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*Postgraduate Affairs Group Annual Conference, University of Plymouth, 14–16 July 1997*

*Consciousness and Experiential Psychology Section First Annual Conference, Parsifal College, The Open University, London, 11–12 October 1997*

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*Mathematical, Statistical & Computing Section Annual Meeting, Birkbeck College, University of London, 22 November 1997*

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## Postgraduate Affairs Group

*Annual Conference, University of Plymouth, 14–16 July 1997*

### **The effect of temporal frequency on contrast gain control**

G ABONIZIO, University College London

Adaptation to a high contrast grating leads to improvements in differential contrast sensitivity (e.g. Greenlee & Heitger, 1988; Ohzawa *et al.*, 1985). Previous studies have found that the magnitude of contrast adaptation effects is dependent on adapting temporal frequency (e.g. Lorenceau, 1987; Wright & Johnston, 1985). The present study addresses the question of whether the improvements in differential contrast sensitivity found after contrast adaptation, have a similar dependency on adapting temporal frequency. Subjects were adapted for five minutes to a 2 c/deg sine wave grating of 80 per cent contrast. The temporal frequency of the adapting grating was varied between sessions. Adapting temporal frequencies were either of 0, 0.05, 0.1, 0.2, 0.5, 2 or 4 Hz. The magnitude of improvements in differential contrast sensitivity was found to increase with increasing adapting temporal frequency. The optimum adapting temporal frequency was 0.1 Hz. It is suggested that the contrast gain control mechanism previously proposed to account for the improvements in contrast discrimination after high contrast adaptation (Greenlee & Heitger, 1988; Ohzawa *et al.*, 1985) may operate primarily on the temporal frequency tuned cells of the visual cortex.

### **Negative intrusive cognitions: Differential decay – rates of emotional and neutral words**

M ABBOTT, M TAFT & P LOVIBOND, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia

Intrusive cognitions are repetitive thoughts that are difficult to dismiss. The present study

employs a repetition priming paradigm to investigate the resistance to decay of negative intrusive cognitions. The repetition priming effect refers to the finding that subjects are faster to recognise a word on its second presentation. This effect becomes weaker when intervening items are placed between the first and second presentation of a word; no further decay takes place after four intervening words. Subjects who experience negative intrusive cognitions about failure and subjects who did not experience intrusive cognitions classified failure-related and control words in a lexical decision task. Stimuli is repeated with zero, one, three and seven items intervening between the two presentations. Intrusives are expected to show a stronger repetition priming effect for failure-related stimuli, compared to non-intrusives. Furthermore, it is expected that priming effects will decay more slowly for intrusives than for non-intrusives.

### **The self-perceptions of pupils with Down's Syndrome in relation to their academic competence and social acceptance**

A BEGLEY, University of Warwick

In the light of recent evidence concerning the integration of children with Down's Syndrome, it is important to research the effects of school placement on the self-concept of those pupils. This paper presents data from stage one of a two-stage study on the self-perceptions and self-esteem of pupils with Down's Syndrome, between eight and 16 years old, in two school-related domains: academic competence and social acceptance. Ninety pupils participated in the first stage of the study (76 attended special schools and 14 attended mainstream schools). The pupils completed the Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence and Acceptance (Harter & Pike, 1984) and a School-Situations Grid. The majority of pupils have positive views about themselves. A number of significant sex and age differences were found. School placement has no significant

effects on the self-concept of the pupils. It is concluded that school placement may be of secondary importance in shaping the self-concept of pupils with Down's Syndrome.

### **Visual evoked potentials (VEPs) in Alzheimer's Disease**

J CALVERT, Glasgow Caledonian University

The visual decline in Alzheimer's Disease is different from that in normal ageing, although acuity levels remain normal. Visual Evoked Potentials (VEPs) are used as an objective measure of visual functioning, and can identify vision problems not normally found in a typical eye exam. Past authors (e.g. Wright, Harding & Orwin, 1984) have found characteristic patterns of VEP responses in Alzheimer patients. However, by altering the stimulus parameters other investigators have found varying results. This study aims to investigate the VEP responses of Alzheimer patients to a broad range of stimulus parameters to identify exactly what changes occur in the visual system during Alzheimer's Disease. The presentation reviews past research, and describes the chosen VEP methodology.

