



LETTERS

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. Letters to the editor are not normally acknowledged, and space does not permit the publication of every letter received. However, see www.thepsychologist.org.uk to contribute to our discussion forum.

Dealing with student plagiarism

I AM writing in response to J.M. Wober's letter ('Disciplining plagiarists', January 2006). In printing Wober's letter, *The Psychologist* could be seen to have opened a debate on academic plagiarism. This is perhaps timely, given that as lecturers in higher education we are often presented with statistics that inform us that students have no idea what plagiarism is, and that a majority of students report having plagiarised at some point in their career.

While I do not necessarily disagree with Wober's remarks, I do think it is important that we avoid the dangers of building an argument based on the comparison of different populations. However, let us assume that the comparison between professional role models and students is useful. On this basis, it is worth expanding on some of the points made by Wober, particularly the 'if it's a student we flunk them' issue.

Behind the idea of 'flunking' students for plagiarism there are many issues that have been visited time and again by university plagiarism boards. I have sat on many plagiarism boards, as board chair, as the lecturer whose work has been plagiarised, and as a representative of the student. I have never been in any group of staff in which the only consideration made is to 'flunk' the student. In contrast, university plagiarism boards in my experience have carefully and deliberately considered the following points.

1. Plagiarism is often caused by something other than outright dishonesty. Is it a lack of time, pressure to perform, or lack of knowledge of what constitutes plagiarism?
2. Did the plagiarist seek to give themselves an unfair advantage over their peers?
3. Have there been any additional plagiarism attempts?
4. Have there been any further attempts to conceal the plagiarism?

I do not seek not to muddy waters here regarding the particular case of alleged plagiarism referred to in Wober's letter, but it does provide us with an opportunity to consider the issues more analytically, especially in relation to the causes of plagiarism. I know I am not alone in often



being dissatisfied with the outcome of student plagiarism cases. University rules are always well thought through, correct and clear, but often in real cases they tend to lead to the perception by staff that the student is either treated too lightly (e.g. they are told to redo the essay and nothing more is said than a few disciplinary words) or treated too harshly (they fail the module or the course, often leading to the student leaving the course and chosen career for ever). The latter can lead to the extreme result of a ruined life brought on by a young and foolish person who didn't listen to or read the rules.

I do not mean to suggest that there are only two options in plagiarism cases, but these two resulting perceptions seem to occur more often than they should. I have always been in favour of a community service model. The student writes of their crime, their experiences, their feelings, and their stupidity around both the plagiarism and the disciplinary process they have just gone through. This work is made anonymously available to other students (on school webpages) not only to warn and deter other students of plagiarism but also to give them an account from a peer perspective. This seems to me a crucial addition to the present lecturer-led warnings, which seem at the moment to be the equivalent of telling a five-year-old to eat their greens because it is good for them.

The community service model also leads to an additional contribution being made by the plagiarist and something positive is put back into the academic community.

Therefore, there is something perhaps here for the alleged plagiarism case. Proper consideration of Point 1 would perhaps tell us something about the nature of plagiarism in the non-student academic world and why it may occur. We already have a modern-day 'bogeyman' from the unproven and unresolved Cyril Burt case, so perhaps it is time for another approach. As psychologists/psychiatrists we have the rare opportunity to begin to understand the cause of something, and this case provides us with an ideal time to start. Thinking about student cases in which I have been involved, I can recall two or three students who have gone through a disciplinary process following plagiarism, have been treated with understanding and support rather than punishment and exclusion, and have gone on to better their lives. If we combine this approach with some sort of community service, this particular alleged case of plagiarism could be turned to our advantage, and used as a learning experience that can help us prevent further plagiarism. The key question is whether or not these opportunities exist in our current psychological and educational climate?

John Maltby
University of Leicester

Pre-tertiary psychology teaching

I WAS interested to read your report of the BPS/Higher Education Academy event on the future of psychology teaching ('Future directions for psychology teaching', February 2006). As a teacher of A-level psychology with an honours degree in psychology and BPS status, I find that the students who want to learn psychology have an expectation of the subject. They expect to be able to read people's minds 'as Derren Brown does', or to become forensic psychologists or criminologists.

