Leaders in SHAPE: Claudia Hammond

Speaker: Claudia Hammond

Chair: Professor Dorothy Bishop FBA

As part of the Leaders in SHAPE *series, author, broadcaster and psychology lecturer Claudia Hammond joins Dorothy Bishop to discuss her life, career and latest book* The Art of Rest*.*

This talk is available to watch on YouTube

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Professor Dorothy Bishop FBA [00:01:12] Good afternoon and welcome to this British Academy event. My name is Dorothy Bishop and I am Professor of Developmental Neuropsychology at the University of Oxford and also Chair of the psychology section of the British Academy. Today's event forms part of our new series *Leaders in SHAPE*, where we meet the most influential figures within and beyond academia who are shaping the fields of social science, humanities and the arts.

The first event in the series, which took place last month, featured Gary Younge, and today it gives me great pleasure to welcome Claudia Hammond to our virtual stage for episode two.

Claudia is an author, broadcaster, and Visiting Professor of the Public Understanding of Psychology at the University of Sussex. Her latest book, *The Art of Rest: How to Find Respite in the Modern Age*, was released last year, and she's well known to psychologists as the presenter of the Radio 4 series *All in the Mind*, which does a fantastic job of presenting psychological topics to a broad audience.

I was delighted when she was awarded the British Academy President's Medal in 2017 for outstanding service to the cause of the humanities and social sciences.

Today, we're going to discuss Claudia's life and career for about 30 minutes before taking a selection of audience questions. So if you'd like to ask a question, please submit this in the YouTube chat section. And you're welcome to tweet during the event and can copy in the Academy's Twitter handle @BritishAcademy_. And just otherwise sit back and enjoy our 30 minutes of discussion.

Hello, Claudia. Welcome, and thank you for joining us.

Claudia Hammond [00:03:13] Hi! Thank you so much. Great to be invited.

Professor Dorothy Bishop FBA [00:03:16] Yeah, it's great to see you again. To start our discussion, I wanted to look back to your childhood. I read that you announced your interest to work in radio to Roald Dahl when you asked for his autograph at a children's book festival. So what sparked your love of radio?

Claudia Hammond [00:03:36] So I think, according to my parents, I was about 10 or 11 at the time and they didn't know that I was interested in radio or TV or media. And Roald Dahl, I queued up to get his autograph, obviously loving his books, and then he asked what I wanted to do when I grew up, and I told him I wanted to work in radio. And so I don't know really.

I mean, the radio had always been on in the background, and obviously I'd always watched TV as a child and realised there must be people behind the scenes who were making all of this happen, and that it's always on all sorts of different topics, and that this would be something really interesting to do.

I know that there was a lot of people now who say they want to go into the media at that time it was more unusual. I can remember when I was a bit older at school, them asking me what I'd like to do, and there was a sort of card index box where you could look up different jobs, and I looked under radio and there was nothing, and then I looked under "T" for television and it had television aerial erector, but I'm not too good at climbing on rooftops, so I'm not sure I'd have been very good at that, to be honest.

Then the careers' teacher asked me in the sixth form what I wanted to do, and I said I wanted to work in radio or in the media, and her response was, "Do your parents know about this? Are you sure this is a good idea?"

I took the notice and started trying to work my way towards doing this by volunteering for hospital radio. So from when I was 14, I was doing a programme, which I have to admit wasn't very good, called *Claudia Sunday Requests* at the local hospital, the same hospital that had in fact saved my life when I was a baby, so it was really nice to be going back there, and I started that way, trying to get the experience to get in.

Professor Dorothy Bishop FBA [00:05:23] That's fantastic, and I gather you then went on to work in the newsroom at BBC Three Counties Radio when you were only 18, which is fabulous. But then you suddenly went off in a different direction and chose to study applied psychology at Sussex University and then did an MSC in health psychology at Surrey. So what were the things that led you in that direction?

Claudia Hammond [00:05:50] So I knew when I was at school that I knew I wanted to work in radio, but I knew I wanted to do a new subject. I did very mixed A levels. I did physics and maths and German and art. I liked sciences, and I liked arts, and I knew I didn't want to do any of those subjects as a degree though. I wanted to do something new and different. So before I had my year out where I got the job in the local radio station, I'd already decided that psychology would be the subject that would be interesting.

