



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.

TV psychology – compulsive viewing

IT'S a good time to be a psychologist if you're interested in disseminating your work through the media. The draft criteria for the 2008 RAE include media coverage as an 'esteem factor', and there seem to be more serious psychological documentaries than ever.

Clinical psychologist Dr Frank Tallis, who appeared in the BBC1 series *Secrets of the Sexes*, says: 'At the moment BBC Science is really into making experimental documentaries – so I guess that's good for psychologists and the discipline in general. Working with the BBC is fine, but they do tend to have a series idea worked out before they contact their psychology experts. So in a way, you are being asked to act a part as much as make an intellectual contribution. Make sure that your role in the programme is clear before signing a contract.' The Society's Public Relations Unit can help (e-mail mediacentre@bps.org.uk).

In the third part of the series (see tinyurl.com/dryde) Dr Tallis talked to newly married couples. This footage was interspersed with Professor Dacher Keltner over in America, simply looking at past and present photos of the couples, to decide whether trouble was brewing. The result was compelling if a little fishy, as Dr Tallis confirms: 'I filmed hours of clinical interviews, but this was reduced to a few

CHANNEL FOUR

The House of Obsessive Compulsives

questions and a few answers in the programme. If you want something to make it in, keep it really simple and really short.'

One comment that particularly interested me was Professor Adrian Furnham, in the second part, saying 'a lot of scientific papers will come out of this'. When I spoke to him, he said: 'I doubt if I personally will make use of the data, though the director tried hard to get the science right and collect the data as we suggested. I have bought the computer programme he used, so I learnt a new tool for research... I think it is good to be able to inform directors about the subtleties and complexities of the issue, but they of course have to make television

programmes. There is compromise. But what you see from all the edited stuff often belies what went on in the background. The director read and understood the literature. He was excited and enthusiastic, and this affected all those around him.'

Sadly it appears that despite growing RAE credit for such activities, not all are keen on the expanding opportunities to promote our discipline. Professor Furnham said: 'Inevitably, your scientific colleagues snipe at the generalisations, lack of rigour, selling out, etc., but that is the cost of popular science. I got over 40 complimentary e-mails and just two, from academics, which were not.'

Over on Channel 4, Professor Paul Salkovskis and colleagues from King's College were also benefiting from programme makers' newfound tendency to experiment psychologically. In *The House of Obsessive Compulsives* (see tinyurl.com/d8td3), three sufferers were put in a house together and received intensive therapy over two weeks. Midway through the first programme Salkovskis was confident that 'the strengths of the three individuals have been shared in a way that's massively advantageous', although my own obsessive tendencies made me wonder whether wiping your hand round the toilet and then going to eat lunch was actually a bit much.

It's fascinating stuff. Salkovskis has a way with words: OCD 'is a false friend. It tells you you can make yourself safe if only...'. Treatment is about 'transferring from head to heart. To really understand it you have to live it.' And what lives the three were living – Wendy hadn't touched her husband or kids for three years due to fear of contamination from glitter, and Gerry was so terrified that he would confess to imaginary crimes that he would keep water in his mouth for five hours at a time, so that if he did open it he'd have trouble speaking. He had to stop because his teeth were falling out. Something he said in the house struck me: 'My OCD went "aargh!" and shrank back into a corner.' I wonder whether there is any research on the effectiveness of visualising disorders and battling against them, as I believe there is with treating tumours.

Jon Sutton

BANNING THE F-WORD – NO SUCCESS YET

MOST of you will have heard about the recent attempt by retired head teacher Liz Beattie to pass a motion at the conference of the Professional Association of Teachers that schools should replace the word 'failure' with 'deferred success'. And most of you will have noticed all the 'political correctness gone mad' coverage the story received on the radio, in the tabloids and in the (erstwhile) broadsheets. For the writers of comment pieces in the media, this was like shooting fish in a barrel.

However, the coverage of the story wasn't entirely negative – some commentators recognised there might be a serious psychological point to the suggestion. Mark Kenny in *The Times* noted that the intentions behind the motion were well meaning, and that relabelling failure to encourage further effort might be a worthy aim. BBC News online took a more serious look at the psychological consequences of failure. According to Professor Nigel Nicholson of the London Business School, failure 'has an incredibly powerful emotional impact'. While Professor Nicholson didn't go along with relabelling failure as 'deferred success', he did not agree with use of the F-word: 'The trouble with failure is that it shreds people. They become unresponsive. They cannot learn properly. You need a psychological safety net to learn from your mistakes.'

The potential upside of believing that you will succeed in the future is perhaps best illustrated by a letter to *The Times* from the Reverend J.N. Darrall: 'Sir, it is only my belief in deferred success that keeps me playing golf. Your correspondents who mock it are destroying my confidence.'

But as most of you will also have heard, the conference motion... er... failed.

Adam Joinson