

Psychiatry and the media

Media for Mental Health

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Broadcast media can powerfully influence the way we view the world. Journalists drawn to sensational news items do not necessarily portray the real situation they are describing. Often they strengthen belief in stereotyped images, such as the 'mad axeman'. Yet they have the potential to foster greater public understanding of mental illness and a more responsible attitude to sufferers.

Last year Peter Evans won a BBC award for his work on a Mental Health Film Council (MHFC) project, 'Media for Mental Health'. The MHFC had plans to develop a project with local individuals and groups throughout Britain, aiming to improve the provision and use of appropriate media in changing public attitudes to mental health. Evans, who has past experience of mental health and media work, was in a good position to take on the job of project co-ordinator.

His interest in mental health issues goes back to his schooldays in the 1960s, when he first read about different psychological theories on why people do things and how effectively *The Hidden Persuaders* (Vance Packard, 1960) of advertising can alter ideas. At the age of 17 he felt uncertain about future plans and decided to abandon studying, choosing to start work in the very real world of a residential therapeutic community. "I was thrown in the deep end as the youngest member of staff in a home for disturbed adolescents who had been thrown out of other centres. It was my first introduction to people being really violent, quite a frightening experience." Later there was a riot in the home, which led to its abrupt closure and Evans looking for another job. Still curious about child development, he joined volunteers helping on a children's adventure playground before returning to formal education and studying social sciences. In his final year at college he was able to arrange an attachment to BBC local radio, making his first contact with the world of broadcast media.

He believes broadcast media plays a crucial part in shaping attitudes towards people with emotional problems. In many ways issues related to mental health remain a taboo subject, but he would like

more open discussion, "What we are talking about is something that can happen to any of us. People become ill because of some trauma; changes in body chemistry may follow as a result". He rejects the term mental illness in favour of mental ill health or emotional distress, to try and emphasise the idea that a person is basically well, though may experience a change in mental well being in response to some stress in the environment.

Evans regrets the continuing use of negative clichés on television and radio, though is slightly encouraged by some recent developments. 'We're not Mad, We're Angry' shown on Channel 4 was pioneering in its involvement of psychiatric patients, who have the chance to discuss and criticise mental health services drawing on their own experiences. Similarly Capital Radio's 'Breakdown' featured two former patients who 'relived' their experiences on the programme. More dramatic changes in media presentation have occurred in the area of physical disability. Evans recognises that one of the major difficulties producers face is selecting good positive images of emotional distress rather than falling back on old stereotypes, a problem which may be less difficult to tackle in other areas such as ethnic minorities or women's rights.

He emphasises the importance of building up contact with producers and others working in the media as "often these people may be quite unaware of their own prejudices". "We have regular film presentations focusing on different topics to do with well being, and always encourage producers to come. Then they can get feedback from our audiences which may include patients, family members, and representatives from different voluntary organisations." Attitudes are shifting, "Channel 4 Director Michael Grade seems to be in tune with our work"; he recognises television's role in raising public awareness of important social and psychological issues. In the related area of crime reporting, Grade has already pointed to the central role of the media in creating a distorted picture resulting in false impressions about the subject, as pressure to increase circulation or attract audiences

has led to simplification, over-dramatisation and sensationalism of stories. He has made it clear that he would welcome a more imaginative approach to mental health problems by producers; Evans hopes a production company will pick up the gauntlet.

Looking towards the future, "more resources for our work would be helpful. But above all, we need to build on contacts with people working in the

media encouraging them to rethink their attitudes in creating more positive images of mental health".

Reference

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Style

The nuts and bolts of writing papers

Number 6. The proof of the pudding

RALPH FOOTRING, Scientific Editor, *British Journal of Psychiatry*

This is the last article in the series, and I might have to be allowed a little licence, as it is not strictly about writing papers. However, proofs are an important part of the publishing process, and I suspect not many authors appreciate what has been behind producing them.

After a paper has been accepted, it might have to wait to be copy edited. This is another delay to be aware of and to beware of, but there is often a queue. Copy editing consists of two activities. The essential part is to mark up a paper for the typesetters, that is, to indicate what size text is required, what are main and what are subheadings, what is to be italic, and so on. The other part is to make changes to the author's text. This can involve correcting spellings and grammar, and raising queries with the author regarding missing references or numbers that don't add up.

To differing extents copy editors also involve themselves in the sometimes dubious activity of making the text 'read better'. This can be justified, for example, in making a paper more concise. However, it can also be just meddling and it can be just plain wrong. If you have reason to be anxious about your text, it is quite in order to be difficult. It is important to be difficult before the proof stage, when corrections have to be paid for, and perhaps the most effective way to do this is to request to see the copy-edited manuscript (at the expense of a short delay). To have your writing published, as opposed to your rewritten

writing published, should not be a hurdle to be overcome, and copy editing should be regarded as a service provided rather than an obstruction. Having said this much, I should add that publishers do have their house styles to keep to, and you have to accept this, as it gives consistency, identity, and perhaps even authority to publications.

After copy editing, the paper is sent to the typesetter, where the text (with codes for the text size and column width etc.) is typed into a computer. Sometimes a publisher (more likely a book publisher) will ask you for your word-processor disk with the text on it, so that the typesetter need only type in corrections and codes. The computer then guides a laser over a roll of photographic paper, and a page of text results. Many computers now produce a full page, but sometimes a single column ('galley') is produced, which is later cut up to fit the page.

One copy of the proof will be read at the publishers, and one will be sent to the author. The text on the proof differs from that in the original either because the copy editor changed it or because the typesetter made a typing error.

When marking the proof, remember that someone has to spot your corrections. Some of the cleverest researchers into the workings of the human brain would seem to be unable to appreciate that people are not all that good at picking up small pencil marks among columns of black text. Use red in preference and always make marks in the margins. There are in