SIGSEC AND EDITOR: Paul Eaves

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Cognito

Happy New Year!

Welcome to the New Year's edition of Cognito! As we turn the page on another year and contemplate fresh starts, this issue gathers some pieces that speak to both our challenges and possibilities.

In 'A Nightmare Over Christmas', the psychology of nightmares and troubled sleep is explored. What better time than January, when post-holiday exhaustion meets ambitious resolutions, to understand why our sleeping minds sometimes torment us and what we might do about it?

Mike Griffiths continues our discussion on lottery tickets and examines our relationship with probability and decision-making. As many of us set financial goals for the year ahead, it's worth considering how we think about chance, risk, and rational choice.

'Pleased to er... er... Meet You' tackles that familiar New Year scenario: meeting new people at gatherings and immediately forgetting their names. Understanding the psychology of name recall might just save you some awkward moments in the months ahead.

Finally, Weverton Silva's excellent piece on 'Giftedness in Adulthood' explores hidden trajectories and expanded modes of functioning. For those considering how they might develop or redirect their abilities in the year to come, this offers valuable perspective on potential that doesn't always follow conventional paths.

Wishing you all a New Year that bring you happiness.

Inside this issue

Worth thinking about?

"What the new year brings to you will depend a great deal on what you bring to the new year."
Vern McLellan

The Frontal View

I think it is easy to view the New Year just as a culturally constructed temporal marker and leave it at that. However, I think it holds genuine psychological significance for many Mensans seeking personal change. The phenomenon of New Year's resolutions represents what some term the 'contemplation stage' of behaviour change, where intention crystallises into commitment, albeit often without adequate preparation for the 'action' and 'maintenance' stages that follow.

Our annual ritual of resolution-making reveals both opportunity and challenge. The optimism inherent in these declarations aligns with what is called hope theory, whereby folks will engage in goal-directed thinking that combines agency (motivation) and pathways (planning). However, research consistently demonstrates that approximately 80% of resolutions fail by February (Mine do!), suggesting that cultural enthusiasm exceeds psychological readiness for sustained change.

Before we dismiss resolutions as futile exercises though, I'd encourage an examination of the underlying needs these declarations represent. What does a specific resolution reveal about a person's values, their perceived deficits, or their aspirations for wholeness? Person-centered theory suggests that authentic change emerges from congruence between one's actual and ideal self, rather than from externally imposed expectations or calendar-driven urgency.

So, this might indicate that the therapeutic value lies not in achievement of resolutions but in the reflective process they initiate.

Paul

Giftedness in Adulthood

Hidden Trajectories and Expanded Modes of Functioning

When people talk about giftedness, the image that usually comes to mind is that of very quick, very curious children, often with some kind of academic distinction. But when we turn to adult life, things look different—less obvious, more diffuse. Many individuals go decades without making any connection between what they feel, think, or perceive and what the literature has described for more than half a century.

Part of this happens because, historically, the topic has remained confined to a school-based model. If someone was not "the prodigy of the class," that's it—they grow up assuming none of this applies to them. Yet contemporary models point in another direction.

1. Contemporary Models and a Broader Understanding

Joseph Renzulli, through his Three-Ring Model, already indicated that high cognitive ability alone is not enough. There is creativity, there is deep task commitment. It's a combination, not a test score.

Françoys Gagné, in his article about the Differentiated Model of Giftedness (DMGT), takes a complementary route. He clearly separates natural aptitudes from developed talents. And this explains a great deal. Because, in the end, there are people with enormous potential who simply never found the environment, circumstances, or even the time to turn that into something visible. The capacities don't evaporate—they remain stored, waiting for an occasion to emerge.

2. Intensities and Ways of Perceiving the World

Kazimierz Dąbrowski discussed a set of intensities (sensory, cognitive, emotional, and others) that many adults recognise in their own functioning. It is something like living with an internal "volume" set higher—not in a dramatic sense, but in perceiving layers that pass unnoticed to others (See more about these sensitivities in other articles in this newsletter).

