

Activity 8.2

Below is an extract from an article by British psychologist Oliver James that was published in The Guardian newspaper in October 2005. You may like to read this with your fellow students and then discuss the issues he raises in relation to the material you have read in sections 8.5 and 8.6 of this chapter.

New research on schizophrenia suggests that the drugs won't always work

Oliver James

The Guardian, Saturday 22 October, 2005-11-01

".....Rates of schizophrenia vary as much as 16-fold around the world, as does its course. It is less common in developing nations and tends to last much longer and be more severe in rich, industrialised nations compared with poor, developing ones (even so, about 20% of schizophrenics in developed nations recover completely without taking anti-psychotic drugs). In fact, if you become ill in a developing nation where hardly anyone is treated with drugs, you are 10 times less likely to have any recurrence of the illness - a huge difference, also nothing to do with genes.

What it may have a lot to do with is the administration of drugs (see British psychologist Richard Bentall's book, [Madness Explained](#)). They have been shown to impede traumatised people from understanding their voices or visions and recovering from them. There is a close relationship between the drug companies and the psychiatric establishment. While it may not be the intention, the establishment explanation of the causes of and solutions to schizophrenia are crucial components in the process of selling drugs. If patients can be persuaded their illness is an unchangeable genetic destiny and that it is a physical problem requiring a physical solution, drug companies' profits will grow. An [analysis](#) in Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica by New Zealand psychologist John Read shows those who buy this genetic fairytale are less likely to recover, and that parents who do so are less supportive of their offspring.

The huge importance to drug company profits of the bio-genetic refrain becomes apparent when you learn that most people do not hum along with it. Surveys find that the majority of people mention such environmental factors as trauma, stress and economic hardship as the commonest causes of schizophrenia. It may be seen that the drug companies have an uphill struggle to persuade them otherwise, for which they badly need the help of the psychiatric establishment's towrope. In Read's analysis, letting go of that rope will prevent it strangling the many schizophrenics whose illness has been caused by abuse. Genes may still emerge as a major cause of vulnerability to schizophrenia, as may problems during pregnancy. There is already no question that illicit hallucinogenic drugs are a major reason some vulnerable people become ill. But even if this is true, following Read's important work, it will be hard to ignore its implications...."

The Guardian "Think again: New research on schizophrenia suggests that the drugs won't always work" 22 October 2005. Reproduced by permission of Oliver James

- Given the evidence provided in Sections 8.5 and 8.6 how would you evaluate Oliver James' views?

- Is the role of genetic inheritance over-emphasised in the explanation and treatment of psychotic symptoms?
- Does the policy of long-term treatment with antipsychotic drugs prevent individuals “coming to terms” with their delusions and hallucinations as suggested by James?
- Are the symptoms that constitute schizophrenia an “unchangeable genetic destiny that requires a physical solution” such as drugs?

Remember to make your arguments objective and evidence-based. Support your arguments with facts from empirical studies that are described in Sections 8.5 and 8.6 or are taken from the additional reading material highlighted in those sections.