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EXPERT WITNESSES IN RAPE TRIALS

PLANS for expert witnesses to give evidence for the prosecution in rape trials about the trauma suffered by victims have been shelved by ministers.

The rape law review, carried out by several government departments, is expected to be published soon. A spokeswoman from the Attorney General's Office said the idea of expert trauma witnesses had not been dismissed, it was just they would not appear in person. 'The rape consultation does examine the way in which rape juries can best be presented with expert evidence which in itself raises some complex issues,' she said. 'These issues will also be covered in the government's response to the consultation paper.'

DOGAN PRIZE IN PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE

THE Foundation Mattei Dogan Prize is awarded in recognition of a contribution that represents a major advance in psychology by a scholar or team of scholars of high international reputation. Nominate by 30 November at www.am.org/iupsys/information/dogan.html.

POSITIVE SELECTION OF 'SCHIZOPHRENIA GENES'

SEVERAL genes associated with schizophrenia appear to have been positively selected in human evolutionary history. That's according to an analysis of 76 genes by Bernard Crespi and colleagues published in the Proceedings of the Royal Society B (tinyurl.com/2ej46k).

Twenty-eight of the genes studied showed signs of positive selection, including DISC1 ('disrupted in schizophrenia 1'). The finding lends support to the idea that genes linked with schizophrenia also confer benefits, for example in terms of creativity and cognition. It also helps explain how prevalence rates have remained at around 1 per cent despite the detrimental impact of the illness on human health and reproductive fitness.

The three 'Rs' for science

THE Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform have released a 'universal ethical code for scientists', based on rigour, respect and responsibility. The public statement is intended for 'anyone whose work uses

scientific methods, including social, natural, medical and veterinary sciences, engineering and mathematics'. It aims to foster ethical research, to encourage active reflection among scientists on the wider implications and impacts of their work, and to support

constructive communication between scientists and the public on complex and challenging issues.

Described as the scientific equivalent of doctors' Hippocratic Oath, the code was launched by the British government's chief scientific adviser, Professor David King, at the British Association for the Advancement of Science's annual festival in York.

Richard Kwiatkowski, Chair of the British Psychological Society's Ethics Committee, described the code as 'a very positive development. The ethical code for scientists has been adopted by a large number of organisations, and some universities now require students to have signed copies in their theses. The integrity of psychological research is essential for it to be treated with authority by broader society: if this code makes that more likely, then it is to be welcomed.' JS

□ *For more about ethics, see the article on p.672.*

THE CODE

Rigour, honesty and integrity

- Act with skill and care in all scientific work. Maintain up-to-date skills and assist their development in others.
- Take steps to prevent corrupt practices and professional misconduct. Declare conflicts of interest.
- Be alert to the ways in which research derives from and affects the work of other people, and respect the rights and reputations of others.

Respect for life, the law and the public good

- Ensure that your work is lawful and justified.
- Minimise and justify any adverse effect your work may have on people, animals and the natural environment.

Responsible communication: listening and informing

- Seek to discuss the issues that science raises for society. Listen to the aspirations and concerns of others.
- Do not knowingly mislead, or allow others to be misled, about scientific matters. Present and review scientific evidence, theory or interpretation honestly and accurately.

Colour contrast processing in the brain

NEUROPSYCHOLOGISTS have localised a form of colour processing to the primary visual cortex – far earlier in the brain's visual pathway than previously thought (tinyurl.com/yw2c6c).

Robert Krentz and Charles Heywood at Durham University, together with Lawrence Weiskrantz of Oxford University, tested the ability of brain-damaged patient DB to contrast adjacent colours. This ability is thought to underlie 'colour constancy' – the way objects appear to be of the

same colour to us regardless of the light that is illuminating them. For example, grass appears to be the same shade of green under both a blue sky and the red light of a setting sun.

Usefully for the researchers, patient DB has significant damage to one half of his primary visual cortex, but not the other. So Krentz and his colleagues presented DB with a series of visual illusions to the side of space that he sees with his intact visual cortex and then again to the side that is processed by his damaged

cortex. They used visual displays (pairs of colour discs against a graded colour background) that lead to a visual illusion in people with intact brains because of the very colour contrast processing that is thought to underlie colour constancy.