What really appealed to me was that it seemed to be a combination of all the things that I liked doing. There was research methods involved, rigorous methods, and there was maths involved in the stats, but that it was about people as well. And so it seemed to combine evidence that I was very interested in how you get the best evidence with humans, which like everybody I'm interested in and human behaviour. And so I thought well, this sounds like the ideal subject.

While I was at Sussex University, I worked part time all the way through, actually for the local radio BBC station there, Radio Sussex, but then got really into psychology and then I couldn't decide what I should do when I left, but was interested in psychology, and I was lucky enough to get a studentship from a research council at that time and got a place on a master's course doing health psychology.

I partly got interested in health psychology in particular from that experience when I was working in hospital radio. Before each Sunday evening when I went there, I used to go round the wards talking to the patients asking them for their requests of what music they would like to hear on the radio that evening. I'm convinced that not many people listened to it, but they did enjoy chatting, and I got really interested in chatting to those patients.

Sometimes they would tell me about terrible symptoms they'd had of things happening to them that they didn't want to tell the doctor about, or the nurses, because they didn't want to bother them, and they're telling this 14-year old girl instead. This just got me very interested in how people think about their health, and what they do about it, and what they don't do about it. Once I did a bit of psychology and medicine as part of my undergraduate course, and got really interested in that, I thought, well, this will be an interesting subject.

[00:08:13] So after that I was torn, really, because there was radio on the one hand, that I'd been working in and really loved, and then there was psychology on the other hand, which I hadn't expected to love quite as much as I did, so then I wasn't quite sure how I was going to go about doing both of these.

So for a long while I kept them going as separate tracks so when I first worked after university, after my postgraduate degree, I was freelancing at Radio 5 Live when it had just started doing general news. So that was doing any news that came up at all. Then I started doing some lecturing in psychology separately, so they were very separate things for about 10 years while I was reporting.

So life has been much easier since I've managed to combine them all. To be honest, it's much easier specialising because everything's about the same subject now. Everything I do is either about psychology or about health.

Professor Dorothy Bishop FBA [00:09:03] It is wonderful, though, to hear how you really got expertise in both of these streams so that you could really bring them together so well. I gather in 2003, you wrote and presented a popular Radio 4 series called *Emotional Rollercoaster*, which explored the science of emotions and what they are and why they happen and how they're created.

Then you wrote your first book with the same name in 2005. So that was a new development and was writing a book something you were already knowing you're going to pursue or did it just sort of come about by chance? How did that happen?

Claudia Hammond [00:09:40] Oh, I'd always thought the idea of writing a book would be fantastic, and my father's a writer and has written lots of non-fiction books, and I'd always seen the proofs all around the house when I was younger. I'd always thought, wouldn't it be amazing to write a book?

Then I started around that same time when I was doing the series on emotions, thinking, well, what would it be interesting to write a book about? And that series, they were just 15 minute programmes, and so in fact, the book ended up being very, very different and isn't a

book of the series, but there was so much more to say about all of these things. and I realised how interested people were in them

Then I looked up how you write a proposal which I didn't know how you write a proposal for a non-fiction book. I wrote a proposal, sent it to an agent who got in touch straightaway saying, yes, I think this is interesting, and then helped me to rewrite the proposal because I hadn't done it in the right way at all.

A few weeks later they said, yes, I've got a publisher who's interested, and Fourth Estate, which is part of HarperCollins, published that first book, which was amazing. I still remember so well the phone call where he phoned up and said, yes, they want it. I thought, "I can't believe I'm allowed to write a book. This seems amazing."

Professor Dorothy Bishop FBA [00:10:50] Oh, that's a lovely story. And another thing you've done, I mean, you've got many strings to your bow, because you've used your media background so that you've been able to do this large scale research with the media, so collaborating on these big studies with academics in the media on subjects such as loneliness and rest. So can you tell us a bit about whose idea was that and how did it come about.

Claudia Hammond [00:11:18] Yeah, that's been an amazing opportunity to do that because it means it's brought together one of the things I might have done, which was to continue in psychology and go on to doing research. I always thought that was very interesting. Obviously I spend a lot of my time interviewing people about their research, and so to get to be involved in that, as well as programmes has been a real luxury. It's been really nice.

