



TO THE EDITOR...

Letters should be marked clearly 'Letter for publication in *The Psychologist*' and addressed to the Editor at the Society office in Leicester. Please send by e-mail if possible: psychologist@bps.org.uk (include a postal address). Letters over 500 words are less likely

to be published. The Editor reserves the right to edit, shorten or publish extracts from letters. If major editing is necessary, this will be indicated. Space does not permit the publication of every letter received. Letters to the Editor are not normally acknowledged.

Silence is a political act

ELIZABETH Mapstone may not want 'to belong to a professional body that gets involved in politics (Letters, February 2001), but I'm sorry to have to tell her that she already does. Whether we like it or not, psychology, like any discipline, contains an implicit political ideology; and silence or denial of our involvement is no less a political act than explicit political action. In the former case, however, our involvement takes the form of unconscious complicity in those social practices that we try to ignore.

STEPANO CAGNONI / REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

Ulfried Geuter (1992), in his thorough analysis of the growth of psychology in Nazi Germany, notes that 'in the course of the

professionalisation of psychology... [psychologists] were relatively blind to, when they did not actively affirm, the social and political context in

which professionalisation took place' (p.259). Moreover, 'the things that benefited the discipline or the profession were seen by many as being

wholly good, no matter... in whose service' (p.260).

The choice we have to make, therefore, is not between involvement or non-involvement, but between awareness of our involvement or denial. As Geuter remarks: 'If the application of psychology is seen as neutral or even humane in principle, an absolute loyalty to the state has already worked its way into the self-image of the science.' (p.268.)

David Kidner

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Reference

Geuter, U. (1992). *The professionalisation of psychology in Nazi Germany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Taking a look at ourselves

AFTER reading 'How do we look?' and 'Turning the roundtables on psychologists' (February, 2001) I had what might be described as an 'I knew it!' experience. Although it is pleasing that there is genuine interest in psychology outside the discipline, it is disappointing that the majority are seriously misled. All too often psychology is talked of as something closely related to mindreading and psychic powers: obviously something for the budding magicians and

Mystic Megs of today. Either that, or the psychologist can be sure to be met with that all-too-familiar strange look accompanied by the mandatory 'Are you psychoanalysing me?' question. If only people were aware that psychology has so much more to offer than clichéd amateur Freudian theory.

Furthermore, the belief that psychology is no more than common sense and 'mumbo jumbo' is held not only by 'the man on the street' but also among fellow university students. Of course, we all think that our chosen area of study is better than anyone else's, but by and large the attitudes that I have met towards psychology do not credit it with the scientific and

academic merit it deserves. I have come across many students who regard psychology as an 'easy' course for those who are not serious about an academic or professional career. One fellow student was visibly surprised to find that, yes, we do use statistical analysis in our studies and research.

On a more superficial level, I find that what impresses people the most is the title of a course – usually anything long or medically involved is a sure thing in terms of educating 'oohs' and 'ahs'. Psychology will probably tend to elicit thoughts of a bespectacled, bearded man with a German accent asking a patient about their mother as they rest on a chaise longue.

Nevertheless, it would be

a lie to say that we ourselves have not, at some point, referred to stereotypical beliefs of certain disciplines, cultures, and so on. Probably one of the most popular games to play while waiting for a lecture theatre to empty is 'guess the degree' of the post-lectured students who spill out into the hallway.

It seems clear that such narrow perceptions we are all guilty of possessing are born out of ignorance. If psychology is to operate to its full potential when serving society then it seems important for society to be receptive to psychology in the most positive way.

Rachael E. Jack

*Psychology undergraduate
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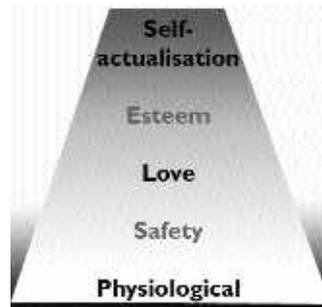
DEADLINE

Deadline for letters for possible publication in the June issue is **4 May**

Maslow – A different view

CARY Cooper quite rightly cites Maslow's theory of human motivation, which has indeed been viewed as 'a classic' contribution to psychology. However, this mention of Maslow reminded me of an 'earth-moving' experience which occurred some 10 years ago. Given the rarity of such occasions, in my experience, I wanted to share this with colleagues.

The event was an international conference on management, and the speaker was a Canadian psychologist, Dallas Cullen. Her subject was Maslow, and included a description of the methodology of his 'ground-breaking' research.