When viewing the displays with the intact side of his brain, DB experienced the visual illusions as a typical person would. But crucially, when the displays were shown to the side of space processed by his damaged primary visual cortex,

Q: Would our roads be safer without signs and markings?

The German town of Bohmte has removed all signage and markings from its roads in an attempt to cut accidents and congestion. The move is the latest test of the European Union's Shared Space project (www.shared-space.org), inspired by Dutch traffic expert Hans Monderman's philosophy. He proposes that traffic management tools, such as signs and speed bumps, actually deter drivers from using their own intelligence and engaging with their surroundings. The scheme is also being trialled by Suffolk County Council on a road in Ipswich.

However, not everyone supports the idea of removing traffic signs and markings. Mike Winnett, senior advisor to the Global Road Safety Partnership (www.grsproadsafety.org) told us the thesis is flawed. He said it is important to distinguish between types of traffic sign – those used to warn of hazards, directional signs and instructional signs. Directional signs may become less necessary, particularly with the growth of in-car GPS, but, he said: 'it would be foolish to remove hazard warnings, especially in this age of litigation and corporate liability. However ugly or intrusive, they are warning of danger.' As for instructional signs, he added: 'You will find motorists will complain vehemently if they get traffic tickets and could not see the instruction signs (no parking, for example).'

What about the psychological effects of removing road signs and markings? Professor Ian Robertson of Trinity College Dublin said he was unaware of any empirical research looking at this. 'One could speculate theoretically', he said, 'that it could increase caution, and one could equally well speculate that it might reduce caution. It may well have different effects on different categories of drivers – for example, impulsive young drivers may drive more dangerously with no signs, while older drivers may drive more cautiously.'

Familiarity could be another factor. For example, Robertson said, drivers familiar with a particular route might drive much as they did before. This could cause problems when a familiar driver meets on the road with a less familiarised, cautious driver who is expecting others to drive in a similarly cautious fashion.

In conclusion, Robertson warned: 'It would be absurd to propose such a scheme without a very careful empirical evaluation of its effects – theory is of little use in such a case, data is everything.' *CJ*

□ See www.bps.org.uk/jan06news for more.

The 'colour constancy' of grass is a 'pigment of our imagination'

DB no longer experienced the illusions. This result strongly suggests that primary visual cortex is involved in colour contrast processing. By contrast, in a separate task, DB's luminance judgements (i.e. not dependent on contrasting colours) were shown to be normal regardless of the whether he used the intact or damaged side of his brain.

Dr Kentrige explained the implications: 'Colour is a product of our nervous system – it is a "pigment" of our imagination. The colours that we see are more related to the materials that things are made of than the light reflected from them into our eyes. Making this happen involves many complex processes. One of the earliest involves seeing contrast between pairs of colours. We have found that this important step of seeing colour contrast happens much earlier in the brain than we had realised up until now.'

In a separate but related development, psychologist Ernest Greene at the University of Southern California has shown an aspect of shape recognition processing actually occurs in the retina itself (tinyurl.com/27d9ao).

Greene presented participants with silhouette-like shapes made up of dots. Such is the brain's proclivity for seeing shapes that these dot displays are all we need to recognise objects. However, this recognition is extremely time sensitive – if the appearance of the individual dots making up a shape is separated by mere fragments of second, the percept of an object is lost.

Crucially, Greene observed that this same temporal sensitivity persisted whether related dots were (by virtue of their location on the retina) processed by the same hemisphere or different hemispheres. Because it is unrealistic to imagine that this sub-millisecond precision could be preserved through the visual pathway all the way to the higher brain areas normally associated with object recognition, the finding suggests that the simultaneity of the dots is being registered in the retina itself.

'This finding suggests that the responses from the two sides of the retina are being linked in some manner, and the process of joining the two halves of an object is not done only in the brain,' Greene explained.