The first one I did was called *The Rest Test*, and that was with a group of psychologists, mostly from Durham University, and that was because I was part of a residency that I was invited to. A group of people were applying for a residency at Wellcome Collection in London, and this was the chance to spend two years occupying the top floor of the Wellcome Collection on the Euston Road, to look at one subject in particular with a whole group of people, and we applied.

I really never dreamt we would succeed in getting it, and we got it. And so rest was the topic. And we had composers and geographers and all sorts of people from all sorts of different disciplines, which has been absolutely fascinating because I spend most of my time interviewing doctors and psychologists who are great, and I love that.

So it's absolutely fascinating to talk to some completely different people doing completely different subjects and to work with artists and so on, and to just see how people from different disciplines have been taught and trained to think in a different way and just ask really interesting questions that I'd not have thought of about things.

That was how the first one came about. And then I talked to Radio 4 and the World Service, once I was part of this residency, about whether we could do something much bigger. We were doing lots of small things with audiences, and I was interested to know, what do a lot of people think about this? And is there a real opportunity because the media has the advantage of being able to reach a huge number of people?

The World Service has 97 million listeners across a week listening in English and Radio 4 say *All in the Mind* has 1.2 million listeners, so there's a chance to reach a load of people that you couldn't normally do in research or would be very difficult to do in research. It was great and it was great to see the psychologists who led the study. It was great to see how that was done and then how other subjects could feed into it as well, which they very much did in some of the questions.

Then after *The Rest Test*, I thought, it would be great to do this again. I was noticing the topic of loneliness becoming more and more talked about and I thought to do something large scale on loneliness would be really interesting, and I managed to persuade Welcome to fund that. And then we've just done a third one, which the results were all over Radio 4 for a week last week. So it got bigger. It was called *The Touch Test*, which was all about touch, which 40,000 people took part in, which was amazing.

So it's been really interesting to see how that works. Obviously there are limitations because people decide to take part, so it's different from a study where you may have a more representative sample who haven't chosen to take part. But it's interesting to see what you can and then can't do with that data. What's interesting with all of these three is how well they then fit in, actually, with other research that's been done. They sort of link in together and form part of a bigger picture.

Professor Dorothy Bishop FBA [00:14:35] Yes. I'm impressed that you say that, but you're actually often tackling subjects that I think haven't been looked at really closely. Certainly not on this sort of scale with people giving opinions on them, and so it's really it's great to see you doing really quite novel things, I would say.

Do you think these large scale studies have helped with changing attitudes towards mental health in the media? That's because obviously, you're focusing, particularly for the loneliness one, on a topic that I think for many years people didn't like to admit to loneliness because it was seen almost as an admission of somehow failing or something.

Claudia Hammond [00:15:18] Yes. And it's interesting that in the research, people are more likely to answer the question differently depending on whether the word loneliness is in there. And previous research has found that men in particular are less likely to admit even in anonymous confidential research that they feel lonely, but they will say they haven't got the friends they'd like to have. They haven't got the relationships they'd like. They feel left out sometimes. So people will use different phrases.

So I think particularly with the loneliness, it was a way of talking very openly about a subject, and it has been really interesting how many people then did get in touch and talk about that. With all of these you put it out there and you go to a lot of effort to try to launch it, make sure it's publicised, and make sure people hear about it, and you have no idea whether I think these subjects are really interesting, and everyone else is going to agree or not.

We wait to see how many people take part, and with the loneliness survey, actually 55,000 people took part, and I think that is because it's such a crucial social issue as well. So I would like it if it did change things in terms of getting people to talk about it more and to talk about it in all sorts of different forums.

As well, I make lots of Radio 4 and World Service programmes about all the results when they come out, but then lots of other places that are very different will interview us about the results. And so we're able to engage a different groups of people who we wouldn't necessarily reach because of there being this big piece of research that's been done, and so I hope that that's really useful.

With all of these, the data in the end becomes open access, and so I would really like it if other researchers then took the big amount of data there is, because we ask about so many different things. People spend 30 to 40 minutes investing their time and filling it in. So I'd love it if people researched it for years. There's many PhDs worth of stuff in there to be extracted.

Professor Dorothy Bishop FBA [00:17:10] That's fantastic. So you're really creating a resource for other people as well as answering questions that you started with. With the survey you did on rest, the other big study, that relates to your latest book, I gather. So you have your latest book, *The Art of Rest*. What was the most surprising finding from that particular study?