This, of course, does not imply pathology. It is perfectly possible to have heightened sensitivity and still be emotionally stable. The difficulty arises when the person tries to interpret all this with no conceptual reference. Then it becomes "I'm too much," "I'm overly anxious," "I complicate everything," and so on—explanations that often hinder more than help.

3. Masking – a Quiet Adaptation

In adulthood, a very common yet rarely discussed phenomenon emerges: masking. Without noticing, the person learns to adjust—to speak less, to slow down their thinking in groups, to avoid comments that might sound strange, to hide interests that no one else seems to share.

This does not arise from a conscious decision; it just happens. And when they finally notice, the person has already incorporated this way of "dimming their own brightness" so as not to disturb others. It is an adaptation, yes, but one that charges a price: the loss of reference to one's natural functioning.

4. How Giftedness Tends to Manifest in Adulthood

Unlike childhood, when there are clearer indicators, adult expression is subtler. Instead of academic achievements, patterns emerge:

- ease in grasping complex ideas;
- discomfort with overly repetitive tasks;
- silent irritation in the face of illogical reasoning;
- need for autonomy, including intellectual autonomy;
- deep analysis—sometimes excessively deep.

It is also common to see obstacles: loss of motivation in predictable environments, difficulty setting limits, fluctuations in energy, and a recurrent sense of being "slightly out of place" in social interactions.

None of these elements defines giftedness on its own. But placed side by side, within a person's life history, they begin to make sense as parts of a single mode of functioning.

5. Clinical and Subjective Implications

Giftedness is not a diagnosis. But suffering does emerge when someone tries to fit into moulds that do not align with their way of functioning.

Many adults describe:

These experiences arise from a delicate interaction between cognitive predisposition, emotional sensitivity, life history, and environment—not from any single cause.

- self-criticism that doesn't know where to stop;
- difficulty slowing down their thinking;
- frustration in predictable environments;
- an incessant search for coherence;
- emotional exhaustion after intense social interactions.

6. Final Considerations

The discussion on giftedness in adulthood is still forming. The field is young compared to research on children. What seems clear, however, is that understanding this mode of functioning does not create hierarchies of value. It mainly helps give shape to experiences that have accompanied a person for years, often without a name.

Over to Readers

Have you recognised any of these patterns in your own experience of adulthood? How has understanding giftedness in this way affected your self-perception? How have you navigated the experience of masking or intensity in your own life?

Weverton Silva

Psychologist — CRP 04/54978

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Next Issue...

A Call for Your Thoughts on IQ

The next edition of Cognito will explore a topic that sits at the heart of our community: IQ itself. What does intelligence quotient really mean beyond a number? How does it shape our lives, our relationships, and our sense of self?

We're inviting you to share your personal reflections and experiences. Do you tell people your IQ? Perhaps you're selective about who knows, sharing with close friends but not colleagues. Or maybe you've found that mentioning it changes how people interact with you, for better or worse. Some members treat their scores as deeply private, whilst others see them as simply another biographical detail.

Your perspectives matter because they represent lived experiences that go beyond what research papers can capture. Whether you've found your IQ score liberating, limiting, or largely irrelevant to your daily life, we'd love to hear from you. Perhaps you have thoughts on how IQ testing itself has evolved, or questions about what these scores truly measure.

As always, all contributions can remain anonymous if you prefer. Send your reflections, questions, or musings to the usual address. Your insights will help create a rich, nuanced discussion that reflects the diverse experiences within our community.

What does IQ mean to you?

A Nightmare Over Christmas...What's that about?

When we think back on how we enjoyed this Christmas, we conjure images of festive cheer, twinkling lights, and family gatherings. Yet for many of us, the reality is far more complicated. The time between late November and New Year's Day has long been associated with elevated stress levels, sleep disruption, and unwelcome nocturnal visitors in the form of vivid, often distressing, dreams. For members of the Mensa community, these challenges may take on a particular character shaped by the distinct psychological profile that often accompanies high intellectual ability.

