

# Listen with mother

New research highlights poorer mother–child interaction in twins with delayed language. **NEIL MARTIN**

ONE of the intriguing findings in the literature on the development of language is that twins tend to develop language later than singletons. On average, the delay is about three months by the time infants have reached three years of age. Several reasons have been mooted for this discrepancy. Among these are obstetric complications, family background and the interaction between the mother and infant. In two related studies published in the March issue of the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* Michael Rutter, Karen Thorpe and others from the Institute of Psychiatry and the Universities of Queensland and Bristol have pitted these alternative explanations against each other. One seems to be more important than the others.

The group measured the communication and language abilities of 96 pairs of twins and 98 pairs of singletons who were no more than 30 months apart in terms of

chronological age. Measures were taken at 20 months and three years.

In the first of their studies, Rutter *et al.* found that the language ability of twins was 1.7 months below singletons when the infants were 20 months; this difference increased to 3.1 months at three years. There was no significant relationship between language development and obstetric/neonatal complications, birthweight or congenital abnormalities, thus ruling out these factors as probable causes of the language delay in twins.

In the second study Thorpe and her team used the same sample but this time measured the degree of mother–infant communication that occurred. This interaction was found to predict language development significantly. Having a mother who encouraged the child to speak, who elaborated the children's comments, who read with her child and who talked about the story she was reading was associated

with significantly better language development. This interaction was significantly less apparent in the twin group. The mothers did not differ significantly in terms of their education or social background, which suggests that these factors had negligible effects on the results.

Discussing the implications of their findings Thorpe *et al.* suggest that 'it follows that parents of twins need to be aware of the likely importance for language development of the ways in which they interact and communicate with their twin children'.

Rutter, M., Thorpe, K., Greenwood, K., Northstone, K. & Golding, J. (2003). Twins as a natural experiment to study the causes of mild language delay. I: Design; twin-singleton differences in language, and obstetric risks. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 44, 326–341.  
Thorpe, K., Rutter, M. & Greenwood, K. (2003). Twins as a natural experiment to study the causes of mild language delay. II: Family interaction risk factors. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 44, 342–355.

# Nipping bullying in the bud

**JON SUTTON** reports on the first study linking workplace bullying back to the playground.

FIND a way to cope with bullying at school and you may be saving yourself a whole lot of trouble later in life. That's the suggestion from the first study to report an association between victimisation at school and work.

Peter Smith and Monika Singer (Goldsmiths College) teamed up with Helge Hoel and Cary Cooper (UMIST) to survey 5288 adults from a wide range of workplaces across Great Britain. Participants were asked to think back to their school days to find out whether they saw themselves as a bully, victim, bully/victim, bystander or not involved at all. They were also asked which of 10

copying strategies they commonly used, including making fun of it, fighting back, getting help or staying away from school. This information was related to self-reports of bullying others or being bullied in the workplace.

Just over 10 per cent of workers reported being bullied in the previous six months. The highest risk of workplace victimisation was for those who had been both bullies and victims at school, supporting suggestions from previous research that this category of school pupils should be a focus of concern.

In school a wide range of coping strategies was reported, but 'got help from teachers' was only reported by 6 per cent. Males more often said that they 'tried to avoid the situation', 'fought back', or 'tried to make fun of it'. Females more often reported that they 'tried to ignore it', 'got help', or 'did not really cope'. Respondents who said they 'did not really cope', or used some 'other' strategy when bullied at school were more likely to have been

bullied in the previous six months of their working life than those who reported other coping strategies. The authors suggest that the remaining eight coping strategies could all be seen as ways of dealing with the situation, and that someone who checked 'did not really cope' or 'other' 'probably was not able to use effective coping strategies through lack of confidence, lack of social support, or other factors which have an appreciable component of individual psychological characteristics as explanatory factors'.

However, the authors are keen to stress that 'many victims at school do not become workplace victims', and that factors such as environment, social support and individual factors that have changed over time are probably more important in determining whether victimisation continues from playground to workplace.

Smith, P.K., Singer, M., Hoel, H. & Cooper, C.L. (2003). Victimization in the school and the workplace: Are there any links? *British Journal of Psychology*, 94, 175–188.

## Associate Editor: G. NEIL MARTIN

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# What might have been

**PAUL REDFORD** reports on a cross-cultural study of regret.

**O**UR lives go through many twists and turns – some events we look back on with pleasure, others we are embarrassed about and others still we regret. However, although most other emotional responses to past behaviour focus on what we have done, regret can focus on both what we have done and what we haven't done. Regret involves a belief that we wish the decision could in some way be revoked. This involves complex cognitive processes concerning the causes and consequences of actions, alternative possibilities and outcomes, and an associated emotional response.

Although a number of studies have indicated that we regret action more than inaction, this finding seems to be time linked. In the short term we may regret things that we have done, but over time we regret more things that we haven't done but wished we had. However, most of this research has been conducted in the US,

where there is strong belief in self-actualisation (anything can be achieved if one just tries).

In a cross-cultural analysis of regret



Thomas Gilovich (Cornell University) and colleagues found that in line with the US findings, participants in China, Japan and Russia were also more likely in the long term to regret things that they hadn't done than things that they had. In an analysis of the types of issues that individuals from the

different cultures (including the US) may regret, in terms of their self-focus or other-focus, there was no difference between the samples.

Gilovich *et al.* propose that we have ways of reducing 'the sting' of regrets of actions over time (every cloud has a silver lining!), but the sting of inaction seems to increase over time. We realise that the consequence of failure might not have been that bad, or we realise that we might have the ability to do something we thought we may fail at. So although if you don't try you can't fail, you will feel worse about not trying than if you at least give it a go and fail.

Gilovich, T., Wang, R. F., Regan, D. & Nishina, S. (2003). Regrets of action and inaction across cultures. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 34, 61–71.

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