

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.

Misunderstanding understanding

IN January's issue of *The Psychologist* 'Research in brief' asked 'Are we a nation of mental health illiterates?' The question was based on a survey published in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* which showed that members of the public (i) have difficulty 'correctly recognising mental disorders'; (ii) believe that depression and schizophrenia are caused by the social environment; and (iii) have an almost uniformly negative view of psychotropic medication, citing side-effects and dependence.

All of these issues, however, have been the subject of intense controversy and debate in the psychological and psychiatric literature and between professionals and service users. The debates have questioned whether it is useful to interpret particular behaviours and experiences as specific mental



Is this person depressed, schizophrenic or just expressing emotion? The public may have difficulty in 'correctly recognising mental disorders', but these are the subject of intense debate

disorders which can be 'correctly recognised' by experts; they have questioned the belief that these assumed disorders have a biological basis; and they have suggested that we need to give greater consideration to the negative effects of psychotropic medication. The issues have

recently been discussed in detail in the Society's Division of Clinical Psychology report on understanding psychosis. In the context of these debates, it seems unfair to see the public's views as 'misunderstanding'.

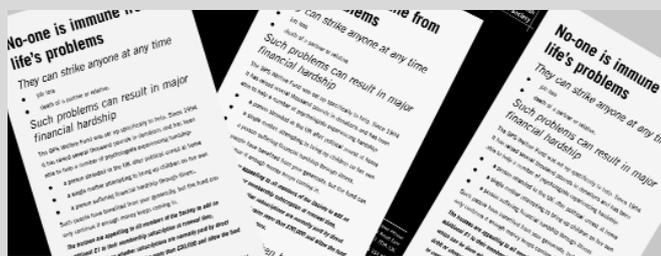
Certainly, if we wish to develop the kind of constructive relationship with the public that

was the subject of other features in the same issue of *The Psychologist*, we should perhaps not begin by querying their literacy when they disagree with the views espoused by mainstream psychiatric journals.

Mary Boyle
University of East London

Appeal for assistance

THE Society's Welfare Fund, set up in 1994, was intended to give assistance to members who experienced 'exceptional hardship'. Over the years a number have been helped, but the fund has always been woefully under-resourced – the balance in hand has never exceeded £21 10. Recently, in order to put the fund on a firmer footing, an appeal was sent out with subscription reminders for 2001, asking members to donate £1, on top of their subscriptions, to go to the fund. If every member had signed up, the



fund would have £30,000 per annum and people in real need could be given real help. However, due partly at least to the poor design of the appeal, only £550 in donations have so far been received.

Most of this £550 has already been distributed to

recent applicants to the fund, and the balance currently stands at less than £100. Consequently it is unlikely that we will be able to respond to requests for help in the immediate future.

A further appeal, again to coincide with subscription

reminders for 2002, will be made at the end of the year. In the meantime if anyone could see their way to sending a small donation (e.g. £5, although anything would be welcome) we would be most grateful; and so would be the fund's applicants. Cheques for any donations should be made out to The British Psychological Society's Welfare Fund and sent to Russell Hobbs at the Leicester office.

Janet Carr
Chair, Welfare Fund
Geoff Lindsay
Honorary Treasurer

Academics and the media: Your money or your life?

I WAS very interested to read the 'Head to head' between John Radford and Joyce Collins in the January issue, and would like to add a few further points and some personal advice to the debate.

I wholeheartedly agree with Radford's assertions that academic authors are not

adequately remunerated for their contributions, and that other activities in the dissemination of knowledge (e.g. media contributions) can be costly in time with little financial benefit. However:

- I have never heard an academic say that they entered the profession to

make money. Most of us do the job because we find intrinsic – rather than financial – value in what we do.