The Christmas Stress Phenomenon

Recent research paints a stark picture of the psychological toll the festive season exacts. A 2023 survey by the American Psychological Association found that approximately 89 per cent of American adults experience increased stress during the Christmas period, with 47 per cent reporting grief over lost loved ones and 46 per cent struggling with financial anxiety around gift-giving. Research from the University of Skövde highlighted how financial stress can create a particularly pernicious cycle, where anxiety itself drives impulsive spending behaviours, which in turn deepen financial worries. The season has also been shown to trigger loneliness and feelings of helplessness, particularly among those without immediate family support.

What do you think?

What makes this relevant to Mensans is not merely the prevalence of holiday stress, but how our specific cognitive and emotional characteristics may amplify its effects. Research consistently demonstrates that individuals with high intellectual ability exhibit heightened emotional sensitivity and intensity, sometimes referred to by psychologists as "overexcitabilities" (see Weverton's article in this issue where he talks about these sensitivities). Our acute awareness of the world's complexities, combined with perfectionism and analytical overthinking, can transform the season's demands into something considerably more psychologically taxing.

How Stress Shapes Our Dreams

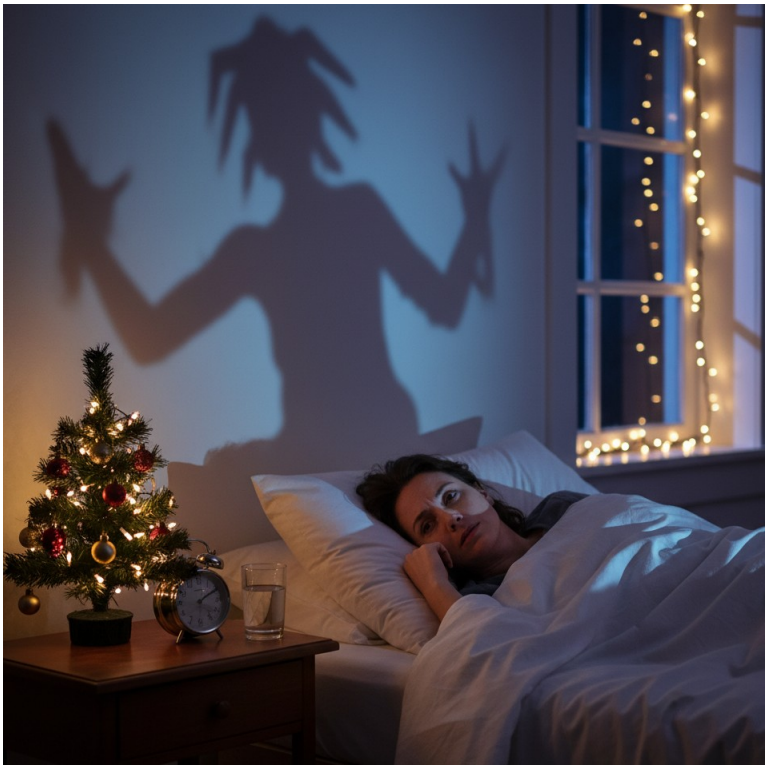
This brings us to the connection between stress and nightmares. Dr Michelle Carr, Director of the Dream Engineering Laboratory in Montreal's Centre for Advanced Research in Sleep Medicine, explains in her research that dreams serve an important psychological function: they allow us to process our experiences, organise memories, and adapt to emotional events. However, the relationship between stress and dreaming is significant. Nightmares become more frequent and severe during periods of emotional upheaval, and they tend to be triggered by experiences of trauma or adversity that recur as the mind attempts to overcome or adapt to negative events.

What distinguishes nightmares from ordinary bad dreams is their intensity. Nightmares are vivid, highly negative dreams that actually awaken the sleeper, often in a panicked state. Bad dreams, by contrast, are milder negative dreams that may feature minor frustrations or confusion but do not cause arousal. Most people experience some negative emotions in their dreams (which is actually normal), but true nightmares break through the boundary between sleep and wakefulness.

The Vulnerability of Gifted Individuals

Research on personality traits associated with nightmare proneness reveals something particularly pertinent to our community. According to Dr Carr's work, people prone to nightmares share certain characteristics: they tend to have heightened emotional sensitivity, react more strongly to emotional situations in waking life, and possess what she describes as "more vivid imaginations in general, an inner life that is sometimes as enriching as it can be terrifying".

