



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.

Seeing things differently

In the absence of any major disasters, which were this year yet to arrive with the hurricane season, late summer is typically a time when newspapers are looking for items to fill their columns. In August they found one in *The Psychologist*, in the form of the long-standing debate surrounding the possible existence of IQ differences between men and women. Read on for an example of how a story starts and how it can snowball, some would say out of control...

Perhaps the stage was set for the coverage with Michael Buerk's assertions on Channel Five (*Don't Get Me Started!*, 17 August) that men and masculine values are being overtaken by women's continuing advances in society. Male superiority needed to be reinstated in the intelligence stakes. Then, in September, there were more psychological stories on gender



topics: Oliver James on the similarities between men and women, quoting Janet Shibley Hyde's work, and discussions on whether men or women are to blame for problems in conceiving children after the age of 30 (for example, 'Late baby blues? Blame the men' in *The Guardian*).

But in between was a flurry of coverage on IQ. Without wanting to appear too incestuous, the story began in June in *The Psychologist*, with an article by Tomás Chamorro-Premuzic and Adrian Furnham on intellectual competence. This provoked a letter from Richard Lynn in the August issue, confirming that his research with Paul Irwing showed clear gender differences in IQ. A journalist on *The Times* saw *The Psychologist*, called Lynn for more quotes and on 25 August ran with 'Is this a clever thing to say about women's IQ?', with most of the nationals and a number of regional newspapers following up over the next couple of days.

The flavour of the headlines and their accompanying stories left little room for doubt on where the bigger and cleverer brains were thought to reside, though there was clearly some sense of irony in the wording: 'Men clearly smarter than women, say (male) scientists' (*Yorkshire Post*); 'Girls need manpower' (*The Sun*, Scottish edition) and 'Men cleverer than women say scientists' (*Glasgow Herald*). In *The Guardian*, under the headline 'Psychology's odd couple join battle of the sexes', Sam Jones focused on Lynn and Irwing as 'two of the unlikeliest scientific bedfellows'. Irwing was quoted as saying: 'To be honest I'm not sure I have done the right thing, but in the end I thought it would be dishonest to suppress it.' Irwing was also interviewed for the *Today* programme (see tinyurl.com/aezr5).

The story was picked up by the *Times Higher Education Supplement*, which ran a front page item 'IQ claim will fuel gender row' and a leader item on the topic 'Free to be controversial', linking the issues to the differential achievement of academic distinctions and promotion. There was some glee in the reference to the concept of academic controversy within psychology, which was fuelled by Simon Baron-Cohen's quoted dismay at being linked with the reported findings.

The following week, the *Higher* ran a further story on the inside pages, which quoted 'key experts' other than the original researchers. Adrian Furnham, Jane Mellanby and Melissa Hines all raised doubts about the nature of the five point difference. Perhaps understandably, Paul Irwing attempted to widen the debate via a feature article explaining his position on the differences research in particular and the nature of research in general. Psychology was definitely in the news.

In all the articles the coverage referred to the fact that Irwing and Lynn's paper was to be published in November in the *British Journal of Psychology*. This reminded me that the BPS Press Committee had, as usual, been circulated with the abstracts of forthcoming BJP papers and invited to prepare press releases on potentially newsworthy findings. These are usually released to coincide with the journal's publication. However, on this occasion the newspapers beat us to it. When the paper is finally officially published, there will be little appetite for the story. Well and truly out-manoeuvred!

Finally, September saw the appearance of a popular psychology magazine. *Psychologies* has been heavily advertised – 'Ever read something that made you see differently?' and 'Get to know yourself' – and appears with a picture of Meg Ryan on the cover. The magazine is an English version of an extremely successful French publication and includes a wide range of articles and features, with the close involvement of qualified psychologists. I can see that it could be a rich source of psychological information for the wider public. More to follow on this.

Harriet Gross

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