



TO THE EDITOR...

Letters should be marked clearly 'Letter for publication in *The Psychologist*' and addressed to the Editor at the Society office in Leicester. Please send by e-mail if possible: psychologist@bps.org.uk (include a postal address). Letters over 500 words are less likely

to be published. The Editor reserves the right to edit, shorten or publish extracts from letters. If major editing is necessary, this will be indicated. Space does not permit the publication of every letter received. Letters to the Editor are not normally acknowledged.

Speaking out on the Society's role

WHAT a refreshing read the November issue of *The Psychologist* was with John Sloboda and Peter Coleman's invitation ('Taking a stand') for us to reflect on the public role that psychology and the Society could or should take. This is an issue I have considered at length before.

The Society was not the first psychological organisation I joined – that honour fell to the American Psychological Association with its long and laudable history of disseminating the findings and policy implications of its members far and wide. Whether it be imprinting, learning or the significant role of early experiences, I came to expect a well-organised public response to be a part of professional psychology, both in the clinic and more generally.

It was with great surprise, and concern, that I came to recognise that the BPS has taken a very different stance to public statements. Through my involvement with various committees, I have come to see the conservatism of the Society as an almost phobic reaction against that most fearsome of positions – being *ultra vires*. It appears to me that this is behind a very efficient mechanism of losing time and significance by double and triple checking every nuance in unwieldy committee structures.

I am not suggesting that we



should aim to exceed our responsibilities in any concerted manner. I am suggesting that by always interpreting our role in the most conservative of fashions, we are effectively silenced and the impact that psychology has for individuals, groups and societies is lost. The withholding from public debates of expertise that resides in the Divisions and Sections of the Society could also be seen to constitute ethical problems, including conspiracy or neglect. This may not be a laudable concern for the safety of the Society or a check on personal views running wild under the guise of science, but rather a concerted effort not to challenge the shocking inequalities in Society and the atrocities that Sloboda and Coleman draw our attention to.

As Sloboda and Coleman point out, other national bodies (the APA included) can collate their expert knowledge and make effective public responses in the timeliest of fashions by way of position papers (both scientific and policy), the media, and even senate select committees. It seems inconceivable that the BPS should be so shackled by

anxieties that it is led to inactivity, thereby wasting valuable chances to add a psychological perspective to public debates that influence the very constituency of psychology. I hope that as a Society we will take this invitation to reconsider our position and the public role that is inevitably ours as the experts in the science of human behaviour.

Martin Milton
Chartered Counselling
Psychologist and Registered
Psychotherapist
Adult Psychology and
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SHOULD the Society speak out on public issues? Yes, I should say, loud and clear, whenever we have reliable knowledge, *qua* psychologists, that is not generally available in the public domain, or is either ignored or concealed for political purposes.

In his last two columns in *The Psychologist* the President has been gently preparing us to accept our responsibility to give advice beyond the confines of our own membership. Tommy MacKay himself accepts that 'to represent The British Psychological Society is something wider than representing a learned organisation' (October 2000).

It was as a learned organisation that we very largely regarded ourselves for at least the first half of the 20th century. When I joined towards the end of 1949 the Society was a shadow of its present self; and we were still concerned

primarily with research, teaching and the development (fairly tentative and limited) of psychology's applications in education, industry and in relation to medicine – as, for example, in the Committee of Professional Psychologists (Mental Health). As a Society we were essentially introspective. Even within the universities it took us the best part of the first 50 years of our existence to become recognised as an academic discipline in our own right. At the Queen's University of Belfast, for example, psychology was regarded as an offshoot of philosophy and was lodged in that department until the 1950s.

Now, I believe, we must accept that we have come of age; and that brings me to Sloboda and Coleman's article 'Taking a stand'. With their general sentiments I personally agreed wholeheartedly; but I was at the same time very conscious that I was probably agreeing on other grounds than those of my training and knowledge as a psychologist. What one can unequivocally endorse is their suggestion that we should be able to show our solidarity with colleagues such as those they mention in Yugoslavia. And that can be done most effectively, perhaps, by getting our government to agree with us.

While working out the logistics for delivering our message to the press or government departments will take some thinking over and time, this is certainly a subject which should be debated at our first centenary AGM. Sloboda and Coleman's concluding

DEADLINE

Deadline for letters for possible publication in the March issue is **26 January**.

paragraphs suggest the kind of motion we could be debating.

