

MEDIA VIOLENCE

The Commission on Media Violence, established by the International Society for Research on Aggression (ISRA), has concluded that 'research clearly shows that media violence consumption increases the relative risk of aggression, defined as intentional harm to another person that could be verbal, relational, or physical.' Chaired by psychologist Professor Barbara Krahé at the University of Potsdam, the Commission published its final report and recommendations in August, in the journal *Aggressive Behaviour* (tinyurl.com/bwhf6ua). The full text is also available via the ISRA website (tinyurl.com/c33ytub).

LOST LETTERS

Deploying the lost-letter technique used by Stanley Milgram, researchers at UCL found that addressed letters left face-up on a dry day in poor areas of London were less likely to be picked up and posted (37 per cent) than letters left in wealthier areas (where 87 per cent were returned). Jo Holland and her team scattered 300 letters across 20 neighbourhoods, from East Sheen, the least deprived, to St. Dunstons, the most. Ethnic composition and population density were not related to the rates of return (*PLoS One*: tinyurl.com/9clzsnq).

CBT FOR INSOMNIA

Cognitive behavioural therapy for insomnia (CBTi) could soon be easier to access through the NHS. The ESRC says that a training programme used as part of a successful trial for older patients is now being used to train therapists nationwide. '[W]e have effectively overcome one of the chief barriers to giving CBTi for insomnia – the lack of skills in the workforce,' said Chartered Psychologist Professor Kevin Morgan of Loughborough University.

MODERN-DAY PHINEAS GAGE

An accident in Rio de Janeiro in August, in which a man's brain was pierced by a six-foot-long metal rod, recalled the historic Phineas Gage incident of the 19th century. After falling from the fifth floor of a building, the rod entered the top of the man's skull, his hard hat offering little protection. Unlike Gage, whose bar shot straight through his brain and landed metres behind him, the Brazilian man was left with the bar protruding from between his eyes. The surgeon who later removed the implement told Sky News: 'The fact that the patient arrived here lucid and talking is incredible.'

fMRI court controversy

A US judge has ruled that fMRI-based lie-detection evidence is inadmissible in a murder trial.

According to local media reports, Judge Eric M. Johnson of the

Montgomery County Circuit Court, Maryland heard evidence from experts

including Frank Haist, a professor of psychiatry who was

representing the company No Lie MRI, and New York University psychologist Liz Phelps,

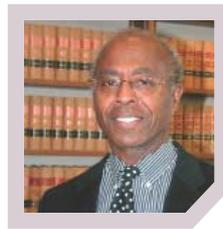
who was sceptical of the technology. In the absence of expert consensus, the judge said local statutes meant the evidence was inadmissible. Nonetheless, the case is just the latest example of neuroscience technologies finding their way into the courtroom.

Last year an Italian judge commuted the sentence of a woman convicted of murder after fMRI evidence

purportedly showed a series of structural abnormalities in her brain relative to controls. And

according to a Royal Society report published last year on neuroscience and the law, the number of US cases in which neurological evidence or behavioural genetics is submitted has been rising steadily over the last decade. The same report warned that a particular weakness of fMRI lie-detection is the ease with which suspects can deploy countermeasures.

This point was at the heart of the recent debate in the Montgomery court. Both the defence, who wanted to submit the fMRI evidence, and the prosecution, cited a study published in 2011 (see tinyurl.com/bsq66a2) that



Judge Johnson

Make the ethical everyday

Following a succession of research fraud scandals in social psychology, the Society for Personality and Social Psychology (SPSP) has published an open letter to its members (tinyurl.com/9zeycel). SPSP President Patricia Devine, professor of social psychology at the University of Wisconsin Madison, said that opportunity came out of crisis and she urged social psychologists to 'make discussions of ethical behavior part of the everyday discussion in your lab'.

The organisation has appointed a Task Force on Responsible Conduct, chaired by Jennifer Crocker of Ohio State University, which first met in January this year. An initial report from the group is available (tinyurl.com/8bezerd) and includes a number of recommendations, including setting up a website for replications and failed replications to be deposited, encouraging journals to publish replication special issues, and encouraging but not mandating data sharing.

Professor Devine said her organisation was also planning to hold a symposium devoted to these issues at their meeting in New Orleans next January. 'SPSP is taking initiative to develop new workshops, policies, and standards for responsible conduct in research,' she said.