CJ

Localising sounds

RESEARCHERS have identified a part of the brain as being responsible for localising sounds in space. The planum temporale, located behind the auditory cortex, has been implicated in this role before, but some commentators had suggested the region was only active when people deliberately attempt to localise a sound. Now, in a brain scanning experiment, Leon Deouell and colleagues have shown that the planum temporale

responds to changes in the location of sounds even when participants are distracted by a silent movie or button-pressing task.

Writing in the journal *Neuron* (tinyurl.com/28d3z1), the researchers said their experiments showed 'neurons in this region [planum temporale] represent, in a nonintentional or preattentive fashion, the location of sound sources in the environment.'

CJ

Combating cyberbullying

THE UK government's Department for Children, Families and Schools (DCFS) has launched a new campaign, including online adverts, a short film and revised guidance, to help combat cyberbullying – described by Secretary of State Ed Balls as a 'particularly insidious type of bullying as it can follow young people wherever they go, with no refuge'.

The DCFS said a recent survey found up to 34 per cent of 12- to 15-year-olds had experienced some kind of cyberbullying, involving either mobile phones, e-mails or online networking sites like MySpace. The department's new guidance includes lists of contacts for getting online material taken down and ways to trace malicious texts and e-mails.

Bullying researcher Dr Mike Eslea at the University of Central Lancashire told us he welcomed the government's new campaign, especially its emphasis on targeting bystanders (the online campaign is titled 'Laugh at it and you're a part of it'). 'During almost every bullying incident, other children are present, many of them laughing and reinforcing the bullying,' he said. However, he was sceptical about the government's cyberbullying prevalence figures, telling us: 'Thirty-four per cent is by far the highest estimate I've seen. Most studies have found only around half that number.'

Eslea says that a key problem with tackling cyberbullying is keeping up with

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technology. 'The best cyberbullying research I know of is by Nathalie Noret and Ian Rivers. They've got a massive sample that they've been following for five to six years, but I don't think they've got any of the newer technology in there [social networking sites like MySpace and Bebo]. It's all focused on texts and e-mails. And the issue with the new online sites is that it is so public, yet hard to track down the perpetrators who can post material and comments online anonymously.'

The government's new guidelines on bullying also include for the first time information on tackling homophobic bullying. Dr Eslea told us this was particularly welcome, and that whereas the government may have overestimated the prevalence of cyberbullying, they may have

underestimated the extent of homophobic bullying. 'In particular,' he said, 'there doesn't appear to be any mention of homophobic bullying by teachers, who, for example, are often complicit in the use of homophobic nicknames and jibes.'

Meanwhile, in Switzerland, a group of 30 researchers, including Professor Peter Smith at Goldsmiths, University of London, have signed the Kandersteg Declaration (see tinyurl.com/2vmqmq), calling on governments around the world to step up the fight against bullying. The researchers who signed the the declaration had all attended the Joint Efforts Against Victimization Conference in Kandersteg in June.

Professor Erling Roland at the Centre for Behavioural Research at the University of Stavanger in Switzerland, one of the key organisers of the Declaration, told us it was important for psychologists to inform school personnel about the short-term and long-term damage bullying can do to victims, and that it was also crucial that teachers and parents assure victims that their bullying is not deserved.

'In addition,' he said, 'I hope that psychologists can help teachers and others to understand more about the main mechanisms behind bullying, not least how important proactive aggression on the part of the bullies is. The reason is that unless this is understood clearly, it is difficult to prevent and stop bullying.'

CJ

Violence begets violence

TO reduce violence among youths and between adult partners, the mistreatment of children must be targeted. That's according to Xiangming Fang at the National Centre for Injury Prevention and Control in Atlanta and his colleagues, who examined whether perpetrators of violence had been mistreated in their childhood.

Over nine thousand participants, aged 11 to 19 years, reported whether they had been violent in the previous year. Then when the sample were aged 18 to 26 years, they stated whether they had been violent towards their sexual partner and whether they had been maltreated as a child.

Participants who were neglected or physically abused in childhood were more likely to be violent in adolescence. In turn, those who were violent in adolescence were more likely to be violent to their partner in adulthood. For female participants only,

being neglected or physically abused in childhood was directly associated with being violent to one's partner in adulthood, independent of whether they had also been violent in their adolescence.