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I THINK the idea of the Society taking a more overt political stance is an excellent one, especially given the qualifications wisely outlined by Tommy McKay (President's column, November 2000). But what really struck me about John Sloboda and Peter Coleman's piece was the unquestioned assumption that any comment should be negative and critical. The implication seems to be that it is morally superior to make critical rather than supportive comments, particularly of governments. Admittedly, this reflects the level of discussion in our society generally. The political system, the media and the courts, for example, all favour the use of conflict and criticism of others as the main

tool of discussion. The authors say that this is a sign of a democratic process, and indeed it is. However, we need to consider what the psychological effects of this are.

The incidence of depression has been steadily rising in Britain for several decades. In cognitive therapy 'ignoring the positive' is seen as a major psychological precipitant of depression. It seems to me very likely that the conflictual basis of public discussion is having a negative effect on our collective mood. It is not as though this is a particularly useful means of producing constructive change. There is an increasing awareness in the literature on organisational and individual change that positive movement can be effectively brought about by looking at what is already working and developing this (e.g. de Shazer, 1995; Hammond, 1996).

A balanced approach should sometimes involve praising the government as well as criticising

it. I feel the need here to point out that I am not a fully paid-up Labour Party member, a naive do-gooder or indifferent to the suffering (including psychological) of people involved in military conflicts. It is a symptom of the problem that acknowledging a government's achievements should be seen as perverse or bizarre.

So by all means let us become more engaged politically but let us do so in a way that promotes the

greatest degree of psychological well-being. After all, the Society has a particular responsibility in this area.

Neil Rothwell
Consultant Clinical
Psychologist
Forth Valley Primary Care
NHS Trust

References

- de Shazer, S. (1995). *Words were originally magic*. London: Norton.
Hammond, S.A. (1996). *A thin book of appreciative enquiry*. Plano, TX: Thin Book.

Learning from other psychologies

SUE Cavill's report ('Psychology in practice: Welfare of refugees', November, 2000) is simultaneously encouraging and disheartening. It is encouraging that we are beginning to wake up to the existence of world views besides our own, but despairing that we seem reluctant to accept this simple

fact. Two recent publications (see references) detail Western psychologists' and allied professionals' ignorance about and, oftentimes, arrogance towards other peoples' world views.

Eastern and Central European experience reinforces this concern. At the 1997 international annual conference of the helping professions in

SPEAKING OUT ON REFUGEES

THE juxtaposition in November's issue of Sue Cavill's reflection on the work of psychologists with refugees ('Psychology in practice: Welfare of refugees') and John Sloboda and Peter Coleman's call for the great involvement of the Society on issues of public debate ('Taking a stand') prompted me to reflect on one very specific example of the potential for psychologists to inform evidence-based policy. Kate Harris's reported concern regarding the potential damage of current implementation of government policy on refugee dispersal is widely shared by refugee workers across the country. There is, indeed, solid research evidence that settlement of refugees away from established cultural and kinship networks puts refugees at increased risk for mental ill-

health and acculturative stress (Ager, 1999). While formal government policy notes the value of cultural and ethnic ties, current practice gives little indication of this serving as a real influence on decisions regarding dispersal of asylum seekers to different parts of the UK. Contemporary practice is risking huge costs in terms of both refugee suffering and ultimate failure of settlement initiatives.

The Society has, in fact, invested in the development of guidance in this area, through support of the European Federation of Professional Psychologists Associations Task Force on Refugees and Forced Migration from 1994 to 1997. The guidelines resulting from the work of this group explicitly promote the value of facilitation of asylum-seeker

support networks amongst co-ethnic applicants' and indicate how 'networks of refugees for refugees show considerable promise in easing transitional stress' (EFPPA, 1997).

I have myself used these guidelines extensively in training with refugee assistance workers, and am aware of their broader use across Europe. However, the Society, including myself (as a member of the original group), has clearly been neglectful of dissemination of such analysis both into appropriate policy environments and into the broader public debate regarding reception of asylum seekers.

I have, belatedly, forwarded a copy of the guidelines to the Immigration & Nationality Directorate (which is co-ordinating implementation of government policy on dispersal),

noting the grounds for concern if the principles they encapsulate are neglected. While opportunities for the Society to reinforce such principles through formal representation to government departments should be welcomed, I share Sloboda and Coleman's view that, in a democracy, public pronouncements on such issues may also play a valuable role.

Alastair Ager
Centre for International Health
Studies
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References

- Ager, A. (1999). *Refugees: Perspectives on the experience of forced migration*. London: Cassell.
EFPPA (1997). *Report of the EFPPA Task Force on Refugees and Forced Migration*. Guidance notes on assistance to displaced persons, asylum seekers and refugees. Brussels: Author.

