it’s a bit of both” and move on to new phenomena.’ Newell asked whether this approach would actually lead to a cumulative increase in knowledge.

Young added that this was often the case in his own field. Researchers ask whether features of face perception reflect generic expertise or domain-specific ability, or whether we rely on facial features or configurations – all of which remain hotly debated issues. So perhaps a data-driven approach may reveal more than simply asking an either/or question.

He described some of the methods he and many other researchers have used to reveal more about human face perception – perhaps the richest source of social information we have. Modern technologies allow us to combine features across faces to create an ‘average’ face, for example.

Some of Young’s own work saw him collect 1000 faces from the internet, ambient face images which were not standardised as they so often are in this type of research. Participants rated these faces on intelligence, attractiveness and trustworthiness and subsequently using computer image manipulation the most trustworthy, intelligent or attractive-looking faces can be combined to look for shared characteristics.

Using this data-driven approach Young concluded there are co-varying, rather than specific, features that make up the perception of a given characteristic. He said these approaches help researchers move away from asking questions they have come up with based on their own preconceptions and can instead find the features or characteristics participants use spontaneously.

He concluded that the advantages of data-driven approaches are particularly useful when we want to get a real picture of how people see and categorise the world without bringing biases from one’s own hypotheses. He concluded: ‘This approach is useful when there’s co-variation between many potential cues, although we tend to look for “the” critical cue for such things, it’s more important to look at how different cues co-vary and how our brains can exploit this property.’

After a brilliant selection of sessions on health psychology and wellbeing and several workshops on statistical techniques, two of PsyPAG’s award-winning researchers spoke about their work and career journeys so far. Lauren Bussey (Northumbria University) won the Masters Award and talked through her thesis study on the effects of rosemary and lavender essential oils on memory in older adults.

Bussey explored prospective memory: this can be time-based, such as remembering to do something at a certain time in the future, or event-based, such as remembering to withdraw money when walking past a bank. She tested 150 older participants, in a room with either lavender or rosemary or no aroma, on their prospective memory and asked them about their calmness, alertness and contentedness. To mask the true nature of the study, participants were asked to drink a cup of ordinary juice before the tasks, being told that the herb may or may not be contained within it.

Lavender, long known for its relaxing properties, impaired time-based prospective memory; rosemary, which appeared to increase alertness, enhanced both time- and event-based prospective memory. Bussey suggested in the future it would be interesting to study these effects in those with no sense of smell.

The winner of the Rising Researcher Award, Harriet Smith (Nottingham Trent University), explored whether we really can guess what a person looks like based on the sound of their voice. Smith said there were many contradictions in this area, some suggesting this was possible when participants see moving images but not static ones. Through some methodological tweaks Smith saw that in was, in fact, possible for participants to match faces to voices, even if these faces were static. She gave the gathered postgraduate students some advice based on her experiences: ‘Try to send in potential papers early and self-promote them on Twitter, Facebook and ResearchGate. After my first paper was published I got a press release put together and it got picked up by radio stations. It really made me think about the potential implications of my study.’
The changing face of rest

A major new exhibition exploring rest and noise, tumult and work, through installations, performance, drawing, poetry, data, sound and music, opens at the end of September. Rest & Its Discontents draws on Hubbub, a two-year residency led by Durham University and undertaken by 50 international psychologists, artists, writers, social scientists, broadcasters, humanities researchers and mental health experts in The Hub at Wellcome Collection in London (tinyurl.com/jbq8vwk).

Highlights of the exhibition include a ‘radio of rest’ by Nina Garthwaite of In The Dark radio, which weaves together voices, sounds and music from within and beyond the show, broadcast as a series of live programmes, podcasts and web streams. Also Patrick Coyle’s The Floating Thirty-Nine comprises 39 solar-powered objects floating on the large expanse of water immediately outside the gallery which alludes to the number of categories of labour prohibited on the Sabbath.

The exhibition is not confined to conventional artworks either; Lynne Friedli’s investigations (tinyurl.com/je7xfn5) into anti-work struggles and politics will also be debated live with local campaign groups in the gallery. Guerilla Science will be carrying out a listening experiment taking exhibition visitors to a nearby 20-storey building to explore the psychogeography of rest in the capital’s rapidly changing built environment.

Antonia Barnett-McIntosh’s film Breath, will also be shown, it explores the concept of breath as musical rest and breathlessness as a form of exhaustion in a flute performance. Teaching us to Relax by Ayesha Nathoo explores the 20th-century history of therapeutic relaxation surveying the messages, instructions and depictions of alternative relaxations as proposed by psychology, alternative health, physiotherapy, physical education and antenatal self-help books.

The exhibition will also be accompanied by an extensive programme of events including an exploration of the ramifications of the 1975 Iceland women’s strike, a panel discussion about the anxiety generated by mass media and rolling news, a cabaret of anti-work songs, and new music and poetry performances.

As Rest & Its Discontents opens, the results of the world’s largest-ever survey into subjective experiences of rest, The Rest Test, will be announced on BBC Radio 4’s All In The Mind by broadcaster, writer and associate director of Hubbub Claudia Hammond.

The exhibition, curated by Robert Devcic, founder of GV Art London, runs from Friday 30 September to Sunday 30 October at The Mile End Art Pavilion.
Engaging the public in applied health research

A group of psychologists at the University of Kent are making an impact on applied health research, finding innovative ways to involve the public through interactive activities on topics such as dementia, mindfulness and wellbeing.

Dr Kate Hamilton-West, a Chartered Psychologist and Senior Research Fellow at the University of Kent’s Centre for Health Services Studies (CHSS), spoke to us about the importance of embedding research and researchers within local communities and wider society: ‘Applied health research often involves working as part of a multidisciplinary team, with academics and clinicians specialising in fields such as public health, primary care, health economics and statistics and with members of the public acting as lay advisers or experts-by-experience,’ she said. ‘This latter role is crucial for ensuring that researchers ask questions which are relevant to end-users, that research methods are appropriate and outputs have the potential to be implemented into practice. Without appropriate public involvement, researchers run the risk of investing time and resources into projects with limited public impact.’

Dr Hamilton-West was part of a team led by Amanda Bates, CHSS Public Engagement Officer and a PhD student in applied psychology at the University of Kent, which put on a ‘Let’s Talk About Health Research’ event. Held in a community centre in Canterbury, the day also involved CHSS psychologists Sarah Hotham and David Lowery, as well as Nicola Enright, a service user who has long-standing links with CHSS, and Leah Thorn, a Leverhulme Trust Artist in Residence hosted within CHSS. Interactive activities included screenings of Thorn’s film ‘Watch’, which explores the impact of dementia on a father/daughter relationship; a mindfulness eating exercise; and ‘Picture of Health’ (drawings by members of the public illustrating what ‘health’ means to them). Researchers discussed research relating to these themes, and delegates were encouraged to share their perceptions and experiences of health research.

‘More than 100 people attended the event and feedback was highly positive,’ Dr Hamilton-West tells us. ‘To help drive some of the day’s ideas forward, we are developing a Patient and Public Involvement Group including local people willing to act as “critical friends” to our research. We’re also showing our ongoing commitment to public engagement through a series of open lectures – the next one is 6 October, on remote video consultations.’

To find out more about opportunities to get involved with CHSS research, see www.kent.ac.uk/chss/public/involve.html
Letters from America

Our editor, Jon Sutton, reports on three days of the 2016 Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, held in early August in Denver, Colorado

Day 1 What on earth is going on?

Beginning his keynote to officially open the American Psychological Association’s gathering, Jonathan Haidt said: ‘We come together at a time that is confusing.’ Haidt’s focus was the political polarisation, violence and intolerance in the US and beyond, but perhaps he was also acknowledging the aftershocks of the Hoffman Report into the Association’s complicity with ‘enhanced interrogation’, described by current President Susan McDaniel here as an ‘organisational tsunami’.

From my own personal perspective, adapting to the sheer scale of my first APA conference, I wondered if I could chart a path through the potential confusion of this opening day. In my own admittedly idiosyncratic choice of sessions, could I pull out connecting threads that are holding psychology together in its response to major societal challenges?

Well, perhaps the first is that some of the greatest minds psychology has to offer made no great claims for the privileged nature of their knowledge. Psychology doesn’t have all the answers. But where it is perhaps unique, Albert Bandura argued via Skype link, is as a ‘core discipline’ that integrates knowledge from several other professions. So it was heartening to see poets, political scientists, philosophers and many more pressed into service to understand the issues. And while some speakers reached deep inside for explanations of violence – with Diane Gartland, for example, drawing on psychoanalytic concepts to suggest that for a terrorist, the path to orgasm may run through death, not love, with the explosive incident as the climactic event – others were well schooled in social and historical antecedents, with Aaron Beck considering extremism as a carry-over of events that happened centuries ago, when (with some justification) Muslims started to perceive colonial powers as oppressive.

Haidt too demonstrated a keen knowledge of politics and social history, outlining many changes and trends that have interacted with our tribal nature. The 1990s in particular saw political parties in the States realign and ‘purify’ their offerings, with the advent of cable TV only increasing the ‘echo chamber’ nature of debate. A loss of the common enemy at the end of the Cold War, increased immigration and racial diversity and other polarising trends have been a ‘ten-car freight train crashing down the line of our democracy’. Haidt said, and figures on both sides of the political divide have been powerless to stop it. The destination is tribal politics – we are far more full of ‘passionate intensity’ (Haidt invoked the WB. Yeats poem ‘The Second Coming’).

One way this manifests itself is in the language we use about the ‘other’ group. Aaron Beck drew on observations from his early years in private practice to show how couples in marital counselling often had the image of the other person as highly unsavoury – ‘demons’ and ‘devils’. ‘Minds had been hijacked by a violent way of perceiving each other’, Beck said, biases grotesquely destroying the image of another person. ‘Perhaps what I learned in my practice with individuals and couples has some bearing on this wider context of conflict, violence, war, genocide,’ Beck pondered. ‘When a group is in competition with another group, each group seeing themselves as the victim, each group shows the same kinds of distortions I had seen in the couples.’

How does this play out in the current US political context? Albert Bandura strayed from his policy of not devoting any time to analysing Donald Trump by suggesting that ‘his dominant mechanism is dehumanisation. He attacks people mercilessly, and this gets him in the media. Who wants to listen to moderates?’ This shouldn’t be news to any of us, but it was still surprising and shocking to see Haidt’s graph showing that through the Bush and Obama years, warmth toward the other party has nosedived, the gap between that and warmth for own party was still surprising and shocking to see Haidt’s graph showing that through the Bush and Obama years, warmth toward the other party has nosedived, the gap between that and warmth for own party growing by the year. Haidt is bracing himself for the more recent data.

For both Haidt and Bandura, morality appears to be the key. Quoting Voltaire, Bandura said: ‘Those who can get you to believe absurdities can get you to commit atrocities’. The recent National Medal of Science winner is taking the fight to various industries that spread this moral disengagement, including the gun lobby and the tobacco industry. Take the latter. ‘If you’re going to be killing half a million people annually,’ Bandura said, ‘this is going to require a vast collection of disengagers’ – that includes farmers, advertisers, lobbyists, lawyers, legislators… All making use of
mechanisms which allow them to distance themselves from the affective reaction of self-contempt that usually keeps us in line with moral behaviour. For Haidt, the key point is that ‘morality binds and blinds’.

Drawing on nature to illustrate this, Haidt showed that large structures in nature – think termites, bees – are always built by siblings, driven by that parental loyalty. Not so with humans. The first large structures we see in our societies are always temples: ‘we circle around sacred objects and principles’, Haidt explained. Or, asDurkheim put it, ‘ritual generates social electricity’. The problem is, circling around shared values creates a ‘moral electromagnet’, where everything one side is all good and everything the other is all evil.

Extremist groups and political parties have learned to manipulate this, ramping up the ‘us vs. them’ rhetoric. Bandura might call it ‘palliative comparison’: in simple terms, terrorists see themselves as freedom fighters against evil forces of oppression. And Haidt described Donald Trump’s campaign as a very open attempt to echo Richard Nixon’s 1968, appealing to the conservative who values authority, loyalty and sanctity in ‘troubled times’. Here, Haidt acknowledges the influence of Karen Stenner’s thinking on the ‘triumph of racial, political and moral intolerance’ that marks the authoritarian conservative of the ‘laissez faire’ and ‘status quo’ varieties. Haidt’s own data suggests this is about being triggered by Trump’s current support, and he concludes that ‘some people have an alarm button on their forehead – when that button is pushed, then they become authoritarian’.

Now, we can see a lot of these ideas playing out beyond the US as well. Haidt referred to the rise of far right parties across Europe, and demonstrated the centrality of morality in the fascinating statistic that views on the death penalty predicted Brexit voting far better than income did. But given that I’m in the US, could I pull out another connecting thread that might be specific to this nation? Aware of the risk of falling under its spell myself, could it be grandiosity? Earlier in the day, looking to understand acts of mass violence from a psychoanalytic perspective, Frank Summer argued that US culture treats violence as banal but glorifies it at the same time, trumpeting the overwhelming force of ‘shock and awe’ while quietly ignoring the people killed. Summers pointed the finger at the ‘self-adulation’ of Americans. ‘The US is alone as viewing itself as a nation without flaws,’ he claimed; ‘any politician that ran on the basis that the US has good points and bad points would be laughed at. Military might has become embedded in the concept of exceptionalism, of grandiosity.’ Then again, ‘This might not be America’s problem alone’, with Aaron Beck musing that mass murdurers in general often seem to have ‘grandiose ideas that they will have their day in the sun’.

So what do we do about all this? Can I find crumbs of comfort at the end of this path? Aaron Beck seemed positive. Learning from the historical antecedents, he said, we do have supranational organisations that have decreed that colonialism and expansionism are no longer acceptable. ‘Peace is the natural state of the world’, and ‘the kind of killing that takes place today is simply a drop in the bucket’, he said. Beck used the example of Vietnam: during the conflict, training programmes would show gruesome images of the enemy to overcome a natural inhibition against killing them. Decades later, Vietnam is a popular travel destination: education and experience has tackled that ‘distorted negative image’ and ‘we see that they are no different from us’. Beck called for more. Integration of various populations of the world, a view shared by Haidt with an important proviso based on Stenner’s ideas: the focus should be on an abundance of common and unifying beliefs, not on ‘multiculturalism’.

As for Albert Bandura, he feels we have to make it hard for people to remove humanity from their behaviour; we have to inform the public of these mechanisms of moral engagement; and we need to build societies that value a sense of common humanity, where we link our self-satisfaction to that of others, rather than to the production and consumption of ‘stuff’.

For that, we may well need brave, passionate, far-sighted psychologists. (Earlier, Craig Shealy James admitted ‘I love my field, but the near-vision of psychology sometimes frustrates me.’) But beware, Haidt would warn, the dark side of passionate intensity: ‘Psychology too is full of passionate intensity’, he says, quoting Buddhist wisdom: ‘If you want the truth to stand clear before you, never be for or against. The struggle between ‘for’ and ‘against’ is the mind’s worst disease.’ Unfortunately, Haidt fears more than ever for political diversity within psychology. ‘The left and the right live in different fields now,’ he said. ‘How would you feel if you met someone at this conference wearing a Trump badge? If a client, a patient, a student comes to see you, and it’s clear they are voting Trump, could you treat that person fairly, equally?’ Haidt called on the assembled audience to become the change we seek, by being more humble, less judgemental, more accepting of diversity of viewpoint, and seeking to change things from the perspective of love, not hate. ‘Yes, work for change,’ he urged, ‘but doing it in an angry, vindictive way tends to backfire.’ (Hoffman’s shadow again?)

Thankfully, there wasn’t a positive note to end this first day. Haidt drew on Abraham Lincoln’s inaugural address to suggest that whatever the multitude of factors behind an era apparently defined by confusion and conflict, things will come good again. ‘Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.’

Day 2: Look for clarity and creativity

After the diet of conflict and intolerance on day one, I needed a palate cleanser. Could I uncover a clear mind, beauty and aesthetics, a creative way of thinking?

The 8am session had promise. Dr Rita Bush works in the US Government Office of the Director of National Intelligence, ‘bringing the best minds to bear on our problems’. Could her ‘Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Activity’ use gaming to train analysts to recognise and mitigate their cognitive biases? On her appointment, the need was pressing; referring to the commission that after the Iraq War looked at US intelligence capabilities regarding weapons of mass destruction, Bush (not that one) noted that the report ‘never used the word cognitive bias or groupthink, but it’s all through it’.

Why games? They provide experiential learning, freedom to fail, and repetition. New intelligence analysts are likely to have grown up playing video games. Bush’s team began a competitive process that one successful bidder, Matthew Rhodes, later called a ‘virtually impossible project – to create effective, durable training in a short amount of time, on the very resistant problem of cognitive biases, that outperforms an alternative technique (training videos)
that was working pretty well, assessed using unknown materials by a team we don’t know and can’t have contact with’. Rhodes and his multidisciplinary team rose to the challenge, developing a game – CYCLES – where a ‘teach-play-test’ format proved effective in not only teaching analysts about common cognitive biases such as the representativeness bias – our lack of sensitivity to statistical properties of the world – but also reducing them.

Jeanette Cleveland (Colorado State University) then considered cognitive biases in performance appraisal at work. Anyone who has conducted such appraisals knows it can be a challenge, recalling and integrating a substantial amount of information over a long period of time, and in a ‘noisy’ environment with a lot of competing demands. According to Cleveland, a cognitive lens on performance appraisal has led to more nuanced training to give, for example, more emphasis on information gathering rather than on recall (using a diary to collect specific information as it occurs); and training methods to help raters develop a common understanding of the task and the judgement they must make. By 9am, violence had reared its ugly head again, with Joshua Correll giving a fascinating and unfortunately topical overview of his research into race and police armed response. In his comparison of trained officers and novices, using what he freely admits is a ‘very crappy video game’, Correll has demonstrated the impact of racial stereotypes on decisions whether to shoot in an ambiguous situation. In this lab scenario, there’s what Correll calls a more ‘trigger happy’ orientation for black targets, as stereotypes such as ‘athletic’ and ‘dangerous’ are activated (as opposed to ‘smart’ and ‘boring’ for white targets). Expertise does not eliminate stereotypes, but it minimises their impact via effortful processing. But under an ‘effortful load’ design, where people carry out a concurrent task, the biases come back. And what could be more effortful than the current situation on the streets of the States? ‘People are walking out there terrified’, Correll said. ‘If these biases can be brought back with a simple number-based task in the lab…it’s been studying this for 16 years and I still don’t think we have much idea of what is going on out there.’

