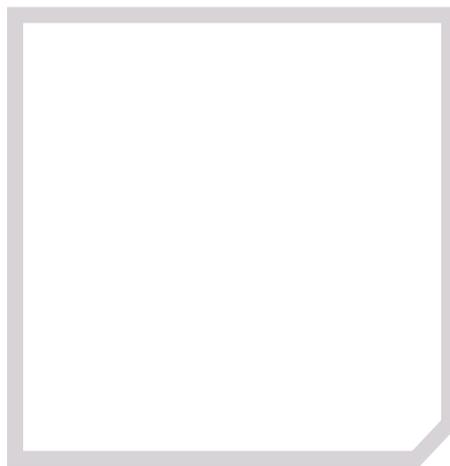


# Therapists still attempting to 'treat' homosexuality

A Wellcome Trust-funded survey has shown that a minority of mental health professionals are still attempting to provide 'treatment' for homosexuality, despite negligible evidence that this is ever effective and ample evidence that to do so can cause harm (*BMC Psychiatry*: text at [tinyurl.com/cvj4c8](http://tinyurl.com/cvj4c8)).

Michael King, professor of psychiatry at the Maudsley Hospital, and colleagues, received completed surveys from 1328 mental health professionals, including psychologists, counsellors and psychiatrists. The results were mixed. Only 4 per cent of those surveyed said they would attempt to change a client's sexuality, and yet 17 per cent said they had previously helped at least one client reduce or change their homosexual feelings. Moreover, there was no evidence that these instances had become rarer between the 1970s and the present day. Such attempts were more likely amongst male and older therapists, and members of the British Psychological Society and United



Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy rather than members of the Royal College of Psychiatrists (the Society has made a statement concerning this and the media coverage, at [www.bps.org.uk/ihrp](http://www.bps.org.uk/ihrp)).

Among those therapists who reported having offered 'treatment' for sexual

orientation, justifications given included: client distress; the client's right to choose the aim of their treatments; a history of sexual abuse; and a belief that the client is confused about their sexuality. There appeared to be little awareness of the harm that such attempted interventions can cause.

'Treatments to change sexual orientation do not appear to have become completely a thing of the past,' the researchers concluded. 'Guidelines on appropriate approaches to clients who are confused or upset about same-sex desires could be useful.' Professor King said: 'The best approach is to help people adjust to their situation, to value them as people and show them that there is nothing whatever pathological about their sexual orientation.'

Publication of the findings coincided with the launch of a website that features oral histories from people who have undertaken such therapy, as well as from professionals who have devised and provided it (see [tinyurl.com/qnunjn](http://tinyurl.com/qnunjn)). **CJ**

## New psychology award

The British Academy has joined forces with publishers Wiley-Blackwell to create a new prize for an outstanding contribution to psychology. The Academy's new annual Wiley Prize in Psychology, worth £5000, will recognise excellence in research in

psychology – alternately rewarding lifetime achievement by an outstanding international scholar and promising early career work by a UK-based psychologist.

The first award, for 2009, will be awarded to one of the leading pioneers of modern

psychology – Professor Martin Seligman, currently Albert A. Fox Leadership Professor at the University of Pennsylvania and Director of the university's Positive Psychology Center. Professor Seligman is a world-renowned expert on depression and happiness. He will receive the prize in September at the British Academy's annual ceremony, and he will also give the 2009 British Academy/British Psychology Society's Annual Lecture.

The President of the British Academy, Baroness O'Neill, said: 'I am delighted to be able to announce this important new collaboration. It is vitally important that we celebrate major scholarly achievements

in fields such as psychology, which has such a profound impact on all our lives. And no one demonstrates that better than Martin Seligman.' Philip Carpenter, Managing Director, Social Science and Humanities publishing at Wiley-Blackwell, said: 'We offer our warmest congratulations to Martin Seligman, whose influence on modern psychology has been immense.' Martin Seligman commented: 'I am grateful for this splendid honour.'

The 2010 Wiley Prize will be awarded to a UK-based psychologist whose early career (defined as within five years of receipt of doctorate) shows outstanding promise. Nominations are invited via [tinyurl.com/rdepmb](http://tinyurl.com/rdepmb). **JS**

### RESEARCH DIGEST

The Society's popular and influential Research Digest service is now on Twitter and Facebook! To keep up with the latest psychology radio shows, podcasts, lectures, public exhibitions and other events, see <http://twitter.com/researchdigest>. To follow on Facebook, see [tinyurl.com/digestonfacebook](http://tinyurl.com/digestonfacebook).