Dubrovnik, Croatia, a large number of presentations documented the human suffering caused by the crises that continue in that region. They expressed concern about the different approaches by indigenous and international bodies and individuals in their attempts to ameliorate the adverse social and psychological impact of the crises on the affected communities. Diverse groups each had a somewhat different approach to the same problems: there was a palpable lack of common understanding of what was needed, and no cohesive strategy for achieving the common goal of rendering help.

A further unfortunate aspect of this relationship concerns

the assumptions with which Western helpers responded to the crises. Very often they arrived at the point of crises believing that they had been recruited, or had volunteered, as 'experts'. They arrived to take charge of the situation, with little regard for the efforts of their indigenous colleagues. Such assumptions or misunderstandings naturally caused not only confusion but also resentment and even antagonism towards the international helpers. The Western helpers misinterpreted such attitudes as evidence of the workers' ignorance of their own situation, thereby reinforcing their initial assumptions. This kind of situation is obviously inimical

to crisis intervention. Its self-defeating nature suggests a need for the proper training of international teams of helping professionals, providing them with a common background in terms of values, goals and approaches.

Consideration of Central and Eastern European contributions at the 1997 conference prompted a group of the participants to pursue the possibility of designing and providing such training at both local and international levels. The principal aim of the programme will be to prepare helping professionals to provide immediate and post-crisis help, based upon interdependence and mutual respect, to any community

experiencing crises caused either by a human conflict or natural disaster. Such services and support will be provided upon request from the affected community, and will be guided by the cultural, moral, religious and spiritual belief- and value-systems of the inviting community. Sue Cavill's report clearly endorses this approach.

Kwame Owusu-Bempah
School of Social Work
University of Leicester

References

- Holdstock, T. L. (2000). *Re-examining psychology: Critical perspectives and African insights*. London: Routledge.
Owusu-Bempah, K., & Howitt, D. (2000). *Psychology beyond Western perspectives*. Leicester: BPS Books.

Editor's note:

This letter has been edited.

LACKING

I HAVE recently graduated from a psychology degree. Whilst undergoing my studies I became increasingly aware of and concerned about the lack of a component, either compulsory or optional, which addresses the fact that psychology involves far more than the Western perspective that we are so avidly taught. There are many students and practitioners alike that seem to be ignorant of this concept and blinded by Western ideals.

In this ever-increasing multicultural society it is important that psychology takes on a multicultural perspective; otherwise the consequences for non-Western society may be seriously detrimental. Multiculturalism isn't just a finicky issue of equal rights, which studies from the United States have adequately exemplified.

Bonnita Alicia Thomas
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London N5

Editor's note:

This letter has been edited.

Overcoming overuse of undergraduates in research

WE are grateful to Laura Simonds for highlighting the importance of training psychology students to recruit and interview non-undergraduate samples (Letters, October 2000). However, we feel there are a number of additional important issues concerning gaps in undergraduate and postgraduate psychology training that need to be addressed.

Psychology students and academics need to be updated on the issues outlined by Simonds, and to expect that recruitment and completing research does not always run smoothly. Many graduates are leaving psychology courses without being taught: data cleaning and maintenance (e.g. checking that information stored is accurately reflected in databases and transcripts, and that work has not been lost); issues around data protection; and what information to collect routinely (including reasons for refusal to participate, and descriptions of 'unsuitable' participants). Dealing with 'difference', and interpersonal and assertiveness skills required

when dealing with members of the public are also not covered.

Postgraduates probably won't have been trained in more advanced skills, for example the role of ethics committees, dealing with steering groups, and management skills (most researchers are not trained in how to manage staff, but could be required to manage assistants).

More importantly, psychology degrees do not address basic issues of personal researcher safety. Many research assistants and postgraduates move from the relative security of working within their departments, to working in communities they may be unfamiliar with. Methods courses should alert students to these issues, so they can ask what safety procedures are in place when applying for research jobs or studentships.

We acknowledge through our own working practices that it is difficult to know which topics to prioritise in degree programmes. As some academics have only utilised student samples they may not be aware of all the above issues, nor how to teach them. However, as many employers

may assume they have been covered in psychology degrees they will not think to offer training – and as many researchers may not be aware they need such skills they will not know what training and support to ask for.

We argue for psychology methods courses to include the issues outlined here. Such approaches will mean that researchers won't have to learn by experience, and will avoid wasting time and money. In addition, it will make the research experience for both researcher and participant a safer and less stressful event; and improve the accuracy of research outcomes.

Petra M. Boynton
Susan Catt

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Gary W. Wood

*The Communications Research
Group
Birmingham.*

Editor's note:

This letter has been edited.