In search of clear thinking in the consulting room, Scott Lilienfeld argued that in psychotherapy, the conditions for ‘intuitive expertise’ are rarely met. Feedback about client improvement tends to be of questionable validity, often ambiguous and extremely delayed. This may explain Wallish’s finding that the average therapist rates themselves at the 80th percentile of all therapists in terms of effectiveness and skills, with none rating themselves below average. ‘Smart, thoughtful people can be fooled by naïve realism’, Lilienfeld warned. ‘Regression to the mean’ is probably the main bias affecting them, he said: clients tend to come in when their condition is at its worst, and therapists often fail to recognise that life itself can be a very powerful therapist. As a first step, Lilienfeld said we should be making practitioners aware of biases, and that they don’t just affect other people. So much for a clear mind, what about beauty? I discovered that people in a museum spend roughly the same time looking at a piece of art as they did 15 years ago (Lisa Smith, University of Otago), but now (depressingly) they take a selfie with every one. Then Jennifer Drake (University of New York) demonstrated how we value the process behind the work, by labelling art as ‘made by hand’ or ‘made on computer’ labels. People prefer computer images with no labels; when labelled correctly there’s no real difference in judgements of preference or quality, but when the labels are switched people will prefer the incorrectly labelled ‘made by hand’. Finally in this symposium, Pablo Tinio (Montclair State University) considered the photographic composition technique of ‘leading lines’ – an environmental aspect converging on a focal point. Tinio found that people’s eyes darted over ‘leading lines’ images more, but didn’t actually prefer them (although he admitted this could have been an artefact of his image manipulation).

Later in the day, Thalia Goldstein (Pace University) gave her perspective on another creative medium, acting and theatre. Acting is uniquely human and, Goldstein said, ‘a strange phenomenon that we all take for granted’. There is little understanding of the psychological skills that make acting possible, and actors themselves aren’t much help, often simply describing their trade as ‘talking loudly and clearly while avoiding bumping into the furniture’. Goldstein explained that acting classes and exercises (in particular with children) can increase vocabulary, emotional control, and empathy: ‘Acting may not be the only way to try to take on the perspectives of other people’, she admitted, ‘but it may be one of the better methods we have in an age when empathic concern has declined in American college students. Acting classes are a safe place which is widely available, where you can try to walk in the shoes of others and you can leave when it’s over.’

Could considering creativity on a neural level give us a shortcut to it, boosting it as a state rather than a trait? Adam Green looked at the formation of analogies, such as ‘infancy is to lifetime as sunrise is to day’, in relation to activity in the left frontopolar cortex (which he creatively described as having ‘a lot of sticky out parts, good for connecting things’). He found that simply cueing people to think more creatively improved performance on this task, but when people were cued and ‘zapped’ using tDCS, they were more creative still.

Moving beyond individual brain regions, Harvard’s Roger Beaty assessed whether people high in the ‘Openness to
Day 3 A change is gonna come...

After entering this huge maze of a conference to confusion and conflict, and then forging on in search of clarity and creativity, could I find an exit on day three to concrete change? The President of our own Society, Peter Kinderman, won't thank me for saying this, but the early morning symposium he participated in didn't fill me with optimism. It considered the future of diagnosis – ethics, social justice, and alternative paradigms – as ever more. ‘We can start using language to get a sense of who people are and how they are connecting with others,’ Pennebaker enthused.

He now spends time trying to rethink what makes good science, and good education. Pennebaker's approach is multi-disciplinary, multi-method, multi-measurement. It is always grounded in reality. Take self-reports. They are just self-theories, Pennebaker says disparagingly. ‘Always at the back of my mind I’m thinking “what are the behaviours that can be measured so that I don’t even need to bother with self-reports?” Don’t ask students ‘Have you become more cognitively flexible?’ Ask whether they go to museums more, did they get a better paid job?’ With echoes of Lilienfeld's talk, Pennebaker then encouraged the audience to ‘be scientists at whatever we do. Test it out on yourself. Being a true believer undermines your ability to see things with accuracy.’

As the afternoon drew to a close, I listened to Anjan Chatterjee from the University of Pennsylvania quote Rudolf Arnheim's warning that ‘Art may seem to be in danger of being drowned by talk.’ Thalia Goldstein had just outlined how acting classes can increase narrative coherence, and I pondered whether talk and narrative was actually the thread holding this second day together. Words, talk, narrative, they sparkle throughout Pennebaker's glittering career. He now pays tribute to them and the power of social support by exhorting a new generation to ‘go to lunch with someone who thinks differently from you’. That way lies clear, creative thinking, and isn’t that what a conference is all about?
Adolescence is a critically important period, yet we have a poor understanding of it. So argued Jacquelynne Eccles (University of California, Irvine), whose focus is the ‘person and stage environment fit’. ‘We not only create bad environments for adolescents,’ she argued, ‘we don’t let them get out.’ We should be creating environments that create opportunities for emotional support, autonomy, mattering, responsibility, identity, engagement. If we are not, and adolescents find themselves in poor-fitting contexts, we should not be surprised if they reject us. It’s an adaptive response on their part to withdraw from that setting.’ Eccles highlighted examples of good practice, such as the Coca Cola Valued Youth Program, where adolescents judged to be at risk for school drop-out were allowed to tutor younger children in reading. ‘It made the kid feel confident, empowered to help,’ Eccles said. ‘Why isn’t everyone doing this? Because we don’t trust teenagers, particularly so-called risky ones.’

Adolescents and their ‘pharmaceuticalisation’, make it hugely difficult to keep ‘Big Pharma’ out of the therapy room. As she pointed out, some changes in DSM-5 and in the recommendation of universal screening for major depressive disorder for everyone over 13 in the States mean we are likely to ‘wind up with even more over-diagnosis and therefore over-treatment’. Acting as discussant, Donna Rockwell (Michigan School of Professional Psychology) asked ‘How much power do we really have to make changes? How much is about control over the population, about capitalism?’

And yes, I know it’s easy to be dismissive from the sidelines (although we have published several issues and articles on the topic) when these people have formed an international coalition to make real efforts at impact. And Rockwell did point to us Brits for positive signs, such as the rise of the case formulation approach, and the public engagement efforts of psychologist and voice hearer Eleanor Longden. All I’m saying is that for my quick fix of concrete change I think I’m going to have to look elsewhere. Perhaps ‘Big Pharma’ was uppermost in my mind when I went to my next talk, from Courtney McLaughlin (Indiana University of Pennsylvania) on mapping mental health. She explained how, using ArcGIS GeoEvent Manager, she mapped the precise location of 130,000 public tweets in 1.5 days, trawling for the word ‘depressed’. This suggests ethical interventions such as more efficiently targeting resources at areas that are emoting more, but all I could think about was a drug company partnering with Amazon Drones and dropping medication at your feet within minutes of tweeting ‘feeling a bit depressed’ for the fifth time in a week. As with much change, proceed with caution.

When catastrophic mistakes led the USS Vincennes to shoot down an Iranian airliner in 1988, Salas was part of one of the most funded behavioural science programmes in history. How can psychology help turn a team of experts into an expert decision-making team? In this and many other challenges on the big stage, Salas and his teams have designed training that has demonstrated significant improvements in team behaviours, safety, cognition and wellbeing, even with experts. ‘You can teach an old dog new tricks.’
Salas tries to cut through the messy, dynamic environment of teamwork with ‘more parsimonious, powerful theoretical engines, fewer variables’. He says that ‘the number one killer of teamwork in any domain is that team members don’t have clear roles and responsibilities. That’s something that takes three minutes to fix.’ Then teams need a compelling purpose to exist – a goal, vision, objective. A leader needs to promote, develop, reinforce that, exist – a goal, vision, objective. A leader

Then teams need a compelling purpose to exist – a goal, vision, objective. A leader needs to promote, develop, reinforce that, exist – a goal, vision, objective. A leader needs to promote, develop, reinforce that, exist – a goal, vision, objective. A leader

Appropriately, my day ended with a talk about an area where there has already been local change. Marijuana was legalised here in the Mile High City in 2014, but Carl Hart (Colombia University) wants much wider change. His reasoning, in a title he admitted was provocative: ‘Pot can cure racism’.

Hart explained that marijuana makes up half of drug arrests in the US, and at State level black people are four times more likely to be arrested despite similar levels of use. ‘This is not a racial disparity, an implicit bias, this is racial discrimination.’ Black males comprise 6 per cent of the general population but nearly 40 per cent of the incarcerated population. One in three black boys born in the US are projected to spend time in prison. Marijuana law enforcement plays a role in many deaths.

Black people are clearly a vulnerable group here, and Hart reminds us that psychologists are comfortable thinking about other vulnerable groups. ‘We should think about black people in the same way in terms of drug law enforcement.’ So what has happened in terms of the race data in Colorado? ‘There has been a 38 per cent drop in Latino arrests; a 34 per cent drop in white arrests; but a 23 per cent drop in black arrests. Blacks are still three times more likely to be arrested than counterparts. ‘Marijuana legalisation is not a cure,’ Hart admits, ‘but it offers some relief. It has partially removed one tool used to racially discriminate.’

Hart argues passionately that if laws were to change nationally, science can be used to educate and keep people safe. ‘The main thing I have learned from a career of giving people drugs as a neuropharmacologist’, he said, ‘is that drugs are predictable. And as psychologists we know about dose, about user experience, about the importance of setting and of routes of administration.’

‘What about the children?’, Hart hears you cry. Yes it’s true that most users of cocaine and heroin have used marijuana, but most don’t follow that path. ‘It’s no more a gateway to heroin than it is a gateway to the White House!’ Hart smiled, in front of photos of the last three Presidents (who have all admitted to smoking marijuana in the past). Hart acknowledged the numerous reviews on cannabis and psychosis – ‘The Lancet really has become the marijuana/psychosis journal’ but said that his own review suggests cannabis does not in itself cause a psychosis disorder… It’s just that both early use and heavy use of cannabis are more likely in individuals with a vulnerability to psychosis.

As for simple, concrete change, Hart would require law enforcement agencies to report and justify arrest data. ‘As tax payers, we pay their salaries, we need to see this data. And we need to call out discrimination and those who support it.’ We need better drug education, Hart says, and for more people to ‘come out of the closet as drug users’ in order to provide a more realistic picture of what a drug user looks like. He hopes that, along with legalisation, might ‘allow us to focus on the real issues, and why some people are developing problems with drugs … Psychosocial effects are so important, but they’re just not sexy. You may have to have a picture of the brain to convince people that it’s important.’

Rowing back from his title, Hart warned that ‘we can’t expect legalisation to make us un-American, and racial discrimination is as American as apple pie’. But he had a message for the younger members of the audience: ‘Your generation must be impatient with the level of progress. You should push for society to be more progressive and change.’

If I had to pick out one thread from all three days, it would be that of a large number of individuals looking to create change, towards a progressive society, with all sorts of pressing real-world concerns. But also an acknowledgement from those individuals that they don’t have all the answers – it’s only through collaboration, and reaching out beyond our discipline, that ‘a change is gonna come’. That’s a pretty healthy message for any conference.
In the 1950s the American psychologist Harry Harlow famously showed that infant rhesus monkeys would rather cling to a surrogate wire mother covered in cosy cloth, than to one that provided milk. A loving touch is more important even than food, the findings seemed to show. Around the same time the British psychoanalyst John Bowlby documented how human children deprived of motherly contact often go on to develop psychological problems. Now this line of research has entered the neuroscience era with a study in Cerebral Cortex claiming that children with more tactile mothers tend to have more developed social brains.

Jens Brauer and his colleagues videoed 43 mum–child dyads as they sat together on a couch and played with a Playmobil farm. The mothers knew they were being filmed but didn’t know the aims of the study. There were 24 boys and 19 girls and their average age was 5.5 years. Coders then watched the videos and counted every instance that the mothers touched their child or vice versa. Finally and within the next two weeks, the researchers scanned each child’s brain while they lay as still as possible looking at a lava lamp screensaver (a brain imaging technique known as a resting-state scan).

The researchers were particularly interested in levels of resting activity in the children’s brains in a network of areas known to be involved in functions such as empathy and thinking about other people’s mental states – sometimes referred to as the ‘social brain’. They found that the children who were touched more by their mother in the 10-minute play session tended to have more resting activity in the social brain, especially the right superior temporal sulcus (STS). Children who received more touch also showed more resting connectivity between different functional nodes within their social brain, such as between the STS and the inferior frontal gyrus and the left insula.

Children touched more by their mother also usually touched their mothers more, but the links between mothers’ touch and the children’s neural activity were still significant after factoring this out.

Previous research has found that greater resting activity in a person’s social brain is linked with their social and emotional abilities, such as being able to take other people’s perspective. Based on this, the researchers said: ‘...one may speculate that children with more touch more readily engage the mentalizing component of the “social brain” and that, perhaps, their interest in others’ mental states is greater than that of children with less touch.’

The research has some serious limitations, most obviously – and as the researchers acknowledged – that the results are correlational, so it’s possible unknown factors are driving differences in amounts of motherly touch and in the children’s brain development. For example, perhaps some mothers are more engaged on many levels, including talking to their children more. Such mothers might be more tactile, but it could be, for instance, the way they talk to their children that is responsible for the brain differences. Another major factor, not mentioned by the researchers, is potential genetic effects. The same genes driving tactile behaviour in mothers might be passed down to their children influencing their brain development. It’s also worth noting that it remains to be seen whether similar results would be found for levels of touch from a father or other caregiver.

These issues aside, Brauer and his colleagues ask us to consider their results in light of animal research that is able to experimentally control how much motherly touch different individual animals are exposed to. This has shown that greater maternal touch is associated with important brain changes in rats, for example in the way their brains respond to stress, and that rats raised with more touch go on to be more tactile towards their own offspring. ‘On the backdrop of this work then, it is not unreasonable to suspect a potential causal role of touch for human development,’ the researchers said. CJ
More evidence that literary, but not pop, fiction boosts readers’ emotional skills

In Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity and the Arts

Three years ago, a pair of psychologists at the New School for Social Research in New York attracted worldwide interest and controversy when they reported in the prestigious journal Science that reading just a few pages of literary fiction boosted research participants’ recognition of other people’s emotions, but that reading pop fiction (also known as genre fiction) did not. Now the same researchers have returned with a new paper in Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity and the Arts that used a different approach to arrive at the same conclusion – again, reading literary fiction, but not genre fiction, appears to be associated with superior emotion-recognition skills.

The research from 2013 involved online participants reading a few pages of literary fiction (including excerpts from novels by Don DeLillo, Lydia Davis or Louise Erdrich) or pop fiction (including excerpts from Danielle Steel, Rosamunde Pilcher and Gillian Flynn) and then attempting to discern people’s emotions from looking at their eyes.

One of that study’s critics was Mark Liberman. On his influential Language Log blog he expressed surprise that the study had even been accepted for publication – after all, he argued, the researchers had hand-picked just a few seemingly arbitrary examples of literary and genre fiction. It was, he said, a ‘breath-taking overgeneralisation’ to extrapolate from the effects of these passages to say anything about lit fiction or genre fiction as a whole.

For the new research, David Kidd and Emanuele Castano tested over 2000 more people on the same ‘Reading the Mind in the Eyes Test’ they used previously (the test involves looking at just the eye regions of actors’ faces and selecting from four complex emotion words which one best describes each actor’s felt emotion). Some of the participants were recruited via a link in a New York Times article about the association between reading fiction and interpersonal sensitivity, others were recruited via Amazon’s Mechanical Turk survey website.

As well as completing the emotion-recognition test, the participants were also shown a list of 130 names and asked to say which, if any, were the names of established authors. Sixty-five of the listed names were authors, some of them of pop fiction (such as Dick Francis, Tom Clancy and Stephen King), others of literary fiction (such as Salman Rushdie, George Orwell and Kazuo Ishiguro). Greater recognition of literary authors was interpreted as an indication that a participant had read more literary fiction.

There was a clear pattern in the findings – the more literary fiction authors that participants recognised, the better they tended to perform on the emotion-recognition test, and this association held even after statistically accounting for the influence of other factors that might be connected to both emotion skills and reading more literary fiction, such as past educational attainment, gender and age.

A second study involving over 300 more participants recruited online was similar but also included a measure of participants’ self-reported empathy levels – this was to check that it’s not simply that people with more empathy are more attracted to literary fiction and also tend to do better at the emotion-recognition test. Again, participants who recognised more literary fiction authors also tended to perform better on the emotion test, and this association remained even after controlling for the influence of differences in participants’ empathy levels. Kidd and Castano said the consistency of their findings across three samples showed that the patterns they found are ‘robust’. They believe the apparent link between reading more literary fiction and better emotion-recognition skills emerges because ‘the implied [rather than explicit] sociocognitive complexity, or roundness of characters, in literary fiction prompts readers to make, adjust, and consider multiple interpretations of characters’ mental states’. However, they acknowledged that ‘no direct evidence speaks to the precise mechanisms’ by which literary fiction exerts its postulated benefits.

Perhaps mindful of some of the criticism levelled at their earlier research, Kidd and Castano also point out that their findings should not be taken as evidence of ‘the superiority of literary fiction’. Rather, they say, all types of fiction are likely to have an effect on people’s emotional understanding, but in different ways. They speculate that reading more pop fiction that’s filled with stereotypical characters might encourage the ‘other strategy of social perception’, which is to understand people ‘in terms of their social identities and roles’ – an approach likely to be favoured in less individualistic cultures.

Critics of the new research might feel that Kidd and Castano are again extrapolating rather far from some fairly vague results – for example, it’s worth noting that the meaning of performance differences on the Reading the Mind in the Eyes Test is an area of contention in psychology, where it’s been shown that performance is related to verbal IQ, not just emotional perspective taking. Others perhaps will continue to feel uncomfortable about the very enterprise of attempting to distil the benefits of reading fiction into a number on a psychometric test.

The secret to strong friendships? Interconnected memories

In Journal of Personal and Social Relationships

No man is an island: we act together, think together and even remember together. Elderly couples have interconnected memory systems, working together to deftly remember their shared past. New research in the Journal of Personal and Social Relationships shows that platonic friends see themselves similarly. In a sample of 216 students and online recruits, Nicole Iannone and colleagues found high agreement with items such as ‘My best friend and I can remind each other of things we know’, part of a scale measuring ‘transactive memory systems’ – shared systems of recording, storing and recalling information. Ratings were even higher when participants were referring to friendships that were longer, more trusting or of a higher quality overall. Gender had no effect on degree of interconnection, but seemed to shape the kind of interconnection. In a second study with 340 participants, same-sex friendships were more likely to have overlap in similar memory areas, such as both knowing a lot about movies, whereas mixed-sex friends had distinctive areas of expertise – suggesting a good team-up for a trivia night. The authors note that in their sample, memory interdependence was the single best predictor of friend quality, more even than relationship length or a measure of trust, raising the idea that putting faith in someone else to preserve your past is an important facet of long-term intimacy.
If we’re being honest, most of us would admit that we keep an ongoing mental record of who has done what for whom among our relationships. It sounds a little churlish but this note-keeping is a basic aspect of social functioning that means we can avoid being taken advantage of by free riders, and also helps us decide who to turn to when we’re in need.

When does this sense of social fairness emerge? Developmental psychologists have previously demonstrated that pre-schoolers have a keen sense of reciprocity – for example, they will share more toys with other kids who have previously shared more with them. A new study in Developmental Psychology has flipped this around, showing that already by age three years, children also recognise when others are indebted to them.

