



## 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](mailto: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.

# Reflexivity and the evolving debate

**T**OM Dickins (Letters, September 2001) wrote of his 'dismay' at the critical comments published in August by Rose and Rose, in regard to evolutionary psychology and specifically in regard to Thornhill and Palmer's controversial book on rape. Dickins denounces the kind of observations that Rose and Rose make as 'hyperbole'. In contrast, I write to encourage more such observations, which I would call by a different name.

Essentially Rose and Rose, like other critical theorists, are calling for greater *reflexivity* about the questions we set ourselves in science. Dickins seems to disagree, implying that all questions are equally worthwhile. He states that evolutionary ideas 'might be wrong – but we won't know until we look'. A reflexive approach leads us to think more insightfully about the bases on which we choose our questions – which are the more thoughtful, valuable, better?

Ironically, Dickins's own arguments illustrate the consequences that an absence of reflexivity can hold for a line of analysis. Rose and Rose had argued that the evolutionary account of rape objectifies female victims (because, among other reasons, it compares their behaviour to that of scorpionflies). Dickins contends that this criticism is 'not

entirely accurate' because Thornhill and Palmer devote an entire chapter of their book to the psychological distress of rape victims. Indeed they do. The authors craft a detailed *evolutionary* explanation of why women should be traumatised by rape. This is a major plank of their theory that has been largely overlooked in the heated debate surrounding their book, despite the fact it is arguably the most radical component.

Thornhill and Palmer's evolutionary framework leads them to hypothesise that married women are more traumatised by rape than are unmarried women, for married women risk losing their partner's material support and investment in any offspring. They further hypothesise that copulatory rape (using a penis) should be more traumatic than non-copulatory rape (using objects such as broomsticks, bottles or fists), for the former carries the risk of unwanted insemination, thus denying women the ultimate evolutionary advantage. And the authors propose that as a woman's physical injuries increase, her psychological pain should decrease; for the visible signs of resistance reassure her mate that she was not involved in a consensual affair.

Need I point out that these hypotheses are outrageously insulting and insensitive to women? Thornhill and Palmer go even further, offering empirical data that they argue support such hypotheses, despite the fact that those data are derived from exceedingly poor scientific methods

(Zeedyk, 2000). Can anyone seriously argue that such claims do anything other than discount rape victims' pain and subjectivity, precisely as Rose and Rose argued? Dickins seems to believe that the act of giving attention to women's experience is sufficient, with the substance of that attention treated as immaterial. He defends the work of Thornhill and Palmer as evidence of a genuine desire to 'understand' women's experience of 'this dreadful event' called rape. Their claims may be a (dismal) attempt to explain women's behaviour, but they cannot possibly be classed as an attempt to understand their experience.

The act of choosing and

supporting hypotheses is not the objective, empirically driven process that Dickins and Thornhill and Palmer wish it to be. Their ideas are inherently as couched in political choices and epistemological frameworks as are Rose and Rose's, but they seem less aware of, or interested in, their own biases. In my view, such a lack of reflexivity carries much greater danger for science and for society than any 'hyperbole' in which Rose and Rose could be accused of engaging.

**M. Suzanne Zeedyk**  
*University of Dundee*

### Reference

Zeedyk, M. S. (2000). Review essay: Epistemological bases of theoretical coercion. *Psychology, Evolution, and Gender*, 2, 324–336.

**D**ISMISSING evolutionary psychology because women are delaying motherhood in contemporary Britain (Lynne Segal, 'Main agendas and hidden agendas', August 2001) makes as much sense as slamming social psychology because some people like being on their own, or condemning cognitive psychology when behaviour responds to reinforcement. No single part of the discipline has all the answers.

Critics of evolutionary psychology generally accept that natural selection has shaped human behaviour to some extent, and that's all an evolutionary psychologist would ask. After that, as in any discipline, it's a matter of debate over particular hypotheses and evidence. The strength of evolutionary psychology has been to recognise that human

cognitive mechanisms must have evolved early in our evolutionary history, to deal with the contingencies of early environments. It is because contemporary environments differ from those of early humans that our behaviour also differs from assumed ancestral norms. But the fact that some aspects of human behaviour are more universal than others shows us where to look for the experiences that shape our behaviour. The greater risk of infanticide suffered by stepchildren compared with biological children in many societies suggests a predisposition for parental love to be strengthened by early contact. The fact that Sweden seems to be an exception to this pattern leads not to a rejection of this conclusion, given the current balance of evidence, but instead to a search for aspects

## DEADLINE

Deadline for letters for possible publication in the January issue is **23 November**

of Swedish life that ameliorate the stresses of step-parenting. Nothing special about this: as data accumulate and a simple story becomes more complex, more variables are needed to explain the richer picture.