The reality is that most of the students are not prepared for a real grown-up subject. They find it very difficult to grasp that psychology is a scientific discipline and not a game. They like doing attachment and Milgram, they don't like the 'hard' bits. This is especially true at AS-level. They all want to try this new subject, but, generally, half of AS students do not make it to A2-level. The idea of GCSE psychology might help to provide a foundation of knowledge, but it would have to be extremely basic in content. However, it might reduce the numbers of AS candidates, especially those who ultimately find that psychology as a subject is not for them and go and do media instead.

I teach the AQA A syllabus which is taken annually by about 48,000 AS students. I agree with AQA Chief Examiner Simon Green's experiences of exam paper answers – my students can get a good grade at AS by learning the information by rote without really understanding about analysis and evaluation. It is only at A2-level that students begin to appreciate what psychology is really about and can see how research builds on previous findings.

The surveys by Peter Bannister are similar to my ex-students' experiences. Some tell me that they are finding it boring because they are covering the same areas of the syllabus, others are finding it interesting because they are learning new areas of psychology. One student reported that he was surprised to find that where it had taken him a whole term to complete one piece of research coursework, he had done 'five of them in the first term of uni'. This demonstrates that either prior experience of carrying out research has helped them get ahead, or that for a lot of students, they are just not mature enough at 16–18 years old to cope with the demands of this extremely wide and varied subject.

In response to Martin Conway's input, my status in school is as an unqualified teacher as I have only got a PGCE in further education, even though I have specialist knowledge in my field. I could not get on the Cert. Ed course to become a qualified teacher because I could not offer a mainstream subject as a first. Maybe with GCSE psychology this will now change, allowing more psychology graduates to become qualified teachers in their own right.

As far as the exam boards are concerned, if they want to keep numbers of entrants high they will continue to reduce content and make it more accessible to young students. If as it would seem that A-level psychology is not a prerequisite for taking a psychology degree, then we can carry on dumbing it down in order to entertain the pupils and to make sure that grades remain high. But that is another matter for discussion.

Eleanor A. Crossley
Carlton
Nottingham

If you read an article in *The Psychologist* that you fundamentally disagree with, then the letters page is your first port of call: summarise your argument in under 500 words. But if you feel you have a substantial amount of conflicting evidence to cite and numerous points to make that simply cannot be contained within a letter, you can write a 'Counterpoint' article of up to 1500 words, within a month of the publication of the original article. However, it is best to contact the editor about your plans, on jonsut@bps.org.uk. We hope this format will build on the role of *The Psychologist* as a forum for discussion and debate.

Tackling prejudice in academia

I HAVE no doubt that the authors of 'Institutional sexism in academia' are correct in the conclusion implicit in their title. Not only is there institutional sexism, but I would be surprised not to find racism, ageism, and many other prejudices as well, of which we are largely unaware because they are embedded within our culture and because their victims' voices are not heard.

However, I had some problems with their article. My first difficulty was with the level of analysis. Underlying questions about the nature of discrimination *per se* were not addressed, such as why people tend to associate with some social groups and to disassociate themselves from others, or why some of us try to enhance our individual or identity group's self-esteem by devaluing others. Whether that devaluation is on the grounds of gender, race, perceived disability, income, occupation, or whatever, is in my view a secondary issue. Until we address the primary issue of why we devalue others at all, those prejudices will always be with us.

Secondly, I was uneasy about the attributes that the authors ascribe to the parties in the feminist/male-dominated debate. I felt that I was being offered a stark choice: either I must embrace a feminist/qualitative methods/social



constructionist epistemological package, or I would, by default, be aligning myself with a male-dominated/quantitative methods/positivist position. Surely this is the kind of simplistic generalisation to which feminists (rightly) object when it's applied to matters of gender or sexual orientation.

I suspect that the authors of the article would perceive me as being one of those who have been 'trained to uphold a positivist, quantitative and natural science model of psychology'. Possibly I have been, although I'm not sure what they mean by 'natural science model', I can't see what's wrong with quantitative

DEADLINE

Deadline for letters for possible publication in the April issue is **13 March**

methods, and I don't perceive science as positivist by definition. I'm puzzled. I would find it genuinely helpful if the authors could expand on their perceptions of traditional science and also if they could explain why my 'upholding' of

it prevents me from being delighted by a levelling of the playing field of opportunity for marginalised minority groups.

