



'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.

The Times they are a-charging

PSYCHOLOGY was in the dock in May care of *The Times*, charged with 'living in a dream world'. 'Why psychology has got it wrong' screamed the headline. We certainly have got it wrong in terms of communicating with the media if the majority of journalists are living in the same dream world as the author Peter Watson. His four pages of psychology bashing (available at www.thetimes.co.uk, although the site now charges a download fee) contained very little that was identifiable as modern psychology.

In the first of two articles Watson's gripe was that psychology 'is sinking in a morass of jargon, flawed research and scientific disagreements – and is clearly failing the people that it is supposed to help'. I think most of us would admit that reasonable arguments could be constructed for and against all these points, but Watson seemed too busy with straw men. A large chunk of Freud and the unconscious here, a dash of learning theory there, and some questionable studies from the 1950s – the authoritarian personality, and subliminal advertising.

The next day brought another attack, moaning that 'psychological "facts" are the most unreliable, paradoxical, inconsistent, and malleable entities in science'. Watson

referred to Oliver James, 'one of our leading psychologists', in support.

The debate spilled over into the next day, with some agreement with Watson's views. Psychology 'never developed objectivity like other disciplines', it is 'full

of people who entered psychology because they wanted to "understand themselves"'. Others defended our honour, with Ian Handley (a clinical psychologist from Belfast) highlighting 'the lack of rigour, balance and objectivity in his thesis'. Our own editor Jon Sutton commented: 'Peter Watson's article would perhaps be more accurately titled "Why selected parts of pre-1970s psychology haven't produced as many concrete "facts" as the whole of genetics and physics, which I know more about"'. The President and Honorary General Secretary sent a response to Watson's first piece, but it was not published.

But there is no avoiding the fact that if psychology hasn't failed, if it is producing useful and interesting research, it seems that some people are not getting to hear about it. We hope that these pages serve to encourage and assist you in showing that psychology will not, as Watson believes, be 'six feet under' by 2039, the 100th anniversary of Freud's death.

Harriet Gross

TIP OF THE MONTH

Don't get interrupted mid-flow in a radio interview. In the studio turn off your mobile phone. If you're doing it from home or the office by phone put a 'Do not disturb' sign on the door – there's nothing worse than someone shouting 'Do you want a cup of tea?' in the background as you handle a complicated question!

■ Next media training days are Monday 29 September and Monday 1 December. Contact Dawn Schubert for details on dawsch@bps.org.uk or tel: 0116 252 9581.

The wonders of brain plasticity

VIEWERS of the recently screened Channel 5 production *Sharon Parker: The Woman with the Mysterious Brain*, must have been struck, as I was, with the amazing ability of the brain to compensate for loss – in this case an estimated 90 per cent of brain mass! Ms Parker received a diagnosis of hydrocephalus when she was eight months old, a condition which left her with greatly reduced brain volume. Developmental delays and cognitive impairments typically accompany such dramatic brain abnormalities. Not so for Ms Parker, whose measured IQ (assessed during filming) came out at a respectable 114 and whose daily activities extended to running a busy household.

The programme followed the Parker family to the US where Sharon was invited to undergo specialised investigations of brain function. The results indicated that her brain had compensated for the lost volume through reorganisation and expansion of the remaining tissue. While she still experienced some everyday problems, especially in organising and remembering things, Sharon's case highlights the remarkable plasticity of the brain, providing neuroscientists with a unique opportunity to study brain adaptation and to further our understanding of mechanisms of recovery following brain injury.

Stuart Anderson