The Research Digest blog (see [www.researchdigest.org.uk/blog](http://www.researchdigest.org.uk/blog)) now sits at number 27 in the top science blogs as compiled by Wikio, based on the number and weight of incoming links (see [www.wikio.com/blogs/top/sciences](http://www.wikio.com/blogs/top/sciences)).

# Increasing self-screening

A simple intervention can boost breast self-examination tenfold, psychologists have shown (*American Journal of*

*Health Promotion*: [tinyurl.com/dgl67w](http://tinyurl.com/dgl67w)). Between 1998 and 2001 Nangel Lindberg and colleagues at

Kaiser Permanente in California followed 600 women, some of whom received the training intervention whilst the others received dietary advice only. The breast self-examination training involved a 45-minute session, including a video and practice on a silicon dummy, plus follow-up phone calls one and two months after the session. A year later 59 per cent of the women who had received the training were still performing effective monthly self-examinations, compared with just 12 per cent of the control group. Most previous studies have failed to find effective ways to encourage self-examination. 'Many women avoid breast self-exams because they are worried about doing them correctly; however, our study showed that with a relatively simple intervention, women can learn the proper technique, and once they feel confident they will continue to do their exams,' Lindberg said. Breast

## BILL PASSED

On 5 May the House of Lords debated the legislation needed to bring practitioner psychologists under statutory control by the Health Professions Council. It was agreed (for the Hansard Report see [tinyurl.com/s60debate](http://tinyurl.com/s60debate)). The legislation has already been debated and agreed in the House of Commons and by the relevant committee in the Scottish Parliament. This means that the HPC will be the statutory regulator for practitioner psychologists from 1 July 2009.

See [www.bps.org.uk/statreg](http://www.bps.org.uk/statreg) for updates, and for an interview with Marc Searle, Chief Executive of the Health Professions Council, see [tinyurl.com/c3exhh](http://tinyurl.com/c3exhh)

cancer is the most common form of cancer in women and some evidence suggests that early detection, via regular self-examination and mammograms, can increase survival rates. The researchers said their intervention could be adapted to other forms of self-checking, for example for testicular cancer. **CJ**

# Psychologists and torture

A newly declassified report of the Senate Armed Services Committee into the treatment of detainees in American custody, combined with the declassification of four CIA memos, has turned attention once again to the role played by psychologists in interrogation practices during the Bush era. The documents make it clear that psychologists, along with other health professionals, were closely involved in the design and application of interrogation practices, including waterboarding (simulated drowning) and stress positions.

In response, American Psychological Association President James Bray reiterated his organisation's policy towards interrogation, which includes prohibiting members from working in detention settings where international law is

violated, and the explicit condemnation of named interrogation techniques, such as waterboarding. Bray named two CIA-employed psychologists identified by the media as having been involved in designing interrogation techniques – James Mitchell and Bruce Jessen – but said they cannot be punished by the APA because they are not members. 'It is also my fervent hope that the American people – and the world – will not judge all psychologists by the few who were involved in this sorry chapter in our history,' Bray concluded, 'but by the tens of thousands of psychologists who spend their professional lives working for the public good.'

Meanwhile, Psychologists for Social Responsibility (PsySR), an independent organisation based in Washington, has

called on the Obama administration to launch an 'independent, nonpartisan commission to fully investigate US torture and prisoner abuse under the Bush Administration', and for the commission to include a special focus on the role played by psychologists in interrogation. In their statement, PsySR encourages all psychologists to sign an online petition (see [tinyurl.com/akcqxu](http://tinyurl.com/akcqxu)), organised by Physicians for Human Rights, which calls for just such a commission. 'Foremost, as a profession we must confront the mindsets and networks – of power, privilege, and influence – by which our own core healing principles were abandoned for purposes that evoke our outrage, our bewilderment, and our shame,' said PsySR's president-elect Roy Eidelson. **CJ**

## FUNDING BOOST

The Scottish Minister for Public Health has announced significant investment in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Acknowledging the 'long-standing underfunding' prevalent in CAMHS services, Shona Robison revealed £1m investment this year, increasing to £3.5m in 2011/12, to be spent on increasing the specialist workforce.