Sue Gerrard

8 Croft Way
Market Drayton
Shropshire

INFORMATION

■ I AM a clinical psychologist working in a child and adolescent mental health service. We have a number of **WISC-III and WPPSI-R tests that we no longer require** and were wondering what other services have done with their old tests. If anyone has any ideas I would be very grateful to hear from you.

Jo Steer

South London & Maudsley NHS Trust
E-mail: Joanne.steer@slam.nhs.uk

■ DO you suffer from **IBS, ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease**? Would you be willing to take part in a study exploring sufferer's different styles of relating to others? For my MSc in counselling psychology I am conducting a questionnaire-based study that takes a maximum of 25 minutes to complete. If you feel you may be interested in taking part and would like further information please contact me, your time would be greatly appreciated.

Katherine Poole

E-mail: katherinepoole1978@yahoo.co.uk

■ WE are seeking help with an investigation into a linked series of **burglaries and sexual assaults against lone elderly females across South London** since 1992. The offender sometimes takes breaks from sexual offending, but we know he is still active and has committed burglaries recently. Perhaps he has been in contact with mental health or forensic services in the past. Perhaps he has been in prison.

From victim accounts and scientific work around the DNA profile of this offender, we know he is a light-skinned black man whose family originate from the Caribbean. We believe he is in his

mid-30s, around six feet tall, polite and softly spoken. He is comfortable being around older people and knowledgeable about their special needs. From conversations with his victims, it is possible that his mother died around the year 2000.

We are seeking the assistance of anyone who thinks they may know or recognise this man through their work as a psychologist. All calls to the incident room (020 7230 0519) and Crimestoppers (0800 555 1111) are treated in confidence. We have the DNA profile of the offender – all innocent individuals will be eliminated from the inquiry.

Simon Morgan

Detective Superintendent
Lewisham Police

■ I AM a PhD student at the University of Leicester, and am conducting an evaluative study on the specialist police service response provided to rape survivors, focusing on **male rape survivors in London**. If there is anyone who has professional contact with this group and is willing to pass information regarding this study on to them, it would be much appreciated.

Joanna Jamel

E-mail: jj28@le.ac.uk

■ WE are seeking **people caught up in the London bombings on 7 July last year** for an internet questionnaire and interview study looking at the relation between identity and behaviour in stressful situations (see tinyurl.com/7c8zq). Do you know of anyone who might be willing to speak to us?

John Drury

Chris Cocking

E-mail: j.drury@sussex.ac.uk or cpc20@sussex.ac.uk



Narcissism and the American dream

LISBETH Shore takes exception to my article on Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night*. It seems my reference to illusion of 'the American dream' is taken by her to be a swingeing criticism of the American nation. I have to say this is reading more into my article than I ever intended or, I would argue, is there.

The American dream is a shorthand for a particular type of belief, prevalent in America but also found in this country

and elsewhere, where the fantasy is that anyone can do anything if they just put their mind to it. This is a destructive, narcissistic fantasy, as I argued, since it is not premised on people's varying abilities or on a recognition that while some may succeed, many more fail. It is definitely not the same as decrying the dreams and aspirations of ordinary people or groups of people. But then I never actually said it was. It is a little unfair to be criticised for

CLARE WHELAN (1975-2006)

CLARE Whelan died suddenly on New Year's Day aged 30. She graduated from University College Dublin and obtained her MSc in forensic psychology at Surrey University in 2000. She then spent a year working in Dublin within the field of addictions, before registering for her PhD at University College of Cork (UCC), where she undertook to extend her master's work in the assessment of sexual offenders. This involved the development of novel psychometric models for collating diverse sources

of data from non-compliant cases. In addition to this work she was coordinating the postgraduate forensic psychology programme at UCC.

Clare was much loved by her colleagues, her students and her friends within the psychology arena, for her cheerful 'can-do' approach to life and her sense of humour. She was poised to become a great asset to the psychology profession; all who knew her are shocked at the loss of one so full of life and potential.

Catherine Farr

Wokingham, Berkshire

something one hasn't actually said.

