

**DO LOOKS COUNT?**

Your article, "Change of Face...Change of Fate" [May/June], underscores the importance physical appearance plays in both our personal and professional lives. Though many dismiss concern over physical attractiveness as "vanity," the fact remains that our looks are exceedingly important to our happiness and success.

Most people who lose weight, undergo cosmetic surgery, or upgrade their makeup and wardrobe report enhanced self-confidence. This alone can be justification for making an effort to be the best one can be. In sum, most beauties are made—not born. By the way, I was quoted in the article as being a "social psychologist in Berkeley." I am an affiliated scholar at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Your [March/April] interview with Helen Gurley Brown, editor of *Cosmopolitan*, should be an inspiration to all women. Ms. Brown is a wonderful role model. She has achieved remarkable success in a tough field and still bubbles with enthusiasm when discussing her long-standing marriage. She often gets a hard time from the press and the public for her "Cosmo Girl" persona, but in reality, she is encouraging women to "go for it."

*Debbie Then, Ph.D.  
Stanford, CA*

**DIFFICULT ANSWERS**

In response to your [March/April] PT Advice question, "You're Having What?" I ask why can't a panel of experts relate to a 16-year-old having sex? Not one of the parents mentioned giving their child a hug or a smile! There were no positive questions like, "Was it nice," "Do you like him/her a lot," "Do you need any help financially for birth control? By the way, what are you using?"

Give the kids some credit; be positive. And if your kids aren't 16 yet, talk to them about methods of self-fulfillment and maybe they'll wait until they are older. In any case, it is not your choice. Kids cannot become adults unless you let them live; sex is an important and positive part of living. Teach them about sex instead of pretending that they will learn about it later. Hopefully the next generation will accept the fact that teens are sexually interested.

*G. Madsen  
Vancouver, BC, Canada*

**COGNITIVE CHOICES**

I believe your [May/June] article, "What You Can Change...What You Cannot," by Martin Seligman, Ph.D., is well written and scholarly; however, I take some exception to the "authoritative" manner in which cognitive therapy was appraised. In my readings, both scientific and popular, there appears to be a complex biochemical interaction in these diagnoses. Some individuals demonstrate significant behavioral components, while others do not. To me, a more balanced view would include both biological and cognitive processes, where the latter is amenable to change.

There is no contention on my part that cognitive therapy works best for some. However, in other instances, a combina-

**'Teach kids about sex instead of pretending they will learn about it.'**

tion of therapy and medication appears more effective than therapy alone.

To take this idea a step further, some patients do not seem to have a significant response or change as a result of cognitive therapy, and a reduction of their symptoms seems to be best achieved with medication. These distinctions in patients' circumstances, which result in appropriate attention given to a wide range of individual differences, seem to make for a better "mix of reality."

*William H. Koelle, Ph.D.  
Hagerstown, MD*

**IT TAKES TWO TO TANGO**

I found Dr. Poirer's statement that "men are obsolete," in the [May/June] States of Mind department preposterous. He also said that "males create a lot of problems and are more expendable." Females create no problems? Of course, they have nothing to do with the population problem. Doesn't a species reach a point where expansive reproduction is detrimental to the species as a whole? If Dr. Poirer suffers from a problem of inadequacy, I suggest he do society

a favor and not spread it to the general population.

*Shawn Irwin  
Baton Rouge, LA*

**MEANINGFUL DESTRUCTION**

Michael Ventura gave a compelling account of his experience during the Los Angeles Northridge earthquake in his article, "The Earthquake People," in the May/June issue. One of the statements he made is that "psychology offers no solace in dealing with larger-than-human events." Most people, including psychologists and scientists, would agree. Most, but not all. Psychology does offer solace in dealing with traumatic human disasters such as the earthquake or other destruction by fire, wind, or water.

Ventura's words are well thought out and should be heeded: "These forces should not only humble us, they should focus us. The presence of these great forces beneath our feet, in our seas, in our skies, is like a voice telling us in no uncertain terms to live this day."

Psychology can help us deal with these catastrophes. It can reveal to us that the voice that Ventura writes about is a voice from our past, from our collective mind, informing us that we do have a choice if we would only listen to it.

*Gene Sierras  
Tucson, AZ*

**ALIEN NATION**

Jill Neimark's March/April article, "The Harvard Professor and the UFOs," was snide and inaccurate. In her gloss on a vastly complex subject, she declined to mention the decades of serious research and the growing body of scientific literature dealing with the UFO abduction phenomenon, arguably the most important event in recorded history.

As evidence for the physical nature of UFO abductions, I showed her a series of graphic photographs of scars, marks, and wounds suffered by UFO abductees during their encounters. One such wound, near the subject's shoulder blade, is a three-and-a-half-inch-long straight cut surrounded by a massive bruise. The examining physician described the cut, with its evenly placed horizontal extensions, as a surgical incision. To Ms. Neimark, the surgical incision was "indeterminate...un-

remarkable...garden-variety abrasions and minor bruises."

With heavy sarcasm she states that I spoke of other "proofs" of UFO reality. Now, "proof" is a word I scrupulously avoid using; after all, for nearly one quarter of our population there is no proof that the Holocaust ever took place.