This should translate to an increase of 80 psychologists by 2012, along with a parallel growth in the number of psychiatrists. There are currently 36 training places for clinical psychologists in Scotland, of which roughly a third work in CAMHS. This will be increased by 10, with the additional places ring-fenced for CAMHS.

## FUNDING CUT

As part of the April Budget, the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills has been asked to make additional savings of £400 million in 2010/11, almost 2 per cent of its budget for that year. The Budget states that the savings will have to be made through a renewed efficiency drive, reduced expenditure through lower than anticipated inflation rates, and the 'strategic reprioritisation and re-phasing of programmes'. DIUS will also aim for 'greater contestability', with universities bidding against each other more for programmes and services.

## GAMBLING AWARD

Professor Mark Griffiths, Professor of Gambling Studies at Nottingham Trent University, has won the US National Council on Problem Gambling Research Award in recognition of his outstanding research contribution in the problem gambling field. He will collect his award at their Annual Conference in Indianapolis this month.

## THE SOLOIST

The National Alliance on Mental Health (NAMI) – a US-based charity – has produced a website ([www.nami.org/soloist](http://www.nami.org/soloist)) to coincide with the American release of the film *The Soloist*, which tells the real-life story of Nathaniel Ayers, a gifted street musician diagnosed with schizophrenia. The website uses the film as a springboard from which to help educate visitors about schizophrenia, and includes a video segment of Dr Ken Duckworth, NAMI's medical director, answering questions about the illness. 'The movie will help people look beyond stereotypes and create better understanding of the challenge for treatment and recovery,' said NAMI executive director Mike Fitzpatrick.

# Genetic links to autism

Three new studies published simultaneously at the end of April have provided the strongest evidence to date for the genetic basis of autistic spectrum disorders (ASDs). The two studies in *Nature* ([tinyurl.com/pzem2v](http://tinyurl.com/pzem2v); [tinyurl.com/of4hrp](http://tinyurl.com/of4hrp)) and another published in *Molecular Psychiatry* (<http://tinyurl.com/omwgd5>) involved thousands of children with ASD and thousands of controls. All three papers identified new common genetic variations that seem to be associated with an increased risk of developing ASD. In other words, these are genetic variants which are often seen in the normal population but seem to be disproportionately more prevalent among children with ASD.

Nearly all the implicated genes are known to either influence communication between neurons or influence the growth pattern of neurons during brain

development. The team leader on the *Molecular Psychiatry* paper, Professor Tony Monaco of the University of Oxford, said: 'This does seem to fit with what we know from brain scans – that people with autism may show different or reduced connectivity between different parts of the brain. This new knowledge allows us to focus our studies on developing new treatments and intervention therapies for the future.' Although he welcomed the new findings, psychologist and autism expert Professor Simon Baron-Cohen at the University of Cambridge said genes were just one part of the puzzle. He told *New Scientist*: 'The challenge for future research will be to establish which aspects of autism they [the genes] can explain, how many of these genes are necessary and sufficient to cause autism, and how they may interact with environmental factors.' CJ

## FROM THE RESEARCH DIGEST...

# Witnessing rudeness

Seeing one person be rude to another can stunt a person's creativity, impair their mental performance and make them less likely to be civil themselves. Christine Porath and Amir Erez, who made this finding, say it has profound implications for the workplace, where rudeness has been described by some as a modern epidemic.

Across three studies in *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* ([tinyurl.com/qlmw3o](http://tinyurl.com/qlmw3o)), Porath and Erez recruited students to take part in what they were led to believe was an investigation into personality and task performance. Porath and Erez contrived situations in their lab so that the participants witnessed either a researcher be rude to a student for turning up late, or one student be rude to another student for taking so long over a consent form.

Witnessing an act of rudeness, whether committed by a researcher or student, led the participants to solve fewer anagrams, come up with fewer uses for a brick (and to come up with more aggressive uses!), made them less likely to offer to participate in another study, and lowered their mood.

A third study showed that the harmful effects of witnessing rudeness were greater when students were enrolled in a collaborative group task, compared with when they were enrolled in a competitive group task where they had something to gain from the rudeness victim's ordeal. Although the harmful effects were lower in the competitive scenario, they were still present.

Porath and Erez said this is the first study to investigate the direct effects of merely witnessing rudeness, and that future research should explore the underlying mechanisms. 'The conclusion that rudeness may not be contained within the instigator-target dyad and that it affects performance is theoretically and practically significant because it implies that the organisational functioning and climate could be affected by isolated rude incidents,' the researchers said.