Contemporary influences on reproductive decision making are so different from those of our early environment that delaying motherhood, for example, comes as no surprise to the evolutionary psychologist. We do not yet understand the mix of selected predispositions and modern conditions that have shaped the dramatic changes in reproductive patterns since the demographic transition, but evolutionary psychologists are working with anthropologists and demographers on the problem (e.g. Cronk *et al.*, 2000).

Psychologists should embrace the search for a more complete understanding of humanity, not stand unhelpfully on the sidelines.

**John Lazarus**

*Department of Psychology  
University of Newcastle*

#### Reference

Cronk, L., Chagnon N., & Irons, W. (Eds.) (2000). *Human behavior and adaptation: An anthropological perspective*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

## 'Same again' could create new problems

**A**S members of the team that cloned Dolly the sheep, we are well versed in the safety hazards that have been the main theme of the human reproductive cloning debate. But if this technology ever reaches the stage where it is considered safe to use on humans, what kind of psychological problems might such children suffer throughout their life? This is where we need the input of psychologists.

The main reason hailed for using human cloning as an assisted reproductive technology is for infertile couples. However, being brought up alongside your older genetic copy could have a detrimental effect on the

clone. A very young child may be oblivious, but as age increases and they become aware of their origins, how will the child feel? As the teen years turn into young adulthood, the clone would begin to strongly resemble their genetically identical 'parent', which might become increasingly disturbing. The clone could be at risk from problems of identity and feelings that their life choices would constantly be scrutinised and compared.

And how would a clone interact within the family unit? For example, if genetic material from the father was used to create a clone, what would be the relationship between the mother and her 'son', who is actually a younger version of

her partner, especially as the child grows into adulthood? How would the father react to his son/younger twin brother?

Even with the most well-meaning parents, we have doubts about whether any cloned child could be brought up as an entirely unique individual with an open future. The effects of identity problems, the burden of expectation and uncommon family relationships could cause serious psychological harms.

Another reason given for reproductive cloning is to 'replace' a deceased relative – usually a child, although requests for partners and parents have been made. The expectation of the parents to reclaim their lost loved one could, we believe, put an unfair burden upon the clone, with the child suffering emotional problems as they deal with being a dead person's copy, resulting in feelings of low self-worth. Again, family relationships would suffer.

It is often quoted that a cloned child should be thought of as a delayed identical twin, and that since identical twins do not suffer psychologically from



**Dolly the sheep is unlikely to be at risk from problems of identity and feelings that its life choices are constantly scrutinised**

## INFORMATION

■ I AM a trainee counselling psychologist **researching the issues that Asperger's syndrome sufferers bring into therapy**. I would be very grateful to hear from anyone who has worked with AS sufferers and has experience of counselling them.

**Natasha Berthollier**

31 Newton Road  
London NW2 6PS  
Tel: 020 8830 7336; e-mail:  
novaber@aol.com

■ I SEEK **voluntary experience assisting a child psychologist (ideally part-time) in London**. I have an extensive experience in child care (children aged from three to seven) in Steiner and Montessori

nurseries and with special needs children. This is my final year at Birkbeck College (BSc psychology) and I really hope to make use of my experience with child care and special needs.

**Valerie Mortin**

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London W1G 6NA  
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■ I AM a researcher looking at **perceptions of adulthood**. I would be very grateful if people would take a few minutes to fill in an **online questionnaire** at [www.soton.ac.uk/~fmu](http://www.soton.ac.uk/~fmu). I am particularly interested in the views young adults have of adulthood. If

anyone has suggestions for how to recruit large numbers of young adults I would be most grateful.

**Fiona Ulph**

University of Southampton  
Southampton SO17 1BJ  
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■ I AM an assistant psychologist working for Mid-Sussex NHS Trust. I am keen to contact any other **assistants in the Haywards Heath area**, or to meet up with an assistants' group (if one exists). If there is no group in the area, I am keen to set one up – so please get in touch!

**Eleanor Millett**  
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■ I AM a Chartered Clinical Psychologist working in adult mental health for the NHS and also on a private basis. I am interested in hearing from anyone with **knowledge or experience of clinical supervision over the internet** (e-supervision).

**Stephen Smith**  
West Hampshire NHS Trust  
The Friarsgate Practice  
Winchester  
Tel: 01962 854091

having a genetic copy, then neither would clones. But a point that tends to be forgotten is that identical twins start life together at day one; each identical twin baby is a bundle of potentialities with their personalities yet to develop, abilities and talents yet to be discovered, and life choices to be made. They are not faced

with an older (perhaps much older) genetically identical twin.

A clone is not an exact copy in every respect; owing to variations in environment this would not be the case. But even if the clone felt unique, we doubt whether this uniqueness would be seen in the eyes of the outside world.