Participants who were sexually abused in childhood were no more likely to be violent in adolescence than their unharmed peers. But for men only, those who were sexually abused in childhood were more likely to be violent towards their partner as an adult.

Writing in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* (tinyurl.com/2e863w), the researchers said their results suggested that '[violence] prevention efforts should occur early in life and should focus on multiple types of violence that occur in the developmental trajectory.'

CJ

'You don't have to be happy to work here, but it helps'

EMployees in countries with a happier, more extravert population, tend to exhibit greater commitment to the organisations they work for. That's according to Garry Gelade and colleagues writing in the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* (tinyurl.com/23kbwt). By contrast, employees from countries with more neurotic, cynical populations tend to show less commitment. Perhaps surprisingly, whether a country has an individualistic or collectivist culture has no bearing on employee commitment.

Work psychologists are interested in employee commitment because it predicts key outcomes such as lower staff turnover and absenteeism, higher sales achievement and customer satisfaction. Using

surveys conducted across 49 countries, Gelade's team measured 'affective commitment' – when employees stay with an organisation because they want to, not because they feel they ought to, or because they have no choice.

Personality, cultural and socio-economic scores for countries were taken from data already published, for example by the World Bank. Staff in countries whose populations scored higher for extraversion, happiness, and lower for cynicism, neuroticism and conservatism, tended to exhibit more commitment to their places of work, as judged by their agreement with statements like 'I am proud to work for this organisation'.

The researchers said a possible explanation was a form of emotional contagion. 'Thus,

in countries with high average levels of positive affect,' the researchers surmised, 'employees will experience pleasant peer-to-peer and superior-subordinate interactions and consequently develop positive attitudes toward their organisations, which will be reflected in elevated reports of affective commitment.'

Dr Gelade of City University, London, added: 'With an increase in corporate employment in many parts of the world, many corporations operate cross-nationally and employ an international workforce, especially in London. This study will have practical implications for organisations seeking to maximise commitment levels among an eclectic workforce.'

CJ

Stress and productivity

SPEAKING at 'Stressed out: Is workplace stress damaging UK plc?', a fringe event at the Labour Party Conference, Professor Cary Cooper (Lancaster University) detailed his work as chair of the US government's strategy

group on workplace stress. He told the meeting that stress was costing \$3 billion in decreased productivity and \$19 billion in lost employment in the US, and that it had become the leading cause of sickness absence in the UK and across Europe.

There was some good news, according to Cooper – programmes in the Government Office for Science (GO – Science) were investigating what could be done to improve mental health. However, he criticised the government's decision to opt out of the Working Time Directive, saying that a meta-analysis he had carried out had shown that if an individual consistently worked long hours then they would become ill.

Cooper also called for more people in the Health and Safety Executive, in particular those with skills in psychosocial areas. He also suggested that an occupational health worker, with links to employers, should be employed in GP practices. JS

STATUTORY REGULATION UPDATE

DISCUSSIONS continue with the Department of Health and the Health Professions Council.

Issues discussed included threshold level of qualification for entry to the Register; and those chartered psychologists without an adjectival title, but who have practising certificates and who wish to continue to practise.

At the beginning of October, the Society received a new draft of the Section 60 Order (the necessary piece of legislation for psychologists to be statutorily regulated); and, a draft of the public consultation document. The Society remains concerned over reductions in public protection following the transition from voluntary to statutory regulation.

For the latest updates on statutory regulation, see the President's column and www.bps.org.uk/statreg.

BYRON REVIEW – CALL FOR EVIDENCE

TANYA Byron has launched her independent review of the risks to children from exposure to potentially harmful or inappropriate material on the internet and in video games (see www.dfes.gov.uk/byronreview).

'As a clinical psychologist with many years of experience working with children, young people and their families, I am very pleased to have been asked by the government to conduct such an important review,' Dr Byron said. 'This review is about pulling together the shared responsibility we have as parents, society, government and industry to protect our children and young people from harm... I will be engaging with all the people who have a role in this – in direct conversations, through focus groups, by engaging with the existing research, and by asking people to share their views.'