This item originally appeared in the Society's free Research Digest. For more and to sign up, see [www.researchdigest.org.uk/blog](http://www.researchdigest.org.uk/blog)

# Cognitive training in schizophrenia

Less apparent than the hallucinations and delusions are the cognitive deficits associated with schizophrenia. And yet it is often these impairments in learning and memory that can be the most debilitating. Now two new studies suggest intensive computer training in basic sensory and learning tasks can lead to sustained improvements in global cognitive functioning among patients with schizophrenia, leading ultimately to improved quality of life.

Sophia Vinogradov at the University of California and colleagues had 29 patients with schizophrenia undertake 50 hours of computer-based training for 10 weeks. Twenty-six control patients spent the same amount of time, and received the same amount of supervision, playing computer games.

The computerised training focused on improving the patients' basic auditory skills and learning. Example tasks included distinguishing between easily confusable syllables, and recalling conversations. 'The basic notion is that

by improving the speed and accuracy of information processing in the auditory system, higher-order functions such as verbal encoding and verbal memory retrieval have more reliable signals on which to operate,' the researchers explained.

A key facet of the training was that it exploited the fact that procedural learning appears to be intact in schizophrenia. The training was therefore deliberately sustained and rewarding, with difficulty continually adjusted so that patients achieved an approximately 85 per cent correct response rate.

Crucially, the patients who received the training showed improvements not just in their auditory skills but on global measures of cognition, as compared with the control patients (in press at *American Journal of Psychiatry*). A sister study followed up 32 of these patients for six months – 10 from the control condition and 22 from the training condition. Twelve of the training patients received a further 50 hours training, which

broadened out to include visual and cognitive control exercises (*Schizophrenia Bulletin*: [tinyurl.com/pzsf4m](http://tinyurl.com/pzsf4m)).

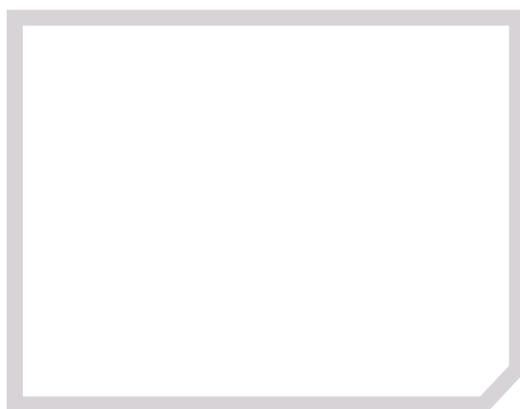
The exciting finding at six months was that improvements in cognition appeared to be sustained, and that these improvements were associated with gains in quality of life. Cognitive improvements were broadest among those patients who received the more sustained and comprehensive training package.

The researchers said their results provided ' tantalising early evidence' for the effectiveness of computerised, neuroplasticity-based cognitive training. However, significant hurdles remain. For example, few prior studies have involved such extensive training, which makes it hard to tell whether the outcomes were due to the content of the intervention or its intensity. That same intensity also places a question mark over the practicality of this intervention in real-life settings – a caveat compounded by the fact the patients in these studies were all clinically stable. **CJ**

# New research centre targets child abuse

Psychology professor Antonia Bifulco at Royal Holloway, University of London, has become co-director of a newly launched research centre dedicated to helping prevent crimes against children. The Centre for Abuse and Trauma Studies ([www.cats-rp.org.uk](http://www.cats-rp.org.uk)), which launched at the end of March, aims to 'further the understanding, treatment and policy implications of abuse and trauma and its consequences'.

The Centre's other director is Professor Julia Davidson, a criminologist from Kingston University. This month the Centre will begin a 30-month Europe-wide investigation into the



Professor Bifulco (left) and Professor Davidson at the launch at the Reform Club

behaviour of men who seek to groom children and young people online. Professor Davidson said: 'We hope the results of this very innovative study will be used to inform

and interviewing child victims of sexual abuse about their experience in police investigations. The Centre also undertakes workshops and training for CPD for

preventative advice for parents and schools to reduce risks to children from internet abuse.'

Other research projects include evaluating social learning interventions in previously abused young people in residential care,

psychologists and social workers.