This profile closely aligns with what researchers have identified in gifted populations. Multiple studies indicate that high-ability individuals commonly exhibit what psychologist Kazimierz Dabrowski termed "overexcitabilities"—intensified reactions in emotional, imaginative, intellectual, and sensory domains. For Mensans, this means we may literally experience dreams with greater vividness and emotional potency than the general population. Our analytical minds, which serve us so well in solving problems, can turn, during sleep, toward catastrophic thinking and elaborate nightmare scenarios.



The perfectionist tendencies that research consistently identifies in gifted individuals add another layer of vulnerability. Research in the Canadian Journal of Experimental Psychology and the Journal for the Education of the Gifted demonstrates that high-ability individuals frequently set unrealistically high standards for themselves and experience anxiety when falling short of these self-imposed demands. Christmas, with its commercial pressures and family expectations, provides ample fodder for this perfectionist anxiety.

The Vicious Cycle

Dr Carr describes a particularly troubling pattern: when nightmares disrupt sleep, they leave people feeling emotionally drained and exhausted. This emotional depletion reduces our capacity to manage new stressors the following day, which leads to even further disturbance at night, creating a cycle that becomes increasingly difficult to escape. Sleep is one of our crucial tools for restoring emotional balance, and when nightmares hijack this restorative process, we lose precisely the resource we need most during stressful periods.

Consider the psychological state of a high-ability individual during December: worrying about whether holiday gatherings will meet expectations, experiencing financial anxiety about gift purchases, anticipating potential family conflict, and processing grief about absent loved ones. These anxieties do not disappear when we close our eyes. Instead, they enter the dream space, where our vivid imaginations and emotional intensity can amplify them into distressing nocturnal experiences.

Understanding Christmas-Specific Nightmares

It may reassure you to know that nightmare researchers have identified specific patterns in Christmas-related dreams. Dr Kelly Bulkeley, a dream researcher at the Sleep and Dream Database, reports that holiday nightmares sometimes involve symbolic transformations of festive elements. One individual described a recurring nightmare of a Christmas tree that grew increasingly threatening and whirled toward them; another reported seeing a skeleton wearing a Santa hat. For some, Christmas nightmares take the form of "grief dreams"—abstract experiences of loss that may not involve obvious Christmas imagery but emerge from the emotional weight the season carries.

For analytical individuals, understanding that these nightmares represent our minds attempting to process complex emotions can itself be helpful. We are not having irrational dreams; we are having very rational responses to genuine psychological challenges, expressed through the language our sleeping brains use.

Moving Toward Solutions

Dr Carr's recommendations for managing nightmares offer practical hope. She suggests writing down nightmares and working to feel relaxed and safe when recalling them, as this retrains the mind to reduce its threat response to nightmare images. She also recommends the technique of re-imagining or re-writing a nightmare into a more positive version and visualising this revised scenario before falling asleep. These practices help the mind unlearn its repetitive patterns of distressing dream responses.

Beyond nightmare-specific interventions, the broader research on holiday stress emphasises several evidence-based approaches particularly suited to our cognitive style. Physical activity significantly reduces both anxiety and nightmares by releasing endorphins and enhancing sleep quality. Mindfulness practices help harness our analytical minds in service of the present moment rather than allowing them to spiral into catastrophic thinking. Setting realistic expectations and establishing firm boundaries around family obligations removes a significant source of perfectionist anxiety.

