

Reference

LITTLEWOOD, R. (1985) An indigenous conceptualisation of reactive depression in Trinidad. *Psychological Medicine*, 15, 275–281.

'The fish that got away'

DEAR SIR

Dr Cook has misrepresented the essence of our observation. Perhaps there is a need for further clarification. Our concerns were not unlike those of Dr Cook in that we questioned, not criticised as he states, Dr Littlewood's style of community based research among 'ethnic groups' in a fishing village in Trinidad. We attempted to point out a commonality in the two cited papers with respect to the issues of collaboration, credit and responsibility in transcultural research. In support of our observation, we cited Dr Cook's letter (*Psychiatric Bulletin*, March 1989) where he made the observation of Littlewood's "inconsistencies between the ideological stance taken and the final presentation of his study" in the context of collaboration, credit and responsibility. It is worth reading again.

We respect Dr Cook's feelings, impressions and opinions even when he changes or distorts them. However, he cannot and must not tell us what we feel, neither should he attempt to invalidate our concern for transcultural research that is so relevant to us. In addition, he subtly attempts to influence the editorial balance. Why the self-importance Dr Cook? Why the authoritarianism? Certainly, your colleague Dr Littlewood can speak for himself. Who's misinterpreted? Who's bereaved? Who's colonial?

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(This correspondence is now closed – Editors)

Fostering/adoption: ethnic issues

DEAR SIR

As a child psychiatrist, I am often asked by social services to carry out assessments of troubled children who require foster or adoptive placement. Public attention has recently been drawn to the importance of ethnic and cultural factors issues in meeting the needs of these children. This was stimulated by the case of a 17-month-old baby removed from white foster parents and placed for adoption with a black family. The case has raised questions about the importance of matching children for ethnic and cultural factors where developmental, emotional and social factors also need to be given due weight. In August 1989 Mr David Mellor, then Minister for Health, expressed the view that social services policy in this area might need to be reviewed. I wrote to him at that time, to support the case for a broad assessment of need in such cases.

I received this reply from the Department of Health:

"As you may know, the Minister for Health is now Mrs Virginia Bottomley: you will understand that she cannot comment on a judgment of the court. Mrs Bottomley takes the view that race and culture are important factors in seeking foster parents and adopters for children in care; she supports efforts to encourage people from ethnic minorities to come forward, so that more families are available which will reflect the racial origin and cultural background of children in need of placements.

"However, she does not agree with any rigidly and dogmatically applied policies which place racial and cultural factors above the wider needs of the individual child. Nor would such policies or practice be in accordance with the law, which requires courts and agencies to give first consideration to promote and safeguard a child's welfare throughout childhood, taking into account the child's wishes and feeling, having regard to his age and understanding. A placement with a family of different race can sometimes be in the child's interests, where that family is able to understand and meet all the child's needs, including those arising from his racial and cultural background."

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