

FORUM LIGHTER SIDE

The late, great, Richard Gregory, who died in May, wrote *Eye and Brain*, a perception text enjoyed by almost every student mainly because it has no formulas or graphs, just visual illusions galore. On Richard's website (www.richardgregory.org) is a paper, somewhat improbably written for the Vatican, which says, 'it is hard to believe that learning can't be fun'. Richard was a fun teacher, and he was fun because he was funny, finding 'funny ha-ha' and 'funny peculiar' in the most mundane phenomena. The ever-punning Richard would have enjoyed his own commemoration, called a *funeral*.

Psychologists ought to know about fun, because everyone else does. On 'fun', Google has 531,000,000 pages of images (and turning off Safe Search illustrates Freud's description of people as 'polymorphously perverse'). There is 'Nuns having fun', 'Fun with Braille', 'Making geometry fun', 'Put the fun between your legs' (a bike advert), and a contrived eight-line mathematical proof on what constitutes fun.

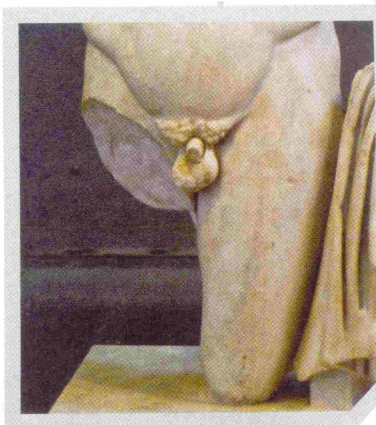
What though of the psychology of fun? All that PsyclINFO has is such heartsinks as, 'Sexual behavior at work: Fun or folly?', 'Exploring the role of positive and negative consequences in understanding perceptions and evaluations of individual drinking events', and 'Pottermania: Good, clean fun or cultural hegemony?'. Neither fun nor informative. An exception may be, 'Is sex just fun? How sexual activity improves health', but I won't provide a plot spoiler.

Few psychologists have asked how people have fun. Fortunately University College London undergrads are made of sterner stuff. In our three-week, second-year attitudes lab, a hundred students use focus groups, structured interviews, grounded theory, and attitude questionnaires to explore a single-word topic, such as 'Fashion', 'Art', 'Science', 'Europe' or

'Careers'. Two years ago we knew we'd enjoy the class, because everyone laughed and clapped when we announced the topic: 'Fun'.

Loads of ideas and data were generated, and we found five different types of fun: sociability (laughing with friends), contentment (relaxing with family), achievement (doing things well), ecstatic (that's a small 'e', and means crazy and excited), and sensual (do I have to explain everything?). Not everyone liked all of them (and certainly not at the same time).

The un-fun thing was when Adrian Furnham and I wrote a research paper, full of correlations and factor analyses. Perhaps we shouldn't have called it, 'Fun, fun, fun', but good, indifferent and bad journals all rejected it. For some sad, po-faced, reviewers, fun meant dumping from a great height on those doing fun research. Eventually a new journal understood us: 'It is fun to read this study about fun.' Find out more at *Psychology* (had no-one thought of that title before?), via www.scirp.org/journal/psych. Have fun!



Chris McManus studied scrotal asymmetry in Greek sculpture: see <http://tinyurl.com/greekballs>

Chris McManus is at University College London. This column aims to prompt discussion and debate, and the odd wry smile.