

Annual Student Writer Competition

Are you passionate about psychology?
Fancy shouting about it to 42,000
readers, and winning a great prize?

Winners will have their articles published in *The Psychologist*, and will also get an expenses-paid trip to the Society's London or Edinburgh Lectures or Annual Conference (UK travel, hotel and registration fee).

There are two categories – **undergraduate** and **postgraduate**. We are looking for writing which **engages** and **informs**: maximum of 1500 words.



The
British
Psychological
Society



1. Send three copies of your article to: The Psychologist Annual Student Writer Competition, The British Psychological Society, 48 Princess Road East, Leicester LE1 7DR, to arrive no later than **TUESDAY 31 JANUARY 2006**.
2. **Do not** put your name on the article itself – the judges will work blind.
3. On a separate sheet please list **all** of the following: name, address, telephone and fax numbers, e-mail, departmental address, name of head of department/supervisor, word count, and which category you are entering.

See the August issue of *The Psychologist* for this year's winners and the judges' report. Also visit www.thepsychologist.org.uk and click on 'Write for The Psychologist' for more information.



Associate Editor: Nicola Hills

Short articles (around 600 words), news, tips, quotes, cartoons and other contributions of particular relevance to students are most welcome. Send to: Nicola Hills, c/o the Society's Leicester office. E-mail: Nicola_Hills@hotmail.com

Psychology students – This time it's personal

BY CATHERINE BUTLER

If we consider identity to be multifaceted, how much of you is there in your training? It could be argued that with the increased use of qualitative research methods and reflective practice, psychology as a profession is shifting to invite more of you into your professional role. Carrere and Weiss (1988) propose that as a profession:

We are no longer detached, 'objective' Copernican observers, rather our involvement in psychological work is revealed to be an intimate one... Accordingly, it is important that psychology as a science address the subjective and personal engagement of students in its professional education. (p.151)

But how much of you do you choose to bring in? In my current master's in systemic therapy I am encouraged to speak from the identity position that informs my reflections on the work, be that gender, culture, ethnicity, class, etc. For example, when listening to stories of sexual abuse with African clients, I might say 'While you were talking, I found myself thinking that as a white Western woman I would label what you are describing as an abuse of power; I wonder if this fits for you?' However, some of

these positions feel more comfortable to speak from than others. In my clinical psychology training, I felt varying degrees of comfort discussing different aspects of my identity that I felt connected to the work with different supervisors and tutors. For me the greatest area of conflict was around my sexuality (which I defined as



Psychologists are no longer detached Copernican observers

lesbian at the time). Choosing to be 'out' or not is always a complex issue, but there were times when my reflections on the clinical work were informed by this view, or when I felt dismayed in staff meetings witnessing opinions that I considered homophobic.

However, it also felt uncomfortable holding different aspects of my identity so separate. This has also been written about by trainees from ethnic minorities, for example, Patel (1998) discusses how 'it was as if the denial of differences... became a feature of professional identity...[leading to] two differing self-perceptions: a professional and a personal identity' (p.14).

My dissertation reflected this was also the case for lesbian and gay trainees (Butler, 2004). They reported that training environments presented numerous

challenges to personal–professional integration, including anti-lesbian and gay sentiments from peers, lecturers and supervisors. When trainees were open about their sexuality, they risked being positioned as an expert or feeling marginalised within their peer group. Trainees reported that such experiences left them feeling disheartened with the profession, so much so that one trainee had decided not to apply for clinical psychology jobs. Such findings have serious

consequences for diversity within our profession.

However, the experience of negotiating different valued aspects of identity can be an opportunity for growth, providing the individual with an increased range of coping strategies for dealing with future challenges and an increased sense of self-efficacy (Milton & Coyle, 2003). The British Psychological Society also recognises this and in its accreditation guidelines (2002) for clinical psychology training, it states that courses should encourage 'professional competence relating to personal and professional development and awareness' (p.25).

It feels as if the time is ripe to stand up and be heard within the multiple contexts of training (placements, lectures, research, essays, etc.). To speak from your lived experience and prior knowledge, from whatever identity position informs you (be that family position, gender, ethnicity, culture, class, sexuality, age or ability). In this way we can integrate our strengths and resources and own and develop a professional identity that is relevant to us. Such a position also requires us to accept difference and diversity in our colleagues and clients, which can only serve to benefit the communities we aim serve.

■ Catherine Butler is a clinical psychologist in Camden Primary Care Trust. E-mail: catherine.butler@camdenpct.nhs.uk.

References

- British Psychological Society. (2002). *Criteria for the accreditation of postgraduate training programmes in clinical psychology*. Leicester: Author.
- Butler, C. (2004). Lesbian and gay trainees: The challenges of personal and professional integration. *Lesbian and Gay Psychology Review*, 5(1), 22–29.
- Carrere, R.A. & Weiss, A.G. (1988). The relationship of the personal from graduate training to professional practice. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 19, 147–157.
- Milton, M. & Coyle, A. (2003). Sexual Identity: Affirmative practice with lesbian and gay clients. In R. Wolfe, W. Dryden & S. Strawbridge (Eds.) *Handbook of counselling psychology* (2nd edn). London: Sage.
- Patel, M. (1998). Black therapists and cross-cultural therapy: Issues of power dynamics and identity. *Clinical Psychology Forum*, 114, 13–15.