Hierarchy of needs

What was so unusual about his research at the time – and indeed since his time – was that it was based on data collected solely from women. There were 140 women in his sample, aged between 18 and 28 years.

Apparently, Maslow regarded all of them as relatively 'normal' people,

some being 'maladjusted to a greater or lesser degree, but none being obvious 'neurotics'. Cullen added that the basis of the judgement of 'neurotic' or 'normal' is not given, but a 'real homosexual' (in researcher's terms, a woman whose sexual contacts with women were by preference rather because of curiosity or an inability to find a suitable man) is 'of course not included in our criterion group of "normal" women'.

What was the nature of the data-collection process for constructing this major theory of human motivation and its content? The answer is that Maslow conducted semi-clinical interviews averaging about 15 hours with each participant. The subject of the interview included: sex drive; presence or absence of technical virginity; history of promiscuity; frequency and intensity of climax in heterosexual relations; ease of excitability; number of everyday objects regarded as sexual stimuli; and so on. From the information obtained in these interviews, he assigned the women a score on a 17-point scale of self-esteem.

One might ask why the women provided such intimate information to such a young researcher (he was around 24 years at the time). Apparently, it was not always easy for him. Nonetheless, our stalwart researcher pushed on by 'inveigling' the shy (and hence, deemed by Maslow to characterise low self-esteem) women, through the use of 'almost tearful pleadings'. Why was Maslow so interested in the women's sexual attitudes and experiences? Apparently, he was interested in relating his observations of dominance in primates (exhibited in one primate mounting another) to dominance in humans, and relating this in turn to self-actualising behaviours.

Space does not allow a full

Engaging with biology

STEVEN Rose ('DNA is important – But only in its proper place', March 2001) tells Robert Plomin that sociology and genetics, as distinct disciplines, have no common ground. However, the recurring problem of disciplinary separation, in this case, is only a partial account. Sociology *ipso facto* privileges the social and so will challenge both psychological and biological reductionism. Biological reductionism is endemic in the overlapping knowledge domains of sociobiology, evolutionary psychology (and psychiatry), differential psychology and eugenics. All of these currents are dominated by non-falsifiable supposition masquerading as science. Also, it is worth remembering that social Darwinism and the eugenics spearheaded by Darwin's cousin Galton were associated with one of the key political catastrophes of the 20th century.

Whilst genetics has not influenced sociology, the latter has produced a limited and

cautious engagement with biology, in the midst of a large contemptuous silence (Benton, 1991). This small response has been sophisticated and damning in equal measure, especially when underpinned by critical realism rather than the currently modish 'social constructivism' (Dickens, 2001).

Can I thank the editorial team for encouraging interdisciplinary discussion in the pages of *The Psychologist*? In future though, could some thought be given over to inviting sociologists, not just biologists and psychiatrists, into our disciplinary arena? Authors like those I cite might provide refreshing logical and political insights for BPS members about their knowledge base.

David Pilgrim
Clinical Psychology Services
Preston

References

- Benton, T. (1991). Biology and social science: Why the return of the repressed should be given a (cautious) welcome. *Sociology*, 251–230.
- Dickens, P. (2001). Linking the social and natural sciences: Is capital modifying biology in its own image? *Sociology*, 35, 93–110.

Obituaries

I AM puzzled by the obituary policy of *The Psychologist*. On the one hand there are the odd death notices of members in a list that says little else – which I skim in case my own name crops up. On the other hand some people disappear without trace. How does the system work?

Robert R. Green
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Editor's reply: Deaths of Society members are recorded in *The Psychologist* in three ways. We publish short announcements in the Society section if we are notified in writing specifically for this purpose. If an 'obituary letter' is sent in within a reasonable time, it will be considered along with all the other letters. We would prefer such letters to take the form of a short personal memoir, rather than simply listing the major achievements and events of person's life. We may commission full obituaries for the Society pages if the person was particularly well known or active within the Society. It is possible that someone's death may be recorded in all three ways. We do get to hear of some deaths, but in general (as with other sections of the publication) we are heavily reliant on our members for their contributions.

explanation here of Cullen's fascinating critique of Maslow's assumptions, attitudes, and behaviours as an investigator (Cullen, 1994). But before finishing, I suspect that some readers may be asking why Maslow only included women in his sample? The answer is twofold: firstly, because 'the men were far more evasive, and tended to lie, exaggerate, or distort their sexual experiences'; and secondly, because interviewing women

'was more fun – illuminating for me the nature of women, who were certainly to a shy boy still mysterious' (cited in Hoffman, 1988, p.7).