Claudia Hammond [00:17:38] Well, it was very interesting, actually, because this was the study that was done by the group from Durham University. What was really interesting was one of the things we looked at, which hadn't really been done before, was what sorts of activities people found restful, and in fact, I've done a kind of top 10 countdown that the book is structured around counting from 10 down to the most popular.

What was really interesting was that the top five were all activities that people tend to do on their own. And so although people enjoy things like socialising, particularly now as it's getting harder, those things like socialising or eating out with friends, they came at numbers like 18 and 21 and 23 in terms of the list of activities that people found most restful, but the top five were all things people liked doing on their own.

I think that what this shows is that in order to get a rest, sometimes what we need is a rest from other people, which is interesting because in a way that's kind of the opposite of loneliness there. But even if you do have the relationships that you would like, what people sometimes want in order to rest is to get away from those people and to get some time on their own.

Whatever the activity was, there were different sorts of activities, reading came at number one, for example, people seem to like them partly because they could do them on their own and get some real peace there. And I think that people are very busy and want to try to get some rest and some peace.

I think that even say in lockdown when some people were furloughed, you could say, "oh, well, then they got all the rest they wanted in the world", but one thing that we did find was that enforced rest isn't the same. Enforced rest doesn't feel as restful. So people who are in prison get to rest a lot of the time. But I don't think they would say it was a lovely, restful time that they had when they were there. And likewise, if you're not able to do anything because of the pandemic and the situation, and not being able to work, then that's not something that feels restful.

In fact, in the study, we found that people who had a very small amount of rest, their wellbeing was lower. People who had a big amount of rest, say 10 hours rest a day, their wellbeing was also lower. So it's a question of getting the balance between rest and activity rather than just say more rest is what we really need.

Professor Dorothy Bishop FBA [00:20:00] In your book, you encourage people to take rest more seriously; to take it as seriously as sleep, and you offer some ideas, a sort of roadmap, for having a more restful and balanced life.

This seems really important because I think so many of us almost feel it's lazy to take rest, or this somehow morally wrong, especially if it is these sort of activities you do on your own, that we sort of somehow feel we should be rushing around doing things or achieving or whatever. Do you have any tips you can share with the audience about how we might get better at unwinding and calming our mind and recharging our bodies?

Claudia Hammond [00:20:41] Sure. And you make a very good point there. So nine per cent of people who responded told us that they felt guilty whenever they rested. In fact, when we asked people words associated with rest, words, you know, words like "calm" and "relaxing" came up, but also a significant number of people said things like "frustrating" and "difficult" and "hard to obtain", and so we do seem to have this tricky relationship with it.

So one of the things that I suggest is when you've worked out which activities, and it will be different for different people, just because something came at number one, it doesn't mean that that's what everybody should be doing, you need to find the activities, or the group of activities, that you find restful, and then to try really hard to almost prescribe yourself 15 minutes of doing that rest each day if you can.

Now, I know if people are really busy, particularly if people are, say, working and caring, and when people were homeschooling their kids, that's a lot easier said than done. But if you can find that 15 minutes and do the thing you find restful, and so as not to feel guilty, tell yourself, "well, this is for my mental health and I'm going to do this now."

So, for example, I find gardening the most restful thing. I have a tiny greenhouse that just has room for me to stand in it. And now deliberately, particularly when I'm working at home, I may say in the middle of the afternoon, decide, "well, I'm going to prescribe myself now 15 minutes of gardening" and I'm just going to go and deadhead things. Or if it's raining, I'll go in the greenhouse and it is absolutely lovely. And I feel straightaway that sort of calm coming over me. And if you can find the activity for you that does that, then to carve out that 15 minutes I think is really important.

I think if you are so busy that it's very difficult, then one thing is that we don't always notice the moments of rest that we can have. We don't always notice the opportunities to rest, and I think sometimes time that feels like wasted time, we could reframe it in our minds as restful time.