- It could be argued that journalists and other writers have to write to make ends meet, whereas the vast majority of academics are salaried and earn money whether they write or not.
- When it comes to the media, academics can usually negotiate appearance fees for radio and TV programmes. If they really want you, most will provide a fee. Even on written articles, you can occasionally get a fee if your contribution makes up the majority of the article and/or you can ask for a byline.
- If you are a good writer (and populist with it), then cut out the middle man or woman and write the article yourself. Newspapers and magazines will pay standard rates irrespective of your

journalistic background.

- Instead of spending 30 minutes talking to a journalist only to get one quoted soundbite, ask them exactly what they want and set a time limit. It's also worth remembering that in some countries (e.g. Norway and Sweden), academics have it written into their contracts that they have to talk to the media about their research if it is relevant. At least in the UK we get the choice!

Mark Griffiths

*Reader in Psychology
Nottingham Trent University*

Pam Briggs, Honorary Press Officer, replies: *The key point here is the 'advancement and diffusion of psychological knowledge', which is a major professional responsibility enshrined in both the Royal Charter of the Society and in the workings of the Press Office.*

Any offers?

I COMPLETELY agree with John Radford's comments in your January issue. Money is an issue, isn't it? I started my PhD with the purpose of pursuing a career in academia. I would still like to, so would many of my colleagues, but we are all considering other offers. Why? Because despite the fact that we dearly love our areas of research (why else would anyone commit three whole years to it?)

the profession simply does not pay well. I recall a conversation with Professor David Rose (John Radford's Head of Department) five years ago in which he speculated that academic salaries would be 'bought into line with industry within 5–10 years'. I hope he was right. Time's running out!

David M. Parslow
*Chair, Student Forum
Institute of Psychiatry
London*

Suicide – It brings on many changes

RORY O'Connor and Noel Sheehy's interesting article on suicidal behaviour (January 2001) concludes that 'hopelessness is the psychological construct most consistently implicated'. But what is hopelessness? Is it always a rational cognitive reaction to circumstances or is it, more usually, a symptom of depression? Surely it is the latter. The same individual in the same circumstances feels hopeless when depressed but not hopeless when not depressed.

Richard A. Ryder
*11 The Imperial
Exeter*

I READ Rory O'Connor and Noel Sheehy's article, which was informative and interesting.

I would like to draw the

attention of the readership to research which indicates that 'a subtle change in the sound of someone's voice is the first sign that they are serious about committing suicide' (Sample, 2000, summarising a paper that originally appeared in *IEEE Transactions on Biomedical Engineering*). This research may prove to be of benefit to people who experience suicidal feelings, and lead to improvements in the understanding of such behaviour and its social context.

Sample states that Silverman (a psychiatrist at Yale University) teamed up with an electronics engineer at Vanderbilt University, Mitchell Wilkes, after Silverman noticed that he seemed to be able to 'sense from a patient's voice whether they were likely to

attempt suicide in the near future'. They found two factors that could distinguish between those who were at high risk of committing suicide and those at low risk: use of a narrower range of frequencies when producing their vowels than people who are just depressed, and higher-pitched voices. Wilkes stated that 'the goal is to have a diagnostic device for emergency rooms or that could be linked up to helplines'.

The research focuses on an aspect of nonverbal communication (NVC). Are there other aspects of NVC that would also be fruitful? Are the changes in voice related to an increase in, for example, anxiety over what is involved in attempting suicide? Do people at risk of suicide show such changes earlier when discussing what for them are

the main factors in their distress. And if so would it be useful to focus with them on improving their problem-solving skills (impaired skills which are already known to be a risk factor) in relation to such factors possibly preventing their distress developing to the point where they attempt suicide?

Some people who experience depression describe themselves as feeling empty or hollow inside: is this someone's way of describing something that is also reflected in voice?

Jan Cave
*14 Laverock Court
Station Road
Taunton*

Reference

Sample, I. (2000, 19 August). Voice from the grave. *New Scientist*, 17.

ADVERTISING DIVERSITY

YOU asked for comments about including a personal ad in *The Psychologist*. I must admit that when I saw it my immediate reaction was 'ouch'!

