

**Richardson, J. D., Paularena, K. I., Belcher, J. W., et al (1994)** Solar wind oscillations with a 1.3-year period. *Geophysical Research Letters*, **21**, 1559–1560.

**Salib, E. & Cortina-Borja, M. (2006)** Effect of month of birth on the risk of suicide. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, **188**, 416–422.

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**Authors' reply** We are pleased that Cornélissen & Halberg find that our recent association of month of birth and suicide complements their earlier findings in Minnesota. However, they regarded the use of stacked data, at the outset of analysis, as monthly counts as a limitation which they claim can be remedied by focus upon broader chronomes.

In their analysis of suicides in Minnesota from 1968 to 2002 they claimed to have confirmed the concept of transyears, both a near-transyear and a far-transyear. They also claimed to have found the 1-yearly component to be bigger in the longer dataset (Halberg *et al*, 2005). They also reported a 20-year cycle in Minnesota suicides, which is not dissimilar to what they believe exists in many other phenomena of psychiatric interest such as religiosity, wars and crime. Halberg *et al* (2005) stated that the 'photic and thermic calendar year which have been the main focus in suicide research, should now be extended to include not just the effect of seasons but magnetoperiodisms, including the newly discovered near-transyear.'

Cornélissen & Halberg are therefore interested in looking at the data from England and Wales to investigate not only whether transyears can be aligned with calendar-yearly components, but also whether during the span examined the calendar year or the transyear is larger in

amplitude. Interestingly they have made almost identical comments regarding another study on autism (Bolton *et al*, 1992). We are not sure whether they had access to the unstacked data for autism and month of birth, and if so what was the outcome of their analysis?

Providing that we have definitive evidence to substantiate the above claims, we agree that it would be most interesting to compare, before stacking, the chronomes of suicides at birth and death on the same population.

**Bolton, P., Pickles, A., Harrington, R., et al (1992)** Season of birth: issues, approaches and findings for autism. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, **33**, 509–530.

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## One hundred years ago

### Alcohol amnesia

In the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* for August, 1906, Dr. Isador H. Coriat, of Boston, discusses the experimental synthesis of dissociated memories in alcoholic amnesia. In this condition the lost memories are merely subconscious, and during a distraction or inhibition of the upper consciousness may come to the surface and occupy a place in the conscious mental life. This emergence of lost memories occurs in dreams or in delirious or hallucinatory states; it may also be attained by means of proper experimental methods, such as hypnosis, or by the experimental distraction method (hypnoidal) of Sidis. This last method has been employed by Dr. Coriat, and has yielded useful results in the experiments which he records. His first case was admitted to hospital suffering from delirium tremens. On recovery it was found that the patient had a sharply localized amnesia, from noon of one day to the morning of the next. The experiment was made in a quiet and somewhat darkened room; no leading

questions were asked, and the only suggestion made to the patient was that he must try and fill up the blank period. "The patient was asked to close his eyes and to listen intently while a magazine clipping relating to the Monroe doctrine was read to him, the reading occupying about three minutes." He was then told to open his eyes and say what events had come into his mind. He immediately replied, "I have it all now," and then proceeded to recall the sequence of events which he had previously forgotten. In a second case of a similar nature reading experiments were again tried. The first was unsuccessful, but the second produced a partial return of memory; a complete restoration of memory could not be brought about, although further experiments were attempted. In the third case of alcoholic amnesia reading methods proved unsuccessful, and as a substitute for these the patient was ordered to listen for three minutes to the tick of a stop watch. This treatment was adopted on four occasions, and resulted in a partial restoration of

memory. In Dr. Coriat's fourth case the extremely monotonous sound stimulus of the stopwatch was again applied. Three trials were made, and memory was restored in isolated patches, which afterwards were connected and fused together in chronological order. Dr. Coriat observes that in the deep-seated amnesias the accurately gauged form of stimulus provided by the stopwatch is more efficacious than the reading method for inducing the hypnoidal state. We congratulate Dr. Coriat on discovering a new application of the Monroe doctrine. He has shown it to be a useful restorative for alcoholics, though with a scientific candour which transcends patriotism he admits that it is less stimulative than the ticking of a stopwatch.

### REFERENCE

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