The SPSP was founded in 1974 after breaking away from the APA and has over 7000 members worldwide. The organisation publishes *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, one of the most prestigious journals in the field, and a favoured outlet of Diederik Stapel, Dirk Smeesters and Lawrence Sanna, the three social psychologists who recently departed their posts under scandal. SPSP also publishes *Personality and Social Psychology Review* – also highly regarded in the field – and *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, a new electronic journal that's published jointly with other social psychology bodies.

The SPSP letter and plans attracted a luke-warm reception online. Dan Simons at the University of Illinois felt that as a publisher of major journals, the organisation hadn't gone far enough. But what troubled him most was Levine's claim that one SPSP Task Force objective was to promote the scientific credibility of the discipline. 'Perhaps a good place to start would be taking actual steps to bolster the foundations of the science itself,' Simons wrote on his blog (tinyurl.com/93o6o6y).

Elsewhere the influential Neuroskeptic blog (tinyurl.com/8d2jgql) complained

showed distinct brain activity in participants who lied about seeing their birth date appear onscreen. However, the same study showed that making a subtle toe movement to specific non-birth-dates was enough to undermine drastically the accuracy of the lie-detection.

Coincidentally, a study published this August showed that judges considering a fictional case were more lenient in their sentencing of a psychopath when they heard neurobiological evidence about the causes of the condition, including information on associated brain abnormalities (tinyurl.com/d8ldwcm). Another relevant study published last year found

that mock jurors were particularly persuaded by fMRI lie-detection evidence compared with more traditional technologies like the polygraph (tinyurl.com/ccykdxv).

Professor Paul Burgess of UCL, a psychologist who's been involved in a UK court case where brain-based evidence was submitted, told us that neuropsychologists are likely to play a growing role in court as our understanding of psychological and neurological conditions affecting behaviour increases, and as new technologies are created for detecting these conditions. 'However,' he added, 'this role is always likely to concern the degree to which the brain

scan (or other form of evidence) can be considered a good indicator of the state of mind of the individual at the time of the action. At our current state of knowledge, most people (scientists included) do not consider there to be a transparent and inevitable correspondence between this kind of evidence and the action being considered.'

Regarding the worry that brain scan and genetic evidence may be disproportionately influential, Burgess predicted this may change as the general public becomes more familiar with this kind of information. 'Here the psychologist also has a key educational role to play,' he said. **CJ**

that the SPSP report failed to acknowledge that 'enterprising researchers' have already established a website for replication attempts: <http://psychfiledrawer.org/> (see also the Reproducibility Project tinyurl.com/9nhp68h, and our May 2012 issue). The pseudonymous blogger also

argued that 'replicability', not replication, is the key to effective science: 'Failure to replicate findings is a symptom of problems with those original findings, rather than being a problem in and of itself. Good results replicate; we want better results to be published.' **CJ**

Animal consciousness

Psychologists and cognitive neuroscientists are among the signatories to a new declaration of the presence of consciousness in animals, 'including all mammals and birds, and many other creatures, including octopuses'. The Cambridge Declaration of Consciousness, was published at the Francis Crick Memorial Conference on Consciousness in Human and non-Human Animals, held in July.

Written by the neuroscientist Philip Low, the declaration was edited by the psychologists Jaak Panksepp and Diana Reiss (among others), and was signed by all attendees at the conference in the presence of Stephen Hawking.

'The absence of a neocortex does not appear to preclude an organism from experiencing affective states,' the declaration states. 'Convergent evidence indicates that non-human animals have the neuroanatomical, neurochemical, and neurophysiological substrates of conscious states along with the capacity to exhibit intentional behaviors.' **CJ**

| tinyurl.com/ceynmqn



FUNDING NEWS

Epilepsy Action is offering funding for **three-year PhD studentships**. The studentship should have an epilepsy-related psychosocial or applied clinical non-laboratory research focus. Applications should be made by prospective supervisors based at UK universities. Closing date is 31 October 2012.

| tinyurl.com/d9g2rvn

The Association for the Study of Animal Behaviour has Research Grants for up to £5000 available to help support promising **pilot research projects and small-scale projects**. The grants are to fund travel to conduct collaborative research or to bring a collaborator to the applicant's institution. To be eligible to apply applicants must be a current member of the ASAB and have been a member for a minimum of one year prior to applying for funding. There are three closing dates a year: the next is 1 November.