Last month the Centre held a 'Route Mapping' event at the House of Lords on the current crisis in child protection services, attended by around twenty academics and experts from different children's service agencies. Professor Bifulco said: 'Our aim was to highlight some practical ways forward to influence policy and practice in this very difficult area following from recent cases such as the death of Baby P. Psychologists can play a central role in working with children and families around abuse issues, and psychology research is fundamental in understanding the consequences for abuse on disorder across the lifespan.' **CJ**

## Special school links

In a move that it's hoped will bring advantages to all involved, the Experimental Psychology Department at the University of Bristol has formalised its relationship with the nearby Fosse Way School for students with special educational needs. Together, the Psychology Department, the National Autistic Society, members of the local community and the school now form the Fosse Way School Trust.

Dr Chris Jarrold, a reader in the department, helped set up this arrangement and is now one of four Trust directors. Another lecturer, Dr Liz Pellicano, has become one of the school's 15 governors.

'We've had a long-standing relationship with Fosse Way School for the last ten years or more,' Jarrold told *The Psychologist*. 'We've worked with children there who have autism or Down syndrome and others who don't have a particular diagnosis. We've also previously given talks at the school about our work. Now the school has decided to formalise its relationship with us – to get us more involved, not in the day-to-day running or management of the school, but in the direction of it.'

'We are also looking to do joint research projects with the school to see if we can tailor our research more around things the school will find useful – carry out more educationally minded research,'

Jarrold said. The Psychology Department also hopes to support the school in writing grant proposals for funding from educational trusts and charitable bodies.

Fosse Way School is located in Norton-Radstock, has 145 pupils with a range of learning difficulties, and has

consistently been rated as outstanding by Ofsted. Jarrold said the new Trust was the latest example of the school's forward-looking approach. 'This is a chance for us to give something back to a school that's been very supportive of us in the past,' he added. **CB**

## Gobet's opening gambit on the RAE

Inspired by their recent investigation into chess expertise, a team of psychologists has written to the *Times Higher Education Supplement* voicing concerns about assessment procedures used as part of the recent Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) – a UK-wide review that influences how much funding universities receive.

Professor Fernand Gobet at Brunel University, Dr Merim Bilalić at Tübingen University, and Dr Peter McLeod at Oxford University, specifically challenged the assumption that panels of experts in a given subject area are equipped to review accurately

research from an area outside their particular specialisation. The finding that chess experts' performance declines when solving problems outside their specialisation 'sheds some worrying light on this assumption', Gobet's group wrote.

The study with chess players involved asking an expert in one particular opening style to remember and solve chess situations both related and unrelated to their favourite opening style. The results showed that operating outside one's specific area of expertise diminished performance by about one standard deviation or 'class

level', relative to completing the same feats within one's area of expertise. So, for example, a 'grandmaster' would perform to the typical, lesser standard of 'international master' when operating outside his or her favoured domain (*Cognitive Science*: [tinyurl.com/rxvxnv](http://tinyurl.com/rxvxnv)).

The idea of extrapolating from these findings to the RAE came from Professor Gobet, who was in charge of the psychology RAE 'return' at Brunel. He'd noticed how reviewers often wildly disagreed about the quality of submitted papers, even when they all came from the same domain of specialisation.

Gobet explained to *The Psychologist* how the problem of expertise transfer would apply to the RAE: 'Say one panel member is a world expert in research into problem solving, a subfield of cognitive psychology, and that she has mostly used standard behavioural experiments in her research. She would be the equivalent of a top chess grandmaster specialising in the French defence, to use one kind of player we had in our paper. Now she has to evaluate papers say in clinical psychology. That would be the equivalent of finding a good move in a Sicilian position. So our claim is that, while she

# First for Scotland

The Brain Injury Rehabilitation Trust (BIRT) is set to open its first centre in Scotland within the next few months. There's currently a shortage of brain rehabilitation services in Scotland but it's hoped the new 25-bed hospital, located in Glasgow, will help plug that gap. The new centre will cater for patients with severe cognitive, physical or emotional problems following acquired brain injury, providing intensive neurobehavioural assessment and rehabilitation. It will be led by psychologists and follow a behavioural model of rehabilitation rather than the medical model. Mike McPeake of the Disabilities Trust is leading the project on behalf of BIRT. He said: 'We have been very keen to establish a presence in Scotland for some time and from our discussions with colleagues in the field of brain injury in Scotland we knew that there was likely to be a significant demand for any such service.' CJ