So if you've missed the parcel and you've got to go and queue at the delivery office yet again and for a long time, then that may be really annoying because you're wasting 10 minutes when you've got loads of things to do. But if somebody said to you at a different time, you can have 10 minutes now to just lean against this wall and watch the world go by,

then you may think that was okay and quite a nice thing. So I think it's important to try to reframe those annoying wasted moments as this is restful now, and I'm going to rest in some way, and I'm going to do that and I can't do anything about this time, so I'm going to rest instead.

Professor Dorothy Bishop FBA [00:23:13] That sounds very sane. And currently, of course, we have really massive problems with coronavirus affecting everybody. And we're hearing about an increase in problems with mental health and so on. And these are things you have discussed on your show *All in the Mind* and on the World Service in *The Evidence*. Do you have any plans to work on a larger scale project on that topic?

Claudia Hammond [00:23:40] Yes. I don't know if we'll do a research project on that. They take so long to get off the ground that, I'm hoping, the pandemic would be over by the time we could get it going. But when the new series of *All in the Mind* starts at the beginning of November, this is definitely a subject we're going to return to, and I think it is such an important topic.

The Evidence is a programme on the World Service that's all about the evidence around COVID-19 because I have a kind of sideline in global health programmes as well. So obviously global health is big on everyone's minds at the moment, and so, this is the kind of thing I do when I can't get to sleep, I think I'm on the 58th programme I've done on COVID-19. So we will no doubt continue doing those. And so many COVID-19 programmes will be coming up in the future, and I think that mental health is an important thing to look at in those.

One thing I really want to do is to look at how we get through this winter. What is it that we can do, what steps people can take in their own lives in order to try to get through the next few months, which I think may be harder without the long light evenings and the very good weather that we were blessed with before. So I think that's going to be a challenge, and I think the uncertainty is the hardest thing. The thing we have to somehow try to learn to deal with is that we don't know when it ends, sadly.

Professor Dorothy Bishop FBA [00:25:08] To change to your current situation, I was fascinated to hear that you are a Visiting Professor of the Public Understanding of Psychology at the University of Sussex. You must be the only one of those in the world. Is that right?

Claudia Hammond [00:25:24] I think Richard Wiseman at the University of Hertfordshire is Professor of the Public Understanding of Psychology, I think. So yes, rare. So I was really pleased. I was delighted to be invited to do that because well, because I was at Sussex, so there's nothing lovelier than being invited back to your old university.

I was just starting, in fact, my very first day of doing all sorts of interesting things in person was going to be March 23rd, so obviously lockdown had begun. So, so far I haven't been back there to talk to have conversations about how the role was going to go, and obviously,

so far it's all been remote since then. But one day I will be going back there again and that will be really nice.

I think that I really, in all the different things I do, what I want to do is to try to increase the engagement with psychology and understanding of psychology, because I think that there is so much research out there that's really valuable and that really talks to the questions of our time and things that policymakers are trying to decide and things that we're all having opinions on and are trying to decide.

I think that the psychological approach doesn't always get included in that. And I think there's really good evidence out there that could be used more. And so that's one of the things I'm going to work on with people there at Sussex, and to talk as well to the students, and particularly the postgraduate students, about how they can use their own work to increase public engagement with psychology as well, and how to get that out there so that people are talking about it so that it really means something in the real world.

Professor Dorothy Bishop FBA [00:27:05] It really, I think, has emerged as incredibly important that we get decent standards of evidence in the area of psychology out there, because it's just so difficult sometimes to find the signal among the noise. And that's one of the things that's great about your shows is that one feels it's high quality work that you're presenting. We're nearly out of time. We've just got a couple of minutes and I just wanted to finish, before we go to audience questions, about what else is on the horizon for you.

Claudia Hammond [00:27:36] So lots more COVID-19 programmes then the new series of *All in the Mind*, that's coming up, and I have started another book. I'm not sure if I'm allowed to talk about the topic of that book yet, but that will come out soon. Then the paperback of *The Art of Rest* comes out in a couple of weeks' time, and comes out in America next week, so I shall be talking some more about rest at all sorts of different events.

It's always fascinating doing those because people's questions about rest are so interesting, and when I'm doing programmes in a studio, unless it happens to be a phone-in, then I don't get people's questions until afterwards. And so I love live events, even online, because it is so interesting to see how people think differently about things and the connections that people make that I had never thought of. I love that because I'm always learning.