| tinyurl.com/74fuh5c

The Department of Health's Policy Research Programme has extended the deadline for the receipt of **research proposals for the Suicide Prevention Research Initiative**. This is to allow researchers to formulate their research proposals in line with the Suicide Prevention Strategy (published on 10 September 2012). Within the call five priority research areas are identified, including how to reduce the risk of suicide in people with a history of self-harm, how the media can be better supported in delivering sensible and sensitive approaches to suicide and suicidal behaviour, and how the health and social care system can provide better information and support to those bereaved or affected by a suicide. The deadline is 13 November 2012.

| tinyurl.com/cjkjom5

The government of Canada provides **Banting Postdoctoral Fellowships**. The objectives of the programme are to attract and retain top-tier postdoctoral talent at Canadian research institutions, develop leadership skills and to position fellowship holders to be the future research leaders. Under this scheme both Canadian citizens and non-citizens can apply for a two-year fellowship at a Canadian institution. Further details are available online. The closing date for applications is 1 November 2012.

| tinyurl.com/bobppj6

info

For more, see www.bps.org.uk/funds
Funding bodies should e-mail news to Elizabeth Beech on elibee@bps.org.uk for possible inclusion

A peculiar prevalence of p just below .05

Like a tired boxer at the Olympic Games, the reputation of psychological science has just taken another punch to the gut. After a series of fraud scandals in social psychology and a US survey that revealed the widespread use of questionable research practices, a paper published this month finds that an unusually large number of psychology findings are reported as 'just significant' in statistical terms.

The pattern of results could be indicative of dubious research practices, in which researchers nudge their results towards significance, for example by excluding troublesome outliers or adding new participants. Or it could reflect a selective publication bias in the discipline – an obsession with reporting results that have the magic stamp of statistical significance. Most likely it reflects a combination of both these influences. On a positive note, psychology, perhaps more than any other branch of science, is showing an admirable desire and ability to police itself and to raise its own standards.

E.J. Masicampo at Wake Forest University, USA, and David Lalonde at Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, analysed 12 months of issues, July 2007 to August 2008, from three highly regarded psychology journals – the *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*; *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*; and *Psychological Science*.



In the August issue of *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology*

In psychology, a common practice is to determine how probable (p) it is that the observed results in a study could have been obtained if the null hypothesis were true (the null hypothesis usually being that the treatment or intervention has no effect). The convention is to consider a probability of less than five per cent ($p < .05$) as an indication that the treatment or intervention really did have an influence; the null hypothesis can be rejected (this procedure is known as null hypothesis significance testing).

From the 36 journal issues Masicampo and Lalonde identified 3627 reported p values between .01 to .10 and their method was to see how evenly the p values were spread across that range (only studies that reported a precise figure were included). To avoid a bias in their approach, they counted the number of p values falling into 'buckets' of different size, either .01, .005, .0025 or .00125 across the range.

The spread of p values between .01 and .10 followed an exponential curve – from .10 to .01 the number of p values increased gradually. But here's the key finding – there was a glaring bump in the distribution between .045 and .050. The number of p values falling in this range was 'much greater' than

you'd expect based on the frequency of p values falling elsewhere in the distribution. In other words, an uncanny abundance of reported results just sneaked into the region of statistical significance.

'Biases linked to achieving statistical significance appear to have a measurable impact on the research publication process,' the researchers said.

The same general pattern was found regardless of whether Masicampo and Lalonde analysed results from just one journal or all of them together, and mostly regardless of the size of the distribution buckets they looked at. Of course, there's a chance the intent behind their investigations could have biased their analyses in some way. To check this, a research assistant completely blind to the study aims analysed p values from one of the journals – the same result was found.

Masicampo and Lalonde said their findings pointed to the need to educate researchers about the proper interpretation of null hypothesis significance testing and the value of alternative approaches, such as reporting effect sizes and confidence intervals. '[T]he field may benefit from practices aimed at counteracting the single-minded drive toward achieving statistical significance,' they said.



When sales staff smile everyone wins

In the *Journal of Applied Psychology*

Serving customers with a smile must be tough if you're not in the mood. In the end, though, sales employees who are more smiley may end up reaping the benefit. A new study has looked at the way an employee's positive emotion infects their customers, and how this in turn feeds back to the employee, boosting their own mood.

Eugene Kim and David Yoon observed 117 interactions between staff and customers at clothing and accessory stores at a large shopping mall in Seoul, South Korea. The emotional behaviour of the employees was observed, then the way their customers responded, and finally, right afterwards, both employee and customer were quizzed about their mood and personality.

The more positive the employee, the more positive the customer tended to be. Moreover, employees who were more positive tended to be in a better mood afterwards, an association that was fully explained by the positive emotions displayed by the customer. In other words, smiley and polite staff initiated a virtuous interactive circle in which customers tended to respond in kind, thus benefiting the worker's own mood.