### **Nurses – comparative risk perceptions and their knowledge of and attitudes to HIV/AIDS**

LJ CARROLL, Glasgow Caledonian University

As the WHO predicts that there will be 30 million-40 million people infected with HIV by the year 2000, nurses will be treating HIV/AIDS patients more often in the future. This poster focuses on comparisons of nurses perceptions of their own risk of contracting HIV and their perceptions of other nurses risks. It also looks at the relationship between nurses attitudes to, and knowledge of, HIV/AIDS, their comparative risk perceptions, and their use of precautions when treating patients who may be HIV+. It adds to previous research

## **'Dimensions of controversy' in the writings of HJ Eysenck**

R RAWLES, University College London  
HJ Eysenck (1916-1997) was a dedicated and subtle experimental psychologist whose major scientific concern was personality. He was also an inveterate polemicist who had the nerve to court vigorous debate on a variety of controversial subjects. This talk examines five dimensions of these enduring debates: (1) Intelligence: his claims that this is largely inherited and that American Negroes 'show some degree of genetic inferiority' are criticized. (2) Freudian psychoanalysis: his trajectory from accepting certain Freudian mechanisms to a complete denial of the value of psychoanalysis is traced. (3) Sexual behaviour: his belief that social pressures always force the homosexual to seek treatment and that aversion therapy be available for sexual 'deviants' is appraised. (4) Psychology of politics: his reduction of an individual's political beliefs and ideology to genetic factors is discussed. (5) Borderlands of knowledge: his late enthusiasms for ESP and astrology are scrutinized. It is concluded that Hans Eysenck defended the truth as he perceived it.

## **Families that contain: Regulating gender and reproducing child sexual abuse**

P REAVEY, S WARNER, South Bank University

The aim of this paper is to critically interrogate normative understandings of what constitutes a 'safe' and 'containing' family environment. Contemporary conceptualizations of 'good' parenting, and healthy family environments draw on attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1973; Ainsworth, 1967) to define the optimum psychological environment in which to raise children. This assumes that normative parenting consists of the ability to furnish children with a 'safe base' from which children can explore and develop autonomy and secure attached relationships in the future. In this, a separation is effected between securely attached children and insecurely attached children which is based on the assumption that styles of parenting are functionally distinct and oppositional. Our contention is that such oppositions fail precisely because they assume that a template for good parenting is undifferentiated and over-arching, and hence is applicable across all family systems and structures. This paper draws on a feminist post-structuralist epistemology to problematize the normative and gendered assumptions embedded in theories of family life, with specific reference to the reproduction and containment of child sexual abuse.

## **Student debt and health: What are the effects?**

R ROBERTS, J GOLDING, T TOWELL, University of Westminster

A sample of 360 students completed a questionnaire providing information on demographic characteristics, financial circumstances, smoking, drug and alcohol use. Physical and psychological well-being were assessed using a 14-item inventory of physical symptoms, the SF-36 and General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12). With the exception of physical functioning, all sub-scales of the SF-36 and the GHQ indicated levels of health significantly below population norms matched for age and sex. Poorer mental health was related to longer working hours outside university and difficulty in paying bills. Students who had considered abandoning study for financial reasons had poorer mental health, lower levels of social functioning and vitality and poorer physical health as indicated by physical health variables of the SF-36. They were also heavier smokers. In addition, being in debt was significantly associated with knowing people involved in prostitution, crime or drug dealing to help support themselves financially.

## **Coping with a heart attack: The use of coping strategies**

E ROTHEILER, E SPEED, Glasgow Caledonian University, C MORRISON, Greater Glasgow Health Board

The aims were to establish 1) differences in use of coping strategies (CS) by myocardial infarction (MI) patients and a random sample of the general population, and (2) variables influencing the choice of CS. The 24 item (Carver, 1997) BRIEF COPE questionnaire was modified to 16 items, each representing one CS. Eight CS were classified as active, eight as passive. Three hundred and sixty-six MI patients, and 339 age- and sex-matched controls completed the MODIFIED COPE and other medical, behavioural and psychological questionnaires, the latter measuring Depression, Anxiety, Anger and Hostility. Methods of analysis included factor analyses, group comparison and stepwise multiple regression. MI patients and controls showed an identical pattern of strategy choice. Active strategies were generally more popular. The number, type, and effect size of medical, demographic, psychological and behavioural variables influencing the CS varied. Differences and similarities between MI cases and controls in the way their coping is affected by these variables are discussed.