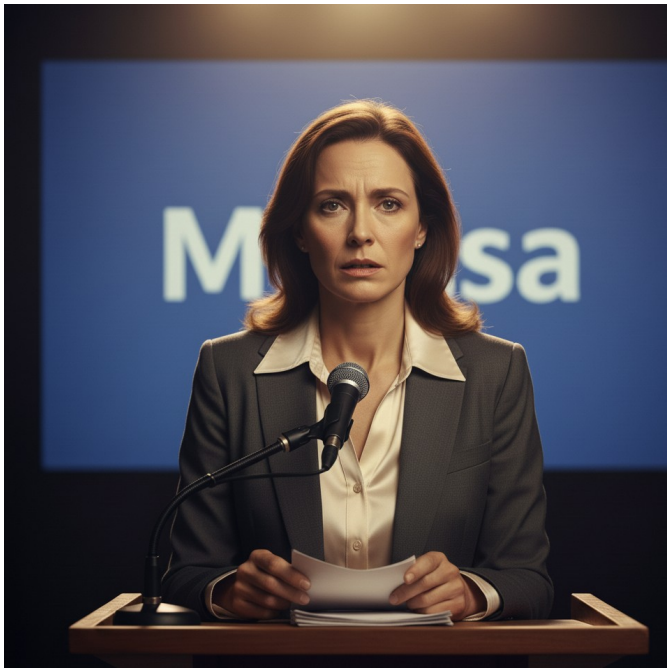
For Mensans specifically, recognising that our high ability does not exempt us from these psychological vulnerabilities is itself an important insight. Our intelligence is an asset, but it cannot prevent us from experiencing the full range of human emotional challenges. Indeed, our heightened emotional sensitivity and vivid imaginations may, at times, make us more vulnerable to stress-related nightmares, not less.

Next year, as you approach the festive season, if you find yourself with nightmares disrupting your sleep, consider this an indicator that your psyche is attempting to process genuine emotional demands. Rather than viewing these dreams as aberrations, acknowledge them as part of the price of possessing both high intelligence and emotional depth. Then, take action: keep a dream journal, practise the visualisation techniques Dr Carr recommends, protect your sleep with good sleep hygiene, and most importantly, grant yourself permission to simplify your Christmas and attend to your own emotional wellbeing first.

Pleased to er...er...Meet You

...and why we verbally "choke" under pressure

An interesting and thought-provoking question posed by a SIG member in the December issue of Cognito read: *"When meeting someone important or famous, the words you want to say are never what come out. Why is that? That seems to apply even if you have known in advance about the encounter and prepared"*.



Why did that catch my eye? Because I can see so many parallels between verbal "choking" and other similar pressure-laden circumstances. The "shakes" when playing a musical instrument in front of an audience. Judging the exact amount of force and accuracy required at that crucial Match Point, to get that tennis ball right into the extreme corner at speed, making its return impossible. Firing the football into the back of the net during a penalty shoot-out with the hopes of your team mates, (to say nothing of those of thousands of supporters) weighing heavily on your shoulders.

All these scenarios (and similar) sit under the umbrella of what can be described as Performance Anxiety. And the more it matters, the worse it gets.

For example, as a student violinist, I would always feel terribly nervous before an exam. However at the time I was due to take my Grade 7, I came down with the mother of all colds featuring everything in the virus' repertoire competing for dominance. The pieces were challenging and normally I would have found them pretty daunting and scary. That day, I walked into the exam room feeling like death and simply caring not one single jot.

I ended up with one of my best ever results.

So what exactly is going on between the ears when our wish for an optimal performance appears to frustratingly elude us?

Before we look into the physical reasons for choking under pressure, particularly with regard to the brain's neuronal activities, it's helpful first of all to take a step back and consider the basic question of why we should feel nervous in the first place. After all, we have rehearsed our speech or piece of music to the nth degree and are confident of our familiarity with it inside and out. So what's the big problem?

It all comes down to the fact that we care about what people think. By putting ourselves centre stage, we are placing ourselves in an evaluation context, cowed by our perception of being observed and thus judged by the audience, be it one person or scores of people.

This goes right back to our tribal ancestors at a time when we were much more vulnerable to large predatory animals, in addition to the weather elements and food sources which were unforgiving, to say the least. It paid to keep in with the crowd as any rejection from the tribe would almost certainly carry a death sentence in one form or another.

What next? Fight? Flight?...
Faced with danger, we have to think...and fast. If confronted with a highly poisonous snake slithering its way towards us; at lightning speed we will have assessed that, given average mobility, the chances are pretty good that we can outrun it. Confronted by an aggressive human blocking any escape route, we may well quickly decide that as there is little hope of breaking free, we will hit out and kick, in order to disable our assailant. There is a third option however...