Considering these issues, would it be possible for a cloned child to be brought up as a balanced individual with an open future and no psychological problems over their origins? This debate should begin now, and not if and when the technology is ever considered safe. Details of any appropriate studies and the

views from researchers in psychology concerning these issues are most welcome.

**Ian Wilmut**  
*Gene Expression and Development*  
**Lesley Paterson**  
*Scientific Secretary to Ian Wilmut*  
*Roslin Institute*  
*Midlothian*

## Weird, happy and colourful...

**T**HE article 'Weird and wonderful' (September 2001) by Neil Martin, giving the titles of 'the most eccentric-sounding journal articles published in psychology and its related subjects in the last century', clearly illustrates that authors of learned papers (or even not so learned ones) can have a sense of humour that is not entirely inconsistent with serious attempts to contribute to psychological knowledge.

Indeed, it could be argued that more such humour, including that which is plain funny, would not be a bad thing. Surely, as professional psychologists, we do not always view our work in a totally serious vein, and many of us can still enjoy a healthy laugh at our colleagues or even ourselves, or at whatever activity we happen to be engaged in at the time.

It could also be argued that a profession has 'come of age' when its members can stand back and see the humorous or funny aspects of their discipline. Even august publications such as the *British Medical Journal* have occasionally included items of a light-hearted or obviously amusing nature, even those of reported fact.

While there can be no doubt that the practice of psychology is a serious business, it would also seem important to view humour in

psychology as a serious matter for enjoyment. In doing so we may even gain increased satisfaction as well as increased enjoyment from the serious side of what we do.

**Arthur Kaufman**

*Sheffield*

**M**OST of the articles in *The Psychologist* bore me, I have to say. However, I read the entirety of the 'Head to head: Happiness – Stuck with what you've got' piece in the September issue.

As a psychologist working in business, I find many of the articles in *The Psychologist* too academic. Many are written in a terse and academic style and seem to focus on beating up opposing schools of thinking or debate methodological differences of interest to few practising (as opposed to academic) psychologists.

However, the piece pitting David Lykken against Mike Csikszentmihalyi should be congratulated for having been very well written. I have a feeling that it was also skilfully edited to maintain the pace as if it really had been a face-to-face discussion between these two notable psychologists.

In addition, the piece

covered the theoretical debate on an issue of relevance to everyone (not just psychologists).

So keep up the 'Head to head' format and let's see some more debates that can be of interest to non-psychologists too.

**Rob Yeung**

*Kiddy and Partners Ltd*  
*London W1*

**I** AM writing about the front cover of *The Psychologist* as I am beginning to wonder about some of the recent graphics. Take for instance the latest cover (September 2001) depicting a tree and a jumper. Not only do I think my 7-year-old son could have provided a better picture, but it gave the whole magazine a comic-book appearance, and this is how many of the front covers are coming across. Being an avid reader of American Marvel and DC comics myself, I can certainly give you some advice on exceptionally good graphics people who will design front covers to do *The Psychologist* proud, if that is what you want. However, will this detract from the supposed seriousness of the publication itself, and in turn the

profession, particularly in the eyes of non-psychologists?

I would not want *The Psychologist* to be as staid looking as, say, the *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, and I think on the whole the front covers are rather colourful and innovative. However, I do wonder who some of the graphics are meant to appeal to, and if we are losing the plot a little in trying to be too cosmopolitan. Something akin to British Airways and their recent debacle with the colourful tail fin, and loss of corporate identity. Whilst I support the move to be modern and colourful and encompass all disciplines, I think the front cover should reflect the status of psychology as a serious profession and not be seen, superficially at least, as something related to a comic book.

I cannot fault the design, layout and contents of *The Psychologist* between the front and back covers, but I do think there needs to be rethink in the message that is being conveyed by the actual front cover itself.

**Paul Cawkill**

*13 Ramshill*  
*Petersfield*  
*Hampshire*

**Editor's comment:** We're always happy to hear your views and receive your submissions. 'The lighter side' format seems to have rather fallen by the wayside lately, but we still welcome humorous articles of up to 800 words. The 'Head to head' debate format is now a year old, and we do need our readers to keep those ideas coming in for it to continue. As for recent covers, what do other readers think of how we match cover design with the content both of the articles and of the publication as a whole?

## Shocking treatment

**I**N this centenary year the BPS has rightfully remembered pioneers in British psychology including William Rivers and Charles Myers (leading researcher/practitioners in the area of shell shock). During the First World War psychologists worked extensively with men suffering from shell shock or 'war neurosis', latterly referred to as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). I am calling on members of the BPS to consider these forgotten victims.