MICHAEL BOWLES 1962-2000

DR Michael Bowles died after a long and enduring battle against cancer. He was born in Rochester, Kent, being the fifth of six children.

Prior to his career in psychology he spent nine years in a number of technical posts in the computing and electronic engineering industry. Then in 1992 he completed a BA (Hons) in psychology and philosophy at the University of Warwick and then joined the South Birmingham Psychology Service working as an assistant psychologist and counsellor. During this time he also completed a diploma in interpersonal

and counselling skills at the University of Warwick. In 1994 he began his clinical psychology training at the West Midlands Regional Training Scheme and obtained his doctorate in clinical psychology through the University of Birmingham in 1997.

In 1997 he joined the Department of Clinical Psychology at the Hastings and Rother NHS Trust and worked as a senior clinical psychologist up until his untimely death. Throughout this period he enriched the department with his energy and foresight and gave freely of his time to staff and clients alike.

Michael was an astute clinician and academic who was respected and liked by all his colleagues. He was noted for his warm and gentle interpersonal style that endeared so many to him. Throughout his long illness he maintained an interest in the people and activities of the department. He was taken in the prime of his life at a time when his career was taking off.

He passed away quietly on 9 July surrounded by family and loved ones. Rest in peace dear colleague and friend.

Terry Kohler
Department of Clinical Psychology
Hastings and Rother NHS Trust

STRAIGHT TO THE POINT...

■ *On the use of animals in psychology, Owen Hargie (University of Ulster):* The day is not that far off when the Society will pass a resolution deploring all animal experimentation. Then, future generations of psychologists will look back at the lack of foresight and compassion of the present generation.

Neil Bathurst (Eminster, Devon): The Society must recognise that there are those of us who will never agree that life can be graded, with some life being expendable in the interests of 'science'. Science that involves the suffering of others, human or animal, is not worth having.

■ *Gordon Marshall (Chief Executive of the Economic and Social Research Council) on gender bias in research:* The ESRC is a 'people-oriented' research council. We do not favour, and have never favoured, funding research about one sex in preference to another.

Desperately seeking... your views

I AM aware that there has long been a debate about the kinds of advertisement accepted by *The Psychologist*; members of the Society have sometimes been uneasy and felt that our house magazine has been giving (selling) space to activities of uncertain merit. The Psychologist Policy Committee has indeed responded to this unease by regularly publishing their policy guidance, which is

suitably quite cautious and restrictive.

I was therefore stunned (my mouth actually fell open in surprise) when, on the page preceding the weighty policy statement in November's issue, I found a 'lonely hearts' advertisement! Aside from potentially contravening at least two of the principles outlined in the policy statement overleaf, the advertisement uses language which seems... um... not

precisely within Society guidelines.

What will we be seeing next? Holiday lets for caravans in Skegness? Christmas gifts for your head of department? Dame Thora Hird extolling the virtues of stairlifts? These products may all be of relevance to some psychologists without being directly connected with the science or practice of psychology.

Whilst in no way being short of a sense of humour or narrow-minded (although perhaps that is not for me to judge!), am I alone in not wanting to see this kind of advertisement in *The Psychologist*? Ought we

merely to applaud the perspicacity of the advertiser in selecting such a target audience?

Adrian Skinner
Department of Psychology
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GROUP of psychologists, GSOH, strong sense of professional identity, outraged that *The Psychologist* should descend to running lonely hearts advertising seeks support from like-minded peers, any Division, clear sense of boundaries preferred.

Pat Short
Fiona Clerk
Lorraine Childs
Broadmoor Hospital

Editor's reply:

This was the first advertisement of its kind that we have received. It was considered carefully by the Editor, the Chair of The Psychologist Policy Committee, the Publications and Communications Directorate Manager, and the Chief Executive. We decided that it should go in. In our opinion it did not contravene any of our advertising policy statements, nor did the language fall outside our guidelines.

I would be interested in hearing the views of other members on the inclusion of this advert, or on the general issue of attracting diverse advertising of relevance to our readers. Such an expansion could potentially allow us to pass on benefits to readers in terms of a more colourful publication, more pages of copy, and perhaps eventually financial rewards for authors.

Differential Psychology Section

THE Scientific Affairs Board and Council have recently backed a proposal to form a Differential Psychology Section within the Society (see *The Psychologist*, November 2000, p.574). Such

a Section will provide a forum for all those interested in the nature and assessment of individual differences in personality, abilities, mood and motivation to meet, keep up to date and exchange

views. Our intention is that it should appeal to a broad range of members including both practitioners and academics, specialists and non-specialists. The activities of the Section will be determined at its first meeting, but could well include a conference,

newsletter and workshops in the first instance.