Freeze?
Some creatures tactically adopt the freeze response as an instinctive means of basically boring the wits out of its attacker. A mouse for instance, will characteristically "play dead" as its feline assailant paws it, sometimes flicking it into the air in order to provoke some degree of movement. Maybe the reasoning behind the instinct is that if there is no fun to be had through a chase, the cat will lose interest and turn its attention to something else. (Unfortunately this rarely happens as my younger son's cat will testify; seeing its little motionless captive as a cheap ready meal).

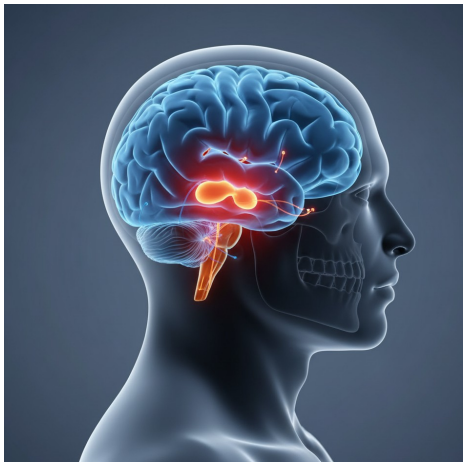
However, when in the business of a performance, basic instincts have to go out of the window. It really isn't appropriate to go round knocking seven bells out of your favourite TV star because the impressive conversation you've rehearsed over and over again has now totally escaped you. Flee? Not really if you want to verbally converse or to communicate a piece of music to an audience (although I must admit to having seen this happen with one or two unfortunate youngsters tearing out of an exam room, leaving a somewhat baffled examiner sitting at his or her desk).

In performance circumstances, the freeze response, though enforced, is obviously somewhat less spectacular than its alternatives but nevertheless, wouldn't it be nice if those words just rolled off the tip of our tongue or the musical notes flowed effortlessly under our fingers?

So how does the freeze response work?

The Freeze Response
Through millions of years of evolution, the human body developed important physiological reactions to keep itself safe, albeit with a massive failure in its ability to differentiate between a life threatening event and a socially threatening one. The most common instinctive mammalian response is to flee or where this is not possible, to fight. The pupils in the eyes will dilate; all senses appearing sharper and more focussed and there will be a general shutting down of all non-essential systems such as the immune and digestive systems.

The heart rate will increase, optimising blood flow to the muscles, creating greater tension within them in preparation for fight or flight. If however this tension is not released through such, then the sense of fear will be so overwhelming that the immediate reaction will be one of trembling and shaking as the freeze response takes over.



The battle between old and new: Amygdalae versus Frontal Lobes
First of all, let's clear up a few definitions. The amygdalae are situated at the base of the brain in the form of two almond-shaped cells in each hemisphere. As the oldest and most reptilian part of the brain, these cells constitute the emotional centre of the brain alerting us to environmental dangers and forming memory associations with each stress response.

The frontal lobes form the newer part of the brain and are involved in reasonable and logical thinking, decision-making and future planning. In the face of a minor to moderate threat, the frontal lobes will dominate over the amygdalae, enabling a safe, rational decision to be taken in order to remove oneself from immediate danger and significantly inhibiting inappropriate responses thus allowing for more socially appropriate interactions.

Problems occur in the face of severe stress which can result from the pressures of work, relationships and many other sources connected with the fast demanding pace of modern living. This is the cue for the amygdalae to roll up their sleeves, hijacking and disabling the frontal lobes in one fell swoop, activating the fight, flight or freeze response. While the fight or flight response causes the body to be preoccupied with intense physical activity in order to attack or escape, this disabling of the prefrontal cortex under the freeze response will simply cause the mind to go blank.

How would this affect speech?
The increased muscle tension in the body also transmits to the voice box, causing the voice to become shaky. Speech delivery may well change in speed, becoming unusually fast or slow due to the amygdalae's release of the stress hormones adrenaline and cortisol, while the hijacking of the frontal lobes by the amygdalae will result in the loss of clear thought.