Many professional organisations have both a sober professional journal and a more light-hearted newsletter. Have you considered this? You could distribute the newsletter by e-mail, probably to most of your members, say three or four times a year. Personal advertisements and other things of that sort could be read quite painlessly in a newsletter.

Sylvia Moody
22 Wray Crescent
London N4

IN response to the Editor's call for comments on advertising, I can see no harm in broadening the magazine's publication interests, and do not believe for one

moment that the editorial process, or indeed its members professional integrity, would allow the floodgates to open for the advertising of stairlifts or holiday caravans.

Annette Haywood
Department of Psychology
University of Sheffield

Comment from Graham Powell, Chair of the Psychologist Policy Committee: *The Psychologist Policy Committee has discussed in some depth the diversity of advertising attracted by The Psychologist. We will continue to judge members' advertisements by reference to our existing advertising policy. We will seek advertising of relevance to our readership to ensure that The Psychologist remains economically viable and that we can continue to develop the publication as a service to members.*

The Delphi technique and evidence-based solutions

IN an interesting article ('Back (again) to the future', January 2001) Helen Haste and her colleagues are accurate in emphasising that their use of the Delphi technique explicitly to examine psychologists' expectations of the future actually (implicitly) examines 'current preoccupations'. Indeed, there is considerable psychological research on the discrepancies between peoples' judgements about the future and about how they will feel in the future, and their later judgements. It is also interesting that the

authors finish their article commenting on some shortfalls of the Delphi technique and suggest using instead scenario-building.

Rather than being developed by the Rand Corporation, as the Delphi technique was, scenario-building, originally used by the military, was first really 'successfully' developed by Shell. It is most unfortunate, however, that scenario-building has been widely promoted throughout the business community with virtually no evidence (other than basic anecdotal evidence from fellow practitioners) concerning its efficacy. From a psychological standpoint, a whole range of issues have yet to be addressed, before scenario techniques can be readily endorsed as a routine basis for intervening in

DEADLINE

Deadline for letters for possible publication in the May issue is **30 March.**

organisational decision processes. Not least among these are questions concerning in which situations, if any, and for whom, scenarios are useful. To the extent that scenario techniques are found to be effective, it would also be useful to know why this is the case.

Rather than taking tools and techniques from the world of business at face value, why

don't we, as a professional body of scientist-practitioners, examine carefully the alleged benefits of such interventions, challenging current practice where necessary, in order to build a future founded on evidence-based solutions?

Gerard P. Hodgkinson
Professor of Organisational Behaviour and Strategic Management
University of Leeds

BERNARD UNGERSON – A MEMOIR

BERNARD Ungerson died on 27 June 2000. I was asked to contribute an obituary for *The Psychologist*, which I was delighted to do. Then I discovered that Bernard, being Bernard, did not want an obituary. So this is a memoir, not an obituary, and if the ghost of Bernard comes to haunt me for it, I will protest that a memoir is justified, for he was memorable, even unforgettable.

Bernard was born in 1912, and graduated from the London School of Economics in 1936. A contemporary, Harry Henry, informs me that he gave Harold Laski, a tutor who was rather sceptical of the value of psychology, a hard time. I have heard that Cyril Burt, his external examiner, claimed that he could not allow him a first, because none of his examination answers exceeded one page in length.

Upon graduating he joined the National Institute of Industrial Psychology, where he assisted Winifred Raphael in industrial investigations. Along with most of NIIP staff he was conscripted into the armed forces in the Second World War, and played a significant part in establishing the War Office Selection Boards, the model for the postwar Civil Service Selection Boards, the two-day Group Selection Procedure and many industrial assessment centres. He ended the war with the rank of colonel.