The consultation closes on 30 November. The Society's Policy Support Unit will be preparing a response: see www.bps.org.uk/consult or e-mail psu@bps.org.uk.



Science and how people draw the earth

WHEN children are asked to draw the Earth they often produce intriguing pictures in which, for example, people seem to be standing on a flat disc or inside a hollow sphere. But do children construct naive, theory-like mental models of the Earth, or are they just baffled by the task? Gavin Nobes and Georgia Panagiotaki (University of East Anglia) gave adults the drawing task previously given to five-year-old children, with instructions to draw the Earth, people and sky. Fewer than half of the adults drew scientific pictures, and adults were almost as likely to draw so-called 'naive' pictures (including the flat and hollow Earths) as were children. Up to half of the answers to questions (e.g. 'Where do people live?') were categorised as non-scientific (e.g. 'inside the Earth').

Follow-up interviews with adults who gave non-scientific responses revealed that none believed the Earth to be flat or hollow, but that they found the apparently simple task confusing and challenging. Since children very probably find it even more difficult, these findings suggest that children's non-scientific responses, like those of adults, often result from methodological problems with the task.

The authors point out that this conclusion is likely to extend to other areas of research and practice, saying that 'many commonly used tasks and questions could actually be considerably more difficult or ambiguous than they seem.' They recommend that, wherever possible, alternative methods should be used to ensure that instruments are valid (e.g. if

children are asked to draw their view of an object, they should also select pictures of it). Also, regardless of how simple they might appear to be, children's tests should be piloted with adults to help reveal any methodological flaws.

JS

SOCIAL INCLUSION

AS the prosperity and well-being of the majority in this country continues to rise, there remains a persistent minority who, for a plethora of interconnected reasons, get left behind – such as children in care, learning disabled, offenders, the mentally ill, and the unemployed. Psychologists met at the Society's London office in October to discuss what more can be done to help these most excluded members of our population.

Attendees heard from a series of keynote speakers, including Naomi Eisenstadt, Director of the government's Social Exclusion Task Force, whose three-pronged strategy involves reforming systems, such as children's services; performance management to ensure services are delivered to vulnerable groups; and innovation at the front line, to build an evidence base for what works.

Citing research showing unemployed men have a 20 per cent increased risk of death, occupational psychologist David Carew, of the Department of Work and Pensions, said that work was key to social inclusion – it's good for health and creates identity and purpose. 'If ever there was a challenge in the 21st century alongside climate change, then making everyone's lives a little better, is it,' he said.

David Morris of the National Social Inclusion Programme made vivid the

Herculean size of the social inclusion task, revealing, for example, that while less than a quarter of adults with mental health problems are in work, less than 40 per cent of employers say they will recruit people with mental health problems. 'We can't get very far without collaboration from professional bodies,' he said.

During the afternoon session, psychologists described some of the social inclusion work they've been doing on the ground. For example, mental health is not covered in the national curriculum, but Dave Harper and Catherine Sholl of the University of East London, have tested a psychosocial educational intervention for teenagers, which involves information on mental distress as well as the chance to meet 'Joe', a mental health service user. Teenagers in north west London who participated in these sessions showed improved attitudes compared with a control class. 'The teenagers were really open to changing their attitudes and really enjoyed meeting Joe,' Sholl said.

Elsewhere, Jan Bostock of

Northumberland Psychological Services and lay preacher and former service user Michael Lavelle, described their work helping people with mental health problems manage their finances. 'We're so good at the bio-psycho approach,' said Bostock, 'it's almost as if we need to forget it and focus on the social.'

Lavelle pointed out that it's hard enough to cope with a mental health problem without the added burden and stigma of falling into debt.

Geoff Shepherd, Policy Adviser to The Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, ended the day with a wake-up call regarding the state of our

prisons, which, he said, are 'appalling' when it comes to mental health. Mental health problems are four to five times more prevalent in prisons, yet they have one sixth of the mental health resources. 'It's a challenge for the BPS,' he said. 'The things that work for people outside prison... why aren't prisoners given them? They're people after all.'