Similarly, I would ask Ms Shore to read my article again for she seems to have quite missed the part where I pointed out there is also a healthy sort of narcissism. I cited the psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut, who was the first to articulate and develop this notion and pointed to the way, in Fitzgerald's book, the starlet Rosemary Hoyt can be seen as an exemplar of healthy narcissism.

As to my final comment about President George W. Bush, I freely admit this was a jibe, but it is not, as she said, a non sequitur. In *Tender is the Night* there is throughout an undercurrent of violence, and in the book's focus on Americans in Europe, Fitzgerald illustrates the clash between the new and

the old worlds in a way that is sensitive to the values in both. George Bush, whose rigid, religious and dogmatic views seem miles away from those of the cultured Fitzgerald, was at the time of writing on a trip to Europe. It seemed a nice way to end the article, to focus attention on another sort of narcissism that has I fear become far more destructive.

I shouldn't need to say that criticising George Bush is not the same as criticising America, and I can only apologise if my use of the term 'the American dream' was taken as somehow meaning that all Americans are narcissistic or that destructive narcissism is peculiarly American. I do not believe this and never have.

John Marzillier
24 Norham Road
Oxford

Strengths of skills management

READ the article 'Playing to your strengths' in the February issue with great interest, and I fully support the message of taking a positive approach to people's attributes and characteristics.

The 'Putting strengths into practice' section was particularly relevant to my own area of occupational/organisational psychology, and the example of constructing and managing teams made a good deal of sense. I was surprised, however, at the lack of any reference to the work carried out in the last 30 years on team skills management and team roles by Meredith Belbin and his team at the Industrial Training Research Unit (ITRU) at UCL, together with Ben Aston and Andrew Life at the

Administrative Staff College, Henley. This research and its consequent application deals with the key points raised by Linley and Harrington:

- an emphasis on identifying both an individual's strengths and 'tolerable' weaknesses;
- composing a team based on complementary strengths and managing the concomitant weaknesses;
- addressing individual development needs; not trying to achieve all-singing-and-dancing managers but recognising individuals do have 'weaknesses' and encouraging productive alliances;
- promoting a philosophy of looking for the *positive* contributions people can

offer, and managing the team process to make best use of these team resources;

- working to ensure team members understand what they can and cannot expect from each other, and providing a language (Team Roles) to articulate this.

The key patterns of strengths Linley and Harrington give as examples for team composition correspond closely to the Team Roles identified by the ITRU research. Recent research has confirmed these basic patterns of strengths or Team Roles, while also picking up

interesting changes that reflect changes in management culture in the last 25 years or so: differences in the strengths that are valued in an individual.

'Strengths psychology' is a welcome emphasis, and as the authors of the article say, 'we suspect the best is yet to come'. Some acknowledgement of past and current research and thinking in other areas of psychology is likely to help in this respect; or perhaps the firewalls between the Divisions are still too robust?

Roger Mottram
8 Hesketh Avenue
Didsbury, Manchester

ARE YOU THE PAXMAN OR PARKINSON OF PSYCHOLOGY?

We are looking for a new Associate Editor for interviews. The role involves suggesting suitable people to interview, and then either conducting and editing the interview or arranging for somebody else to do so. The position is voluntary, but travel expenses will be paid (although some interviews may be carried out via e-mail). Interviews are a popular part of *The Psychologist* and we would like to run more of them. This is an ideal role for someone who is fascinated by a range of areas in psychology – both research and practice – and loves meeting the people involved.

If you want to know more about the role, contact the editor on jon.sutton@bps.org.uk. To apply, just send a brief summary of what you would bring to the role to jon.sutton@bps.org.uk or at the Leicester office address.

SHEILA WOLFENDALE (1939–2006)

PROFESSOR Sheila Wolfendale was unique amongst educational psychologists. Her death leaves the next generation of teachers, psychologists, parents and carers without her immense knowledge and understanding of children's learning. She had the ability to influence policy makers based on absolute knowledge of the real issues involved in the process. Sheila's inimitable style, fearless humour and unsurpassable integrity afforded her the iconic status that few achieve.