Of course, not all customers are made equal. Kim and Young found that customers who scored lower in agreeableness and lower in emotional stability were more influenced by the positive emotion of the staff.



More agreeable customers would be friendly anyway and highly stable customers are less prone to outside influences on their emotions.

A weakness of the study is that the researchers didn't assess staff mood at the outset, prior to each customer interaction. Though unlikely, they admitted this means that they couldn't completely rule out the possibility that interaction had nothing to do with the results – that an employee's mood at the outset had simply affected both their own emotional display, the customer's response and their own mood at the end.

Notwithstanding the need for more longitudinal research, Kim and Yoon said a key message for managers was to see customers as 'coproducers of a positive service interaction'. As well as 'recruiting and hiring employees who are adept at displaying positive emotions', they said that managers should also consider reminding customers of the part they have to play by saying thank you and being civil.



Cheeky pictures suggest psychologists identify with the arts

In the *PLoS One*

What does it matter which side of your face you show when you're having your photograph taken? A team of scientists say that it reflects how much you see yourself as emotional and arty or rational and scientific. Owen Churches and his colleagues analysed the personal webpages belonging to 5829 English-language university academics around the world. They found that engineers, mathematicians and chemists more often posed with their right cheek; English lit. dons and psychologists with their left. '[M]ost academic psychologists, who may have entered the profession during its arts-oriented past, perceive themselves as being more akin to arts academics than scientists,' said the authors.

The researchers made their observations after choosing 30 universities at random from the 200 listed by the Times Higher Education World University Rankings for 2010 to 2011.

When they found scholarly departments where the convention was for academics to present a photo of themselves, they went on to analyse all academic photos to see which cheek was visible. Straight-on photos were ignored. That left 3168 photos for analysis. Consistent with previous research there was a strong effect of sex – women more often pose with their left cheek showing. But the differences between the arts and science academics held even after controlling for this confound. The contrast also survived an analysis that excluded any photos that looked like they'd been taken by a professional photographer.

These new findings build on past research that's shown the left side of the face is perceived as more emotionally expressive than the right; that emotionally expressive people are more likely to pose with the left cheek showing; that, historically,

people have tended to pose more often with their left side showing, but older portraits of scientists, in contrast, show them posing more often with their right cheek; and that viewers tend to guess that an unknown academic posing with their right cheek is a scientist, whilst guessing that left-cheek posers are arts scholars. These findings, Churches and his team explained, 'suggest a difference in the inward role of the two cerebral hemispheres in the creation and analysis of the emotional display'.

In the current study, the general pattern of cheek posing and academic affiliation broke down when it came to fine arts and performing arts – they showed no bias for posing with their left side. The researchers speculated this may be because of their expert knowledge of the history of portraiture.

Critics may wonder about the researchers' interpretation that the posing position of psychologists suggests they identify with the arts. This seems quite a leap from the data that's available. It's also worth noting that there's a huge amount of variation within each academic discipline in posing position. Even among male engineers, for example, nearly 40 per cent posed with their left side facing the camera.

'Academics be warned,' the researchers concluded. 'We present ourselves to our students and colleagues in our profile pictures and the way we do so may reveal more about ourselves than we think.'



The material in this section is taken from the Society's **Research Digest** blog at www.researchdigest.org.uk/blog, and is written by its editor **Dr Christian Jarrett**. Visit the blog for full coverage including references and links, additional current reports, an archive, comment and more.

Also see the Society's Occupational Digest, at www.occdigest.org.uk.



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Opening minds

Kairen Cullen on how coverage of psychologists' involvement in the Paralympics expresses the essence of the profession

In 2002, as vice chair of the Professional Practice Board, I signed the Centre for Studies in Inclusive Education's Charter for Inclusion on behalf of the BPS. In November of that year the Society produced a position paper on inclusive education that acknowledged and attempted to define the need for inclusive education as part of a changing society, and the contribution of applied psychology.

Ten years later the work to develop a more inclusive society has gathered momentum, and the success of the Paralympics is a prime example of this progress. The sale of 2.7 million tickets and an audience of 5.9 million viewers for the closing ceremony are impressive statistics. Psychologists played a key part, and their work with the press and media was an important aspect of this. As Lord Coe said at the closing ceremony: 'Our minds were opened to what people can do.'