In a way, I feel that I'm in a very privileged position because what I do is a bit like being a perpetual student. I get to endlessly read new papers in scientific journals, in psychology journals, and then, unlike when I was a student, I then get to interview the people who wrote them and ask all the things that I wasn't sure about and say, "but hold on, how does this work, and what would that mean" and so on. So I get to be curious forever and learn more things forever, which I really like.

Professor Dorothy Bishop FBA [00:28:54] That's fabulous. Well, thank you so much for a fascinating conversation. And we are going to now go on to audience questions. If anybody in the audience wants to ask a question, they can type it into the chat. I see a question has already popped up here.

So there's a question that says your comments about rest chime with the experience of people who are working at the Hera project for primary care patients in Brighton. And the question is, "Do you have a view on the role of creativity in wellbeing?"

Claudia Hammond [00:29:28] That's a very good question. So creativity and arts and crafts came at number 12 or number 13 as the activity that people found most restful. So very high, so higher than socialising, higher than doing things with pets, higher than gardening, in fact. So I think that definitely it can be because if it's something you enjoy, that you find you can become absorbed in, that this is a key thing.

So one of the things I've tried to do is to identify what the essence of rest is by looking at each of these activities in more detail, and one of the things it seems to need to do is to distract us from our worries, to distract us from those thoughts going round and round in our head all the time. And I think that doing creative arts can be perfect for that because it's something you can become so absorbed in.

There's this concept that was identified by the psychologist, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a couple of decades ago now called "flow", and the thing that gives you flow and again, it won't be the same for everybody. Flow is when you become completely absorbed in what you're doing, and it's not as if time's going fast or slowly, you don't really notice time because you are just concentrating on that. And that can be so restful even though you're concentrating.

One of the things we found was that the activities that were restful could be hard work, if you like. Some eight per cent of people put down running as the thing that they found most restful, and found they couldn't really rest their mind until they tired out their bodies. And so something that does require a lot of concentration, like reading or like doing creative arts, I think, can be really restful, and hugely important.

Professor Dorothy Bishop FBA [00:31:17] Thank you. Another question also about rest is "In your survey internationally, did you discover particular countries or communities who are better at resting than others?" Or perhaps we should expand it and say, are there some that are particularly bad at resting?

Claudia Hammond [00:31:34] We found that the overall amount of rest that people got each day was about three hours a day. Now I know that lots of people might be thinking, "three hours. I should be so lucky. That sounds like a lot." People were able to define what they counted as resting, so if you find cooking enjoyable and restful, then that time would count, as might sitting on a train on the way to work count. And so that is how you can get up to the three hours, if you like.

So we found that the average was three hours worldwide and that when we looked at different countries, they may have slightly more, but sort of 10 minutes more or slightly less, so we didn't see that much variation.

We did see variation in things like one interesting question which was, "Is work the opposite of rest?" And in the UK and the US, France and Germany, the majority of people, usually about three-quarters, would say that they did think that work was the opposite of rest. In

India, only 54 per cent of people said that they thought that work was the opposite of rest, which I thought was interesting.

There were also some differences when it came to the activities. So the top 10 was roughly the same in most countries. In the UK being in nature came second. That came first in New Zealand, and being on your own came higher in Germany than in other countries, although it was pretty high. It was that a number four here in the UK and worldwide.

So there were very slight differences in the activities. But more what was interesting was that we didn't see that many differences. And actually we also looked at personality and even just took the people who scored high on extroversion, even the extroverts didn't include socialising with other people in the top 10 activities, which was really interesting, I thought.

Professor Dorothy Bishop FBA [00:33:30] Yes, I mean, that is so interesting. I suppose for rest you perhaps need to be in a situation where you have no sense of anybody making social demands on you, even if they're people you like, but that you can just do exactly what you want to do without having to accommodate anybody else's needs.

Claudia Hammond [00:33:49] I think that's exactly what it is. And so I think that's why watching TV, for example, was at number nine. Lots of people, we know from other research, watch TV alongside somebody else. And 25 per cent of the time when people are watching TV, they're talking through it, but there's no requirement to talk. You know, you sit side by side, you can talk if you want to.

I think one of the reasons people say they find it relaxing is that nothing is required of you from the other person. You're allowed to just sit there, whereas even if you're out with friends, you need to consider are they okay? Am I talking too much? What am I doing? Should I be doing this? Are they all right? What do they think? And people worry about what other people think of them. And all of those things all come into it as well.