In my interview with Ms. Neimark I used the word "evidence" as I always do, but her deliberate misquotation serves further to undermine the reader's sense of my credibility. She goes on to say that I named former U.N. Secretary General Perez de Cuellar as a witness to a 1989 UFO abduction. In fact, I stated only that "an important political figure," whose desire for anonymity I am respecting, was the witness in the case.

I told her I was aware that in a then-forthcoming (*Omni*) article a journalist would openly speculate that de Cuellar was the individual in the 1989 incident, and I said that I would attest only to the accuracy of the general political status the writer was ascribing to the witness.

The final paragraphs of Ms. Neimark's article deal with an important abduction case I'm investigating. She evidently contacted the three New Jersey-based authors of a scurrilous attack on this case, declined to tell me she had done so, and then uncritically published their conclusions as truth. I was thus deprived of a chance to answer their vaporous suspicions. She wrote that, as I gave her a brief outline of this highly complex case, "Hopkins' reliability began to crumble like old cake."(!)

Now, my credibility is as valuable an asset to me, I'm sure, as Ms. Neimark's reliability as a journalist is to her. Over the past few years I have given talks and led workshops on the UFO abduction phenomenon for mental health professionals who take the subject seriously indeed. In fact, seven psychiatrists and a number of psychologists and therapists have come to me privately to discuss their own suspected UFO abductions.

Considering these facts, isn't it about time that *Psychology Today* assigns a qualified, fair-minded mental health professional to investigate what is, undeniably, a portentous and worldwide phenomenon?

*Budd Hopkins  
New York, NY*

*The author responds: Budd Hopkins did indeed show me photographs of various cuts and abrasions, and as a journalist who has done a great deal of science and medical re-*

porting, I found them unremarkable. I report what I see.

*I question Hopkins statement that for "one quarter of our population there is no proof the Holocaust ever took place." Can he cite the study? This is the kind of sweeping statement—and sloppy analogy—that makes me distrust Hopkins all over again.*

*Hopkins is correct that he never explicitly stated Secretary General Perez de Cuellar's name. In our interview, Hopkins remained true to the letter but not the spirit of his promise to de Cuellar, which was to protect the man's anonymity. He told me clearly where to find the name and made it clear this was the man he was speaking of.*

*Hopkins called me when he first read the article. He was upset I had reported a detailed critique of his work without allowing*

**'The UFO abduction phenomenon [is] arguably the most important event in recorded history.'**

*him to rebut it. Though I still feel my judgment call on his work is correct, I told him then and still feel now that it was a moral error not to give him a chance to respond.*

*Although I never promised him a second interview, I can understand his indignation that he didn't receive it. However, having heard his response since, and having seen a paper he wrote in rebuttal to this critique, I have not changed my mind about his work; he has only confirmed it.*

**SMOKE AND MIRRORS?**

Shame, shame on you for your deceptive title, "Saved From Smoke" [July/August], and the deceptive lead-in that stated, "Mothers who smoke while pregnant may be knocking as many as four points off their baby's IQ. But intensive prenatal care may offset the loss."

It is an insult to the intelligence of your readers to imply that a 75-minute visit every two weeks prenatal, and once a month postnatal, can "curb the mothers' smoking" to an extent that would affect IQ, a questionable measurement in itself.

*Barbara H. Clark  
Lisbon Falls, MO*

*Editor's note: We correctly reported a study that showed the value of prenatal care. According to the research, some women visited by nurses did curb their smoking, thereby eliminating any potential IQ loss.*

**THINGS ARE NOT ALWAYS WHAT THEY SEEM**

I was appalled at the condescending and hostile point of view taken by Hara Marano about EMDR. It is obvious that he was negatively biased and did not intend to give EMDR a fair shot from the start. Evidently the man can't support what he does not understand, whether it works or not. The shame is that the article might actually be mistaken as being objective and intelligent and thus deter many people from further considerations of EMDR as a viable treatment tool.

Because of the fact that I have been trained in the method and use of it, I can personally attest to its ability to enhance "breakthroughs" for clients of mine who have been "stuck" in old patterns for years. Some of my clients have experienced such relief from the old symptomatology that they have been free to discontinue therapy; others have been free to dramatically cut back on their need for ongoing work.

It is obvious that Marano was selective in his input and did not validate feedback from the clinical professionals with whom he spoke. Furthermore, Marano's tone was very demeaning of clinical professionals overall, which was disturbing and seemed to reflect a "Good Old Boys' Club" mentality. When Marano is faced with the reality that he was completely off base, I would like to be there offering him a diaper-wipe to get the, um, mud off his face.

*Sheila K. McHenry Worman, M.F.C.C.  
Ventura, CA*

*Editor's note: Hara Estroff Marano is a good old girl.*

*Comments should be addressed to "Letters Editor," PSYCHOLOGY TODAY, 49 E. 21st. St., 11th floor, N.Y., NY 10010. Or, write to us via e-mail: PsychToday@aol.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.*

**NOTE:**

Inadvertently, the author's byline was omitted from the interview of John Malkovich [July/August]. The interview was conducted by Stuart Fischhoff, Ph.D. PSYCHOLOGY TODAY regrets the error.