His words expressed the essence of what psychology, in its purest sense, is all about. I'm reminded of the BPS logo that features a kneeling Psyche holding a lamp, offering the illumination of our understanding of minds, behaviour and people in general in order to change things for the better.

Professor Jan Burns from Canterbury Christ Church University, Head of Eligibility for the International Sports Federation for Persons with Intellectual Disability (INAS – www.inas.org) and recipient of a BPS Public Engagement Award in 2011, spoke to me live from the Paralympics. She described how she and her team created and administered a clear, rigorous and comprehensive classification system for athletes with intellectual disability and summed it all up as 'really successful' and that her 'very positive' contacts with the world's press and media were crucial to this. When asked about the extent of the coverage, she likened it to the 'snowball effect' that can happen in good research. The BPS Public Engagement Award enabled the production of a video helping the public understand the classification rules for athletes with intellectual disabilities taking part in the London 2012 Paralympics (tinyurl.com/d5zqyz8). This video has stimulated much interest and resulted in extensive press and media take up, including Radio 4's *All in the Mind* programme and articles in *The Times*, *Time Magazine*, the *Wall Street Journal* and *Nature*, to name but a few.

Professor Burns met a number of challenges in the press and media

coverage of her work. Major themes included the frequently very low levels of knowledge and understanding of intellectual disability, research and professional psychology practice and the statistical basis for many of the assessment instruments. Let's hope this coverage will educate more people about psychology and disability, and in so doing benefit the many practitioner and research psychologists who have to deal with the same challenges in their daily practice.

Many of my educational psychologist colleagues have worked long and hard in supporting inclusive educational practice, one of whom is Keith Venables, who, for over a decade, has organised the 'EPs for Inclusion' group, an open discussion forum interested in supporting inclusive practice. In the September edition of *Debate*, the newsletter for the Division of Educational and Child Psychology, he writes: 'EPs try and make sure all children and young people experience success...we're not neutral, we're not bystanders, we're involved, we're skilled and we care' (p.16).

Not surprisingly, the coverage of psychologists' involvement in the Paralympics has not stated explicitly the ethical and values basis of such work. But members will be well aware that the Society's Code of Conduct stresses, amongst other things, the dignity and worth of all persons, the responsibilities to others and to the Society and the importance of accuracy,

clarity, fairness, honesty and integrity in their interactions with all persons. Jan Burns' and other psychologists' work clearly exemplifies all of the above and has illuminated, via the massive press and media engagement, just how much psychology can support the development of a more inclusive world. The measure of how civilised and humane our society is might justifiably be found in examining the experience of its most vulnerable members, and so I hope that the work of psychologists in the field of inclusion will continue to attract a lot of media attention. After all, there is always a choice as to not just how but where one shines the light to help, as Lord Coe said, lift 'the cloud of limitation'.

I The Society will be part of a joint seminar on new government position paper 'Support and Aspiration: Opportunity or Threat' on Monday 8 October, at the Society's London office. £20.00 – e-mail psychinclusion@yahoo.co.uk.



MEDIA PRIME CUTS

Beyond a joke: the truth about why we laugh, from psychologist Robert Provine <http://t.co/qw8Xj0yX>
 Storm psychology: why do some people stay behind? <http://t.co/ii4smETp>
 Discrimination as a factor in post-disaster mental health <http://t.co/0fV10Xiy>
 The growing phenomenon of 'conspicuous giving' <http://t.co/wb1hHV5N>
 'There is no doubt that we need a new approach to the study of intelligence' – James Flynn <http://t.co/11r5VvYL>
 Death by IQ: US inmates condemned by flawed tests <http://t.co/oJPWu2p3>
 Why are we overconfident? <http://t.co/E15Lgt7V>

contribute

The Media page aims to promote and discuss psychology in the media. If you would like to contribute, please contact the Associate Editor for the 'Media' page, Lucy

Maddox, on maddox.lucy@gmail.com. To share examples of psychology in the news and media, connect with *The Psychologist* on Twitter at www.twitter.com/psychmag.

The joy of serendipity

It is perhaps a brave journalist who opens an article with the passage: 'It is pretty easy to go unnoticed as I follow my target along the busy high road, but when she turns into a residential side street, I start to worry. I slow down a bit, hang back and follow the woman from a safer distance.' I'm certainly not sure it would strike the right note if I were to do that myself. But so began a fascinating article in *New Scientist* in August, written by Catherine de Lange.