Markus Paulus at Ludwig-Maximilians-University of Munich recruited around 40 three-year-olds and five-year-olds to play a sharing game with two toy animals. Over three rounds, the children, who were tested alone, had to choose how many stickers to share with each animal. Crucially, Paulus fixed things so that the kids’ choice for one animal was to share either two or three out of six stickers each round, whereas their choice for the other disadvantaged animal was to share either one or no stickers out of two. This obviously ensured that over the three rounds, the child had shared more stickers with one of the animals than the other.

Next, this was important to rule out other explanations for the results, Paulus showed the children that the animals also had their own sticker collection. In fact the quantity of their own stickers meant that combined with the ones from the child, each animal now had exactly the same number of stickers. This ensured that the children’s later behaviour wasn’t influenced by perceiving one animal to be wealthier than the other in terms of sticker ownership.

The most important stage came next. Over several rounds the same two toy animals were shown in possession of various enticing toys, such as balloons, marbles and colouring pictures (each animal always had the same number). Each round, the children were given the chance to ask one animal if they could share their toys, and the interesting test was which animal they would approach.

The children showed a consistent tendency to ask for toys from the animal to whom they had earlier given more stickers, and this was just as true for the three-year-olds as it was for the five-year-olds. The current study’s major contribution is its demonstration that preschool children are able to register and remember to whom they had allocated more resources, and that they strategically asked this recipient in a subsequent phase to share resources with them,” Paulus said.

Further evidence of the sophistication of the children’s thinking came from another similar experiment in which the animals left the room when the children made their sticker
sharing decisions. In this context, the animals were ignorant about which of them the child had shown greater generosity. Crucially the children seemed to realise this – when it came to their turn to ask for toys from the animals, they no longer made more requests of the animal to whom they’d earlier given more stickers. It’s as if the children realised that the animals wouldn’t know who was more indebted, so they didn’t call in the favour they were owed. Regular readers of the Research Digest will recognise that these new findings are just the latest to show pre-schoolers’ sophisticated psychological awareness. For example, by age four, they also know when you’re contradicting yourself, and five-year-olds can see through your bravado. In short, you might think you can run circles round a pre-schooler, but watch out, they’ve probably got you sussed. CJ

We’ve revamped the Research Digest blog with a clean and modern design that looks great whether you’re viewing on your desktop, tablet or smartphone. Please take a look at www.bps.org.uk/digest and let us know what you think.

PsychCrunch episode 7
For our latest podcast we spoke to three experts to find out about the importance of having the right competitive mindset, and how to use self-talk and positive imagery to boost your sporting performance. Listen via the blog.

The material in this section is taken from the Society’s Research Digest blog at www.bps.org.uk/digest, and is written by its editor Dr Christian Jarrett and contributor Dr Alex Fradera.

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New: download our free app via your iOS or Android store to keep up with the latest psychology research every day, on the go!
Mental Capacity Advisory Group – Members

The Society’s Professional Practice Board (PPB) is seeking to appoint Members of the Society to join the above Group from November 2016. The Advisory Group reports directly to the Professional Practice Board.

The remit of the Advisory Group is to advise and guide members and the Society on mental capacity issues. This will include advice on professional standards and good practice for psychologists including the production and updating of guidance documents as relevant; promotion and advice on training opportunities as part of BPS CPD initiatives; and responding to relevant correspondence from members and external parties.

The membership will consist of psychologists who are currently in professional practice and involved in or contributing to complex capacity assessments, Best Interest decision making, DOLS and safeguarding processes. Applicants may also have experience or expertise of the legal context in the court of protection and other judicial processes. The membership of the Group will reflect a breadth of expertise in this area and not representation of the Member Networks. The society would particularly welcome applicants from the Devolved Nations and from practitioners working with older adults and children and young people (transitions).

Members will serve on the Advisory Group for a term of 3 years in the first instance.

For full details on these positions or to request a Statement of Interest Form please contact Carl Bourton at carl.bourton@bps.org.uk

Statements of Interest should reach the Society’s office no later than 21 October 2016.
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Adding a qualifier to Philip Larkin's *This Be the Verse*: 'They fuck you up, your Mum and Dad (particularly if they are psychologists)'. Surely any adult is liable to take their work home with them at the end of the day… how could what we know about human behaviour not bleed into our family life?

As there seems to be surprisingly little empirical research on the impact of parental profession (of any type) on parenting style, we decided to talk to people – those who have grown up with psychologists, and psychologists themselves about the impact of psychology on their relationship with their children.

### An experimental approach

Let's kick off with the most obvious manifestation of a psychologist's profession in their parenting: those who take the tools of the trade home with them. There is indeed a long history of this, notably Jean Piaget, whose systematic study of cognitive development made heavy use of his own children and their friends. Others include Winthrop Kellogg, who in 1931 adopted a chimpanzee, Gua, in order to study its development alongside that of his newborn son, Donald. Kellogg called the experiment to a halt on realising that, while Gua was becoming no more human, Donald was beginning to bark for food. A couple of years later, Clarence Leuba perhaps forfeited his 'Psychologist Dad of the Year' prize by attempting to determine whether laughter is innate by only tickling his infant son while wearing a 'cardboard shield' mask. Rather wonderfully, it is reported that Leuba suspected that the experiment had been ruined because of his wife's failure to fully observe his tickling rules.

In the intervening years, technological advances have meant that psychologists have all sorts of objects on offer when they decide to delve into the minds of their offspring. In *A Thousand Days of Wonder*, Professor Charles Fernyhough (Durham University) takes an intimate look at his daughter Athena's developing mind from birth to age three, and one reviewer (for the *Telegraph*) felt that 'the book really takes off when Athena is old enough to take centre stage; when she starts to run the show, participating and rejecting her role in her father's sometimes needly experiments'. Fernyhough's son Isaac has helped...
If you try to ‘use psychology’ on your young children, don’t be surprised if they throw it back at you. Dr Paul Redford, a Chartered Psychologist at the University of the West of England, tells us: ‘One of the toughest parts is putting the reading into practice – which is probably obvious for practitioners, but to non-practitioners it is a wake-up call. It is all well and good reading Carol Dweck’s work about encouraging a growth mindset or Martin Seligman on raising an optimistic child, but the reality is you are faced with amazingly creative reactions to your encouragements to “try to think of another way of seeing this situation”. “Why don’t you think of one, you’re the psychologist?” for example! Trying at that moment to think of the appropriate response is challenging. I have often wished I had a “Dwecktionary” of appropriate growth-based language to learn.’

As for Aime Armstrong (pictured), she appears to be raising a third generation of psychologists. ‘Because my parents were psychologists and I am now following in their footsteps, I am more aware of my children’s behaviour and how I am with them than I might otherwise have been. Sometimes they turn the tables on me though. My seven-year-old daughter asked me to bake her a rainbow birthday cake with a 3D mermaid that was half inside the cake and half outside. Not trusting my ability to deliver such a culinary feat, I suggested that a simpler cake design might be more practical. Undeterred, she remarked “You can do it, Mum, it might be challenging, but you’ll find a way, don’t give up…”’

Psychologist, heal thyself

For those who don’t enrol their offspring in their studies, formal or otherwise, might they nevertheless find it impossible to leave a psychologically minded approach outside the family home? There are some evocative illustrations of this in Micah Toub’s book Growing up Jung: Coming of Age as the Son of Two Shrinks, such as where he writes about how his dad tells him, ‘That’s good that I died in your dream, Micah. It means you’re integrating your inner father and becoming more independent.’ After he confesses his fumbled attempt to lose his virginity as a teen, Toub’s mom informs him, ‘You have to feel better about an uncertain world. I think that has helped me to be more accepting towards others and ultimately myself.’ And in discussion with her psychology graduate daughter Melanthe, Chartered Psychologist and novelist Voula Grand said that she feels she ‘grew up very psychologically minded… As you had done with the fairy tales, you both used to ask me to tell you the famous psychological studies over and over again, you were fascinated.’

Dr Charlotte Russell (King’s College London) is the daughter of Cambridge psychologist James Russell. She says her father ‘was very interested in us, what we said, why we said it, what we doing and why… Most adults aren’t interested in children at this level and looking back I’m sure that’s a very positive thing to have – to feel that your actions are interesting is
very important! At the time though sometimes it could be infuriating, as obviously you don’t know why you are saying and doing many of the things you’re saying and doing when you’re a child... And so you end up confabulating!

This idea that what psychologists pass on to their children is a general world view, an approach, is supported by Aime Armstrong, now a psychology postgraduate. ‘My parents met at teacher training college,’ she tells us, ‘and Dad’s fascination with psychology and helping young people to learn led to him becoming an educational psychologist. Dad taught me not to make assumptions about people, and to love learning for the pure joy of discovery, rather than for the achievement of a particular qualification. He never pressurised me to do well in exams, or checked whether I’d done my homework, he just talked to me about everything and anything, and answered my endless questions about the world and people. He once said to me “I believe you can achieve anything you set your mind to” – that was amazing to hear from your Dad, but it wasn’t about being clever, it was about being determined.’ The York-based father and psychologist Tom Hartley agrees, but broadens this view to science in general. ‘Science fills that function in providing an overarching framework of values that come through in a parent–child relationship.’

A double-edged sword

So, what of the parents themselves? Do psychologist parents feel different from non-psychologists? And if so, are they entitled to? Our highly selective, unscientific, poll of psychologist parents revealed some interesting commonalities.

Perhaps the most obvious question is whether psychologists try harder to understand what their child is thinking and why. One psychologist dad from Cambridge we spoke to describes parenting succinctly as ‘the toughest theory of mind problem I’ve ever worked on’. This seems to epitomise a psychological mindset, as not only does he want to get inside the minds of his children to understand them better, he couches this desire within psychological terminology.

The US-based psychologist Sarah Rose Cavanagh, whose research specifically focuses on emotional regulation, says: ‘I sometimes feel like I could be a more laidback, natural parent if I wasn’t constantly overthinking everything.’ But then again, ‘I would probably overthink everything even if I had gone into another field.’ Is her overthinking because she’s a psychologist, or is she a psychologist because she’s predisposed towards overthinking? Interestingly, Sam Evans, London-based father and language psychologist, said: ‘I sometimes feel that thinking about scientific problems can make me a bit “absent” when I’m at home.’ Perhaps it can take cognitive effort to detach from that mindset and just play.

Most parents report being more aware of the developmental literature, or at least more able to find and understand relevant material when required. This can be a double-edged sword though. Akira O’Connor, father and cognitive psychologist with interests in memory and déjà-vu, told us it didn’t help him make a better decision: ‘It just made me more conflicted about the decision I would almost certainly have made anyway.’ However, when his son showed signs of colour blindness, he ‘knew to get some Ishihara plates, and…understood some of the more complex psychophysics in the books [he] was reading’. Similarly conflicted, cognitive neuroscientist and memory expert Kim Graham thinks being a psychologist ‘causes you to worry sometimes about whether they have particular disorders’, but conversely her knowledge allows her to understand her children’s ‘behaviour [and] developmental stages’ and helps in ‘explaining it to them’.

Certainly an increased awareness of developmental stages and psychological disorders can lead to an increased tendency to ‘diagnose’ your child. Dr Paul Redford is married to Dr Emma Halliwell (both work at the University of the West of England). He tells us that ‘discussions regarding our children or parenting can end up debating the relative evidence base of “stage based” developmental approaches compared to the evidence regarding the age of onset of enduring personality characteristics, which I guess in other households might be nipped in the bud as “it’s just a stage they are going through”.’

Conversely, knowledge of the large amount of variability throughout development can bring comfort. Information for parents on developmental milestones rarely highlight the large amount of variance common to any
psychological measure, and to psychological development in particular. We tend to be aware of the theories relating to development, and the quality of evidence that is used to support these theories. But does this allow us to do anything more than justify whatever path we have blindly chosen? Redford admits he did ‘over-read developmental literature after my first child looking for an “evidenced-based approach” to parenting, but soon realised that I was also clearly demonstrating confirmatory bias, in that I was just looking for evidence to support the parenting style that I had chosen/fell into.’

So, do psychologists feel a ‘breed apart’ as parents? Interestingly, this question frequently brought out the scientist in those we spoke to, with many saying they didn’t know as they ‘didn’t have the appropriate control condition’. Our personalities, profession and parenting style are likely to be so interrelated that it simply isn’t possible to talk about them as separate entities. But one thing is sure: nobody is going to pan out well… to give a possibly unreliable example, Nicole Kidman’s break-up with Tom Cruise was blamed in some quarters on her father’s position as a renowned psychologist. Others can certainly be wary: Professor Elizabeth Meins (University of York) told us that her daughter’s best friend and boyfriend were ‘quite anxious’ about meeting her and husband Professor Charles Fernyhough. ‘They asked whether we’d be able to assess their personalities immediately. Athena’s eye-rolling at such a notion clearly means that having us as parents at least means that she won’t ever make silly assumptions about psychologists psychoanalysing you the moment they set eyes you.’

Generally, though, the children of psychologists spoke to painted a positive picture… McKenzie Lloyd Smith told us: ‘The first thing anyone ever asked me when growing up, when they found out what my parents did, was “So can they read your mind?”’. But, despite this common childhood misconception, having two exceptionally good psychologists as parents has been nothing but a benefit to me, both in childhood and continuing into adulthood.

The parents were perhaps not quite so sure, seeing both positives and negatives. This shouldn’t be a surprise though: being self-critical is perhaps part of the mindset often associated with psychologists. Although we might be more predisposed towards thinking about our child’s behaviour in quiet periods, all the theory in the world can’t help in the fast-paced world of actually interacting with your child. Sam Evans (UCL) sums this up, simply stating, ‘Kids don’t give you much time to reflect on the way that you parent.’ Perhaps we are just like all the non-psychologist parents out there, winging it from day to day, trying to apply what we know about the world to provide the best possible environment for our children to flourish.

Indeed, scrabbling round for our own words of wisdom to close, it’s writers and not psychologists we find ourselves turning to. Make your children feel safe, advises author Joel Stein (tinyurl.com/jxwvvme). And above all, don’t take the whole thing or yourself too seriously: as Roald Dahl wrote, ‘A stodgy parent is no fun at all. What a child wants and deserves is a parent who is SPARKY.’

**Back to basics**

The common perception seems to be that having a psychologist as a parent is not going to pan out well… to give a possibly unreliable example, Nicole Kidman’s break-up with Tom Cruise was blamed in some quarters on her father’s position as a renowned psychologist. Others can certainly be wary: Professor Elizabeth Meins (University of York) told us that her daughter’s best friend and boyfriend were ‘quite anxious’ about meeting her and husband Professor Charles Fernyhough. ‘They asked whether we’d be able to assess their personalities immediately. Athena’s eye-rolling at such a notion clearly means that having us as parents at least means that she won’t ever make silly assumptions about psychologists psychoanalysing you the moment they set eyes you.’

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Dorothy Rowan, British-based psychologist, author: “Often grassroots ideas inspire people, who would otherwise have lived quietly, to do great things. One such person is Terry Lynch, an Irish GP”.
William Glasser, US psychiatrist, founder of Choice Theory and Reality Therapy: “If ever a man puts a human face on mental suffering and offers an optimistic message, Dr. Lynch is that man. If I ever get seriously unhappy, I’m going to camp on Terry’s doorstep.”
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I think you always been very encouraging of your students and colleagues, and had many friends who are also criminologists. You have always been very kind as a father too, spending lots of time with us three girls teaching us to ride a bike, drive a car, playing games, doing puzzles, etcetera. What has led you to make time for people in the way that you do? I enjoyed very much playing with children at all ages, and I still do with the grandchildren. I enjoy collaborating with people and helping people. I’ve had about 30 PhD students and I still collaborate with many of them. I have longstanding collaborative relationships with many people, who like to continue working with me, and I learn a lot. Every time I collaborate with someone, I learn something new.

I have to be honest, that even though you are a professor of psychological criminology, I never really think of you as a psychologist! Perhaps that is because you never really meet any of the people you have studied! Do you think your work would have been different if you had done more of the data collection yourself? Well, I don’t think it would have made the studies more biased. Clearly, what you say is correct in that I have rarely interviewed any of the participants in the Cambridge study myself, although I have met some of them. But I did hang around with delinquents in my teenage years when I was going to Everton football matches! I have also listened to tape recordings of the interviews with the participants and also I’ve been very keen to include case histories of the participants in our books. In our recent book on criminal recidivism we’ve included the case histories of many of the most prolific offenders. You’re right that I haven’t met face to face with that many criminals, but I’ve done my best to find out about them beyond the statistics, in terms of what they are really like.

Being a clinical psychologist myself, I draw hugely on that concept of ‘scientific practitioner’, rather than thinking of myself as a therapist. I am always interested to use scientific
knowledge to help people to understand their strengths and difficulties, and to make changes to overcome their problems. I think this must relate to growing up with you and your love for science and empiricism. I know that I have teased you over the years about not using your knowledge and findings more to the greater good, more to change society to prevent the hardship that leads to criminal behaviour. How has your work actually changed society? Well, I think I have had some influence, certainly in this country, with government ministers and civil service policy makers. I've always advocated the need for early intervention. I had quite a bit of contact with the Home Office in the 1990s, and I think I may have influenced successive Green Papers and White Papers, which included ideas about early intervention. In 2006 I was very much involved with Tony Blair on his action plan on social exclusion, which was a very good plan in my opinion. It included various programmes such as parent training, nurse–family partnership programmes, treatment foster care and multisystemic therapy. One of my papers was put on the Prime Ministers website, alongside the statement that Tony Blair had been influenced by it.

I think being a clinical psychologist working in CAMHS has affected my parenting greatly. I am more aware of the need to be available and responsive, to take time to really talk with my children. I was more critical of myself as a parent in the early years, particularly that my children never slept well, and I kept trying to change variables to maximise sleep to no avail. However, I think most of my parenting is driven by gut decisions, rather than based on any scientific understanding of learning and behaviour. How do you think being a psychologist affected your parenting? I think my parenting was based on gut decisions as well. But, I have to say, in fairness, that the majority of the parenting was done by your mum. She dealt with most of the difficult things, such as refereeing squabbles, whereas I could do most of the fun things like playing with you all. Your mum was the most brilliant at bringing you up. I was never anxious that any of you were going to be teenage delinquents. Having hung around with delinquents while I was a teenager myself, you and your sisters were very different.

How about as a grandfather? You only had daughters yourself, and now are faced with six grandsons as well as four granddaughters. Do you think your studies made you more alert to boy misbehaviour, possibly mistaking normal toddler willfulness for early delinquency? No, I don't think so. There are some differences between boys and girls in the way they behave, but there are many individual differences between children. I'm not worried about any of my grandsons, they are all within the normal range, I'm happy to say!

I think that using scientific study to actually find out things about human behaviour, which has policy implications, is one of your main legacies. Is that how you would like your work to be remembered? Yes, I think so. The main work that I have done has been advancing knowledge about risk and protective factors for offending, and about the development of offending and antisocial behaviour, and also the effect of life events on the course of development of offending. I've tried to draw practical implications for the early prevention of offending, and I've advocated consistently for early prevention with policy makers, so if I'm remembered at all, I hope it's for that.