Three hundred and six British and Commonwealth soldiers suffering from PTSD were shot at dawn for reasons given then as 'cowardice' or 'insubordination'. Many deserted or 'broke down' under the pressure of front-line fighting, and were executed as a warning to other troops. We currently deplore the use of child-soldiers in war, yet boys as young as 16 were executed. Medical officers were supposed to diagnose PTSD; but most men were not examined by an MO, and diagnoses of shell shock were often overruled. One MO said: 'I went to the trial determined to give him no help of any sort, for I detest his type ... I really hoped that he would be shot' (Holden, 1998).

The impact of these assassinations was widespread. Trauma was caused to those

who formed the firing squads. Psychologists such as Myers were distressed they were unable to save these soldiers. Communities rejected family members of those executed. Many widows were denied war pensions if their husbands were executed for cowardice, placing them and any children into poverty. Finally, it led to a 'stiff-upper-lip' version of masculinity that haunted many survivors of the war, along with negative views of mental illness that still persist.

We would no longer consider the death penalty for those suffering from PTSD, and we should not tolerate that it happened in our recent past. I call upon the BPS to formally support the Shot at Dawn campaign for a blanket pardon – and to state publicly that we consider those shot at dawn to have suffered from PTSD – rather than being cowards. As one condemned soldier wrote: 'I'm dying tomorrow, please clear my name.'

For further information on the Shot at Dawn campaign, see [www.shotatdawn.org.uk](http://www.shotatdawn.org.uk), or contact John Hipkin on 0191 262 4753.

**Petra Boynton**  
*Royal Free and University  
College Medical School*

### Reference

Holden, W. (1998). *Shell shock: The psychological impact of war*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

## Contributions welcome

**T**HE Division of Educational and Child Psychology wishes to express its dismay at the tragedy of 11 September.

The primary purpose of our Division is to support members in their work with children, young people and families within school and community settings. We are aware of the contribution educational psychologists make to the implementation of critical

incident procedures nationally. We are therefore considering dedicating our spring Divisional newsletter to sharing these contributions and would welcome hearing from psychologists in any area of the discipline about their views, experiences and expertise in this aspect of their work.

**Jane Turner**  
*Chair, Division of Educational  
and Child Psychology  
c/o BPS Leicester office*

## David James 1942–2001

**T**HERE was a time, it seems, when many academics were polymaths of their own discipline, and managed also to have wide range of other interests in the arts and elsewhere. That time has gone, if it ever existed, but David James fitted the role perfectly in the modern era.

He nearly always lived in the country, and as one approached the door, passing the garaged vintage car and the sailing boat up on blocks, there would be a couple of large dogs bounding forward. David would be calling to quiet them from inside the kitchen. One would be warmly greeted, taken through to where David had been listening to classical music and given a glass of well-chosen wine.

After a childhood in Yorkshire, he had a varied early career that included a spell at Cambridge beginning to read medicine, a period working for a drug company, and returning to study at Bradford University. While completing his PhD at Bradford, he took a post in Jeffrey Gray's behavioural neuroscience group in Oxford University at the time that the lab was being set up in the new building in South Parks Road. He made a significant contribution to that developing research programme before moving to a lecturing post in Northern Ireland in 1973.

He went initially to the New University of Ulster in Coleraine (now the University of Ulster at Coleraine), and began to set up a small behavioural neuroscience lab, as well as to contribute to the development of a new psychology degree there. He also took his current dog and vintage car with him, bought a Velocette motorbike, and began to write incisive

reviews for the local papers of any major musical event that occurred locally. A few years later it became clear that allergy problems meant that he could no longer be active in behavioural neuroscience laboratory work, and there was a need in the department for expertise in ergonomics. As he was, among so many other things, a frustrated engineer, he willingly agreed to spend a year at Loughborough University of Technology before returning as a senior lecturer to run a degree course in occupational psychology at Magee College, Derry, which was by this time a developing campus of the University of Ulster.

The challenge of working in a new location saw David draw on his wealth of knowledge and expertise to teach on a variety of popular courses including ergonomics, biopsychology, cognition at work, experimental psychology, human-computer interaction, and occupational health. Moreover, at this time David's research interests moved out of the lab, into the applied settings of ergonomics, cognition and ageing, and IT learning among the elderly; he enjoyed 'teaching old dogs new tricks', as he put it. Indeed, he often joked that he could be a subject for his own research!

The many psychologists who went to David's funeral were overwhelmed by the huge number of people who were there, and the many fields of activity and interest that they represented. He was a quintessential English gentleman and a scholar, remembered for his courtesy, wit, charm and, above all, his kindness.

**Julian C. Leslie**  
**Christopher Alan Lewis**  
*School of Psychology  
University of Ulster*