Starting her career as a primary school teacher, she subsequently worked as a lecturer in higher education and an educational psychologist in several LEAs. In 1981 she was appointed course director of the educational psychology training course at the (now) University of East London, a post she held for 18 years. In 1996, along with her colleagues, she developed the first professional doctorate programme for educational psychologists in the UK and remained course director throughout.

Sheila was an active researcher all through her career and published widely on early identification of learning difficulties, parental participation in children's educational development and family involvement in literacy. Publications such as *Parental Participation in Children's Development in Education* (1983) and *The Parental Contribution to Statutory Assessment* (1988) were seminal, changing societal and governmental attitudes to parents' rights and responsibilities.

Sheila was an adviser to the



Department for Education, for example, on the SEN Code of Practice (1993–94) and on Involving Parents in Assessment (2003–4), which included contributing to the subsequent national DfES conferences.

Sheila was a BPS Fellow and very active in the BPS and DECP over the last 25 years on a range of professional committees and working parties, for example in the areas of child and adolescent mental health, EPs working with parents, and the promotion of equal opportunities, anti-racist practice and multicultural perspectives.

Recently, in collaboration with her husband Trevor Bryans, she was evaluator of the Who Cares? Trust Literacy Project for Children in Public Care in Kent, as well as mapping parent partnership provision in Wales, on behalf of the National Assembly Government and NASEN. Her prolific authorship was matched by worldwide presentations at conferences and seminars.

Sheila set up or evaluated

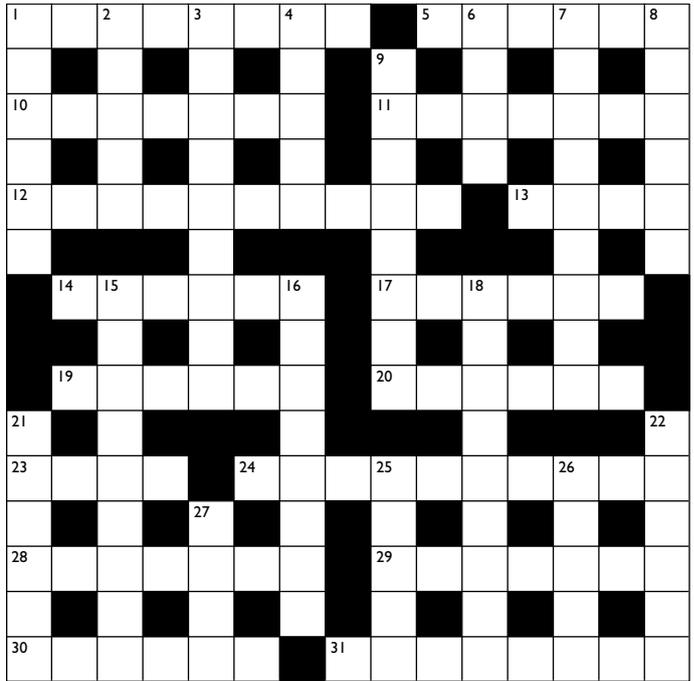
projects in parental partnership and family literacy in Canada, Germany, Hong Kong, Gibraltar, Greece, Malta, Romania and Poland. In 1990, co-sponsored by the British Council and the Australian Reading Association, she gave presentations across Australia as part of International Literacy Year.

Sheila had a longstanding involvement in education within the London Borough of Newham. She was co-organiser of the local Portage scheme, a founding member of the Parents Centre and governor of an inclusive primary school. Her innovative and challenging approach to professional training will be remembered by a generation of educational psychologists.

Sheila knew there was a commonwealth of individual human stories. Her devotion to her family was infinite and her dignified but sudden death has created a void in the lives of all those who loved and knew her.