Have you been surprised how much your work has been read across the world? Yes, I have been surprised. Recently at a conference a man from Peru came up to me and told me that my work is read in Peru, which was particularly surprising because it is not in Spanish.

Looking back, I can remember swelling with pride the first time that one of your studies was referred to in a developmental psychology lecture by Norman Freeman when I was an undergraduate at Bristol University. I have always felt a great sense of pride in you and your achievements, especially when you were awarded an OBE and the Sellin-Glueck Award of the American Society of Criminology. You taught me a lot about the value of scientific inquiry, about the value of intelligence and of questioning assumed knowledge. When we were younger, you used to always debate with us from the other side of the argument, and I remember it used to make us girls annoyed at the time, and we would sometimes stomp off slamming the door. However, I think that this prepared me well for life as a psychologist, for being able to always see the other side of the argument, for being able to weigh up evidence meticulously, for being curious about other people's world view. This has been immensely helpful to me in my life and career, and has fitted well with cognitive behavioural method. I think I have always tried to be kind, encouraging and compassionate to the people I meet, and this is something I learnt from you and Mum when I was growing up.

Great! It is important to always consider alternative viewpoints and alternative explanations!

Growing up with a psychologist

For more, see the feature by Jon Sutton and Aidan Moran on p.758
Learning from educational neuroscience

Annie Brookman considers the potential benefits and concerns in an ever-growing field

Here appears to be a growing appetite among teachers for brain-based findings to guide their work in the classroom: a 2014 survey by the Wellcome Trust found that 91 per cent of teachers have used their understanding of neuroscience to inform at least one aspect of teaching and learning (Simmonds, 2014). Help is at hand thanks to the emergence of the interdisciplinary field of educational neuroscience. This developing enterprise encompasses all scientific areas of research that can contribute to education, including developmental psychology, cognitive neuroscience, genetics and technology.

Educational neuroscience is a highly collaborative pursuit, not only through the convergence of these traditionally independent fields: educators themselves engage closely with the research, enabling a more achievable end goal of rigorously scientific, and translatable findings that can enhance learning. Yet despite these laudable aims, there are some notable criticisms of the field. Here I will examine the present state of research, address some key concerns, and argue that educational neuroscience is a worthwhile pursuit with real potential to improve learning.

**Extending and supporting existing theories**

Neuroimaging lends itself very well to educational neuroscience and is commonly used, as it allows for insights into how we reason and learn. Let’s take an example.

A traditional view of learning holds that when we learn something new about how the world works, we replace our old, inaccurate or simplified knowledge. For example, as a child, you see the sun ‘rise’ and ‘set’ everyday, so likely conclude that the sun goes round the earth. At school, you’re taught that actually, the earth goes round the sun. According to the traditional view, you replace your old, naïve knowledge about the relationship between the sun and the earth in favour of your taught knowledge. More recently, psychologists have theorised that in fact this old knowledge never really goes away, and inhibitory control is employed to suppress it, in order to use the correct knowledge.

While behavioural evidence supported this inhibitory control explanation (e.g. Houdé, 2000), the advent of neuroimaging has allowed neuroscientists to test this theory of learning more directly. Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) shows that areas of the brain associated with inhibitory control are active when reaching a correct answer (Masson et al., 2014). Further research is ongoing in this area, including studies to test whether training inhibitory control within a subject domain can lead to improved performance in that subject. In this way, neuroimaging can give further credence to our theories of learning, and allow us to design classroom interventions based on firm scientific foundations.

**Debunking existing theories**

Educational neuroscience can also bust ‘neuromyths’, brain-based theories of learning for which there is no evidence (Dekker et al., 2012). Perhaps driven by the fact that neuroscientific results are more persuasive to non-experts than psychological results (Munro & Munro, 2014), neuromyths may appear to provide a quick and easy way to improve learning.

The Wellcome Trust survey of teachers found that the most prevalent neuromyth among teachers was the notion of different learning styles (Simmonds, 2014); for example, the idea that ‘visual learners’ learn better when information is presented visually. While it may be true that individuals have preferences, there is no evidence that presenting information in a preferred style improves learning (Krätzig & Arbuthnott, 2006). A concerning outcome of this neuromyth is that teaching according to this theory may in fact have a negative impact on learning: learners may miss out on information that is better learnt another way, and non-preferred styles may not get the chance to develop. More than three quarters of teachers said they used this method to inform their teaching (Simmonds, 2014), highlighting the...
new insights

The relationship between genetics and education is increasingly studied, with new implications for teaching and learning. The Twins Early Development Study investigated the genetic component of educational attainment at age 16. GCSE results had 62 per cent heritability, and intelligence, along with other psychological factors, accounted for 75 per cent of the heritability of GCSEs (Krapohl et al., 2014).

How is this information useful to teachers? Firstly, simply being aware of it may ease some of the huge pressure to get top grades from all students. Secondly, the policy implications of this high heritability for academic attainment are clear: an equal education does not mean equal opportunities. Education should be individualised as much as possible, in order to fit the requirements of each child. Understanding underlying processes and causal mechanisms, even at the genetic level, does not lead to a fatalistic stance – a criticism sometimes levelled at educational neuroscience. Rather it allows for an increasingly personalised approach in providing the level of educational support that each child needs. Indeed the book G is for Genes (Asbury & Plomin, 2013) provides 11 genetics-based policy recommendations for education, many of which emphasise pupil heterogeneity and encourage equality through helping those most in need.

The area of genetics and education is a particularly controversial one, with the potential for misunderstanding and misuse. As we continue to discover more about the influence of genes on learning and attainment, the need for public-facing expert scientists is amplified. The complexity of genetics and heritability is evidenced by recent debates born from confusion over the difference between heritability and the effect of specific genes (Ritchie, 2015). Here we are faced with two divergent dangers: rejecting all genetic research as fatalistic and unhelpful, or accepting genetic findings fatalistically and forgetting the importance of environmental factors.

Educational neuroscience’s aim to engage with all stakeholders is especially important for complex research that requires nuanced explanations of findings and implications.

criticisms of the field

As indicated by the Wellcome Trust survey, teachers are keen to use neuroscience. Yet some scientists have argued that the integration of neuroscience into education is not worthwhile. The concerns surrounding educational neuroscience fall roughly into two camps (Varma et al., 2008): scientific concerns regarding methods and theory, and pragmatic concerns that address practicalities and cost–benefit ratios.

Early arguments against educational neuroscience as an endeavour fell into the former category and focused on the disparate nature of education and neuroscience. The amalgamation of the two subjects was famously labelled ‘a bridge too far’ by Bruer in 1997. The use of neuroscience in an education setting was considered speculative, and not worthy of pursuing. This view was largely based on the assumption that the only relevance of neuroscience to education was in the fields of synaptogenesis and critical periods, with much of the evidence taken from animal research. Bruer (1997) suggested that the link between the two was only to be found in cognitive psychology – the firm ground in which to anchor education and neuroscience. In reality, educational neuroscience does not attempt to link the minutiae of neural mechanisms directly to the classroom, and does indeed incorporate cognitive psychology. Educational neuroscientists argue that all levels of explanation should be considered holistically and as interacting, from the social level down to the genetic. While Bruer’s argument may have held some truth in 1997, it is incompatible with today’s research landscape (which considers all levels of description).

More recently, pragmatic criticisms have emerged, relating to the cost–benefit ratio of educational neuroscience research. Most notably, Dorothy Bishop...
wrote in 2014 that a principal concern is that costly neuroimaging aims simply to identify brain areas associated with cognitive abilities, which is not helpful in informing education. Given that MRI costs hundreds of pounds per scan, Bishop argued that the payoff for such work is not great enough.

Most would agree that costly research should only be carried out if there are potential positive outcomes, but highly positive and beneficial outcomes in this field are possible. First, discovering neural correlates in their own right through basic science research helps to build the foundations for future applied research. Indeed, academics in other disciplines argue that there is no distinction between basic and applied research, since the entire research endeavour is a social investment (Lander, 2015). Second, as described in the fMRI example above, an understanding of neural mechanisms can help us identify likely candidates for effective training programmes. Third, if an intervention is known to work, an understanding of the underlying neural mechanisms may help us to understand why it works, and to improve it further. Finally, at a recent seminar on cognitive training in children, Klingberg argued that brain scans are close to being able to provide as much explanatory power in terms of an individual child’s needs as a psychological assessment. While neuroimaging is costly, the price of sending a child to have a psychological assessment is also high, and neuroimaging may take a fraction of the time. The use of neuroimaging may prove helpful and efficient compared with alternative behavioural assessments.

The criticisms of educational neuroscience have encouraged researchers to crystallise the aims of the field and to carefully consider how their research should progress. Key priorities are to work across disciplines, to collaborate closely with educators, to provide relevant research, and to feed findings back to teachers. This collaborative approach leaves open the possibility for innovation (Varma et al., 2008); an exciting prospect for those working in the field. Sharing insights and methods from traditionally separate disciplines has the potential to move the field forward in unforeseen directions.

**Practical considerations**

While the notion of educational neuroscience may be convincing in theory, the reality of teachers incorporating scientific findings into the classroom raises practical considerations.

**No silver bullet**

One of the problems that educational neuroscience faces is its status as a multidisciplinary subject. Although interdisciplinarity is increasingly encouraged in academia, often this is not borne out in reward structures. Funding is notoriously difficult to secure for interdisciplinary projects, and submitting such work to the Research Excellence Framework was problematic as it did not fit neatly into one category (Byrne, 2014). Unfortunately, systems in the current academic structure are likely to be a further barrier to high-quality educational neuroscience research.

Moving beyond the scientific and pragmatic concerns, there remain some ethical concerns. Transcranial direct current stimulation has been applied to brain regions involved in learning, providing some promising results for children’s maths ability (Cohen Kadosh et al. 2012). However, the long-term effects of this stimulation technique are currently unknown so we must proceed cautiously. Another area of apprehension is the possibility of uncomfortable research findings. Although educational neuroscience does not necessarily lead to a fatalistic approach, the search for

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Teachers may know what the most important research questions are, based on their experiences.
underlying causes raises difficult questions about school grouping according to likely future skill set.

It is indeed concerning to imagine policy taking this approach, but as with the genetic recommendations for education, with greater understanding we can better tailor individual learning plans. More importantly, the debate for what we do with data once we have it is one for society as a whole, not just scientists.

It is clear that teachers have an interest in neuroscience and want to use it to inform their practices. Concerningly, 75 per cent of teachers surveyed by the Wellcome Trust had no outside support when using neuroscience in the classroom (Simmonds, 2014). Researchers, typically funded by the taxpayer, have a duty to engage with teachers, and to provide ongoing support in interpreting findings. This is particularly apparent in light of the ever-increasing requirement for research impact. Findings can be complicated and require detailed explanations with caveats; scientists have a responsibility to disseminate research without hyperbole.

As a young enterprise, educational neuroscience cannot yet offer teachers the quick and easy solutions that are often promised by the media or predatory marketers of new education products. This is possibly the most important thing that teachers can learn from educational neuroscience at the moment: there is no silver bullet, and in order to find the best pedagogical practices we must work collaboratively and wait to see what our findings offer. Good research takes time and requires close investigation of interacting levels of description.

Finally, educators are not the only ones to benefit from this collaboration. Researchers can gain a huge amount in return. Teachers may know what the most important research questions are, based on their experiences in the classroom. They may be able to provide resources that can be used in research, such as exam questions. They will be able to tell researchers how relevant their work really is for education. Good relationships with schools can also enable easy access to research participants, where recruitment is typically hugely time-consuming.

Educational neuroscience is not a one-way conversation where scientists impart their knowledge to educators. It is a dialogue and collaboration with the ultimate goal of enhancing learning for all individuals.
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www.bps.org.uk/p4g2016
Anecdotally, we have known for centuries that the sea can facilitate a sense of wellbeing; empirical evidence is now becoming available, specifically the work of Wallace J. Nichols (Blue Mind) and the University of Exeter’s Blue Gym Programme, which indicates that proximity to the coast is positively associated with good health. As a counselling psychologist who regularly facilitates imagery-based relaxation, it is impossible to overlook how often individuals will opt for a coastal location as their safe, relaxing space; and practitioners are increasingly taking therapy outdoors into natural settings. Furthermore, there is growing evidence to suggest that the coastline and engagement with ocean-based activities, such as surfing and paddle boarding, may carry therapeutic qualities. Early indicators suggest positive outcomes for symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, addiction and autism as a result of surfing.

So, how can we harness the natural power of water to facilitate wellbeing? SEAcotherapy, a health and wellbeing concept, based on current evidence around utilising the sea as a co-therapist, launched this spring. We incorporate various coastal activities, including paddle boarding, surfing, arts and crafts, yoga, pilates, mindfulness and talking therapies. Particular attention will be focused upon wellbeing and preventative mental and physical healthcare, with a view to extending to a clinical population should research evidence show effectiveness. Moreover, we see this as an opportunity to further research the area, to destigmatise mental health and to facilitate awareness of marine conservation towards transformative learning.

For further details, please visit www.seacotherapy.co.uk

The sea as co-therapist

Words by Dr Victoria E. Galbraith; image by Jon Sutton
## 2016 CPD Workshops

Professional development opportunities from your learned Society

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<td>An introduction to the contribution of Clinical psychologists as expert witnesses in the family courts (LIVERPOOL)</td>
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<td>Positive psychotherapy – Applying positive psychology in clinical contexts</td>
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<td>Teaching research methods and statistics in schools, universities and beyond</td>
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**Closing date for nominations: 31 October 2016**

The Education and Public Engagement Board and the Association for Technical Staff in Psychology are delighted to invite nominations for a new annual award. The award recognises the valuable role that technicians play in supporting the student learning experience within their psychology departments.

The Award seeks to recognise excellence by psychology technicians in one or more of the following criteria:
- Technological skill
- Interpersonal communication skills
- Instruction/teaching skills
- Admin/finance skills
- Problem solving
- Innovative skills
- Special skills

There should be a single application for each nominee, which should take the form of a narrative report evidencing each of the criteria above. This should be a maximum of 1000 words supported by testimonials from staff or students as appropriate. Applications should be submitted by the Head of Department by 31 October 2016.

For further information on how to make a nomination and the award criteria please contact emma.smith@bps.org.uk

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The Research Board and the Association for Technical Staff in Psychology are delighted to invite nominations for the annual award recognising the valuable role that technicians play in supporting research within their psychology departments.

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- Using technology
- Interpersonal communications
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- Problem solving
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The genetic battle of the sexes
Sofia Deleniv considers the implications of genomic imprinting for social behaviour and mental health

When we see a toddler showing the first signs of personality, how often are we tempted to say ‘She must get that from her mother?’ Such assumptions are quite sensible – after all, our genetic makeup is composed of two copies of 23 chromosomes, one copy inherited from each parent. But is there any scientific reason to believe that some aspects of our behaviour could be inherited from one of our parents, as opposed to both of them?

Over the past few decades, researchers have observed this phenomenon throughout much of the animal kingdom, leading some theoretical biologists to suggest that this might be the evolutionary outcome of our paternal and maternal genes competing for their own survival. At first thought, this doesn’t make sense. If the genes of mothers and fathers are equally ‘interested’ in the survival of their children, why would they ever compete? According to one prominent school of evolutionary biology, we should blame non-monogamous mating habits for providing the playground for the genetic battle of the sexes (Haig, 2000; Moore & Reik, 1996). To understand why, let’s take some time to examine what it means to be genetically successful.

Seeds of conflict
It’s widely accepted that evolution is driven by the propagation of some genes to future generations, and our intuition is often that genetic success is entirely driven by the survival of our offspring. However, according to a revolutionary hypothesis that has become a central tenet of modern biology, this view isn’t entirely accurate, since your children are not the sole carriers of your genes (Hamilton, 1964). Instead, your genetic success is defined by your inclusive fitness – that is, the survival of your genetic material contained in your children, as well as your kin, whose contribution to your fitness is weighted by the strength of their relatedness to you (eg. the survival of your cousin is equivalent to 12.5 per cent of you, since that is the portion of genes you share). So, if your blood relatives survive and reproduce, their input into the future gene pool is also a genetic triumph for you – after all, a portion of your genes have made their way to the next generation, even if not through your own offspring.

The idea that your evolutionary success is propelled purely by the survival of your own genes raises an intriguing and fundamental issue. And that, is your interests don’t actually lie in the survival of a relative or child as an individual, but rather merely in the survival of the portion of their genetic material that is also yours. Let’s consider that each child is a mosaic of two genomes derived from two distinct individuals. Years ago, the respected evolutionary biologist David Haig suggested that a child’s inclusive fitness can be separated into two independent components, representing the success of that child’s matrilineal and patrilineal genes (Haig, 2000). This means that the genetic material donated by a child’s mother can ‘pursue’ the success of her own bloodline without regard for how the father’s genes fare, and vice versa. In some cases, genes inherited from the two parents end up competing inside their own offspring.

Competition begins when the two parents have conflicting interests. This is found in species that practise polygamy or serial monogamy – so, most primate species, including humans. As a female mates with several males during her lifetime, she will often give birth to children of multiple paternities, and subsequently raise them on her...
own, or with her current partner. Depending on the time these children take to raise, they will likely overlap in time and have to live with each other, sharing resources as well as maternal attention. This means that family groups in non-monogamous societies are primarily composed of asymmetrically related children, who share their mother's genes, but are unlikely to be related via the paternal line. This sows the seeds of conflict.

First, let’s examine the male’s perspective. When he mates with a female, who is likely to eventually mate with others, his genes enter a world of uncertainty. If he has successfully impregnated her, his offspring will probably be raised in a family group that already does or will at some point include other children who don’t carry his genes. These other children will presumably compete with his offspring for maternal attention and resources, and as ruthless as this might sound, the welfare of these children is none of his concern. They do nothing to propagate his genes. In light of this, the male would benefit from transmitting genes that encourage his children to exploit the mother’s care and resources to the detriment of her other children.

This, however, doesn’t suit the female’s interest, as all the children she is raising are equal carriers of her genes, regardless of paternity. If the genes that the female donated to her children produced exploitative behaviours, this would only cause some children to outcompete others and harm the net survival of her genetic material. In light of this, the mother’s genetic fitness would increase if her genes influenced her offspring in ways that could oppose the resource-grabbing genes of the males with whom she mates. This maximises the probability that all her children receive an equal portion of care and chance of survival.

Given the evidence for fundamental tension between the sexes, evolutionary biologists have suggested that non-monogamy has shaped the evolution of a special class of genes, called imprinted genes. These genes stand in stark contrast to most of our genes, which become expressed into proteins from both gene copies that we inherit from our two parents. Imprinted genes are distinct because they carry so-called imprints, or markings, that inform our cells about the sex of the parent who donated a particular gene copy. Subsequently, our cells use this sex-of-origin information to allow only one parent’s gene copy to be active throughout the child’s life, depending on whether it came from the mother or the father. This scenario, whereby one gene copy speaks while the other remains mute, provides an avenue for our maternal and paternal genomes to go their separate ways in pursuing genetic success. This is because at its core, silencing a gene copy donated by one parent is an effective method for preventing it from having an influence on the child’s physiology and behaviour, while handing over the power to the other parent’s gene. Why is that? Quite simply, a silent gene copy doesn’t produce any protein. Thus, if its DNA sequence undergoes any changes it will have no functional implications for the child’s phenotype and chances of reproductive success.

