



'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@boro.ac.uk](mailto:H.Gross@boro.ac.uk).

## '...and all that jazz'

**I**N the last month I have been approached to do interviews on two wildly differing topics. The first was a rather sensible conversation with a journalist from *The Independent* who was writing the excellent supplement on psychology careers that appeared recently (and which you should have received with last month's issue). The second was from the editor of 5 Live's morning show wanting me to take part in a discussion on plastic surgery. On the surface both seemed to be interesting and sensible discussions, until I realised that the reason 5 Live had chosen this topic was that a certain ex-Spice Girl suddenly had a lot more people on the balcony (as the French would charmingly say).

It raised the issue of whether to enter into debates on potentially serious topics when the reason for the debate was probably more entertainment than serious discussion. Particularly as the person in question may have difficulties they are trying to resolve that aren't helped by being

made fun of in the media. As psychologists we have a potential role as educators, but we must be aware that sometimes people want to be entertained rather than educated.

Even if discussing the latest example of the plastic surgeon's art may not be helpful to the community at large, apparently there is a role for psychology on the football pitch. The key to football success is selecting the right players for the big occasion. AC Milan's answer to the problem is to hire a British psychometric testing company, according to *The Times*. They look both at the individual's ability to

deal with the pressure of the big occasion and at the balance of personality types within the team in the run-up to the big game and in the match itself. It certainly can't be doing any harm to the team's performance as they are the European champions. Is this where Carlisle United are going wrong?

It might work for playing football, but there is new evidence that a whole different psychological make-up is helpful if you want to play jazz. *The Daily Telegraph* covering a paper by psychologist Geoffrey Wills in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* highlighted the fact that jazz musicians are four times more likely to suffer from mental health problems. He highlights the fact that jazz musicians also indulge in above-average use of drugs, alcohol and sensation-seeking behaviour. Wills is quoted as having said 'It is perfectly possible to be a balanced person and a great jazz musician', swiftly followed by the all-important BUT, 'but there does seem to be a trend where the two factors co-exist'.

But perhaps jazz musicians aren't so crazy after all: there is a growing body of opinion that psychiatric disorders are just a version of normal. Richard Bentall (University of Manchester), interviewed in *New Scientist*, claims that psychiatric diagnoses have 'no more predictive power than star signs' and that medication makes matters worse rather than better.

Owen Hughes

### WHERE DOES SANITY END?

**A**FTER the summer season with its schedules filled with repeats, it was refreshing to find a juicy debate taking place on Radio 4. *All in the Mind*, presented by Raj Persaud, tackled the topic of what are the boundaries between madness and 'normal' experiences; do delusions only exist in the minds of psychiatrists? Richard Bentall argued that many of those who are diagnosed as mentally ill could lead happier and more productive lives if left alone by psychiatric services; that they have a need to be liberated rather than cured. He drew on information from epidemiology

studies suggesting that ten times more people than those who see psychiatrists have had experiences of hearing voices or having strange beliefs, which could just be seen as eccentricity. Where do you draw a line along that spectrum to distinguish where psychosis begins? He argued that the best people to know are patients themselves, and that more 'talking therapies' are needed.

Peter McKenna, consultant psychiatrist at the Fulbourn Hospital in Cambridge, took a more mainstream biological approach, arguing that for a lot of patients one of the commonest symptoms is having

a lack of insight into the fact that they have an illness.

Peter Chadwick (Birkbeck College) took up the middle ground arguing that for some, finding a narrative sense in their illness and how it relates to their life and personality, may make them feel more in control. But Chadwick also felt that there was a difference between the variations in human experiences and the extreme of a psychotic break, which may need some medical help from pharmacology.

So who is right? Where does sanity end? Looks like this one is going to run and run.

Jeremy Horwood

### TIP OF THE MONTH

A good radio interview is like a conversation overheard by a wider audience, so that is the style/approach you want to develop. A lecturing/hectoring/declamatory style will put your audience off.

■ Next media training day – Monday 1 December. Contact Dawn Schubert for details on [dawsch@bps.org.uk](mailto:dawsch@bps.org.uk) or tel: 0116 252 9581.