

Psychiatry and the media

Famous for 28 years

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For a week in May a handful of ordinary people were as famous as anyone in the country. Famous not for 15 minutes but for 15 minutes every seven years, they are the children who were presented in the early '60s as "a glimpse of Britain's future", now 35 and the focus of Granada's moving, depressing, compelling *35 Up*.

There was no escaping them as they appeared on everything from *Wogan* to *The Late Show*, where a bunch of media pundits analysed the programme's message in their own image, as if it were a particularly ambiguous ink blot. To media-scrutineer Laurie Taylor the 35-year-olds had become TV sophisticates, ready and able to manipulate the genre for their own purpose while Bea Campbell saw the three working-class women as beacons of resilience. But of course they were wrong. You had to be a psychiatrist to know that *35 Up* was a unique follow-up study, a televised collection of psychological case histories.

Take Tony, the East End tyke who mocked the snobbery of his upper-class co-stars and swung a punch in the air to show how he would cut them down to size. Aged seven Tony wanted to be a jockey, aged 14 he was a stable-boy, aged 21 he had quit. In *35 Up* he recalled the greatest moment of his life, some time between programmes two and three when he had raced alongside Lester Piggott at Kempton. Now he was teaching his daughters about horses, partly reliving his own ambition, partly adopting the habits of the class from which he had been excluded, just as his wife did when she treated herself to the use of the toilet at Harrods.

Then there was Bruce, the wide-eyed, bat-eared, tear-jerkingly *decent* seven-year-old who was hoping to end up in Africa "to teach people who aren't civilised to be more or less good". When he last appeared he was teaching in East London. This time he was on a year's sabbatical in Bangladesh. Twenty-eight years ago he was in a posh school struggling to conjugate Latin verbs. In case you had not got the point, *35 Up* showed him in a classroom full of Bangladeshi children (seven-year-olds?), struggling to learn the local lingo.

The point was how all the elements of adult personality can be found years earlier in childhood schemes and fears. Not that this was always so – *7 Up* began as sociology, a study of the rich and poor in

'60s Britain, and many of the kids were selected from extremes of social class to amplify their contrasting prospects. What the subsequent programmes have shown is a switch in public taste, or at least media mileage, from social analysis to psychological narrative.

No-one illustrated the change better than Paul, the helpless-looking one who, with the aid of some inspired editing, produced the moment in the first programme when the limited horizons imposed by disadvantage were starkly displayed. The three upper-class boys who shared a settee and a bundle of snobbish prejudices had just recited their educational futures which took them to Charterhouse and Cambridge. With no intervening question, the camera cut to a puzzled-looking Paul. "What's university?" he said.

In *35 Up* even this accusation on the state of Britain had become a personal quirk, ingrained enough to be hereditary. Paul was now living in Australia, complete with Dennis Lillee moustache and a wife, who, to use his seven-year-old prediction about women, could certainly make him eat his greens. Only the other day, they revealed, their son had blurted out, "What does university mean?" It was uncanny, they thought.

Paradoxically, this interest in the personal at the expense of the social could spell the programme's eventual decline now that the huge class-based disparities between the seven-year-olds have been blurred by common experience of youth, marriage and death. The affluence and the accents still differ but the life events have been similar and the overall effect is that people who were very unlike at seven resemble each other more with each broadcast.

In *35 Up* parents had died, marriages had weakened but in most cases held, grand ambitions had been stoically shelved. Everyone had become *reasonable*, even John the precocious aristocrat whose "Stop it at once!" to a misbehaving youngster in 1964 revealed more about class power than any of his remarks about keeping the poor out of his school. John had swapped his *droit de seigneur* for *noblesse oblige*. A barrister in the Chancery Division, he came across as the sort of neighbour who would willingly lend you his lawnmower and, though he still had no

idea how the other half lived (he believed anyone could afford private education), he was doing his charitable best for Bulgaria. Which was presumably why he agreed to appear this time, having refused seven years ago – although he claimed it was an opportunity to plug the charity, it was really his chance to reassure the nation that he had turned out human.

Only Neil was different. He had suffered from “depression” and his rocking, his mannerisms and his solitary life had been the most unsettling part of the last programme. *35 Up* found him in Shetland, accepted as an eccentric but recently dropped as director of the annual village play, looking too unkempt for viewing comfort. “It’s a mad world”, was how he responded to being asked if he was mad, one of several crass questions. Neil was the exception to what was otherwise a coming together of lifestyles



35 Up: Neil. Copyright Granada Television.

and through him the programme uncovered one type of disadvantage which shows no sign of changing.

Psychiatric Bulletin (1991), 15, 720

Miscellany

John Young Memorial Fund

The Reverend Dr John Young was a pioneering consultant psychiatrist in the field of old age psychiatry. He died on 5 February 1991. (See Obituary, *Psychiatric Bulletin*, July 1991, 15, 459–460.) The members of the West Midlands Association of Psychogeriatricians have decided to institute a fund in memory of his name and to award an annual prize out of the proceeds. It would be in the form of an essay competition for SHOs and registrars training in old age psychiatry in the West Midlands Region. There is now an appeal for donations. Cheques may be drawn in favour of “John Young Memorial Fund” and forwarded to Dr D. Gaspar, Convenor, John Young Memorial Fund, Postgraduate Clinical Tutor in Old Age Psychiatry, West Midlands Region, Hollymoor Hospital, Birmingham B31 5EX.

Rehabilitation for torture victims

The International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT) is an independent non-profit making foundation which was created in 1985 by the Rehabilitation and Research Centre for Torture Victims (RCT) Copenhagen. Its objectives include the accumulation and dissemination of information about torture, the consequences of torture and the possibilities of rehabilitating people who have been tortured; the support of international and national initiatives, organisations and agencies concerned with torture; the support of research into all aspects

of torture, and serving as an international clearing house for information about activities within the scope of IRCT objectives. Further information: IRCT, Juliane Maries Vej 34, PO Box 2672, DK-2100 Copenhagen Ø, Denmark.

Mentally incapacitated adults and decision-making

The Law Commission Consultation Paper No. 199, *Mentally Incapacitated Adults and Decision-Making: An Overview* was issued on 30 April 1991 and is published by HMSO, price £6.90. Copies of the response to Consultation Paper No. 119 by the Law Society’s Mental Health Sub-Committee are available from Shirley Holloway, The Law Society, 50 Chancery Lane, London WC2A 1SX (please send A4 SAE).

Appointment

Professor R. E. Kendell has been appointed Chief Medical Officer for Scotland.

New organisation

A new organisation will be formed when the Medical Campaign against Nuclear Weapons merges with the Medical Association for Prevention of War next year. Its aim will be to create a channel to enable health professionals to extend their concerns beyond prevention of war to helping foster new concepts of health and global security. Further information: Medical Campaign against Nuclear Weapons, 601 Holloway Road, London N19 4DJ.