I'll allow her to take up the story. 'Following random strangers to see where I end up is not the way I usually choose to spend my Saturday afternoons, but maybe it should be. With the rise of technologies designed to streamline our lives – from GPS devices to recommendation

services – little need now be left to chance. But an emerging body of research suggests that chance is a vastly underappreciated ingredient in human happiness. Now, new apps called serendipity generators are encouraging us to buck the ultra-efficiency trend by putting some whimsy back into our lives. Can they help us overcome our inherent fear of uncertainty?'

Noting that the rise of these new apps echoes a much earlier protest against the tyranny of modern efficiency, de Lange described how, in the mid-19th century, the order brought about by the revolution in France gave rise to a cultural phenomenon known as *flânerie*. 'Dissatisfied with the urgency and alienation of the modern-day city, Parisian flâneurs hoped to encourage a certain kind of aimlessly enjoyable wandering in city life.'

Modern day flâneurs such as Ben Kirman, a computer scientist at the University of Lincoln, have created apps like Getlostbot, which encourages users to break out of old routines and try different places. 'Download it, and it will silently monitor your Foursquare check-ins. When you become too predictable, always going to the same bar on a Friday night, for example, Getlostbot will send directions to one you've never tried before.'

In search of the appeal behind such apps, de Lange talked to Tim Wilson, a

psychologist at the University of Virginia. 'Most research on uncertainty has tended to focus on the negative aspects,' she writes, 'but over the past decade psychologists have begun to investigate its effect on good experiences. Their findings are building a strong case that the same mechanism that causes uncertainty to intensify bad scenarios could make it

a crucial ingredient in happiness.' De Lange skilfully covers a body of research revealing just how much pleasure can be gained through the power of uncertainty, and suggesting that technologies that introduce an element of chance into our lives could boost our mood in the day-to-day.

I am always heartened by non-psychologists writing so well on our patch, so

I asked de Lange about her experience of writing about psychology in general. She said: 'Often, the psychological research isn't actually tackling the exact thing the article is looking at. So, Tim Wilson's research looks at uncertainty and its effect on our emotions, so he's not researching the apps that I was writing about specifically. The challenge for me is not to extrapolate the research and apply to situations where it isn't relevant. As it turned out, Wilson was very interested to hear about these apps and reckoned that, based on his experiences with uncertainty, there could be something in the idea. I find psychologists tend to be quite open to discussion about how their research might apply beyond the specific situations they investigated in their studies, although of course those extrapolations would usually need to be tested further.'

Is writing about psychology fun? 'I get a lot of pleasure from reading the methodology of psychological studies,' de Lange said. 'The set-ups are often very clever and fun. I couldn't include all the studies I read about for this article, but there was a great one that Wilson and his team did where people had to go up to complete strangers and give them a gift, then walk away. It must have been a lot of fun to devise and carry out.'

Perhaps that's the message: if it's fun to do, it's likely to be interesting to write about and – like de Lange's article – a pleasure to read. **JS**



Not the way I usually choose

MEDIA CURIOSITY

Is it possible to retain consciousness following decapitation? If, like me, you have a morbid fascination with such questions, you may have heard stories about crude experiments with guillotined criminals in the French Revolution. But are such tales mere urban legend?

Lindsey Fitzharris, a medical historian and Wellcome Trust Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Queen Mary, University of London, blogs under the name 'the surgeon's apprentice: a website dedicated to the horrors of pre-anaesthetic surgery'. She set out to investigate, and her quest makes for fascinating reading (see <http://t.co/oEJItGU>).

The search takes in some gruesome work from Dr Séguret and Jean Baptiste Vincent Laborde, plus a letter from a condemned murderer beseeching his

brother to 'be present at my execution and insist that my head be given to you. Call me with your voice and my eyes will reply to you.'

But surviving the final cut as the most convincing of the anecdotes was the execution of Henri Languille

in 1905, attended by Dr Gabriel

Beaurieux. Shortly after the blade severed Languille's head, Beaurieux noted:

'[T]he eyelids and lips of the guillotined man worked in irregularly rhythmic contractions for about five or six seconds. [After several seconds], the spasmodic movements ceased...It was then that I called in a strong, sharp voice: "Languille!" I saw the eyelids slowly lift up, without any spasmodic contractions – I insist advisedly on this peculiarity – but with an even movement, quite distinct and normal, such as happens in everyday life, with people awakened or torn from their thoughts.'

Fascinated, Beaurieux called out the victim's name again, and once more, Languille's 'eyelids lifted and undeniably living eyes fixed themselves on mine with perhaps even more penetration than the first time'. On the third attempt, there was no response. **JS**