Paul Curran
Alan Labram
University of East London

PRIZE CROSSWORD No.26

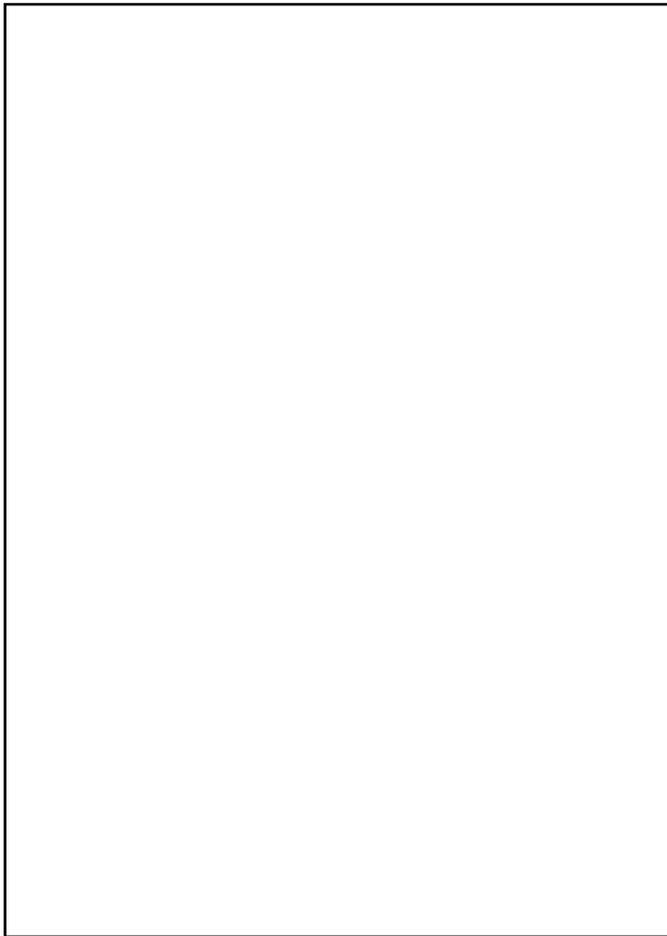


Across

- 1 Postulate, and not get back for PET scan particle (8)
- 5 Comment on commercial (6)
- 10 River Montgomery straddles in state (7)
- 11 The man makes a cuppa, going by the book (7)
- 12 Like some vessels, leaving to follow sea (5-5)
- 13 Bedlam found half-deserted by English historian and theologian (4)
- 14 It might provide the thrust of some wit (6)
- 17 Naturally present in less than nine, we hear (6)
- 19 Corn... by ear, one after another (6)
- 20 Gesell's extremes held by Gage in noisy group (6)
- 23 Concludes objectives (4)
- 24 Anticipation of Tolman's theory? (10)
- 28 Design rap around bird (7)
- 29 Sea nymph at festival provided with beverage (7)
- 30 Have empathy with broadcast (6)
- 31 Quietly steal fifty letters for issues (8)

Down

- 1 He researched conditioned responses to unfinished dessert (6)
- 2 Peers off for a binge (5)
- 3 US psychologist puts irritant over ditch, we hear (9)
- 4 Excel at alfresco party (5)
- 6 Society girl given little time to incur deficit (4)
- 7 Basic spirit entity? (9)
- 8 One giving trial to canopy over bed (6)
- 9 Cap type from slender monarch (8)
- 15 Strange tale can do... to do with stories (9)
- 16 Reliever of muscular tension for negligent soldier supporting Sappers (8)
- 18 Entertaining place for Sir, say, to hit (9)
- 21 American philosopher's condiment (6)
- 22 Circumvent heart operation? (6)
- 25 Keen to get on surrounded by hesitation (5)
- 26 Saltpetre occurring as inert compound (5)
- 27 Warm leg (4)



Solution to Prize Crossword No.25

Across: 1 Psychosurgery, 8 Enhance, 9 Drawled, 11 Perforant, 12 Nines, 13 Avocado, 14 Someone, 16 Abetted, 19 Jungian, 21 Input, 23 Workforce, 24 Nervier, 25 Inspect, 26 Prosopagnosia.

Down: 2 Scherzo, 3 Consonant, 4 Oregano, 5 Updates, 6 Grain, 7 Rolando, 8 Explanation, 10 Discernment, 15 Manifesto, 17 Emperor, 18 Dewdrop, 19 Jarring, 20 Israeli, 22 Trips.

Winner: George Christo, London

Send entries (photocopies accepted) to: Prize Crossword, The Psychologist, St Andrews House, 48 Princess Road East, Leicester LE1 7DR. Deadline for entries is 10 April 2006. A £25 book token goes to the winner, drawn at random from all correct entries.

Name.....

Address.....

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