# Autism and talent

An issue of *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* entitled 'Autism and talent', organised and edited by Francesca Happé and Uta Frith, follows a joint British Academy and Royal Society Discussion Meeting on the same subject where contributors from psychology, psychiatry, neuroscience, history and sociology explored aspects ranging from the history, origin and prevalence of exceptional talent to its basis in the brain, from cognitive theories to the representation of talent and autism in biography and fiction. Some of the challenging questions addressed in this special issue include: Are great artists fundamentally different from the rest of us? Is there a price to pay for exceptional ability in one domain? What is the role of practice? And, finally, could we all become savants (see also our report at [www.bps.org.uk/nov08news](http://www.bps.org.uk/nov08news))? JS  
**I All articles are available online at [tinyurl.com/pquuv2](http://tinyurl.com/pquuv2)**

would be the equivalent of a grandmaster in evaluating papers in her field of problem solving, she would be the equivalent of an international master when evaluating papers in clinical psychology. Still an expert, but now very far from the top experts.'

Gobet said that in all likelihood the situation would actually be worse in the RAE than in chess because the gap between domains of psychology is greater than between different opening styles in chess. 'The cognitive psychologist using behavioural experiments in problem solving research would have a very hard time to evaluate

papers on perception using brain imaging – although both domains belong to cognitive psychology,' he explained.

So how could the next research assessment (the so-called Research Excellence Framework) be improved? 'That's the tough question,' Gobet said. 'Using information about citations or other type of bibliometric information is clearly a step forward, but there are issues as well with this. Given the huge cost of the RAE, one should consider the option of doing away with it entirely, and using other ways of allocating money. But here, I'm well beyond my domain of specialisation.' CJ

## RESEARCH FUNDING NEWS

The National Ataxia Foundation has three awards available to support new and innovative **studies into ataxia**; the Young Investigator Award (closing date 1 August); Research Grants (closing date 15 July); and Research Fellowships (closing date 15 August 2009). Note: the deadline dates given are for pre-submission application enquiries.  
**[www.ataxia.org/research/ataxia-research-grants.aspx](http://www.ataxia.org/research/ataxia-research-grants.aspx)**

The Nuffield Foundation **Social Science Small Grants Scheme** provide grants of normally up to £7500 to cover research expenses. Priority is given to applications from new researchers and pilot or preliminary projects that advance social well-being. Applications can be made at any time.  
**[tinyurl.com/3d3v2x](http://tinyurl.com/3d3v2x)**

The following funding opportunities are available for cancer-related research:

Cancer Research UK offers Project Grants to support **educational and behavioural research into cancer prevention, screening and early diagnosis**. Closing date for applications 10 July 2009.  
**[tinyurl.com/qhhmfv](http://tinyurl.com/qhhmfv)**

Dimbleby Cancer Care provides grants for **research into the care needs of cancer patients, their carers and families**, including support needs and psychosocial care. Closing date 20 November 2009.  
**[www.dimblebycancercare.org/research.php](http://www.dimblebycancercare.org/research.php)**

The Alcohol Education and Research Council (AERC) provides grants for research that improves the evidence base on **alcohol-related matters** and that also seek to develop the skills of people or the capacity of organisations. The research funded is broad-ranging and includes research into the effects and use of alcohol by parents, offenders and students. For further details see their website. The closing date for applications to the Research Grants and Development Grant schemes is 5 September 2009.  
**[www.aerc.org.uk/grants.html](http://www.aerc.org.uk/grants.html)**

Under its 7th Framework Programme the EU is offering **Marie Curie Intra-European Fellowships for Career Development**. The Fellowships support advanced training and transnational mobility that will provide the means to significantly advance a researcher's career as part of a long-term professional development plan. The closing date for applications is 18 August 2009.  
**[tinyurl.com/cfs6y5](http://tinyurl.com/cfs6y5)**

The European Association of Experimental Social Psychology (EAESP) offers two schemes to support early-career social psychologists. The **Postgraduate and Postdoctorate Travel Grants** provide support for short visits to conduct research, complete ongoing projects or undertake training elsewhere in the world. The Postdoctoral 'Seed Corn' Research Grants provide support for preliminary research undertaken by new researchers in the immediate postdoctoral period. Applicants for both schemes must be members of the EAESP. The next closing date for applications is 30 June 2009. There are four application deadlines each year.  
**[tinyurl.com/panxbrl](http://tinyurl.com/panxbrl)**

info

For more, see **[www.bps.org.uk/funds](http://www.bps.org.uk/funds)**  
 Funding bodies should e-mail news to Elizabeth Beech on **[elibee@bps.org.uk](mailto:elibee@bps.org.uk)** for possible inclusion