The active gene copy, on the other hand, does make a difference, which allows it to shape the phenotype of the individual. Ultimately, the fact that the gene copy originating from one parent has the exclusive rights to making its protein product means that it’s also in charge of controlling whatever function is underpinned by that protein. This could concern any aspect of the organism, from hormonal and cardiovascular to metabolic and neurological function.

Ruthless agents
How could this scenario have arisen? Let’s consider a situation in which a female mouse pup inherits two copies of a particular gene, of which the paternal copy is highly active, while the maternal copy results in less efficient protein expression. What if, perchance, the protein coded by this gene influenced the

Meet the author
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pup in a way that gave her patrilineal genes an edge over the matrilineal ones? To take a purely hypothetical example, this protein could make her innately more drawn to subtle pheromone cues secreted by her paternal relatives, and thus more likely to socialise and share her food with them, while robbing her maternal relatives of the same courtesy (or sometimes outright robbing their food stores). According to the prominent evolutionary biologist David Haig, in the case that a gene would benefit the father’s genetic fitness to the detriment of the mother, evolution will come to favour an arrangement in which the paternal copy of the gene becomes maximally active while the copy donated by the mother becomes silent. The mother, after all, does not benefit from contributing to the production of a protein that jeopardises her own genetic success. The imprinted gene becomes the father’s ruthless agent, increasing the likelihood that his children fight for survival at the cost of harming the prospects of their matrilineal kin. In multiple-paternity families, this often concerns half-siblings.

Of course, genes would have no need to compete with each other if the only means to success were cooperation. This could apply to members of largely monogamous species, such as beavers, which tend to raise most of their children with the same life-long partner. In these populations, it is not in a father’s interest to transmit genes that make children exploit their mother so much that she becomes incapable of raising more. After all, any cost that his genes would inflict on the female’s residual capacity to reproduce is a cost he will also have to bear himself, as all her future children would carry his own genetic material. Here, both parents increase their genetic fitness if all children receive equal nutrition and care, which theoretically leaves no room for conflicting interests.

I cautiously refer to this as a theoretical possibility purely because researchers question whether any species truly practises strict lifetime monogamy. Detailed investigations of the mating habits of oldfield mice – classic beacons of monogamy – have revealed that females in fact exchange partners in roughly 10–20 per cent of cases (Foltz, 1981). It appears that most animal species are sufficiently unfaithful to generate parental conflicts of interest that give rise to pressure for the evolution of imprinted genes.

**How do cells remember the parental origins of genes?**

The pervasive existence of imprinting is rooted in the ability of some genes to retain a lifelong molecular memory of the donor parent’s sex. Such memories are created during the development of sex cells, when certain genes may acquire particular markings, called imprints, depending on whether they originate from an ovum or sperm (Villar et al., 1995). Imprints often take the form of methylation, which involves the transfer of methyl groups to segments of DNA or to the proteins around which the DNA winds (E. Li et al., 1993; Rose & Klose, 2014; Wagschal et al., 2008). The presence or absence of these imprints, which carries an implicit signal about the sex-of-origin of a particular gene copy, has substantial implications for how maternally and paternally derived genes are treated once they are donated to a child. As an example, let’s examine a maternally expressed gene – one that is only active on the copy inherited from the mother, while silent on the copy donated by the father.

During the development of the male germ line, the chromosome site containing the relevant gene acquires an imprint, which is placed on each copy of that gene in every sperm cell. When one of this male’s spermatozoa goes on to fertilise an egg and its 23 chromosomes become part of the developing offspring’s genome, the presence of the imprint at this particular site prevents the underlying DNA sequence from being used to make protein. In essence, the gene is silenced. This can occur through many possible mechanisms – for instance, the aforementioned methylation marks can obstruct the underlying DNA sequence and attract various molecules that modify the structure of the protein that organises the DNA, making it more compact, and hence less accessible for reading out. Ultimately, imprints tend to conceal the gene from the machinery that reads out its DNA sequence and translates the genetic code into a protein.

This particular gene might be treated quite differently in the female’s developing ovaries, where it would not become marked with an imprint. Thus, when that gene is transmitted to a developing child, its DNA sequence can be expressed into protein. Such a gene is said to be maternally expressed and paternally silent, or imprinted. Of course, the reverse cases also exist – genes that are paternally expressed and maternally silent, because of obstructive imprints being placed on such genes in the mother’s ovaries.

At the moment, roughly 145 genes are known to be imprinted in mice, while the number is so far slightly smaller in humans (Barbaux et al., 2012). While this is a mere fraction of our total of ~20,000 genes, the fact that they exist at all has yielded some fascinating examples of the conflict between some of our maternal and paternal genes.

**From womb to brain**

The parental conflict within us starts in the womb. The first imprinted gene to be discovered, which codes for insulin-like growth factor II (Igf2), is active only on the copy inherited from the father (De Chiara et al., 1991). When this protein
Potential evolutionary implications of the effects of paternally expressed genes are fascinating and far-reaching. When expressed from the genome of a developing embryo, it promotes placental growth, increasing the nutritional supply to the developing fetus at the expense of the pregnant mother’s health. In light of this, it’s perhaps unsurprising that the maternal copy of this gene is normally silent, coated in obstructive imprints that prevent the underlying DNA from being read out and used to produce more Igf2 protein. From the mother’s perspective, maintaining her copy of the Igf2 gene silent is critical for cushioning the effects of the paternal protein’s demanding nature. Indeed we know that increasing activity of the Igf2 gene in the lab results in oversized embryos that, to an extent, drain the mother of nutrients (Constancia et al., 2002). Thus, in encouraging the developing fetus to exploit her to the fullest and preserving her capacity to recover and produce more children in the future. Since their discoveries, the reverse imprinting of the Igf2 and the antagonistic Igf2 receptor genes has been adopted as one of the primary lines of evidence in support of the idea that genomic imprinting could be a manifestation of an evolutionary conflict between the sexes (Haig, 1997).

Interestingly, imprinted genes are particularly common in the brain, which suggests that the longstanding battle of the sexes may have benefited from hijacking the most sophisticated organ of all (Davies et al., 2005). By contributing to neuronal function, imprinted genes are able to exercise control over something much more complicated than nutrient uptake through the placenta – our behaviours, and perhaps personality traits. This could mean genetic mind-control at its most rudimentary level. Importantly, the abundance of such genes in our nervous system makes us quite sensitive to neurological abnormalities brought on by dysfunction of imprinted genes, perhaps more so than to any other physical anomaly. This is evidenced in both animals and humans.

One imprinted gene that is paternally expressed in the brain, Peg3, has received some attention in the scientific literature due to its critical importance for priming female brains for maternal care, as well as producing normal breastfeeding habits in newborns. Over a decade ago, researchers found that mouse pups who inherited disruptive mutations on the Peg3 gene specifically from their fathers are less capable of seeking out breast milk, likely due to disrupted appetite, and thus fail to gain weight and grow after birth (Curley et al., 2004). Even when raised by healthy wild-type mothers, these pups had a mortality rate of 32 per cent shortly after birth. Their survival rates were even lower when living in litters where some pups did not inherit Peg3 mutations from the fathers and thus produced normal levels of the protein.

Interestingly, inheriting Peg3 mutations from the father can have profound effects on the maternal skills of his female pups when they themselves have children. Researchers have found that these females tend to be strikingly bad mothers, as they fail to increase their appetite during pregnancy, produce poor amounts of breast milk, and often neglect feeding, grooming and sheltering their pups in the early stages of life when they are incapable of producing sufficient body heat to sustain themselves (L.L. Li et al., 1999). Indeed, the brains of mutated females are known to have fewer oxytocin-producing neurons, which are essential for the transformative emergence of maternal behaviours, such as protectiveness and enhanced appetite, as well as lactation (Pedersen & Prange, 1979). It comes as no surprise, perhaps, that the pups of Peg3 mutant mothers are less likely to make it past childhood.

A more puzzling recent discovery is that females don’t even need to inherit the Peg3 mutation themselves to have compromised maternal skills! All it takes is that the fetuses they carry in their womb have a mutated paternal copy of the Peg3 gene (Champagne et al., 2009). The researchers behind this finding hypothesise that the effect might be rooted in disrupted Peg3 protein production in the mother’s placenta, which contains the same genome as the embryo. This perturbation, caused by the child’s own mutation, might degrade the normal hormonal signalling that takes place between the placenta and various regions of the mother’s brain, such as the hypothalamus, which regulates appetite, milk production in response to suckling, and maternal instincts.

The potential evolutionary implications of the effects of paternally expressed genes are fascinating and far-reaching. In the case of Peg3, researchers argue that offspring inheriting a functional copy of the gene from their father and thus benefiting from quality maternal care ‘would themselves be both well provisioned and genetically predisposed towards good mothering when adult’ (Curley et al., 2004). Ultimately, this transmits a father’s genes to future generations, increasing his genetic fitness along the way.

Our species is, of course, not immune to the detrimental effects of disrupted...
Recent explorations suggest that the influence of imprinted genes on brain and behaviour might be more far-reaching than previously imagined. This is evident when we look at neurodevelopmental conditions resulting from events that upset the normal function or inheritance of imprinted genes. As an example, patients born with Prader–Willi syndrome tend to have delayed mental development, extremely poor appetite control (often leading to obesity) and a great propensity for temper tantrums (Cassidy & Driscoll, 2009; Tunnichiffe et al., 2014). This rare syndrome, which affects roughly one in 15,000 children, results from dysfunction of the 15q11-q13 cluster of imprinted genes specifically on the paternal copy of chromosome 15. This might occur in a variety of ways. Most often (~70 per cent of cases) the disruption is due to a massive accidental deletion of this gene cluster, or a mutation, taking place within the sperm cell that goes on to impregnate a female. In the remainder of patients, compromised function of the 15q11-q13 cluster might be brought on by maternal uniparental disomy, whereby individuals inherit both copies of the critical gene cluster, or the entire chromosome 15, from their mother. Regardless of its precise genetic aetiology, Prader–Willi syndrome is characterised by a lifelong silence of a collection of paternally expressed genes (Hasegawa et al., 2012). A different neurodevelopmental disorder, Angelman syndrome, is often considered to be the ‘sister’ of Prader–Willi syndrome, caused by the reverse genetic disruption (Cassidy et al., 2000; Mabb et al., 2011). From the moment of conception, patients with this disorder suffer from an absence of maternally expressed genes on the exact same imprinted gene cluster 15q11-q13. This can result from the occurrence of mutations on the maternal copy of chromosome 15, which disrupts activity of the relevant imprinted genes. In rarer cases, the syndrome can be caused by the inheritance of both copies of chromosome 15 from the father, which means that the imprinted genes which tend to be maternally active remain mute throughout the child’s life (Poyatos et al., 2002). Children with Angelman syndrome tend to present with severe developmental delays, stereotypical jerky movements, speech impairments and an inappropriately friendly demeanour, which inspired the disorder’s original, and somewhat demeaning, name of ‘happy puppet syndrome’ (Williams & Frias, 1982).

A more widespread role?
The phenotypes of both Prader–Willi and Angelman syndromes are extremely complex, rooted in disruptions of multiple genes involved in endocrine function, neuronal plasticity and the differentiation and migration of inhibitory interneurons during cortical development (Hasegawa et al., 2012; Muscatelli et al., 2000; Sato & Stryker, 2010). Collectively, these perturbations can explain several facets of these disorders, including deficient appetite control, learning disability and proneness to epileptic seizures. But importantly, they also highlight the severely detrimental outcomes of disturbing the function of imprinted genes, many of which have widespread effects on the developing brain.

In fact, recent explorations suggest that the influence of imprinted genes on brain and behaviour might be more far-reaching than previously imagined. Some theorists have argued that imprinting dysfunctions might have a role to play in some more widespread disorders, such as autism and psychosis (Badcock, 2011; Skuse, 2000). Only several months ago, a publication in the high-profile journal Cell reported that researchers examining neural cultures derived from the stem cells of severely autistic patients found robust over-activation of the imprinted gene FOXG1, which positively correlated with symptom severity (Mariani et al., 2015). Although the evidence for an association between autism and deficient imprinting isn’t entirely consistent across population studies, and it’s clear that imprinted genes are droplets in the ocean of genes already implicated in this disorder, the association is perhaps something worth our attention and research efforts. Ultimately, it’s quite possible that our vulnerability to various neurodevelopmental conditions is an inevitable price to pay for the evolutionary battle of the sexes taking their competition to our brains.

It is comparatively early days for this area of research. We have yet to understand just how often imprinted genes lie at the root of various neurodevelopmental and psychiatric conditions, as well as how strongly they might be contributing to these phenotypes alongside non-imprinted genes that make up the bulk of our genome. It’s also important to acknowledge alternative explanations for the origins of imprinting that do not invoke parental conflict (eg. Spencer & Clark, 2014). Ultimately, one notable strength of the conflict theory is that we have the opportunity to test its predictions across a range of species with differing levels of partner exchange – something that can be expected to produce varying levels of conflict between the parental genomes. I would encourage readers to try personally picking apart this fascinating scientific battleground, by familiarising themselves with Haig’s (1997, 2000) conflict-based framework, as well as its competition (Spencer & Clark, 2014).
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Criteria: The Award Committee will base its decision on published psychology articles, reporting the research carried out for a doctoral degree.* A maximum of two articles can be submitted, and the following requirements must be met:
- The articles must have been published in refereed journals, or be in press.
- The candidate must be either the sole or senior (first) author of the article(s) concerned.
- The candidate’s doctoral degree supervisor or head of department must sign a statement confirming that the research reported in the article(s), was carried out by the candidate as research for a doctoral degree in psychology that was passed by a university in the UK normally not more than two years before the date of acceptance of the article(s) for publication.

Nominations:
- Proposers must send a 500-word nomination statement outlining why the candidate’s work is outstanding and why they should be considered for the award.
- Proposers must send 10 copies of what they judge to be the candidate’s two most outstanding and significant publications reporting the research carried out for the candidate’s doctoral degree.
- Proposers must also send 10 copies of the candidate’s current full CV.
- Nominations should be sent to Liz Beech at the Leicester office by 1 November 2016.

Award: A £500 prize and a commemorative certificate. The recipient is also invited to deliver a lecture based on the research at the Society’s Annual Conference. The Award Committee may decide not to make an award in any given year.

For more information and the full nomination criteria, please contact Liz Beech on 0116 252 9928 or e-mail liz.beech@bps.org.uk.

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The ‘ugly stepsister’ of the eating disorder family

Nancy Tucker on bulimia nervosa in the latest in our series for budding writers (see thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/contribute for more information)

‘It is not hunger. Hunger is a feeling of a gap inside you. You eat something small to stop that feeling. I go on eating after I’ve satisfied that hunger. I want to keep on eating until I feel full – it’s the final limit – you can then eat no more.’ (patient quote from Russell, 1979)

The early 1970s saw anorexia nervosa move from the realm of the ‘mystifying stunt’ to psychiatric disorder with well-defined diagnostic criteria (see, for example, Bruch, 1974). It was not until the end of the decade – when research on anorexia had granted the illness a ‘typical course’, and most patients were expected to make a full recovery over a period of years (Morgan & Russell, 1975) – that an ‘ominous variant’ of the malady emerged. This was characterised not by persistent food restriction but by episodes of uncontrolled eating followed by periods of ‘compensation’: fasting, excessive exercise, or – most commonly – forced vomiting (Russell, 1979).

This cluster of behaviours, initially perceived as deviant and even sinister, eventually came to define what we now understand to be bulimia nervosa: a severe and debilitating eating disorder, and yet still one all too often perceived as ‘anorexia’s ugly stepsister… not as serious but definitely more disgusting’ (Arnold, 2004).

In my experience, ‘not as serious but definitely more disgusting’ is a hauntingly accurate summation of the subjective experience of bulimia as compared with anorexia. My decade-long struggle with eating disorders (explored in The Time in Between: a Memoir of Hunger and Hope, published by Icon Books in April 2015) comprised a bruising eight-year battle with anorexia, but I will always attest that it was the ensuing bulimia that flung me, broken, to the ground.

In many ways, anorexia and bulimia can be thought of as sharing the same core pathology: an overvaluation of thinness (less for reasons of vanity than because emaciation grants an indefinable feeling of ‘safety’; Serpell et al., 1999); a paralysing inability to eat ‘normally’; and a fascination with – and certain contempt for – the physical body. I can certainly confirm that, psychologically, my anorexic and bulimic years were all but indistinguishable from one another: my idolisation of emaciation and disdain for the act of feeding myself remained constant, and I was appalled by the sudden, and seemingly uncontrollable, changes in my behaviour.

Superficially, however, the difference between the two illnesses is stark: anorexia is only diagnosed once an individual’s weight has dropped below ‘what is minimally expected for age, sex, developmental trajectory, and physical health’, and when food restriction is chronic and marked, whilst a diagnosis of bulimia rests only on the frequency of episodes of binge eating/purging (for formal diagnosis, such episodes must occur at least once per week), with no weight criteria (DSM-5). In the most crude of terms: anorexics are always ‘thin’; bulimics are not.

Evidence – both experimental and anecdotal – suggests that this superficial difference in symptom manifestation is enough to create a staggering imbalance in perception of the two disorders, by sufferers and normals alike. An anorexia diagnosis can feel like a hard-won badge of honour (‘it made me feel special… not

Bulimia can be viewed as a shameful stamp on the skin

References

many people have [that] ability – Evans et al., 2004), whilst a label of bulimia can be viewed as a shameful stamp on the skin. Perhaps this difference results from nothing more complicated than the deeply ingrained moral messages modern society transmits on thinness/fatness: in the Western world, the terms ‘obese/overweight’ have become ‘the biomedical gloss for the moral failings of gluttony and sloth’ (Ritenbaugh, 1982) and synonymous with ‘dirty or ill-in-effect’, whilst an emaciated body is a marker of ‘moral superiority [and] empowerment’ (Evans et al., 2004). When describing her time spent receiving inpatient psychiatric treatment for anorexia, author Carrie Arnold recalls: ‘...since most of the other women in the eating disorder programme at the time suffered from bulimia, I was left in a rather interesting position. I found myself the envy of everyone on the floor. Anorexia has a sort of holiness to it, a sanctity of self-denial, and the skeletal figures appear almost superhuman. Here were people that didn’t have to eat, who could overcome their bodily urges.

This is not a unique observation: in an ethnographic study of an eating disorder unit, Segal (2002) describes how ‘[eating disordered] women [need] to establish themselves as pure anorexics rather than bulimics, who rank lower than anorexics in the eating disorder hierarchy’.