The seminar was organised by the Society's Professional Practice Board following meetings with members of the National Institute for Mental Health in England and the Care Services Improvement Partnership. CJ

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THE curious inconsistencies in the way we use language can provide a window into our cognitions, our emotions and even our social relations. That was Steve Pinker's message at the Old Market Theatre in Brighton last month, where he was promoting his new book *The Stuff of Thought*.

Pinker gave the example of how we talk about being 'underwater' or 'underground' when really those situations entail being surrounded by water or surrounded by ground. Such anomalies betray an intuitive sense of physics in the way we think about the world, in this case demonstrating how we view the world digitally, such as in 'up or down', 'left or right'. In referring to being underwater or underground, our language shows we are principally concerned with the boundary of being above or below a hypothetical edge.

Meanwhile, the way we talk about time reveals we conceive of the past as a loosely defined period stretching back all the way to the Big Bang. Hence, Pinker said, the sense in Groucho Marx's 'I've had a perfectly wonderful evening,

but this wasn't it.' In contrast, we tend to talk about the future as something that is subject to our control, hence the wilful tone of Churchill's 'We shall fight them on the beaches'.

We also use space as a proxy for time ('Let's push that meeting back an hour'). Children sometimes make errors like 'We'd better pack now, because tomorrow we won't have space to pack'; Pinker has argued that this points towards some kind of innate cognitive machinery, predisposing us to think of time as if it were space, to move from the abstract to the more concrete.

Pinker cautions we shouldn't dismiss such observations as mere semantics. Take the way we talk about quantities. We can refer to multiple instances of an object, such as in 'pebbles', or we can refer to an amorphous quantity of stuff, such as 'gravel'. Now apply this to the 9/11 terror attacks, he said. Did disaster strike, or did two towers get destroyed? The answer has profound financial implications: the World Trade Center site was insured for \$3.5 million per destructive event.

CJ

RESEARCH FUNDING NEWS

The BBSRC offer a number of Fellowship schemes to support UK university academic staff, including:

- **Professorial Fellowships** (two awards) provide support for world-class scientists with a proven track record of developing new and innovative research to develop dramatic and novel lines of work.
- Research Development Fellowships (five awards) are for **newer members of university teaching staff** who wish to devote themselves to full-time research. Applications that develop interdisciplinary work by integrating new techniques or methodologies into research are particularly encouraged. The closing date for both Schemes is 14 November 2007.

□ Further details: www.bbsrc.ac.uk/funding/fellowships/Welcome.html

Funding is available from the EPSRC to support **e-Science networking projects**. Suggested projects should provide opportunities for networking and promotion activities to share best practice in the application of e-Science techniques. The EPSRC wish to build national and international networks and interactions that facilitate the wider exploitation of e-Science approaches to research.

The closing date for applications is 27 November 2007.

□ Further details: www.epsrc.ac.uk/CallsForProposals/e-ScienceNetworking.htm

The American Association of University Women is seeking applications for their International Fellowships (six awards). These provide funding for **women graduates** to study, full-time, at American universities. Applicants must show a commitment to the advancement of women and girls by their previous work and proposed area of study or research.

The closing date for applications is 1 December 2007.

Further details: www.aauw.org/education/fga/fellowships_grants/international.cfm

The National Down Syndrome Society's Charles J. Epstein Down Syndrome Research Awards sponsor research into the medical, genetic, behavioural and learning problems associated with **Down's syndrome**. Funding of between \$5000 and \$35,000 per annum is available.

The closing date for applications is 15 December 2007.

Further details: tinyurl.com/297o9t

The British Occupational Health Research Foundation specialises in the provision of evidence-based solutions to practical questions asked by employers and their advisers. Current research priorities include the effect that leading an **active lifestyle** has on absenteeism, productivity and health amongst sedentary employees; and **mental health**, particularly the research priorities identified in the Foundation's 'Evidence review on workplace interventions for people with common mental health problems' report.

The closing date for applications is 24 February 2008.

Further details: www.bohrf.org.uk/content/app_grnt.html

For a list of current funding opportunities go to www.bps.org.uk/funds
Funding bodies should e-mail news to Elizabeth Beech on elibee@bps.org.uk for possible inclusion.