

*Woman in the back:* She's fainted! Do something!

Two male grad students drag the presenter off the stage and stumble toward the campus infirmary.

*Perp* (to his front-row mates): I like brief presentations. They're superior learning experiences.

*Graves:* People who climb ivory towers should try to avoid taking a header.

**The Steve Gould Show** (Discovery). Who says the variety show is extinct? It's simply evolved. Harvard paleontology professor Gould hosts a weekly science review that will drive you cladistic.

Here's the lineup for the first show: Bass drum and kazoo band from Harvard's geology department performs classical music, including highlights from Stravinsky's "Rites of Spring"; comedy and ventriloquism from artificial intelligence guru Marvin Minsky and Chipper, a wise-cracking desktop computer with movable eyes and mouth; Steve chats with Topo Gigio and explains how the mousy little puppet evolved from an ancient line of rubbery rodents; and for the youngsters, heavy metal music and lab demonstrations from four physics graduate students who call themselves "Little Galileo and the

Superstrings." In a regular closing segment, Steve trades hilarious barbs with a panel of evolutionary psychologists, who are joined this week by comedian Don Rickles. The clip, please:

*Panelist A:* Steve, you Marxist biophobe, you wouldn't recognize a mental adaptation sculpted by natural selection if it bit you on your cortical sulcus.

*Panelist B:* Good one, heh, heh.

*Steve:* So funny I forgot to laugh, Darwinian fundamentalists. Punctuate this!

*Rickles:* Hey, shaddup you hockey pucks. I thought my agent booked me on the new *Hollywood Squares*, not *Planet of the Stiffs*.

**LabWatch** (WB). David Hasselhoff plays molecular geneticist Rafe Testosterone, superintelligent (and shirtless) director of a top-secret science place in Los Angeles known as The Top-Secret Science Place. With the power of—you guessed it—science, Rafe and his buff colleagues banish yucky pollution from prime surfing beaches, thwart blubbery biological terrorists who plan to contaminate suntan lotion supplies with acne-inducing chemicals, and blast icky infectious viruses plaguing health-club shower stalls. Pamela Anderson plays bikini-clad biologist Genie Helix. Richard Dean

Anderson reprises his McGyver role in recurring cameo appearances. Music videos in each episode present quick shots of whirling centrifuges, rhythmic computer printouts, and other action-oriented features of lab life accompanied by tunes from Backstreet Boys and Celine Dion. How about a short clip:

*Rafe:* If I don't run a PCR on this MTV right away, you can bend over and kiss the planet good-bye. Quick, Genie, hand me some electrophoretic gel.

*Genie:* We're fresh out. Will my styling mousse do?

*Rafe:* (Adjusts his sunglasses.) Cool.

**C**an you stand it, America? I'm getting goose bumps. Well, okay, my flesh is crawling.

Tune in tomorrow for our next top story: An interview with Richard Simmons about his new aerobic exercise and stress-reduction videotape, *Sweatin' to the Existentialists*. Talk about big fun in a meaningless universe. It's absurd, but then, *c'est la vie, mes amis*. Until then, this is Celia Lloyd for *Excess Hollywood*. Remember, when it comes to entertainment, *ex-cess* is the secret to *suc-cess*. □

## Behavior

### Stressful aftermath of early losses

It's bad enough for a child to have a parent die or to grow up in a troubled, unsupportive family. However, either experience may also set the stage for elevated blood pressure and hormonal responses to stress later in life, a new study suggests.

"For a child, loss of a parent and lack of a good attachment with parents may conceptually be very similar and thus may exert similar [health-damaging] effects on developing physiology," contends psychologist Linda J. Luecken of the Duke University Medical Center in Durham, N.C.

The researcher recruited 30 college students who had each, by age 16, lost one of their parents due to an accident, crime, or illness. Another 31 college students had been raised by two parents who were still alive and married. Students in both groups ranged in age from 18 to 27.

Luecken continuously monitored the volunteers' blood pressure beginning 5 minutes before and ending 20 minutes after they completed each of two stressful tasks. She also measured the students' salivary concentrations of cortisol, a stress hormone, before, during, and after the tasks.

In one task, volunteers gave an impromptu, 3-minute speech on any of three controversial topics—affirmative action, abortion, or same-sex marriages—while facing a video camera. They were told that recordings of the speeches would be evaluated by experimenters. In the other task, students viewed a 7-minute scene from the movie *Terms of Endearment* that shows two boys confronting their mother's impending death.

Participants also completed a 90-item questionnaire that explored their perceptions of their own family relationships. Those who reported either a parental loss or poor family relationships exhibited consistently higher blood pressure than their counterparts, although readings were still within the normal range for resting blood pressure. Cortisol elevation during the speech occurred more often in students who had a de-

ceased parent; comparable cortisol hikes appeared during the movie in students with frayed family ties.

Parental loss or long-standing emotional separation from parents may frequently lead to the weakening of young children's biological stress-response system, Luecken theorizes in the November/December *PSYCHOSOMATIC MEDICINE*. —B.B.

### Antipsychotics and brain changes

The use of antipsychotic drugs, rather than the action of a distinct disease process, appears to bloat the volume of several innerbrain regions in people diagnosed with schizophrenia, according to a team of neuroscientists.

The researchers, led by Raquel E. Gur of the University of Pennsylvania Medical Center in Philadelphia, administered magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans to 96 psychiatric patients with schizophrenia—a severe disturbance of thought and mood—and 128 people who had no psychiatric ailments. Of the patients, 21 had never taken antipsychotic medication, 48 had received only haloperidol or other traditional antipsychotics for about 3 years, and 27 had used both traditional and newer medications, such as clozapine, over a similar period.

The volume of the basal ganglia was markedly greater in medication-treated patients than in both drug-free patients and healthy volunteers, the scientists report in the December *AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PSYCHIATRY*. The basal ganglia consist of clumps of tissue involved in the regulation of movement and thinking. They showed the greatest volume in patients who had taken high doses of traditional antipsychotic drugs.

Medication-free patients differed from healthy volunteers only by having a smaller thalamus, Gur and her coworkers say. Disturbances in this structure, which helps to focus attention and filter sensations, have already been implicated in schizophrenia (SN: 10/29/94, p. 284). —B.B.