The intangible perception of anorexia as hierarchically ‘high’ – almost spiritually so – and impressive to the point of desirability was also noted in ‘Eating like an ox’, a seminal paper on femininity and dualistic constructions of anorexia and bulimia. Here, it is noted that ‘anorexia brings with it the appearance and feeling of total control and almost total denial. This stimulates pride, and a sense of achievement, perfectionism and of being different (perhaps even better) than other people’ (Burns, 2004). Indeed, one of the most recent large-scale experimental studies conducted into the emotional experience of anorexia found that, as well as negative emotions, participants report feeling infused with a sense of pride at being able to achieve their weight loss goals (Selby, 2014), with sufferers observing that ‘anorexia is like the top one… you’re an exemplar of resilience’ and describing the condition as ‘an extreme manifestation of willpower’ (Mortimer, 2015). This silent, secret superiority is something I remember well: the feeling that my protruding bones marked me out as ‘special’; that my ability to resist the needs to which others were enslaved elevated me to almost superhuman status.

Far from a source of superiority, bulimia is routinely experienced as degrading (Saftner et al., 1995), ‘abhorrent’ and ‘crazy’ (Mortimer, 2015). Caught in the crazed process of binging and purging, I remember struggling to judge which I found more shameful: the desperate filling of my body with food, or its eviction through self-induced vomiting. Over time, I came to experience myself as entirely incompetent: incapable of managing even the basic process of eating in a ‘normal’ way. This sentiment is echoed by the research, with Bardone and colleagues (2003) finding self-competence to be lower in practising bulimics than in normal controls, with improved self-competence predicting reduction in bulimic behaviours more strongly than improved self-liking. This result mirrored the earlier finding of Schneider et al. (1987) that increased perception of self-efficacy in controlling binge states is related to decreased purging frequency in bulimia sufferers. This suggests a certain self-fulfillment model to bulimic behaviour: binge eating is experienced as uncontrollable as a result of deficient self-efficacy, and purging becomes an inevitability.

Interestingly, bulimics seem almost universally inclined to view their behaviours through the prism of anorexia, as if constantly preoccupied with the perception that their behaviours represent the ‘grubby underbelly’ of the eating disorder spectrum. One participant interviewed for Mortimer’s qualitative analysis openly self-identified as ‘the worst anorexic ever’, whilst another described anorexia as ‘a badge of honour that I don’t deserve’. Such observations are striking not only in their duality, but in their reinforcement of the superior/inferior relationship between...
anorexia and bulimia – a relationship of which I felt potently and painfully aware during my own struggle. Having ‘migrated’ from anorexia to bulimia, I saw my bulimic ‘failings’ only in the light of my anorexic ‘successes’, and was constantly driven to compare my former ‘superior’ and current ‘inferior’ self in terms of weight, calorie consumption and subjective accomplishment.

The socioemotional phenomenon of ‘in-group pride’ (the sense of achievement one feels in relation to being part of a select group) can be measured according to how willingly individuals identify themselves as members of the in-group (Aboud & Doyle, 1993). The readiness with which sufferers identify with the label ‘anorexic’ is perhaps most obviously observable in the cult-like ‘anorexia communities’, both pro-illness and pro-recovery, which abound in social media, allowing sufferers (majority young girls) to post images and appraisals of their meals and bodies multiple times a day, and receive ‘support’ from fellow community members. There is widespread lack of consensus on the role of social media of this nature – whilst Dr Tony Jafa, consultant psychiatrist at the Phoenix Centre for Eating Disorders, praises it as ‘support’ from fellow community members, there is widespread lack of consensus on the role of social media of this nature – whilst Dr Tony Jafa, consultant psychiatrist at the Phoenix Centre for Eating Disorders, praises it as ‘support’ from fellow community members.

It is in this area that it is relevant to examine contemporary constructs of ‘expected/acceptable’ behaviour and appearance – particularly for women, overrepresented in the eating-disordered population. In Girls and Media: Dreams and Realities (2014), Professor Kara Chan reports that the prepubescent young people she interviewed about ‘what a woman should be’ were quick to stipulate that ‘women should be courteous, refrained [sic], conservative [and] not out of control’. In their interpersonal interactions, women should ‘watch out for their manner in public’, ‘not be promiscuous’ and ‘not have too many sex partners’, whilst at school/work women should ‘achieve highly’ and ‘not break the rules’. Those interviewed were even more strident in their stipulations for ‘acceptable’ female appearance, stating that women should ‘be neat and tidy’, as well as not ‘messy’ and ‘look graceful and poised, with proper neat dresses’. This preoccupation with physical and behavioural neatness strongly favours the typical anorexic’ over the ‘typical bulimic’, and may give further insight into different views of the disorders.

‘Diagnosis hierarchy’ is not just

One means of achieving inter-diagnostic parity would be the removal of separate diagnostic categories altogether, and a move towards an all-encompassing spectrum of ‘eating disorder’.

Inappropriate, but actively destructive. Though bulimia is associated with a dramatic reduction in psychosocial functioning and elevated risk of serious medical complications including heart attack and oesophageal rupture, studies consistently reveal that less than half of all sufferers seek treatment (Mond et al., 2010), with ‘fear of stigma’, ‘low perception of need’ and ‘shame’ cited amongst the most salient reasons for not obtaining help (Hepworth & Paxton, 2007). For me, the obvious weight loss associated with anorexia prompted swift intervention from the medical profession, whilst supportive provision for bulimia – even when actively requested – was limited, with more than a faint ring of ‘afterthought’. Bulimia sufferers are trapped in a vicious circle: they internalise widespread lack of understanding and sympathy surrounding their condition, using it to feed their own shame and neurosis, and retreat further into destructive behaviours, becoming more convinced of the impossibility of recovery. As Alyssa Sheinmel, author of The Stone Girl, attested: ‘…every time I looked in the mirror, I saw that the throwing up couldn’t have been that big of a problem. I didn’t care why, I just knew that I didn’t want to talk about it; not because I was sick, but because I wasn’t sick enough.’ Though anosognosia (symptom severity denial) is also a prominent feature of anorexia (Coman et al., 2013), bulimia sufferers face the additional complication of outsiders’ perception that ‘all is well’ due to the lack of visible malnutrition.

The surface-level bias towards the perception of anorexia as ‘more serious’ and ‘more important’ than bulimia is instinctive and difficult to combat: emaciation is immediately visually arresting, whilst ‘normal weight’ is, by definition, perceptually unremarkable. However, beyond this fleeting discriminatory response to different pathologies within the broad category of ‘eating disorder’, it is of vital importance that efforts are made to ‘iron out’ the disparities in views of the comparative severity and desirability of these two disorders. One means of achieving inter-diagnostic parity would be the removal of separate diagnostic categories altogether, and a move towards an all-encompassing spectrum of ‘eating disorder’ (Burns, 2004), with severity determined not according to weight but to level of mental duress and normal life interruption. Such a disruption of contemporary categories might go some way towards dispelling pejorative associations with bulimia in particular (greed, poor self-restraint, deviance, etc.), and drawing attention to the truth that an eating disorder is, first and foremost, a psychologically based illness, the behavioural and physical manifestations of which are, at most, variable symptoms of underlying pathology.

For me, the journey towards accepting and acknowledging my diagnosis of bulimia was, as yet, uncompleted, and I suspect I will never embrace the label as wholeheartedly as I did that of ‘anorexic’ – though this is, I suspect, positive. For much of the time my bulimia was at its most ferocious, the shame I felt in relation to my behaviour prevented me from accessing the necessary medical and psychological help, and when I did seek support I found very little to be available. My experience of bulimia is still a subject I find difficult to address openly, and one I found challenging to discuss honestly in The Time in Between. Ultimately, I feel I was sincere in my presentation of the condition, but it was a presentation that entailed painful vulnerability in comparison to the ease with which I found myself able to describe the horrors of anorexia. This is, of course, part and parcel of the larger problem: discussing bulimia is, for whatever reason, an exposing experience, thus public narratives tend to favour the discussion of anorexia, thus widespread understanding of bulimia remains shallow, thus negative misconceptions are not dispelled.

In today’s climate of improving mental health awareness, ‘stigma’ – and its reduction – has become something of a buzzword, with eating-disorder campaigners frequently bemoaning the misconception that ‘anorexia is caused by teenage girls wanting to look like skinny models’. Efforts to reduce this stigma have been successful, and we are moving towards a general understanding that self-starvation is symptomatic of something more complex than the fetishisation of haute couture. However, public knowledge of bulimia is pitifully undeveloped, with most either falsely identifying the condition as an anorexia synonym, or simply as ‘having something to do with being sick’. Though my book addressed bulimia only in its final section – as, at the time of its writing, I had only been suffering from the condition for a year – my hope is that an increasing number of sufferers will, in the ensuing years, feel able to share the internal experience of what is a serious psychiatric condition, and not just a ‘shameful habit’. For my part, witnessing at first hand the obstacles populating the pathway towards receiving adequate bulimia treatment has given me a determination to provide such treatment in my practice as a registered psychologist. It is my hope that, by the time I hold this qualification, we will have progressed to a point where bulimia sufferers have reason to feel understood, acknowledged and respected by both the medical and social worlds.

Nancy Tucker is an author and undergraduate experimental psychology student at Oxford University nancy.tucker@hotmail.co.uk
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In February, Jill Winegardner won British Psychological Society Practitioner of the Year for her work in brain injury rehabilitation. One of her comments on receiving the award was: ‘Although I miss the California coast, I was happy to trade it to work in a health system founded on principles of access and fairness to all.’ How did her journey come about?

Jill grew up in Montana, which she tells me is bigger than the UK and still only has a population of just over a million. She proved to be a modest and dryly funny raconteur. Thus, when I asked her why she chose to do psychology, she answered, ‘I went to Stanford to do an undergraduate degree. I was a language major but I overslept and missed my language placement exam and had to choose another major, so I chose psychology. In the States you have to have a PhD to be a psychologist so I did my MA and PhD in clinical psychology at the University of Montana. That was in 1981.’

I wanted to backtrack. What appealed to you about psychology or was it really a question of over-tiredness!? ‘I was lucky that Stanford was rather anti the approaches of clinical psychology and psychiatry at the time… I graduated in the mid-seventies. Stanford took a more social psychology approach, and that appealed to me. It made me think about how you “do” behaviour – was it defined by social constructs, by what happened inside the brain? In addition, my PhD clinical psychology course was clinically rich. We did clinical work for a large percentage of the course, so you were always brought back to reality by the real clients in front of you.’

Jill completed her internship and a neuropsychology fellowship at Case Western Reserve School of Medicine in Cleveland, then joined the Cleveland Metrohealth Hospital, as well as holding an assistant professorship at Case Western Reserve University. She worked for five years consulting with a number of rehabilitation units, then worked for five years at the Cleveland Metro Brain Injury Rehabilitation Programme, which she founded. ‘We thought we had a problem with lack of resources for brain injury rehabilitation at the time, but in hindsight I see that the programme I set up and worked in for five years was well funded and resourced. Most particularly we had a diverse team drawing on a variety of therapies.’

It was at this stage that she met Barbara Wilson, who ‘was and still is a huge influence on me. I started to draw on more non-American approaches to rehab.’ I asked Jill to explain what she meant by that. ‘Well, in the USA neuropsychology was all about testing, imaging, measuring. This was typified by huge neuropsychological test batteries such as the Luria Nebraska. Outside the US I found more humane and person-centred approaches and more interest in rehab. My mentor Dr James Mack influenced me hugely in this, emphasising that you must be driven by the need to help others and by your own hypotheses based on talking to patients, not by numbers. After this discussion I’m And neuropsychology? ‘At that time it had a more scientific basis than the psychiatric and clinical skills approaches. During an internship I was introduced to neuropsychology on a two-week rotation, and I loved it. After finishing graduate school I was pretty sure I didn’t want to be a psychotherapist, so neuropsychology appealed. In retrospect it was great being in at the start of a discipline.’ Later in the interview Jill mentions ‘my family – my sister, brother and my parents were affected by brain illnesses. That has given me a motivation since family is very important to me.’
heading off to give a lecture about interviews in neuropsychological rehabilitation at UEA. I rely on interviews much more than formal number-generating assessments.’

4am in New Orleans
Perhaps it shouldn’t have come as such a surprise, given the huge role that oversleeping had played in Jill’s career moves, that on the strength of one conversation at 4am in New Orleans, she moved to Nicaragua to help set up the practice of neuropsychology. ‘I couldn’t pass up the opportunity even though it meant learning Spanish and writing a manual before going. It was a hugely life-changing experience. I then moved there, arriving in 1990, the year in which the Sandinista government was defeated in an election after, in effect, 20 years of revolution. I found myself in a completely different politico-social situation. I had to unlearn certain Western prejudices – such as the idea that norms on a spatial memory test in a “third world” country would be worse than the US ones. In fact, Nicaraguans were particularly good at that skill for very specific societal reasons.’ You must have faced some criticism given the ‘States’ very different politico-social situation. ‘You have the resources to understand the consequences of their injuries and try out new strategies to compensate for them’. The rehabilitation process focuses on three stages:

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2. Trying out strategies
3. Putting them into practice.

I suggested to Jill that her approach to brain injury rehabilitation is similar to the way Cordelia Galgut’s experience of breast cancer affected her work with patients (as described in our interview with her in the June edition) – an understanding that pathologising a client didn’t help. Jill agreed. ‘We have the resources to understand clients here. We look at how the injury has affected clients and try to understand the consequences of their injuries and try out new strategies to compensate for them’.

Jill’s book (co-written with Barbara Wilson and Fiona Ashworth) Life After Brain Injury: Survivors’ Stories (2013, Psychology Press) gives a vivid account of that approach illuminated by wonderful case studies. In describing ‘Tim’s’ case, for instance, Jill describes the ‘therapeutic milieu’ as ‘an alliance of staff and clients in which the clients experience trust and safety through constructive feedback as they develop an understanding of the consequences of their injuries and try out new strategies to compensate for them’. The rehabilitation process focuses on three stages:

1. Finding out what the problems are
2. Trying out strategies
3. Putting them into practice.

I suggested to Jill that her approach to brain injury rehabilitation is similar to the way Cordelia Galgut’s experience of breast cancer affected her work with patients (as described in our interview with her in the June edition) – an understanding that pathologising a client didn’t help. Jill agreed. ‘We have the resources to understand clients here. We look at how the injury has affected clients and try to understand the consequences of their injuries and try out new strategies to compensate for them’.

Jill has said her Practitioner of the Year award was for all the staff at the centre. She means it. This is the best experience I’ve had of interdisciplinary team work. We work with clients over long periods, value each other’s skills, the atmosphere is great.’ Jill’s explanation inspired me but she had a word of warning for people thinking of moving into the area. ‘These sorts of holistic programmes are very expensive. It costs a lot to work with the clients, even though our success means later costs to society are much lower. So we need to look after this sort of work.’

And one way she’s doing this is co-editing Neuropsychological Rehabilitation: An International Handbook – ‘a book which will encompass this approach of putting the person first’.

Jobs of the month on www.psychapp.co.uk

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GCHQ
Location - South West
Salary - Competitive
Deadline - 07/10/2016

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The National Autistic Society
Location - South East
Salary - £43,072 - £51,964 + £694 Area Allowance
Deadline - 30/09/2016

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Harrow School
Location - London
Salary - Competitive
Deadline - 16/09/2016

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Department for Work and Pensions
Location - Various
Salary - Competitive
Deadline - 23/09/2016

CAMHS Psychological Therapies Leads
Tower Hamlets Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service
Location - London
Salary - Band 8d • Full-time • 37.5 hours per week
Deadline - 25/09/2016

To view these jobs and more please visit www.psychapp.co.uk
An educational experience
Helen Owen attempts to plot a route onto an applied doctorate

Graduating from Leeds University in 2013 with a First, I remember thinking ‘this is it. I’m on my way. What an enriching, full, brilliant four years I’ve completed.’ I knew I had a long road of studying ahead to becoming an educational psychologist, but I was committed to the task. I did have a dilemma many graduates face, though – do I get straight to working on a career, or do I go travelling (again)? Attempting to meet both my growing determination to get myself on the Applied Child and Educational Psychology Doctorate and my desire to be abroad, I spent a summer garnering experience with children as a Head Camp Counsellor in Ontario, Canada. It was amazing and exhausting in equal measure, and I returned home believing I was in a strong position to start an application for the doctorate. However, three years on, a place on the applied doctorate course remains elusive, and thinking of it still largely dominates my professional life.

Rewind three years, after my summer in Ontario, my first ‘proper job’ was one that my dad, a former secondary head teacher, advised me against. So naturally I took it. The role was a Learning Support Assistant in an Emotional Behavioural Social Difficulties school for 11- to 16-year-olds, mostly boys. At the time of my appointment, I was one of only three female members of staff, and the youngest. If you haven’t spent time in an EBSD school, it’s quite difficult to explain. Set up like a ‘normal’ school with timetabled lessons, break times, and so on, the school is characterised by an overarching focus on individual young people rather than the school as a collective. The staff mould themselves to fit each young person’s needs, creating a more nurturing environment, with the rationale that many of the young people missed out the development of core skills and emotional regulation during their formative years. The predictable unpredictability of behaviour leaves you drawing on all the teaching and behaviour management resources you have – differentiation of work, de-escalation, distraction, but above all listening and attempting to understand the cause of the not-infrequent verbal, and sometimes physical, outbursts. In fact, the staff experience a heady daily mix of exhilaration and genuine anxiety when working with the young people.

I spent every day in the classroom but was assigned the task of developing general literacy skills. This involved one-to-one reading with the young people displaying the most challenging behaviours, who, coincidently, were largely non-attenders. In reality, my ‘reading interventions’ were as much a nurture session as they were a time for reading development. I had a chance to practise my child-centred approach in an environment that was crying out for some kind of regular, tailored, therapeutic intervention. This was a topic frequently debated by staff, always resulting in bafflement that these young people, each with an Education Health Care Plan specifying a range of emotional and behavioural needs, were not supported by a therapeutic action plan to address the very reason they were there.

I think my year and half spent at the EBSD school will always be my favourite job (so far). Many sleepless nights and a hairline fracture to the jaw (the chair flying through the air was not aimed at me) are just a few of the memories, but when I reflect on my time, it’s the achievements of the young people that eclipse everything else. These experiences are what I believe got me to the interview stage last year at the University of Birmingham for the applied doctorate. I was delighted to receive a place on the offer reserve list, fuelling my commitment to keep going. However, my frustration with the lack of psychological input at the EBSD school that was so desperately needed, coupled with my personal frustration with my own lack of formal training in psychological practice, grew as the months went by.

This led me to apply for my current role, in an environment where I could at least be on the periphery of psychological input; I hoped that this would be the ‘start’ of my experience that would lead me on to the sought-after Applied Doctorate in Child and Educational Psychology. I now work within the education team at an inpatient centre for young people with complex mental health, behavioural and emotional needs in Northumberland. The facility provides multidisciplinary inpatient assessment and...
A treatment for young people, including those with a learning disability, and is the first such integrated service of its kind in the country. It has been really interesting working with the teachers to plan and deliver tailored sessions that consider communication levels, appropriate topics, timing of sessions, and reward systems, whilst all the time fitting everything around the young people’s psychology and therapeutic appointments. Maximising the therapeutic and social benefits experienced by young people during the process of their admission to the facility is a priority and something I am very much involved in.