It would have been very different if we'd ask people, "What activities do you enjoy most?" then I think friends would have come into it. And I think that is really borne out by what people say they miss at the moment, which is seeing friends and family as much as they would like to. So it's really hugely important. It's just not necessarily restful.

Professor Dorothy Bishop FBA [00:34:50] We've got an awful lot of questions here about rest. I'm sorry to people if I don't get through all of them, but somebody's also asked, "Is rest equally important to our health in retirement? Because the sense in retirement is that it's emphasised how you've got to stay active." I know as well that there is research on aging that suggests one of the worst things you can do is just sort of give up and sit in a chair, and ideally you should be somehow use it or lose it, so is that a problem?

Claudia Hammond [00:35:26] Yeah. So I think again, it's this thing of the balance between activity and rest and getting the rhythms of those right for you. And so I think yes, to rest all the time in retirement might not be a brilliant idea and might not make you that happy, and that you might need to have a combination of that with activity.

I mean, some people, of course, will say in retirement that they are busier than they've ever been, and that they don't get a moment because there's suddenly all these things that they want to do. And so I think there are some people who in retirement almost won't allow themselves to rest because, again, they think they should be so busy all the time. And I think we need to get this balance between rest and busyness. We don't have to be busy all the time. It's okay not to be.

Professor Dorothy Bishop FBA [00:36:12] Yes. Somebody also raised the issue about what if you're somebody who feels the only way to rest your mind is to engage in intensive physical activity because you've already mentioned there are some people who said that going for a run was their way of resting. So there's this sort of distinction, I suppose, here, between the resting of the body and resting of the mind, which sounds like they can get quite dissociated.

Claudia Hammond [00:36:40] Yes, I think that's absolutely true. I think they've pinpointed something really important there. It's absolutely fine if physical activity is your way of resting your mind. I think what is important is to find the way that there is to rest of your mind, and of course to allow your body to rest and recover if you've been doing an enormous amount of exercise, which is why trainers often recommend doing exercise every other day so that your muscles can recuperate in between.

But I think there's nothing wrong with that being your main way of resting your mind, and, of course, the exercise is good for you anyway, physically. I think a huge number of people will relate to that and think, yes, this is their restful thing.

In fact, I also wonder whether it might, for those who find it more difficult to get themselves to get round to running, if that's what they do like doing, particularly as the evenings get dark, to think "oh, well, this is good for me. Not just good for me, for my body, but this is good for me mentally. This is good for me rest wise. This is my rest now, and my time."

There are some people who, if they can't for some reason do the physical activity that they want to, find that very difficult, and then find themselves feeling restless. So yes, I think it's a good idea to rest in that way if you like it.

Professor Dorothy Bishop FBA [00:37:56] Now, a really challenging question moving more generally, not just to rest but to some of the issues you raised about mental health. There's a lot of conversation around mental health. We're now at least talking about it, but there's still an awful lot of people suffering. Do you have any thoughts on how all this discussion and awareness can be turned into real change?

Claudia Hammond [00:38:19] Yes, I think that's such a good question and such an important question. It's taken a long time for the awareness to happen and to get through. There are still, of course, situations where people absolutely do not feel that they can share their mental health status with their boss, and hopefully those are becoming fewer, and it is getting easier for people to talk about.

I absolutely agree that more needs to be done than just say “oh, well, it’s all right because we all talk about it now.” There does need to be real change. There do need to be services available to everybody quickly when they need them. And there is ample evidence around that is often not the case.

I also think that it’s where we don’t seem to have got a lot further is with research on causes and on the interventions that really work. There’s a really interesting new approach being taken by the Wellcome Trust at the moment, which I think is fascinating, where they are setting aside a load of money for funding for mental health research, but it is only for research on interventions and to see what works and what doesn’t work. And it doesn’t have to be therapy or something like that. It can be anything.

It can be a trial to see whether starting schools later for teenagers helps them to get more sleep, which then helps their mental health in the long run. It can be the things that seem to be a bit divorced from it, but practical things which might make a difference. And they are then going to fund people to do these things, rather than looking at basic causes, if you like.