## **Nature, nurture, and nourishment: A twin-study of eating disorders in children**

RM ROWE, A PICKLES, Institute of Psychiatry, London, E SIMONOFF, Guy's Hospital, London

Eating disorders are a serious form of psychiatric disturbance in school-aged children. This paper examines demographic, family, and genetic risk factors for symptoms of anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa in the Virginia Twin Study of Adolescent Behavioural Development. Age and sex trends in symptomatology are reported and the effects of a number of family risk measures are examined. Using structural equation modelling, the relative contribution of genetic and environmental variation to the eating disorder symptoms are estimated. The best-fitting models suggest that additive genetic and non-shared environmental components are important in both anorexia and bulimia while a shared environment component is not significant. The relationship between the results of the two modelling approaches is discussed.

## **The effects of exposure to human pheromones on mood and sexual attraction**

A SCHOLEY, J BOSWORTH, V DIMITRIKAKI, University of Northumbria  
Pheromones are airborne chemical stimuli which are released by individuals and elicit physiological and/or behavioural responses in members of the same species. The possibility of a functional pheromonal system being involved in human sexual behaviour has remained controversial. This paper describes experiments demonstrating that exposure to human pheromones affects both mood and sexual attraction. Pheromones were collected from clean male and female donors' overnight underarm secretions. Participants (N = 120) were unknowingly exposed to the pheromones (or a control condition), completed the Profile of Mood States Questionnaire then rated an opposite-sex vignette character on aspects of attractiveness. Opposite-sex pheromone exposure resulted in significantly higher ratings of the vignette character's sexual and physical attractiveness. There were also effects on mood dimensions which differed with respect to pheromone exposure and gender. We conclude that pheromones play a role in the sensory factors which determine physical and sexual attraction.

## **Movies or photographs: Which one tells the truth?**

C SENIOR, J BARNES, T O'DOWD, H PHILLIPS, AS DAVID, Institute of Psychiatry, London

We investigated the effects of motion on the perception of facial expressions. This was carried out by i) producing the dynamic facial stimuli employed and ii) the rating of the material. The stimuli were created by covertly filming over 200 volunteers as they watched affective material; from this 73 individuals produced usable video excerpts. The final video series was validated against a different group of subjects' ratings of affect content. A final series of 60 excerpts (20 identities with three emotions) was created. Participants were asked to view stills taken from the series or three second video clips. They were asked to rate each stimulus according to the presence or absence of six expressions (namely disgust, sadness, happiness, fear, surprise, anger and neutral) and subsequently to rate the intensity of the expression on a six point scale. Results indicated that when presented in a dynamic manner, facial expressions are identified correctly than when presented statically. However, the dynamic expressions were rated as being less intense than static. Limitations and possible avenues for future work are noted.

## **Young adults discuss expectations of family life**

J SMITHSON, Manchester Metropolitan University

This paper explores the orientation of young women and men (aged 18-30) to family, drawing on a qualitative transnational study conducted in five European countries. Young adults from a range of backgrounds were asked in focus groups and individual interviews about future life course expectations, especially concerning family, work and gender roles. Most participants were not married, and only a small minority were parents. How do these young adults, mostly in transition between family of origin and future, envisaged family scenarios, talk about family? How do recent social and economic changes, and particularly changing notions of gender, affect this generation's orientations towards family? While young women and men talk about wanting 'equal' family roles than previous generations, they also describe gender-specific expectations about their future lives. This paper considers the differing meanings of 'family' for young women and men, especially concerning future expectations and choices.

## **Euthanasia, suicidal behaviours and terminal illness**

P STARACE, Regional Co-ordinating Centre for AIDS Policy, L SHERR, Royal Free Hospital, London

An increased risk of suicidal behaviours is considered almost a natural concomitant of many terminal diseases such as AIDS, malignant neoplasm, multiple sclerosis and Huntingtons disease. Common reasons for suicidal ideation and acts in AIDS patients are social stigma, withdrawal of family support, diminished or lost occupational functioning, loss of personal autonomy, sense of hopelessness and concern with the burden caused to significant others. This presentation reviews the empirical literature on suicide and end of life issues in HIV/AIDS with comparisons for other conditions. A Medline search located relevant studies covering January 1985 to September 1997 as well as the international AIDS conference literature. The studies reveal the need to facilitate access to palliative care, to provide physician education and pointers for disease management. The advent of new therapies which may turn AIDS from a terminal to a chronic disease are not covered in the literature yet, but consideration of these issues may change the debate and add a new dimension to end of life decision making and needs.