This would include the organisation of thoughts into words, resulting in pauses, stuttering or complete memory lapses in terms of what one had originally planned to say. In short, the amygdalae hijack the brain's rational thinking centres for the reason that it perceives the priority of survival over fluent communication.
It's not just the amount of practice which makes perfect

One thing you cannot do in preparation for a performance is to create that same sense of fear. Without an audience, there is no fear which explains why many professional performers, be they musicians, public speakers, actors or other, rehearse their art in less prestigious venues ahead of the major performance. Shows will be undertaken in the provinces before the major performances in capital cities. Amateur performers who tend to get just one bite at the cherry, will frequently be heard to complain ruefully after a dodgy display: "But it was perfect in my front room!"

From the experience of a musician, I can assure you that the mind is certainly not fully on the task in hand "in my front room!" I can be running through a study on the violin while half of my mind is reminiscing longingly on that lovely country walk I went on a few days previously.

Enter the DMN
The Default Mode Network (DMN) in the brain's frontal lobes is active at those times between tasks when we "switch off." It comes into play mostly when we are daydreaming, resting, engaging in introspection and mulling superficially over the past or the future. The DMN also enables us to achieve speed and accuracy in skills at which we are already highly adept, eliminating the need to cogitate deeply. Hence I can practice my violin study in the privacy of my front room while simultaneously daydreaming about the countryside.

Now add a critical audience, all sporting their respective Judges' Hats to the equation. If my brain is behaving itself, then the DMN will be switched down to the point at which it enables me to execute the performance to the best of my ability as I focus intently on my performance minus the extraneous inner commentary. But what if the focus turns to sheer terror?

The unpalatable truth is that this "switch-down" can fail, the amygdalae effectively deactivating the DMN and in doing so, making it more difficult to eliminate internal thoughts which in turn, results in a loss of focus on the task in hand and poor goal-directed outcomes. So instead of focussing on musical expression, the inner dialogue is probably going to go more on the lines of:

"This is going badly. What will everyone think of me?"

Equally, in other stressful situations, similar thought-processes may well apply:

"This shot lies between winning the tournament and being the mere runner-up"

"...and after all the rehearsal on that sparkling conversation I was going to impress Sir or Dame So-and-So with."
"Oh no: my boss is in the audience. What will they tell everyone? I'll get the sack. Lose my house. End up homeless..."

You get the picture. Endless catastrophising.

What happens? Exactly that. Catastrophe! One may even experience the sensation of time slowing down, common to all intensely stressful experiences, largely as a result of the mind overthinking and filling itself with irrelevant and negative thoughts. (I well remember being visited by the external examiner during my final teaching practice and being hyperaware of every single word emanating from my mouth with the proverbial mark out of ten attached to it).

What can we do about it?
As the amygdalae have a way of linking together memories of responses to stressful situations, it is common for people to act "to type;" that is, the same or a similar situation will inevitably provoke the same response. The problem is particularly acute when the freeze response is triggered by everyday situations, leading to what we recognise as a phobia. Thus agoraphobics will fear leaving the house while those with social anxiety will fear everyday social interactions. (There exist of course, a host of other phobias; some being utterly baffling in their unremarkable ordinariness).

The classic form of treatment is gradual exposure to the fear over time until the sufferer becomes much more at one with the source of anxiety. Similarly, it is experience which will help to condition the public speaker or performer not to fear the act of presentation; starting with small steps in facing an audience (e.g. a few friends) and gradually building up to a larger and perhaps more critical audience.

Kimberley Holland* suggests mindfulness as a way of coping with performance anxiety, enabling the sufferer to recognise the symptoms of an "amygdala hijack" and to take stock. Mindfulness, through its technique of slowing down, meditation and controlled breathing, can refocus the body's energy enabling a more peaceful response to a perceived threat.

As a musician, I have often found physical movement to be helpful. You will often notice that top soloists will physically move to the music as they perform. It is a way of loosening up and engaging with and focussing on the music in the same way that lecturers often pace up and down the stage as they speak. The simple act of smiling is also helpful, sending messages to the brain that all is well.

