



## MEDIA

'Media' is the page of the Society's Press Committee. This section of *The Psychologist* aims to promote and discuss psychology in the media. If you would like to comment on a recent newspaper article, TV programme or radio broadcast involving psychology, if you have tips for others based on recent experiences, or if you know of a forthcoming programme or broadcast, please contact the 'Media' page coordinating editor, Harriet Gross (Chair, Press Committee), on H.Gross@lboro.ac.uk.

# Come, friendly psychologists...

**T**HE recent increased interest in positive psychology has finally hit the small screen with the launch of *Making Slough Happy*, a new four-part series by the BBC. The focus of positive psychology is on increasing happiness and well-being (see the special issue of *The Psychologist*, March 2003: [www.bps.org.uk/tiny/9cqbqq](http://www.bps.org.uk/tiny/9cqbqq)). It was with this aim that a team of experts descended on Slough last summer. The team was led by a former head of psychology at the Open University, Dr Richard Stevens, and comprised an author and economist (Richard Reeves), a psychotherapist (Brett Kahr), business consultants (Jessica Pryce-Jones, Philippa Chapman) and a social entrepreneur (Andrew Mawson).

In the programme a 'happiness manifesto' was distributed to 50 volunteers in Slough. The manifesto consisted of 10 activities (see box) that would help each person increase their happiness levels and set off a 'chain reaction of happiness' through Slough. Like most psychologists, I suspect, I am able to name 10 stressors with little or no trouble, yet naming 10 activities that may contribute to increased happiness is a little harder, which I guess is the whole rationale for the rise of positive psychology.

In addition to distributing the manifesto,



BBC

Could these people get you dancing in the aisles in Slough?

the team had the people of Slough engaging in a number of other exercises. These included asking shoppers in a supermarket to smile and dance in the aisles (interacting with strangers), and pedestrians to hold hands in the street (the importance of touch). Some of the 50 volunteers visited graveyards (to remind themselves that life is short and boost their appreciation of being alive) and took part in singing classes, including performing one song titled 'Slough is Happy' to the tune of 'London's Burning'.

At the time of writing, the series is half way through and the data from the 50 volunteers indicates an increase in happiness level of between 10 and 20 per cent, although how this was assessed was not clarified. Also the programme was a little sketchy in how adherence to the manifesto's activities was monitored. How this change in the volunteers will affect the rest of Slough's inhabitants remains to be seen. The programme clearly addresses a worthwhile topic, although I can't help getting frustrated with some of the gimmicky exercises – surely making people happy is a serious business? But it was hard not to smile when the happiness experts fell out amongst themselves in episode two.

Still, criticism and sniping is churlish given the noble aims of the programme. However, one programme that may attract some criticism is Channel 4's new reality programme, which was covered extensively

in the papers and arrived on our screens in December. In *Space Cadets* nine members of the public are taken to a military base in Russia to receive training and then be flown into space. The catch is that the training takes place in a disused military base in the UK (the members of the public land there after circling over the North Sea for hours). The space flight itself takes place in a simulator. The unsuspecting members of the public are told that the whole thing is a hoax after the programme is finished. The programme makers Endemol say a psychologist was involved in choosing the participants in the programme, who all score highly on suggestibility. It all seems a rather harsh joke to me, and I'd be interested to know how a psychologist could justify their involvement.

Marc Jones

## THE 10 SECRETS OF HAPPINESS

- Exercise for half an hour three times a week.
- At the end of each day reflect on five things that you are grateful for.
- Have an hour-long conversation with your partner or closest friend each week.
- Plant something.
- Cut your TV viewing by half.
- Smile at a stranger at least once a day.
- Make contact with a friend or relation you have not been in contact with for a while and arrange to meet up.
- Have a good laugh at least once a day.
- Give yourself a daily treat.
- Do a good turn for someone each day.

## Press Committee

### Media Training 2006

#### Introduction to Working with the Media

A one-day intensive immersion in the media – with lots of hands-on experience.

Dates: (Mondays) 20 February, 8 May, 18 September, 4 December 2006

#### Broadcast Interview Skills

A one-day series of presentations and exercises designed to give experience of being interviewed on radio and TV.

Dates: (Mondays) 6 March, 21 August, 11 December 2006

Venue: BPS London office, 33 John Street

Registration form and further details from: Dawn Schubert, The British Psychological Society, St Andrews House, 48 Princess Road East, Leicester LE1 7DR

Tel: 0116 252 9581

E-mail: [mediatraining@bps.org.uk](mailto:mediatraining@bps.org.uk)