Now, I think it’s really important to look at basic causes too, and we really need to do that. But sometimes it’s hard to see the progress in that. Sometimes it’s hard to see, well, how much do we really understand any better than we did exactly what is causing something, and exactly what’s causing it for an individual. And so I think that in order to alleviate suffering, finding the best interventions that really work is absolutely key.

Professor Dorothy Bishop FBA [00:40:30] Thank you. Changing tack a bit now to somebody interested in perhaps a career more like yours. So we’ve got a question from somebody who says they’re an early career researcher in psychology. “What advice would you have for people like me who want to bring research to a wider audience?” I don’t know that this person wants to do your career or whether it’s more that they just want to get into better engagement with public audiences about the research they’re doing.

Claudia Hammond [00:40:58] So I’d really encourage anyone doing research to make sure they can engage with audiences. And so I think different programmes or magazines, or anything, will always be looking for as a reason to do something, we call it a “peg”, at that moment.

What is new about it? It might be that your new piece of research has just come out, in which case your press office from your university should have good contacts for knowing how they can get that research out there. And it’s a really good idea to contact them proactively to say that there’s something that you would like to talk about.

Alternatively, is there something where you are, where you can offer, say, to talk on your local radio station when they’d like somebody to talk about psychology more generally? Could you deliberately, proactively offer yourself as a guest there, or could you get involved in any opportunities you can find to write blogs, to engage on social media about psychological research, to get it out there in any way you can to look for where the gaps are, where you might be able to do that, I think is really important.

Then if you’re going to do it to then think about it from the point of view of the audience for whatever audience that would be, whether it’s audiences reading a blog, or listening to the

radio, or watching TV, to think about who those would be and what the best way would be of communicating it in a way that would engage people, and that they would find interesting and understandable.

The most popular pieces are often the things that have some connection with people's real lives, rather than something that is more theoretical, to try to engage people with something very practical, but to then show why really good evidence matters and why really good research matters.

I mean, one thing I've done over the years, whether being interviewed many times, or interviewing other people, is to decide if I'm being interviewed about a general subject within psychology that, however short it is, I will always mention one piece of research. So I can't mention all the authors and so on, but I do say, well, some research has found this. I think it's really important to back that up with research rather than just to say well, this is what I think, because what I think doesn't matter. What matters is what evidence and research shows, I think.

Professor Dorothy Bishop FBA [00:43:19] Yes, I think one of the problems for many of us is that our scientific training is almost at odds with being a good person in the media because we always say everything with a thousand qualifications and we have to cite all the references, and then we never like to really commit to a view.

I think perhaps the best advice I had from somebody once is if you're going to be interviewed, often the person interviewing you is typically not hostile. They want you to say something interesting, so you should think what you want to say and get maybe just one point that you want to get across if it's a very short interview, rather than feeling that you have to give a full disquisition on the whole topic. I think that perhaps we don't get trained to do that, so I'm excited by your role in a university where you might be able to get more people engaged with how you communicate, not just what you communicate.

Claudia Hammond [00:44:16] Oh, absolutely. And this is one of the things I've already started doing at Sussex, is to talk to people in very small groups. We're kind of doing masterclasses where people work out how to talk about their research and how to, as you say, not to expect too much; not to expect that they can say everything on this subject, but to think what are the two or three things they would really like to say about this.

They should also try not, if possible, to give too many caveats because I think that one of the ways in which sometimes psychological research can get neglected and ignored by policymakers is if people always say, "well, we don't know yet because more research is needed", because decisions are being made right now about all sorts of things, and those decisions will be made, whether we wait for the research or not. So if psychologists have an opinion, and even if the best evidence so far tells us this, they need to feel that they can say that because 10 years' time is too late.

Professor Dorothy Bishop FBA [00:45:12] Yes. Well, thank you. I'm afraid we have come to the end of our allocated slot. Thank you so much for the questions that we've had, and I

apologise to those whose questions we couldn't get around. There's clearly a huge amount of interest in this topic, and thank you particularly to Claudia.

Claudia Hammond [00:46:10] Now, I'm afraid my screen of you, Dorothy, has frozen, so I don't know if I'm talking over you here, but sorry if I am. Many apologies, but it seems to have stopped at the moment. I just want to say thank you ever so much for all those questions from everybody, and thank you so much for having me. It's been really interesting and I'm very honoured that the British Academy invited me to do this.

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