We may well feel that performance is akin to going into battle. We need to remember however that the biggest battle is occurring within our heads as the amygdalae, DMN and the frontal lobes in particular, all fight for their respective supremacy!

Acknowledgement
*Kimberley Holland: Amygdala Hijack: *When Emotion Takes Over* Heathline, April 18, 2025 Reviewed by Bethany Juby

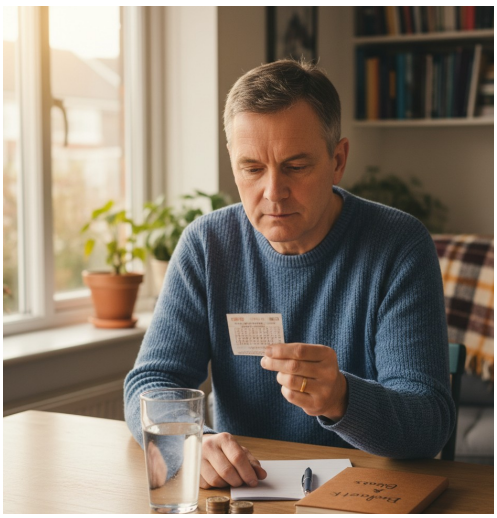
Ros Groves

How do you deal with anxiety in these situations? Let us know.

Why Do People...? Let's Find Out

More answers from our SIG members to questions posed in previous newsletters. Thank you to all contributors — and remember to send in those intriguing questions!

Why do people buy lottery tickets despite understanding the tiny chances of winning?



Mike Griffiths was interested in the previous issue's answer and said this *"I agree with your anonymous respondent, buying a lottery ticket is not necessarily illogical. Perhaps it helps to discuss the question in economic terms. It would surely be a simple-minded economist who would reduce the decision to cost (£x) against the benefit measured by the tiny chance of winning the jackpot, or in more technical terms the "expected return" (the size of the jackpot times the chance of winning it; £x less a share of the promoter's expenses, profits, and donations to good causes; the amount of money you would receive if you were to repeat the process forever, or in practical terms much longer than a lifetime). That is pretty much the kind of economics that used to be taught - and failed to predict real human behaviour - until economists discovered psychology and dressed it up as "behavioural economics."*

(Actually that kind of economics would sometimes say it is sensible to buy a ticket on a rollover draw: if the prize fund is greater than the ticket sales, your "expected return" is greater than the cost of a ticket; an equally unrealistic argument.)

Rather than the cost, you should consider what economists call the "opportunity cost": the value of what is foregone to buy the ticket. In your respondent's case, it seems to be a pint of beer. In my case, I believe it is zero: I am comfortably enough off that I don't miss an occasional couple of pounds at all. (I do the lottery when I feel like it, not on a regular basis.) As for the benefit, I get the same as your anonymous respondent: the feeling of anticipation that I might possibly receive a life-changing amount of money. That is maximised the longer in advance I buy the ticket, and the longer after the draw I get round to checking my numbers. Actually, there is another, albeit small, benefit: the good feeling that some of the ticket price is going to those good causes. (Obviously not as much as if I had directly contributed to a cause I value, but still not zero.)

Of course, we are all different, both in our financial means and in our psychology. For example, if someone is skimping on food in order that they can buy a lottery ticket, and/or feeling anxiety rather than pleasure when waiting for the results, and/or simply buying tickets out of habit, I can't deny that they should review their behaviour."

When meeting someone important or famous, the words you want to say are never what comes out, Why is that? That seems to apply even if you have known in advance about the encounter and prepared.

In her article 'Pleased to er...er...Meet You' in this issue , Ros Groves, provides a substantial response.

Can you help answer these questions received from SIG members;

Why do people avoid tasks until the last minute?
Why do people laugh in situations that aren't funny or are even uncomfortable?
Why do people keep objects they never use but refuse to throw them away?
Why do people talk to pets as though they understand?

CROSSING THE T'S

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Thanks in advance. Paul Eaves