To address the reduction of natural social interaction, due to being in an inpatient service, the Ferndene NHS Trust multidisciplinary team of psychiatrists, psychologists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and teachers have created a bespoke social skills programme. It includes a variety of modules and offers an opportunity for the young people to come together as a group to be taught topics such as emotional literacy, relationships and social communication skills. The modules have been designed to enable the young people to develop reflective skills and become aware of their own progress as well as to increase the confidence that can be carried over to other situations. The philosophy of the programme is one of therapeutic risk management as opposed to risk avoidance, and in many cases where there were concerns of potential risk behaviours, the programme has provided a safe place for conflict resolution and skill building. By its very nature, the multidisciplinary team really does consider individuals holistically, something I try to reflect in my practice, too.

I have made it my aim to try to get a wide variety of experiences since graduating back in 2013. As a result, my views on education, applying psychology in practice and working effectively with young people are continually evolving and being refined; the journal that I have been keeping for some time is a great aid and gives a sharp clarity to professional reflection. I certainly made a few journal entries following my training as a local Community Panel Member in South Tyneside, tasked with creating a contract for a young offender to make amends to a victim of a crime in the name of restorative justice. My involvement in a language development research project at Newcastle University’s Institute of Neuroscience has reminded me what research can unearth and offer to psychology, too.

I’m optimistic that the road ahead is leading me to a future as an educational psychologist. For now, I remain tantalisingly on the outside looking in.
Do you want to make a difference to the lives of children and young people with communication and learning challenges? If so, then we have the role for you.

Acorn Park

Acorn Park is an independent, specialist day and residential school in Banham, Norfolk, that caters for children and young people aged 5 – 19 years who have autism and associated difficulties. We have a deservedly good reputation with parents and placing authorities for meeting the needs of children and young people who also have moderate or severe learning difficulties, and whose behaviour can be challenging.

Our outstanding group of teachers, care staff, learning support assistants, therapists and psychology staff work together as an integrated team, with the young person at the heart of everything we do. We have an exciting opportunity for a qualified Clinical Psychologist to join our multi-disciplinary clinical teams. Embedded within the service you will work collaboratively with education, the care homes and adult services to promote the quality of life, wellbeing and best interests of the individuals we support.

You will undertake all aspects of Clinical Psychology duties, including assessment, formulation and intervention and will provide consultation, advice, information and training to staff enhancing their understanding and practice and supporting the meaningful gathering and analysis of outcome measures.

If you are a qualified Clinical Psychologist, please apply immediately or call our Head of Therapy Arabella Hardy, for information on 01953 888656 or email arabella.hardy@acornparkschool.co.uk. Closing date: 21st October 2016

On-site accommodation may be available

Safeguarding is everybody’s business. The welfare and safeguarding of children and young people should be of paramount consideration, whatever your role or level of responsibility is within the organisation. All employees are required to ensure compliance with the company’s guidance and policy on safeguarding and are required to attend Safeguarding training appropriate to their level of responsibility.
The HCPC are seeking practitioner psychologists for partner roles

**Visitors**

We are currently seeking educational psychologists to undertake the role of visitor. Visitors are responsible for visiting and assessing existing and proposed education and training programmes delivered by education providers.

Tracey Samuel-Smith, HCPC Education Manager explains: ‘Visitors make a real difference to the work we do. They help to safeguard people using our registrant’s services by ensuring education and training programmes meet our standards. Visitors also provide recommendations to the HCPC’s Education and Training Committee regarding the approval or ongoing approval of programmes.’

To become a visitor you need to be on our Register. You must have an understanding of quality assurance in higher / further education or a clinical environment, and also teaching, learning and assessment in educational / clinical environments. You will also need to have excellent oral and written communication skills.

**Panel members**

We are also seeking practitioner psychologists (in all HCPC-regulated specialisms) to undertake the role of panel member. Panel members are responsible for handling complaints known as ‘allegations’ about the fitness to practise of the health and care professionals we regulate.

You must be registered with the HCPC, have excellent oral and written communication skills and the ability to communicate with a wide range of stakeholders. Training will be provided for both roles and a fee will be paid, as will travel and accommodation expenses in accordance with the HCPC Partner Expense Policy.

The HCPC is committed to equality of opportunity and actively guards against unfair discrimination on any grounds (including sexual orientation, religion or beliefs, race, sex, age or disability).

**How to apply**

For more information and to apply visit www.hcpc-uk.org/aboutus/recruitment/partner

Closing date for applications: 23 October 2016
Tentative interview dates: w/c 28 November 2016
Compulsory training days: Visitors: TBC 2017
Panel members: TBC 2017

For more information about the work of the HCPC visit www.hcpc-uk.org
Warfare and wellbeing

To explain why soldiers returning from recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan suffer from high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and experience difficulties reintegrating in civilian life, Sebastian Junger, the American journalist and war correspondent, sets up a challenging dichotomy. He argues that traditional tribal societies created a sense of belonging and purpose that protected people from mental illness. By contrast, modern Western society is safe, focused on the individual rather than the group and is authoritarian. Facing the dangers of the battlefield, soldiers recreate tribal bonds for mutual protection, whilst civilians exposed to air raids report a similar phenomenon.

Comradeship in a context of extreme risk, Junger believes, is the last vestige of an earlier system of governance and relating. Veterans, traumatised by combat, find it difficult to adjust to civilian life because they hanker after the close emotional ties of military service and because there is nothing in modern life to provide them with a similar sense of connectedness and authenticity. This, Junger concludes, is why rates of depression and PTSD remain high and often treatment resistant amongst ex-service personnel.

The study comes close to glamorising both tribal society and conflict, arguing that for many people war ‘feels better than peace’. He takes a macho approach claiming that people thrive on hardship because it provides opportunities for young people to mature through the exercise of courage and sacrifice. Elevated levels of depression and suicide Junger attributes to the valuation of beauty, money and status over belonging and connectedness. However, his assertion that ‘modern society has almost completely eliminated trauma and violence from everyday life’ applies only to subgroups or advantaged nations.

Some of the generalisations do not stand scrutiny. Suicide rates are reported to fall during wars because people feel a corporate sense of purpose, but this claim is subject to reporting bias. Suicide is readily disguised in wartime and often difficult to assess. If a war-weary soldier unnecessarily exposes himself to danger and is killed, should we interpret this as an act of courage or one of self-harm? Few commanding officers would write to home to a parent to say that their son had taken his own life on the battlefield. Junger presents an idealised view of human behaviour in the Blitz, forgetting that cases of larceny rose and black market trading flourished. Serious crime remained at pre-war levels despite young men being conscripted into the armed forces. In part, this statistic reflected the weakened state of police forces as officers volunteered for military service, their ranks being filled by middle-aged men with little understanding of criminality, a point exploited by career offenders.

Junger rightly records that air raids failed to erode civilian resilience in Britain and Germany during World War Two but misses the essential point that mortality and wounding never came anywhere close to that experienced on the battlefield. The 30,000 deaths in London represented 0.3 per cent of the capital’s population, whilst in Dresden the 25,000 killed in February 1945 represented 3.1 per cent of the city’s inhabitants and refugees. Infantry regiments on the Western Front or in Normandy could expect mortality rates of between 10 and 30 per cent in high-intensity battles. With ambitious, wide-ranging books that are loosely based on academic findings, it is tempting to find errors or discredit their claims. Yet these studies have a role. Their authors make imaginative leaps across disciplines and topics that professional researchers are taught to avoid. The elevation of hardship and tribal culture as sources of wellbeing is flawed but Junger’s final observations about the need for a balanced and fulfilled emotional life ring true.

A framework for understanding


Bruce Fink

Most interpretations of seminal works run the risk of being too tightly wound around the original text. Students of psychology are often left wondering whether or not they were reading an interpretation that will enhance their education or stifle it. In Bruce Fink’s Lacan on Love: An Exploration of Lacan’s Seminar VIII, Transference, readers are invited to closely investigate Lacan’s writings on psychology alongside the author. Fink takes the time to address influences that shaped Lacan’s thinking, such as Freud, most of Greek mythology and early philosophy. His book lacks the awkwardness of being too rigid for general interest because he counterbalances all of Lacan’s observations about love with some ideas of his own.

Fink is not in the business of telling you how to agree or disagree with a major figure in critical theory. Instead, he offers us the possibility of taking Lacan’s ideas about attachment and improving them. Fink provides us the framework for how to understand complex dialectical thinking when he writes: ‘Let me try to take this problem a bit further than Lacan himself takes it by raising a question.’ In other words, Fink’s book is not an instruction manual that closes arguments. He is invested in keeping problems open-ended without being longwinded during the dialogue. Nevertheless, it can feel that he is tinkering around a work of art that most us only take the time to notice in passing at the library or in the archives. It is really up to the reader to actually read Lacan’s Seminar VIII or they will gloss over the details that could shape and improve their own thinking.

Fink’s book is an excellent text on meta-critical processes. He writes: ‘This should tell us something about Lacan’s approach to reading texts, whether psychoanalytic, literary, or philosophical, which he exemplifies in a great many of his seminars.’ He is not just asking readers to break down Lacan’s thoughts about thoughts but also to consider whether they have done this much introspection on their own without going over the edge.
When I tell people I research unconventional sexualities as part of my work, I’m often greeted with curiosity and intrigue. It seems everybody is interested in sex, particularly other people’s erotic lives, and the things they get up to behind closed doors – or, as in this case, in front of video cameras. It is this offer of an exploration of the little-known fetish of tickling that initially piques the interest of viewers in this documentary, aptly entitled *Tickled*.

The film starts with a New Zealander reporter, David Farrier, stumbling on a website advertising for ‘elite male athletes’ to take part in a ‘competitive endurance tickling’ event in return for cash. Farrier is a journalist on the lookout for humorous and playful pop culture stories, so this sounds right up his street. Farrier contacts the website’s promoters, Jane O’Brien Media, requesting a light-hearted interview about the unusual subject. This is where events begin to take a sinister turn. The response received is disproportionate to say the least: multiple emails containing homophobic abuse and threats of extreme legal action.

This homophobia is at odds with the overtly homoerotic nature of the tickling videos produced by the company, as attractive young men dressed in sports gear straddle a topless man who is shackled to a bed by his arms and legs.

Instead of dropping the story, Farrier recruits co-director Dylan Reeve to investigate Jane O’Brien Media. What proceeds is a chilling story about power, abuse and wealth. With the backdrop of escalating legal and personal threats against the filmmakers and their families, Farrier and Reeve begin to unpick the story. After encountering an initial wall of silence, they manage to interview a couple of the participants in the tickling videos. They had been paid handsomely for participation, but it’s what happens after the videos have been made which is shocking. The effects are profound, and the impact Jane O’Brien Media has on their lives is astonishing.

The common theme is that the men are all vulnerable in some way: poor, underage, or students, and it begins to become clear that Jane O’Brien Media enjoys exerting destructive power and control over these men. This is very different from what goes on in the BDSM and fetish communities, where consent is central to activities, and power is eroticised and exchanged by all individuals involved, rather than exerted.

The difference between legitimate BDSM and fetish versus Jane O’Brien’s actions is beautifully illustrated when Farrier and Reeve head to Orlando to interview Richard Ivey, a producer of tickling videos who has a fetish for doing the tickling. On the surface, the events that take place on film are virtually the same as in the Jane O’Brien Media tickling videos. However, it is apparent that the intent is completely different. Ivey is open and transparent, and articulates the eroticism of ‘tickle torture’ eloquently. And although it is clear the actor finds the scenario somewhat odd, he is happy to participate and consents enthusiastically. Ivey speaks at length about his fetish and films. Could it be that Jane O’Brien Media are doing something else: deriving pleasure from the exploitation and harassment of young men?

The documentary continues with sinister twists and turns as the filmmakers slowly uncover what and who is behind Jane O’Brien Media, climaxing in a tense final confrontation. What begins in the guise of a Louis Theroux Weird Weekend becomes a trip down the rabbit hole into a world of extreme wealth, and the power it can afford. My lasting impression of the documentary was of the unwavering determination and bravery of the filmmakers to confront the powerful forces behind Jane O’Brien Media, and to expose the exploitation that gave them such a thrill. I’m sure the peculiar and sinister occurrences that pepper this documentary won’t stop at the release of this film, and I am intrigued to see how the next chapter of this story unfolds.

On general release – details at http://tickledmovie.com
Reviewed by Dr Emma L. Turley who is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology at Manchester Metropolitan University
Steve Hayes's area of expertise (the operant behavioural analysis of verbal language) has placed him outside the dominant cognitive paradigm, and even outside the already niche world of behaviourism. But from this position of relative outsider, Hayes and his collaborators have [through truly prodigious levels of publication] developed a psychological intervention (acceptance and commitment therapy: ACT); the empirically supported theory of verbal language that underpins it (relational frame theory); the philosophy of science that underpins both (functional contextualism); and ultimately the field of study that encompasses these and other assumptions, principles and strategies, and clinical methods and developmental vision. Within these sections, papers separated by years and even decades are situated alongside each other, showing how ideas developed across time.

Like a band choosing their ‘Best of’ selections, some of these papers were no-brainers (e.g. the lighters-in-the-air ‘Making sense of spirituality’, 1984), whereas others were more surprising; inevitably, some papers were surprisingly absent (leaving out his tour-de-force 1987 chapter ‘A contextual approach to therapeutic change’ feels to me like Led Zeppelin passing over ‘Stairway to Heaven’ for an obscure album track). Such editorial decisions are impossible to remove from their context (essentially the message of the whole volume), and in context, this is as much academic autobiography as it is an edited volume of otherwise available papers. It is valuable for Hayes’s take on his work and will be of interest to those who are interested in ACT and wish to learn more about its development.

I Routledge; 2016; Hb £100.00
Reviewed by Dr Mark Oliver who is with the Community Team for People with Learning Disabilities at Northumberland, Tyne & Wear NHS Foundation Trust

Worth more than a thousand words

An angry mood
An excited mood
A loving mood
James Eves

A book with no words... now there’s a thought. I am reviewing three colourful books for children using sequential pictures to tell a story about moods, feelings, emotions and events, for infants, pre-readers, beginner readers and those for whom English is an additional language – but books without words.

I wondered about writing this review with pictures only, and how hard that would be.

The main character in each book is a little calf who inevitably experiences changing moods. The vivid pictures are meant to be used by an adult to tell a story to help children describe their own and others’ moods, to develop storytelling skills, whilst improving vocabulary and recognition skills.

One book explores a story about a calf feeling excited about his upcoming birthday party, another is about loving a cat, and a third, is about the anger felt when no one wants to play with you. I won’t include a spoiler about the story.

I think that anything which encourages children to discuss feelings, reactions and events is a really good thing, subject of course to such conversations being carried out with sensitivity, care and with adults who are able to facilitate what I have termed elsewhere as a genuine ‘listening ethos’. Adults might need more help to encourage the child to express his or her views, allowing space, openness and neutrality, than the 10 tips provided.

These booklets are more likely to be used by teaching assistants, support staff, and others helping in the classroom, as well as parents, than psychologists, but they could be used by therapists, specialist teachers and others who carry out social-emotional interventions or language training with children.

The pictures are big, bold, colourful and attractive, and I think would engage children. And one has to give credit for creativity in producing a book with no words at all.

There is much truth in the saying ‘A picture paints a thousand words’.

I Axxiom; 2014–15; Pb £6.99 each
Reviewed by Professor Irvine Gersch who is an educational and child psychologist at the University of East London
**A comprehensive treatment**

Valery Chirkov

The notion of ‘culture’ – one’s own or others’, of a nation, organisation, social or demographic group – has a pervasive yet sometimes complex influence over human affairs. As such, it is likely to be of interest to researchers in psychology or related subjects. Chirkov’s text aims to provide those at postgraduate or advanced undergraduate level with guidance on conducting studies on cultural issues.

In the first part of the book, Chirkov sets the scene by introducing ideas from across the social sciences that might inform the psychological study of culture; in particular, the various strands of anthropology. This is followed by a discussion of philosophical perspectives on the conceptualisation and investigation of cultural issues. These first few chapters are enlightening but very detailed, so will require some effort on the part of an uninitiated reader. Having created an epistemological backdrop to cultural research, Chirkov then turns to the matter of formulating and executing specific studies in subsequent parts of the book. Those readers who are seeking inspiration for their research but find the first part hard-going may wish to instead try starting at Part II, where Chirkov discusses how to formulate a research question and a suitable methodology for addressing the question. If only Chapter 5 in particular (‘Research problem, purposes and research questions’) had been available when I was trying to work out what I was doing as a postgraduate student... Part III turns to the practicalities of executing a research study, with chapters on qualitative and quantitative designs.

I found Chirkov’s text to be a comprehensive treatment of the philosophical and methodological issues that an aspiring researcher should consider (albeit complementing rather than replacing other texts that describe specific methods for collecting and analysing data). While its emphasis is on the study of culture, those interested in other social psychological topics may well find the content useful.

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**Abusing power**

The Stanford Prison Experiment

Kyle Patrick Alvarez (Director)

This is a deeply uncomfortable, powerful, and gripping film, which has deservedly won several awards. It contains two important messages: first, that power is dangerous; and second, that environments and ‘systems’ matter in the production of abuse.

The film is set in the 1970s, when the simulated prison experiment it depicts was carried out, in the basement of Stanford University’s Psychology Department. But the film has chilling contemporary relevance, as Philip Zimbardo explains in his 2007 book *The Lucifer Effect* and the various TED and other talks he has given on the project – the visual evidence of the abuse of detainees in Abu Ghraib in 2003 resonated starkly with the findings of his doomed ‘experiment’. As Zimbardo puts it, ‘the line between good and evil is permeable’. Zimbardo and his colleague ‘authority’ experimenter Stanley Milgram were schoolmates. Both studied psychology and both were intrigued by the human capacity for ‘evil’. In 1961 Milgram conducted a series of experiments intended to investigate human readiness to obey morally wrong acts, and Zimbardo alludes to Milgram’s work when he says ‘all evil starts with 15 volts’.

A few years later, Zimbardo and two of his graduate students conducted an experiment (funded by the US Navy, who were concerned about conflict between guards and prisoners in their naval prisons) in which subjects role-played prisoners and guards in a simulated prison. Notoriously, the experiment was intended to last two weeks but was abandoned after six days, when the abuse perpetrated by the guards reached intolerable levels. Many watching will wonder why it was not abandoned earlier. Zimbardo has admitted that the prison’s dark, compelling forces drew him in too, so that he became the prison’s ‘administrator’: a world in which order and security must prevail. Most of the guards were upset by the decision to stop, and were enjoying their roles, saying ‘it was all just fun and games’.

The researchers concluded that imprisonment destroys the human spirit of both the imprisoned and the imprisoning. They argued that the brutality stems not from the characteristics of individual guards and prisoners (the ‘dispositional hypothesis’), but from the ‘deep structure’ of the prison as an institution. This process is depicted brutally but convincingly throughout the film. The film sticks closely to the details of the experiment, with only a few artistic devices providing flourish in places.