In accord with the Society's rules a Section can only be formed if 260+ members spontaneously express an interest in writing. Thus if you are keen to help develop this branch of psychology in the UK, please would you write in,

and encourage others to do the same?

The suggested form of words is: 'I wish to join the BPS Differential Psychology Section if it is formed, whereon I will be invited to attend the first meeting of the Section as a founder member.' The letter should also show your name,

membership number and signature (an e-mail will not suffice). It should be sent to Lisa Morrison (Scientific Officer) at the Society's Leicester office as soon as possible.

Colin Cooper
School of Psychology
Queen's University of Belfast

Respect for revolutionary force

IN response to Anthony Browne's letter (November 2000) regarding the suffering of men in our society and the lack of research interest into men's problems, I would like to indicate that although he makes some important points, he is missing some others. For example, although females now outperform males educationally, it seems more critical that women go on to be far outperformed by men in their later careers. It is men, not

women, who hold the high-status, high-power, high-reward jobs in this country. There are many more issues at stake than educational qualifications when it comes to success in the job market.

Furthermore, whilst men suffer a great deal with a range of psychological problems, so do women. Notably, women outweigh men considerably when it comes to experiences of depression, anxiety and eating disorders. The other crucial

point is that, unlike for men, women's suffering is related to their low status and lack of power in the social arena, and it is for this reason that their interests need to be represented. The experiences of women have been ignored for far too long.

Finally, I do not believe that the derogatory tone of the letter, aimed at those who have worked to free women from the oppression and abuse they have suffered for centuries, is justified. Concern with

women's issues has been a revolutionary force in the human rights movement of the last century that deserves our utmost respect. Clearly, men's problems today are grave and demand attention, but this should in no way downplay the level of action and concern that is also needed to combat the difficulties women face in their daily lives.

Lydia Lewis
Hackford Cottage
Staunton-on-Wye
Hereford

INFORMATION

■ **THE South East Assistant Psychologists' Group** meets once a month and provides an informal and friendly forum in which to discuss issues relevant to those wishing to pursue a career in clinical or counselling psychology.

We are mainly assistant psychologists working in the NHS, but our membership is open to all psychology graduates working in mental health settings.

We are sometimes able to have speakers at part of the meeting, for example course directors from clinical courses, or specialists in particular therapies or with particular client groups.

We are always **keen to welcome new members**. If you would like to join us, we usually meet on the first Friday of each month at the Bracton Centre, Bexley Hospital, Old Bexley Lane, Bexley, Kent DA5 2BW (Tel: 01322 294300). If you are planning to attend for the first time, please contact us to confirm the time and venue for the meeting.

Samantha Roberts
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■ **I AM** an applied psychology graduate hunting for **clinical experience in the Surrey area**.

Elly Evans
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■ **WE** are working on a proposal to develop **community rehabilitation services for children with acquired neurological disabilities** in Lincolnshire. We would welcome contact from any other clinicians with experience and/or information in this area.

Lisa Duggan
Clinical Psychologist
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■ **I HAVE** been recently elected to the Committee of the Affiliates' Group Section of the Division of Clinical Psychology (DCP). The committee represents both assistant and trainee psychologists,

and to do this more effectively we are **eager to learn about the regional assistants groups in the UK**. It has been difficult in the past to gather such information, but more assistants are contacting the Society and the DCP requesting information on their local branches.

Those who are seeking information for themselves are also welcome to contact me. I would also like to hear from people who are interested in setting up their own assistants groups for their area, and would be happy to act as a link person to help this process.

Furthermore, the DCP has local branches for clinical psychologists who are making strides to have assistant psychologist representation at their meetings, and anyone who is interested in clinical psychology training would learn much from attending these meetings. Please contact me for further information.

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■ **GRAHAM** Cameron, former Principal Psychologist, Mid/East Lothian is currently working as a consultant with Save the Children (UK) in their Ethnic Minority Programme in Yunnan Province, China. He has been asked to set up around **40 counselling centres in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) for street children**, with funding coming from the EU. Because of the chaotic nature of the lives of these children who have the usual problems including prostitution and drugs, at least part of this service will have to be of a 'drop-in' nature. He would be grateful to hear from any **members with experience of setting up such a service**, also from anyone who has experience of doing a baseline survey of training needs for volunteer counsellors who, in this case, are mainly Vietnamese lawyers and doctors with no training and little knowledge of counselling. Graham can be contacted at grahamcam@hotmail.com and would be very pleased to hear from former colleagues and friends.

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