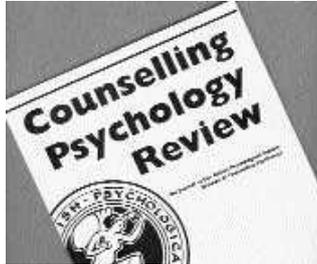
Perhaps some readers, like me, will never feel quite the same about Maslow and his contributions to psychology?
Beverly Alimo-Metcalf
University of Leeds

Reference

Cullen, D. (1994). Feminism, management and self-actualization. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 1, 127–137.
 Hoffman, E. (1988). *The right to be human*. Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher.

Outdated positivism

READ the article 'Does the future belong to the scientist practitioner' (February 2001)



Modern non-positivist scientific investigation

and felt rather disappointed. Are the authors aware of the BPS Division of Counselling Psychology? If so, what apology would they make for failing to take into account the views of their fellow Chartered Counselling Psychologists, who are increasingly being accepted and employed as an alternative to clinical psychologists in the NHS, especially where psychotherapy services are required.

It also seems to me that such a failure shows the extent to which outdated positivist views are still firmly entrenched in the world of academic psychology. Counselling psychology is the place where the complex ideas of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis lend themselves to modern non-positivist scientific investigation. This is the year 2001.

Julian Behrman
*Regent's College
 London*

INFORMATION

■ WE are two clinical psychologists working with **children and adolescents who have developmental difficulties** and disabilities. We are interested in applying systemic thinking to these young people and their families. We would appreciate hearing from anyone else with experience working in this area and who might be able to suggest particularly useful publications.

**Jacqueline Hammond Wyatt
 Kate Robinson**

*Maple Children's Centre
 Kingston Hospital
 28–34 Wolverton Avenue
 Kingston upon Thames KT2 7QB*

■ I AM currently working on a project aimed at the development of psychosocial services within paediatric cardiology, at the Yorkshire Heart Centre, Leeds. I would be interested to hear from other **psychologists working with children and families affected by congenital heart defects**, attached to the 18 regional paediatric cardiology centres around the UK, with a view to establishing a national group.

Any international contacts would also be gratefully received.

Sara Matley
*Clinical Psychologist
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■ EXPERIENCED **co-ordinator of training required by trainee counselling psychologist** to assist in completion of Part II of the

Diploma in Counselling Psychology via the independent route. I have already completed Part I and the research component of Part II, and am eager to enrol as soon as possible. My co-ordinator of training will need to live in London and be a Chartered Counselling Psychologist. If you are willing and able to fill this role then I would be glad to hear from you.

Kerry Smith
 Tel: 07771 620683;
 e-mail: kerry@caint.com

■ I AM a mature undergraduate looking for **work experience**. I am willing to work voluntarily and travel within a 25-mile radius of **Redditch, Worcestershire**. I am interested in counselling psychology with a particular interest in counselling parents of disabled children. I wish to work two days a week between June and September.

Sharron Dawes
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 e-mail: S.Dawes@Tesco.net

■ I WRITE to draw the attention of psychologists to the existence of the **Neuropsych e-mail discussion group**, catering in particular for those interested in neuropsychology, both academics and clinicians. Currently there are about 230 members located in a number of countries. Typical e-mails include requests for information, discussion of research topics, details of posts which are available and conference announcements. The requirements for membership are very simple. All we ask is that you are a genuine professional or

student interested in the area. If you would like to join the list, then simply send me an e-mail giving brief details of your current position and interests.

Tony Ward
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■ I AM a psychology graduate wanting to gain **voluntary experience in clinical psychology** – whether it be an assistant or research psychologist post. I am keen to gain further experience in an academic or clinical setting to enhance my attempts to gain access on to a clinical psychology training course. I would welcome offers of such work throughout the **Birmingham area** – including universities in and around Birmingham.

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■ I AM a psychologist graduate wanting to gain some **experience in clinical research** in the **Guildford / Surrey area**.
Sarah Worden
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■ THE Council of the Ergonomics Society has formed a working group to initiate discussions on the **teaching of ergonomics at A-level**. I am writing as a member of that group. Currently a number of ergonomists have carried out preliminary work with some measure of success.

However, many members of The British Psychological Society have obtained substantial experience of preparing syllabuses, initiating courses, examining and teaching psychology at this level, and I believe that that experience is highly relevant to the task we in ergonomics have set ourselves. Therefore I would be interested in any advice or information that I can acquire to advance our discussions within the Ergonomics Society.

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■ I AM interested in hearing from anyone who has had experience of **writing an information leaflet** for clients of clinical psychology services in a paediatric setting. Also, I would love to hear from anyone else trying to develop a small paediatric psychology service in a community setting.

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