Zimbardo and his colleagues argued that their findings had major relevance for staff training and development, but the study has been severely criticised on methodological grounds: some of these criticisms inevitably can be made of the film. Nevertheless, there are clear resonances with real situations observed in contemporary prisons. Zimbardo warns us that ‘all prisons are social experiments’. From the Attica riots of 1971 to the Medway Secure Training Centre scandal of 2015, it is clear that abuse lurks in our institutions. That is because it lurks, according to Zimbardo, in our souls, and because we fail to notice or organise against it in our institutions. It can start with 15 volts – or with much less than this. The refusal to call prisoners by their names (still a point of contention in many prisons) is an indicator of their lack of moral status. Less legitimate forms of order follow. ‘Bad barrels’ plus indifference should trouble us more than ‘bad apples’. The abuse of power compromises the human spirit, whatever form it takes. Both evil and heroism are ‘ordinary’: we can choose to foster either.

I wonder whether showing and discussing this film might be a valuable exercise in many settings. It has relevance for research ethics as well as for prison and criminal justice scholars, students, managers and on the ground practitioners.

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Reviewed by Alison Liebling, Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Cambridge and the Director of the Institute of Criminology’s Prisons Research Centre. A longer version of this review can be found on our website.
Wondering about hands

The book *Hands: What We Do with Them – and Why* is very much self-explanatory. Darian Leader explores some peculiarities of our busy appendages through the lens of psychoanalytic theory, arguing that the history of civilisation has somewhat been driven by hands. As an author of a wide range of psychology books, and founding member of the Centre for Freudian Analysis and Research, Leader explores the subject matter with an elegant style, alluring to academics and casual readers alike. Owing to how short and concise it is, this is a perfect book to read on those easy weekend days, perhaps over the course of a short holiday.

*Hands* is apparent throughout child development, adolescence and adult maturity. Leader overviews a plethora of subjects, making *Hands* a particularly stimulating book for reflective thinkers. For instance, latent symbolism of hands is important throughout film, history and religion, with implications in the realms of attachment, body language, and social interactions. The consideration of these subjects using everyday experiences, case studies and popular films (such as *Brave*, *Frozen*, *Aladdin*, etc.) offers the reader a chance to absorb the postulations made in this book. *Hands* has discussions that will appeal to a large demographic. For example, the discussion of how our hands seem to need to be kept busy provides great insight into the popularity of fans, cigars and phones. In particular, this gives those who are not familiar with psychoanalytic theories more of an opportunity to conceptualise ideas about the latent representations, symbols of and behaviours and motivations of one’s hands (as well as an excuse to re-watch with fresh insight perspective). All of this, without being too overbearing.

*Hands: What We Do with Them – and Why* is sparse in the use of psychological literature, Leader makes use of a wealth of texts drawing on culture, art, history, technology trends and child development. It is a short, concise and exploratory postulation about psychological and social functions of hand behaviours. I would strongly recommended this book to those who enjoy such conjectures, particularly those interested in contemporary psychoanalytic theory.

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Hilarious and heart-breaking

Jon Brittain’s play *Rotterdam* takes place in an intimate space such that the audience are literally in touching distance of each of the four characters as they move through a series of transitions. This creates a perfect setting for an interesting, funny and thoughtful play, where we meet Alice, Fiona/Adrian, Josh and Lelani.

After seven years living in Rotterdam, Alice [Alice McCarthy] makes the decision that, as it is New Year, she must come out to her parents via email. She shares the content with Fiona [Anna Martine], her first female partner – Alice was originally in a relationship with Josh, Fiona’s brother. Fiona drops a bombshell; she has never felt truly comfortable in her body and wants to start living as he truly feels – as Adrian, a man. This sends Alice into a crisis of identity – is she a lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual?

The play focuses on a series of transitions, as well as the matrix of relationships between all the characters and the wider changes in social meanings for sexuality and gender. For example, while we are introduced to Josh [Ed Eales-White] as representative of a changing heterosexual masculinity, we also witness Alice’s friendship with a queer young woman at work, and how this forms the catalyst for a gradual self-understanding about her own sexuality. Fiona/Adrian presents more contemporary issues about gender and specifically transsexuality, the need for medical support, and the underlying complexity and politics of ‘passing’. Everything is in a state of flux, with Josh commenting on this when he refers to Rotterdam’s status as a port city, with everyone either arriving or leaving, but never staying.

In the background, a fun and free playlist of Europop covers scene changes, where each of the characters cleverly transition the meaning of the small space from flat to nightclub, from office to bedroom, with the aid of moved chairs and props. The laptops, shelving and backpacks, remind us that Alice’s seven-year stay in Rotterdam was only meant to be temporary. The cast of four are all excellent. All the relationships present the love for each other, and how they also share pain and sorrow. The highlight is Anna Martine as Fiona, later Adrian. Absolutely brilliant! Alice McCarthy as the conflicted Alice is excellent, initially reserved and controlled, but gradually finding herself as fun and outgoing. Ed Eales-White [Josh] shows a beautiful sensitivity towards his newly found brother and his partner. And Jessica Clarke [Lelani] is superb – carrying humour and anger and sadness into and out of each scene, like they were gently arranged props. Each character finds ways of asking questions the audience wants to ask at just the right time, and this is the genius of the play. It is so well timed.

Questioning and confusing, hilarious and heart-breaking, *Rotterdam* is a strong and highly enjoyable play: a real ‘must see’.

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Reviewed by George Hales who is a psychology graduate of the University of Chester

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Reviewed by Iggi Moon who is Senior Lecturer in Counselling Psychology at Roehampton University
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Learning from Heisenberg

David Pilgrim considers vitalism and other explanations of what it is to be human

In the recent popular morality tale of TV’s *Breaking Bad*, its main character, Walter White, starts the script in the role of an earnest science teacher, who tells a student confidently: ‘The soul? There’s nothing but chemistry here.’

However, within a few episodes we are taken through a series of subplots that are peculiarly human: facing and seeking to evade premature death from cancer; living with physical impairments; the iniquities of healthcare systems; ingenious criminal masterminds; the illicit drug trade and the unending criminality it spawns; elaborate deceit and self-deceit; the casual capacity of people to kill one another; and the role of contingent events in the world were governed, which render predictability in human affairs highly problematic. By the time that the conformist chemistry teacher Walter White becomes the Machiavellian ‘Heisenberg’, all of these aspects of being human and more are explored.

Religion, Romanticism and reductionism

Heisenberg (the real physicist) was part of a group exploring indeterminacy not long after their colleagues in biology had developed the deterministic orthodoxy of physicalism. The latter had seemingly slain the dragon of vitalism. Vitalists claimed that life was characterised uniquely. Indeed they suggested two discontinuities: life forms were different from the rest of the world, and human life was peculiar.

By contrast, in the 18th century Julien Offray de La Mettrie had famously argued the physicalist case: all forms of matter and events in the world were governed, and could be explained, by exactly the same physico-chemical mechanisms (Vartanian, 1960). Basically, the notion of ‘man the machine’ defied pre-Enlightenment religious dogma. The scientific rationalism of the Enlightenment also met another form of ideological opposition from Romanticism. Although this predominated in artistic circles, it remained influential in the healing trades well into modernity and is present still in ‘alternative’ medicine and much of the psychotherapeutic tradition (Pilgrim, 2016). Romanticism and religion, apart and together, held a clear line about creative vitality and free will. These attributes required the vehicle of a choosing, purposeful and unique individual soul.

Vitalism then had strong allies. Moreover, whilst antiquarian philosophy might be used routinely to adjudicate on profound metaphysical questions, both the reductionist case of physicalism and the vitalism preferred by the religious and the Romantics, found their supporters. For example, the ancient Indian and Greek atomists favoured reductionism, whereas Aristotle and his *Metaphysics* offered us vitalism. A resolution about the vitalism question certainly did not come from natural science itself. One camp, which was the emerging orthodoxy, seemed to be providing the empirical evidence for La Mettrie’s physicalism. For example, the doyen of medical anatomy and physiology Claude Bernard was leading the evidence-based charge against vitalism in the mid-19th century (Bernard, 1869). Physicalism was also supported by the emergence of organic chemistry. Attempting the laboratory synthesis of ammonium cyanate, Frederich Wöhler produced urea, a key component of urine (Wöhler, 1828).

However, others associated with progress in natural science remained adamant that a life force given by God...
defined human nature. These included the Swedish chemist Jacob Berzelius, who identified carbon-based compounds, and Louis Pasteur, an admirer and friend of Bernard. These set a trend, still evident today, of scientists who retain a religious faith (Driesch, 1914; Sheldrake, 1991).

**Emergent evolutionism, organicism and holism**

However, physicalism was under attack from the non-religious as well. For example, the evolutionary biologist J.B.S. Haldane, though not a vitalist (he was an atheist and Marxist), argued that living organisms were self-regulating and goal-orientated in their development and search for survival. This idea of life reaching forward for itself (teleology) was closely linked to the very logic of vitalism that so offended the physicalists.

In psychology the term ‘emergent evolution’ was coined by C. Lloyd Morgan (1923) to point up the emergence of reflective consciousness in human beings. The higher mental functions of people meant that for Lloyd Morgan behaviourism was an inadequate and reductive framework to understand human conduct, as were explanations focusing on the neural substrate of the mind.

The latter relationship was also the focus at the time of Sigmund Freud and his revised theory, and yet he still maintained a version of vitalism (Freud 1920). Freud and all of his psychodynamic tradition retained some notion of an inherent living force (the Id and then Eros), with him adding in the counter-force of Thanatos after witnessing the slaughter of the Great War.

In the early 20th century, organicism also provided a new way of thinking about the vitalist vs. reductionist controversy. It supposed the real challenge facing science was how to define life in general, and human life in particular, not by its empirical character, especially if the reality of life is complex, layered and in dynamic flux. The idea that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts was traceable to Plato. However, holism in modern science was emerging because the mechanistic and reductionist assumptions in the laboratory were being questioned by many scientists themselves.

Holism was anti-reductionist and the case for respecting complexity and uncertainty was made in relation to open systems by those scientists who drew attention to the atypical isolated status of the laboratory. In the latter, ‘variables’ were not simply controlled, they were controlled out – a partial account of reality was logically inevitable. By controlling living reality in order to study it, experimentalism was obscuring, not illuminating, its full fluid complexity.

From this primary critical insight about closed or isolated systems, general systems theory was born (von Bertalanffy, 1969). For this theory our material base was a necessary but not sufficient condition for understanding human complexity. Moreover, all living systems contained emergent and dynamic qualities. This insight did not require a supernatural role but could reconcile (multiple) generative mechanisms in principle with indeterminism in practice.

An example of this was the work of Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, who elaborated a case for the special features of living systems (‘autopoiesis’), while retaining a non-vitalist account (Maturana & Varela, 1980).

Another example of this form of reasoning was the Gaia hypothesis, developed by the chemist James Lovelock and the biologist Lynn Margulis. This opened up for scrutiny the (mal)adaptive role of human action within the world’s ecosystem (Lovelock & Margulis, 1974).

Holism in human science during this period of the mid-20th century was also being advocated by Gregory Bateson (1972) and the polymath Arthur Koestler, who offered yet another materialistic account of non-reductionism, when understanding human complexity and creativity (Koestler, 1967).

These anti-reductionist forms of scientific reasoning posed a deeper question beyond that of vitalism. Open systems in practice were found to have patterns that broadly connected through time and space. However, they were also unpredictable. Increasingly prediction (the old aspiration of experimentalism) had to be replaced by the more humble, but now realistic probability; this brings us back to Heisenberg.

**The legacy and aftermath**

If we reflect on the arguments about vitalism and physicalism, with the benefit of hindsight, then some summary points include the following.

First, the biological bases of our experience and behaviour reflect a mixture of continuity and discontinuity. For example, we are animate not inanimate beings but physical processes constrain our functioning and viability, culminating in our predictable and quick individual death in the context of world time. During the brief time we are alive we are constituted by cells containing organelles like all living matter, which enable the process of replication or reproduction of both our tissues and our separate offspring. This is a discontinuity from the
A fuzzy continuity is that viruses contain nucleic material but not organelles and so they cannot reproduce themselves without the aid of another organism. Another evident continuity is that basic drives and needs evident in other primates are present as well in humans. Human psychology cannot be conflated with primatology but it still has much to learn from the latter.

Second, there is our loss of confidence in reductionism. The latter may have been the scientific orthodoxy at the start of the 20th century, but in more recent times anti-reductionism has held sway in the wake of both organicism and postmodernism. The former of these has left its mark in relation to general systems theory, chaos theory and complexity theory, and the latter in relation to the 'linguistic turn', not just in human sciences but in the arts and humanities in general. However, neuroscience represents the continuation of the physicalist tradition and is now appealing to some psychologists, even though it relies on isolated, not open, system reasoning (HBP-PS Consortium, 2012).

Third, the notion of reflexive human agency and intentionality has remained a concern of moral philosophy but is also evident in cognitive science, where it is reframed as metacomunication: what Gregory Bateson called 'communication about communication'. By codifying the world, social groups produce relatively stable moral orders. Norms, mores and legal codes are understood by those socialised in a particular human society at a particular point in time. These become a framework for conformity and transgression, with language being a particular resource for highly elaborate deceit and self-deceit, as well as the emergence of subtle emotions like guilt and shame.

As for technologies, we are not the only primate with an oppositional thumb to enable a precision grip, and even some birds use tools. However, other species have not produced anything approximating to a wristwatch, a pearl necklace, a computer, a poem, a concentration camp or a nuclear warhead. These artefacts required imagined futures, not just technical competencies.

Fourth, we act as if we are agents with free will. Even if vitalism is dismissed fundamentally as being implausible, and physicalist accounts are preferred, we all still live in a world in which free will and moral responsibility are taken for granted. We are obliged then to take vitalism seriously as a practical psychological question. For example, the moral codes we live by assume the presence of human agency and personal responsibility; otherwise why do we blame ourselves and one another and why do we send criminals to jail? The way we construe our lives has a psychological reality in our inner worlds and can impact on the external world in our practical actions, which can, in large or small ways, change or reproduce our shared outer reality.

It seems that a century ago the death of vitalism was prematurely reported.

David Pilgrim is Chair of the BPS History & Philosophy of Psychology Section
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ONE ON ONE

... with Carl Senior

‘Public engagement is key to survival’

One moment that changed the course of your career
Days after submitting my PhD I was lucky enough to receive the NARSAD Young Investigator Award to study face perception deficits in schizotypal personality, as well as being offered a position to join the Laboratory of Brain and Cognition at the National Institute of Mental Health in the US. I had to take one and refuse the other. I was in a quandary and sought the advice of my PhD supervisor, Anthony David. I distinctly recall his sage-like tone as he advised me to ‘go to America and become a research monster’. I did go to the States – and hated every moment of it as well – but I am now pathologically obsessed with research!

One thing that you would change about psychology
In today’s psychology laboratory there is often much excitement about a hot new technology that will blow everyone’s mind, and the risk of becoming an ‘instrument addict’ is great. Spanish neurophysiologist Santiago Ramón y Cajal was clear in his disdain for this in his seminal text ‘Advice to a young investigator’. Modern-day science is a social affair, and it is vital to move away from technology-driven silos and towards a truly interactive and collaborative intellectual, social, even physical space. Once we accept the cold fact that psychology is probably the only truly interdisciplinary field that exists, we can embrace the benefits that cross-fertilisation of ideas can bring and avoid the fetishistic worship of technology.

One thing psychology has achieved
Psychology and psychologists are everywhere and are constantly being asked for an opinion on a range of matters. Such social and cultural penetration is largely born out of our dedication to public engagement – there are few other scientific disciplines that can boast a strong movement to effective communication with the public. Yet so much more needs to be done still, and it is important that our graduates see public engagement as part of their core activities. Public engagement is key to survival of our field.

One book
The Road by Cormac McCarthy is an utterly profound piece of writing. He called it a ‘love letter’ to his son, and within the first few lines you realise this is forensic examination of the relationship between a boy and his father.

One persistent challenge
Higher education is undergoing seismic changes which have ensured that we academic psychologists are under immense pressure. We live or die by our student satisfaction scores while at the same time chasing research metrics. We can be sure that when the Teaching Excellence Framework arrives, the landscape will shift again. The challenge is to ensure that we still retain a common identity under such pressures, and to take the road less travelled and not join the growing army of academics whose days are consumed by administration.

One alternative career path you might have chosen
I am a pretty good chef, with an obsessional interest in experimental baking. I was about to start a career in baking until I thought that I could earn more money as a psychologist – what a mistake!

One nugget of advice for aspiring psychologists
Learn to say no and always do what you enjoy! Don’t work on a project or publish in a certain journal because you have been told to do so – do it because you are excited about it.

One proud moment
A few years ago I delivered a first-year cognitive psychology course and one of the students on that course was significantly visually impaired. She benefited greatly from the Braille printer that the department used to translate all of the notes, etc., but I was struggling to devise a way to demonstrate the various visual examples such as visual illusions. I had just delivered a public lecture at the Thinktank Science Museum so I contacted them and asked if I could borrow the IMAX screen to deliver a dedicated lecture to this one student. It was a long shot and I thought that they would laugh down my request, but to my surprise they took it very seriously and allowed me complete control over the entire auditorium. I delivered the lecture and due to the massive size of the screen the student could see and experience various visual illusions for the first time in her life. Fully engaging with her studies subsequently inspired this student to develop expertise and a burgeoning career in brain

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The British Psychological Society was founded in 1901, and incorporated by Royal Charter in 1965. Its object is ‘to promote the advancement and diffusion of a knowledge of psychology pure and applied and especially to promote the efficiency and usefulness of Members of the Society by setting up a high standard of professional education and knowledge’.

Extract from The Charter

Society Notice

‘Stories of Psychology’: With Childhood in Mind, London, 6 October 2016, a joint History of Psychology Centre and History & Philosophy of Psychology Section event See p.739
Psychology4Students/Psychology4Graduates 2016 See p.i
CPD workshops 2016 See p.iv
BPS conferences and events See p.771
Technical Support in Psychological Teaching Award – call for nominations See p.771
Technical Support in Psychological Research Award – call for nominations See p.771
Spearman Medal 2017 – call for nominations See p.778
Award for Outstanding Doctoral Research Contributions to Psychology 2016 – call for nominations See p.778
BPS Welfare Fund See p.784
Psychology in the Pub (South West of England Branch), Plymouth (20 October 2016) and Exeter (26 October 2016) See p.786
Welsh Branch ‘Pass me the ball: Narcissism in performance settings’, Bangor, 27 October 2016 See p.786
Psychotherapy Section Conference and AGM, London, 18–19 November 2016 See p.786
DCP Faculty for People with Intellectual Disabilities Annual Conference, Sheffield, 29–31 March 2017 See p.788
Division of Sport & Exercise Psychology Conference, Cardiff, 12–13 December See p.803
Division of Occupational Psychology Annual Conference & Awards Night, Liverpool, 4–6 January 2017 See p.806

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Contact
Carl Bourton carl.bourton@bps.org.uk
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