



## 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](mailto:H.Gross@lboro.ac.uk).

# Appearing to find something special

**T**HIS latest issue of *The Psychologist* will be landing on doormats as the days lengthen and the risks of seasonal affective disorder are reducing. Preparing this in the shortest dark days of December, I have, however, been struck by an article relating the seasons and seasonal events to psychological issues. *The Guardian* reported on the possible psychological implications of birth month. Amongst a series of findings on the links between season of birth and health outcomes, such as the incidence of multiple sclerosis, the article referred to work by Professor Thomas Joiner at Florida State University, who highlights a link between exposure to flu in the womb and later psychological health. This reminded me of work that was presented at the 2004 BPS Annual Conference by Carol Joinson, which received some media interest at the time. Her findings suggested that certainly amongst younger respondents, being born in the autumn and winter was associated with higher levels of sensation seeking.

Still on the seasonal note, and with particular reference to this month's event, a quick trawl of internet news revealed the importance of having a 'special someone' to share significant days with, including New Year's Day and Valentine's Day. This finding arose from a survey carried out by Dr Richard Wiseman in conjunction with *Psychology Today* and an internet dating agency.

An important element in finding that perfect partner is often considered to be appearance. An item picked up by some regional papers in November alerts us to some research that sheds light on how people pick their partners. The *Press &*



Finding that special someone

*Journal* reported work by 'the purple haired university academic' Dave Perrett (St Andrews), which suggested that certain types of facial images – those with more masculine features – are seen as more likely to be promiscuous. Other research, this time by Tony Little of the University of Liverpool, would suggest that people are likely to choose partners who look more like themselves or even their (usually opposite-sex) parents. Although finding the perfect partner may be a major concern for some people, sexual relationships may not be as important to everyone, as our own Nick Neave of Northumbria University, a regular contributor to these pages, pointed out in an *Independent on Sunday* article on asexuality. In this case, he was suggesting that there may be some biological foundations to asexuality.

Of course, forming effective relationships is not always easy, whatever our appearance, and some types of relationship can have a negative rather than positive impact on psychological well-being. Something that has received considerable attention over the past few years is what is sometimes called 'celebrity worship'. Both the *Sunday Mail* and the *Leicester Mercury* picked up on research by John Maltby of the University of Leicester published in the *British Journal of Psychology*, which highlighted the dangers of idolising celebrities. Those who were intense celebrity worshippers tended to suffer poorer mental health, though fortunately those of us who follow celebrities for social or entertainment reasons were likely to be more outgoing and optimistic.

Finally, in keeping with the theme of appearances once more, and perhaps something that has been prompted by what we know of celebrities and their activities, the *Yorkshire Post* reported findings that purchases of injectable forms of cosmetic surgery were booming, particularly at Christmas time. Interestingly, the newspaper also found space to report that working women can feel under intense pressure to look good and prove they are up to the job. However, it quotes psychologist Ros Taylor as saying that although women often felt under pressure to look their best in order to succeed at work, 'they just need to do their job well, rather than be preoccupied with looks'. While this is undoubtedly true, it can be difficult to ignore the importance of appearance, particularly on a first date!

Harriet Gross

## Press Committee

### Media Training Days 2005

Monday 7 March 2005

Monday 9 May 2005

Monday 26 September 2005

Monday 5 December 2005

All Media Training Days will be held at the Society's London office at 33 John Street.

The days will include:

- news writing
- snapshots of the media
- media releases
- interview techniques

For a registration form and further details contact:

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## TIP OF THE MONTH

Try to think about the 'real world' when you are discussing research with a journalist. Give examples of how the research might be applied; use concrete examples to illustrate abstract points you are talking about.

■ Next media training day – Monday 7 March, and broadcast training day on Tuesday 8 March. Contact the Dawn Schubert for details on [dawsch@bps.org.uk](mailto:dawsch@bps.org.uk) or tel: 0116 252 9581.