

## Radio – Owen Hughes listens in

## QUANTITY AND QUALITY

HERE is a dizzying array of sources of radio psychology, from terrestrial radio stations to those now available via the internet. Whilst listening to a selection of these, I became acutely aware that there are two types of protagonist in this arena. Firstly, there are the psychologists who have spent years researching in their specific field and whose aim is to make as many people as possible aware of their findings, and then there are the others who it appears will talk about anything as long as it gives the world a chance to hear their dulcet tones.

Whilst trawling the internet I came across a couple of people who made their living as radio psychologists, very much in the Frasier Crane mould. Their homepages carried lists of their recent broadcasts, which thanks to modern science it is now possible to download and re-experience ad infinitum. Having listened to a couple of the broadcasts, I tried to convince myself that this was one of those North American phenomena that would not catch on over here but then I turned off the computer and turned on the *Jimmy Young Show* (all in the name of research you understand) and found that I was mistaken.

This month also saw the start of a new series of *All in the Mind* with Raj Persaud. The first episode started with a discussion on the nature versus nurture debate, which was echoed on a couple of other programmes. The interviewee was Oliver James, whose new book *They F\*\*\* You Up* argues that the way you are treated by your parents up to the age of six profoundly affects your personality as an adult. I was left wondering what experiences led to their becoming such well-known personalities.

On the more serious side of life, it has been an emotional month for radio listeners. First, we had the murders of Jessica Chapman and Holly Wells and then the anniversary of September 11th. Both events have had a profound effect on the nation's psyche that has led to a desire for psychological comment. Fortunately there are plenty of qualified psychologists able to present sensible comment on these matters.

The merits of new technology that allows for microchipping children so that they can be tracked and therefore kept safe cropped up on Radio 4's *You and Yours* programme. Richard Wilson (University of Leeds) sensibly said that teaching children to be streetwise was a much more successful way of dealing with the situation, pointing out that children are statistically at far greater risk in their own homes than out on the streets.

Psychology has also taken a bit of a bashing with the revelation that after September 11th 'debriefers' outnumbered the dead 3 to 1. It is perhaps timely that a Professional Practice Board working party has recently produced a report looking at how unhelpful this sudden influx of professional helpers can be when there are physical needs that should take precedence.

Finally, *Material World* on Radio 4 hosted a debate from the British Association's Festival of Science in Leicester about whether science has improved our quality of life. The answer was a resounding 'Yes'. But has it improved the quality of radio?

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## Television – Nick Neave looks on

## Normal service resumed

IS it me, or have there been an awful lot of psychology-related programmes on the telly just recently? I know that the media regard psychology as a perennial 'sexy subject', but at the minute it seems to be positively wiggling its hips and cavorting like a lap dancer. Whether it be highbrow documentaries (Channel 5's *Amnesia*), middle-ground feelgoods (BBC1's *Child of Our Time*), or just lowbrow pop psychology (BBC2's *Would Like to Meet*), the telly seems to be saturated by our favourite subject. Maybe it's some post

programme actually appeared to be remarkably normal: except perhaps for 'Cat' who, thanks to an amateur surgeon and tattooist pal, was gradually turning himself into a tiger! All he lacked was a tail but he assured us that he was working on that. Come to think of it wanting a tail isn't that odd, is it? I would love one, maybe a lion's – slinky, but with a fluffy bit on the end.

Similarly, BBC1's *Children Behaving Badly* exposed the tenuous links between normality and abnormality as children with various behaviour problems (Asperger's, ADHD, eating disorders, mutism) tested our preconceptions about 'difficult' behaviour.

*Child of Our Time* also had its fair share of children behaving badly, perhaps understandably so given some rather tangled family situations. This angle contributed more of a 'soap opera' feel to this second series. Howard Steele (University College London) was on hand to give one of the few scientific contributions, observing the parents at play with their child. Again it was difficult to judge what was 'normal', and how normal we might be in their shoes.

Nothing on terrestrial telly could match the sheer splendour of National Geographic's *Evolution*, a wonderful series. The advert in the middle depicting a caveman chucking rocks at dinosaurs did appear slightly incongruous though. Still, it gave some crumb of comfort for the poor deluded creationists.

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BBC – OBSESSIONS SEEKING PERFECTION

## What's up, pussycat?

*Big Brother* people-watching fad, or perhaps they've actually started paying psychologists to contribute to such programmes instead of just massaging egos.

A common thread among the mishmash seemed to be the question of what is normal. The two-parter *Obsessions* (BBC1) highlighted various eccentrics and their quirky behaviours. Bob has OCD and hoards literally everything – the floors of his apartment have long vanished under teetering piles of junk. He hadn't seen his TV for six years, but probably felt much the better for it. Stephanie, obsessed with cleanliness, washed her hands 22 times in the space of half an hour. But the people in the