



'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.

Crave New World?

ALDOUS Huxley's happiness drug Soma may be closer than we think. A *Sunday Times Magazine* article on the research and dealing in legal 'pharmacological oblivion' reports a variety of potions. By popping in the local chemists, I will be able to optimise personality, reduce social anxiety and shyness, become more extravert and control anger. I could give my life more meaning, enhance memory and improve sexual performance, maybe even remember sexual performance! There's even a pill (the antidepressant Citalopram) which it is suggested may curb the 'extravagance' of shopping. I wonder how I'd get on if I shoplifted some from the chemists and my defence was

'I was only trying to cure my habit, your Honour!'

Fortunately, there are many scientists, philosophers and psychologists expressing concern that such an approach to the human condition and life's problems is misleading, and narrowing 'normal' behaviours and personality types would threaten our essential human nature. Professor Jeffrey Gray (Institute of Psychiatry) advises that we need human diversity to survive, suggesting 'you wouldn't want your accountant to be an impulsive risk-taker'.

But if I have to face the depressing inevitability of redundancy, I don't care... I've just taken a couple of Dolezac!

Ged Bailes

Courage in a snowstorm

AS a neuropsychologist, I was delighted to hear Radio 4's *Adventures in Science* edition on memory. Posing the basic question of how do we actually remember what we had for breakfast, the programme managed to touch on current concepts of encoding, retrieval and storage with a smattering of neuroanatomy and neuroimaging. Not bad for 15 minutes soon after nine o'clock in the morning. I would be hard pressed to deliver such a message to a lay audience so succinctly. Credit is due to the various psychologists involved who gave vivid word pictures to describe often complex concepts. More of this, please.

From the *It's My Story* series (also Radio 4) 'Dumbstruck', on recovery from stroke, was regularly trailed. Listening whilst stuck in a snowstorm on the M25, I thought it was a courageous piece of broadcasting. A dysphasic stroke patient described in his own, often chaotic, language what he had experienced. We take for granted the importance of language and make assumptions about those who struggle to express themselves. A fascinating firsthand account, but I wanted to ask so much more of this insightful man. Fortunately, Nick Darke is a playwright and plans to use his experience in subsequent writings. Definitely one to watch out for.

Camilla Herbert

STEFANO CAGNONI (REPORTDIGITAL.COM)

DECISION making of the most important kind was highlighted in BBC2's new series *Collision Course* in which transport accidents were analysed at a minute level. The key to this downbeat yet mesmerising set of programmes was the life-or-death decisions made by transport personnel, and more importantly by the survivors of the ensuing accidents. A carriage being 'far more jolly than I wanted' made all the difference for one survivor of the Southall crash.

The nature of altered perceptions during disasters was addressed by James Thompson (UCL): 'People report that things seem to happen in black and white and so they should. Why bother processing the nuances of colour when all you really want to know is where is the exit?' Jim Reason (University of Manchester) cheerfully reassured us that such risks cannot be prevented and failure is unavoidable. Reason used the example of French knights at Agincourt, fatally weighed down by their state-of-the-art armour, to demonstrate the unforeseen consequences of an excellent defence.

From the sublime to the ridiculous, Channel 4's *Inside the Mind of Roy Keane* offered a psychological appraisal of football's Mr Not-So-Nice Guy. Alongside clips of crunching tackles and lurid headlines, Geoff Beattie (University of Manchester) and Martin Perry informed us that Roy verbally and physically assaults people because he doesn't like 'bluffers' and has a terrible fear of failure, which often accompanies peak sporting performance.

Down in the very depths lurked *Girls Who Shop* (Channel 4). The fact that one in five women are 'compulsive shoppers' was barely addressed by the limp psychological analyses from behaviourist Judi ('women like glittery things') or psychologist Linda ('designer labels improve social status').

Nick Neave

TIP OF THE MONTH

Struggling to simplify a difficult subject for a news release or article? Write it down for a friend or relative who knows nothing about psychology, and then ask them to read it and explain it back to you in their own words. If they come back with completely the wrong end of the stick the chances are it's your writing rather than their reading that's at fault!

■ Next media training day – Monday 2 June. Contact Dawn Schubert for details on dawsch@bps.org.uk or tel: 0116 252 9581.