The 1947 Indian Independence Act caused a crisis in the jute industry in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), when the mill managers, who were Hindus, fled to India. The British government sent Bernard to

East Pakistan to see whether the techniques of recruitment, selection and training used in the British Army could ease the problem. The result was outstandingly successful, and he was awarded a CBE.

Postwar, John Spedan Lewis persuaded Bernard to join the John Lewis Organisation as Personnel Director. At the time Spedan Lewis had a theory that some of the best prospects for senior management were chess players. But Bernard was a keen bridge player, with the view that life was too short for chess. He failed to convince Spedan Lewis, so the appointment was not a success. In 1956 he became a Director of the Anne Shaw Organisation.

He had a knack for the telling phrase. In 1958, in the face of a complaint that he was being too critical of Freudian psychoanalysis, he replied 'I say, any stigma will do to beat a dogma' — a handy phrase in an argument.

For more than 50 years Bernard was a member of The British Psychological Society, a Fellow, and a particular supporter of occupational psychology and its conferences. He was not much involved in Society committees, but as a personnel director was much more active in the Institute of Personnel Management (now IPD), where he was editor of their *Recruitment Handbook*, spoke on their courses and held the post of President.

In his retirement Bernard became a bridge enthusiast, travelling to compete in international tournaments.

David C. Duncan
74 Park Avenue
Ruislip

INFORMATION

■ I HAVE a number of **copies of *The Psychologist*** from Volumes 1–4. I will retain them until midsummer, then failing any takers send them to our paper collection service.

Joyce Tombs

19 Cator Road
London SE26 5DT

■ I HAVE several years' worth of **back copies of *The Psychologist***, and as storage is a problem I would like to get rid of them. I also have several years' worth of counselling journals, for which I would like to find a home.

Daphne Stedman

27 Holness Road
London E15 4EN

■ I AM currently undertaking a top-up doctorate research project investigating the **impact of early dynamics and life events upon careers choices in clinical psychology and medicine.**

I have devised an anonymous questionnaire (five to ten minutes to complete) and need NHS psychologists to complete it.

If you feel that you or members of your department can help, please contact me directly and I will provide you with the questionnaire and SAEs for return. Alternatively, please contact me for further information.

Pauline Graham

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watersons@mail.scarney.northy.nhs.uk

■ I AM currently developing a **self-esteem project for young people aged 13–19** years in Southend, Essex. We support young people who are experiencing emotional distress, via individual counselling to address specific issues and/or personal development group work to build confidence and self-esteem.

I am attempting to validate this using the Rosenberg's self-esteem scale. We have a Rogerian ethos of unconditional positive regard. If any other members have experience in this field, know of other similar

projects nationally, or would like to share information and resources, please contact me on kbrittonself esteemproject@supernet.com

Kelly Britton

Westcliff-on-Sea
Essex

■ **THE East of Scotland Psychology Assistants' Group** is

open to assistant psychologists and psychology graduates interested in a career in clinical psychology. We meet once a month (usually in Edinburgh) to discuss issues relevant to assistant psychologists.

Being part of an assistant psychology group gives the opportunity to share concerns with those in similar positions. The group also offers the possibility of broadening knowledge of clinical psychology with lectures from qualified psychologists of various specialities, visits to departments and an opportunity to get involved in discussions about professional issues. It also allows useful preparation for applications and interviews for clinical training.

If you are interested in coming along to our meetings, or would like further information about the group, please contact us.

**Audrey Matthews
Katharine O'Farrell
Cathal McAuliffe**

Royal Edinburgh Hospital
Tel: 0131 537 6214

■ ON 17 January 2001 a meeting was held at Northwick Park Hospital, Harrow, for **psychologists working within Youth Offending Teams.**

The day was attended by members of the educational, clinical, counselling and forensic Divisions and gave those attending the opportunity to share information and discuss their experiences.

The next meeting of the YOT psychologists group will take place on 12 June. All psychologists working in the YOTs are invited. Please contact Frances Blumenfeld on 01223 718223.

Lance Edwards

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