# Right on target

Joanna Colburn reports on a successful Annual Conference for the Society's Media Centre

Papers presented at this year's Annual Conference reached a far larger audience than the 578 delegates who came along. Indeed, anyone who picked up a newspaper, read a news website or tuned into the radio from 1–3 April may have come across one of the stories sent out into the world by the Society's Press Committee, media centre and researchers willing to engage with journalists and broadcast their findings beyond Brighton's Holiday Inn.

Fighting for space amongst the headlines and stories generated by the G20 summit, our psychology stories held their own. The first day saw a range of our press releases covered in national and regional newspapers: Becky Heaver of Sussex University on pupil size and recognition memory; Cardiff University's Dr Michael Lewis finding (in support of the theory that our expressions feed back and impact on our emotions) that botox could have positive effects on anxiety and irritability; Dr Simon Goodson of Huddersfield University, finding that console driving games leave you feeling more agitated and aggressive than violent shoot 'em ups; Emma Wightman (University of Northumbria) on how red wine extract polyphenol resveratrol could improve mental performance on demanding tasks; and Kristofor Mccarty (University of Northumbria) on how heterosexual women rate funny men as more intelligent than those whose jokes weren't as amusing.

Kristofor Mccarty's story had staying power and coverage continued into the weekend, going global when he was interviewed by NBC North America and Ireland's Today FM. On Friday 3 April the *Daily Mail* printed the double-page feature 'Can you laugh a woman into

bed?' using the research as its starting point. Disappointingly, in this piece as in some comment pieces that followed, the study's findings were somewhat twisted to; 'women really do prefer a sense of humour to good looks'. Katy Guest in *The Independent* picked up on this simplified take on the research in her comment piece, writing 'Funny guys are fun! Congratulations and thanks to the University of the Blindingly Obvious'.

The main story of the conference was arguably research by Liz Wright (De Montfort University) and Professor Tony Cassidy (University of Ulster), who found that people who grow up with at least one sister are generally more balanced and happier as adults. The simplicity of the message and wide relevance made this a massive story across all media on Thursday 2 April, with a 7:30am live interview on BBC Worldwide just the first of 13 interviews for the researchers.

From a public engagement perspective this piece of research was the most successful of the conference. It quickly became the 'most shared' article on BBC news online, featuring on the homepage and on the 'Have your say' pages. At one point it attracted 22 pages of comments, with hundreds of people sharing their experiences of brothers, sisters, family life and their views on the research findings. The story retained its popularity with columnists Melanie McDonagh (*The Times*) and Tom Utley (*Daily Mail*) discussing the research's significance to them personally. Both mocked the findings and welcomed its positive bearing on them in equal measure. However, any negative

comments in the press were massively outweighed by the positive level of interest and lively debate that this research received.

The Society press released 32 of the research papers presented at the Annual Conference, and many of these stories were covered by the local media of the university where the research was carried out. 'Punch and Judy politics' (Peter Bull, University of York) was covered by the *Northern Echo*, for example. Brighton newspaper *The Argus* also ran stories on each day.

On Friday, research by Charis Hunter and Dr Lance Workman (Bath Spa University) was used as some light relief. 'Dog owners matched to their pets' was covered by tabloids and broadsheets alike and spread quickly online.

Web coverage of our press releases meant that research presented at this year's conference will have reached a very diverse audience including many young people. For example, Dr Simon Goodson's research was featured on several gaming websites.

We were joined in the conference press office by journalists from the *Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Mail*, *New Scientist* and *Times*, who took the opportunity to interview researchers, write up longer articles for their publications and report on additional research. This resulted in a steady stream of coverage in these media throughout the week and the additional story 'Foods rich in cocoa may improve performance on challenging mental tasks like arithmetic' (Crystal Haskell, University of Northumbria) ran in both the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail*. Articles in specialist press, magazines and periodicals are still coming through. The amount and content of the news coverage we received this year reflects both the quality of the research at this year's conference and the media's hunger for accessible science stories with a human interest angle that psychological research uniquely provides.



Fighting for space – that's the way to do it!

