



## 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.

# The 'no-diet' solution to that festive excess

**W**ITH Christmas and Hogmanay round the corner, many people will have been cheered to read the wide media coverage of the 'no-diet' diet. According to the research, carried out at the University of Hertfordshire by Professor Ben Fletcher and his team, simply doing something different each day leads to weight loss. This can include things like not watching TV, travelling to work using a different route or visiting a live sporting event. In the study, presented at the BPS Division of Health Psychology conference in Edinburgh, 55 volunteers lost an average of 11lbs following the no-diet regime for four months. Each day during the first month, volunteers had to choose an option from an opposing pair (e.g. extrovert/introvert), and behave that way for a day. Then, twice a week, they would do something different.

*Sun* readers learnt the most about this approach in a six-page spread that not only

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followed a 'do something different' dieter for two weeks, but also listed 40 new things to try (although, suspiciously, 'buy a different daily newspaper' was missing from the list). According to Professor Fletcher, the reason the diet works is that it encourages people to break their routines,

encouraging them to think more carefully about decisions they make.

At the same time as people were being encouraged to not watch TV by psychologists, the BBC launched *Fat Nation*, an exercise/weight loss series that allowed viewers to diet, exercise and give up smoking vicariously while sitting at home. Perhaps salvation comes in the form of the 'TV-B-Gone' device, a universal remote control the size of a car key fob that turns off virtually any TV. The device can be used to turn off intrusive TVs in pubs, cafés and waiting rooms, using a single button without being noticed. 'What I really want', said the developer of the gadget, 'is a device called Life-B-Here.'

Adam Joinson

## NOT JUST FOR BROADCAST

**A**S the waves of reality TV continue to crash on the shores of a seemingly insatiable British viewing public, we professional psychologists continue to advocate to TV producers and the like the value of informed consent – of telling would-be participants as much about what is going to happen during filming as is possible. But what about the longer term?

Informed consent is something we aspire to rather than absolutely attain – particularly in the case of reality TV. No broadcaster or psychologist can completely prepare participants for all possible post-broadcast effects – for example, instant fame and notoriety. Nevertheless, a reasonable effort is usually

made. But in my experience of working with TV companies, psychological follow-up at six months or a year is rarely automatically included at the planning stage.

So, as advising psychologists we must persuade producers not only to inform participants of what will happen during filming but also to budget to follow up participants after broadcast and to offer appropriate support if necessary – just as an experimental social psychologist would follow up participants after involvement in a study using a demanding simulated environment. After all, participants, particularly non-celebrity ones, are potentially vulnerable to post-broadcast effects.

We must wonder then, as viewers of reality TV, whether there is much difference between our 21st-century gaze and that of 18th-century visitors to the St Mary of Bethlehem hospital (or 'Bedlam', as it became known) who found misplaced recreation and amusement in the behaviour of the vulnerable inmates incarcerated therein.

With the rise and continuing dominance of reality TV, a genre that relies heavily on our enjoyment of vicarious experience, have we really moved on as a culture? Perhaps a new year is a good time to do so, reminding ourselves that participants are not just for broadcast.

Mark McDermott

## TIP OF THE MONTH

When being interviewed for radio or TV, don't worry if the interviewer switches from being warm and friendly before to a more confrontational style in the interview. This often gets a better response from interviewees, and gets the questions the audience wants answered. What ever happens, retain an even keel, don't get riled. A calm considered response always plays well against probing questioning.

■ Next media training day – Monday 7 March 2005. Contact Dawn Schubert for details on [dawsch@bps.org.uk](mailto:dawsch@bps.org.uk) or tel: 0116 252 9581.