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We only use 10% of our brains...It is better to express anger than hold it on... These are some of the common myths of “ pop psychology”. Such claims are embedded into the daily media, popular television shows, self-help books, magazines and on the internet. Go into any bookshop and there are shelves of self-help, relationship and addiction books, aimed at the vulnerable. Although many of these self-help books are bestsellers, many psychologist and researchers believe that they are filled with half-truths and myths. Popular self-help gurus, daily television talk show hosts that are self-proclaimed mental health experts regularly distribute psychological advice that is often a mix of truths, half-truths, and false information. Below are five common myths commonly associated with popular psychology.

Myth #1: We Only Use 10% of Our Brains

This myth is probable one of the most pervasive beliefs of pop psychology. Remarkable in one study, when asked “ About what percentage of their potential brain power do you think most people use?” a third of the psychology majors answered 10% (Higbee & Clay, 1998) and even more remarkably, one survey revealed that up to 6% of neuroscientists believed this claim (Herculano-Houzel, 2002). The pop psychology publication and pioneers’ have played a big role in keeping this myth alive. One example of this is seen in Scott Witt’s book, How to be Twice as Smart, where he wrote that “ If you’re like most people, you’re using only ten percent of your brainpower.” (Witt, 2002) Both popular self help books and media advertising can be held responsible for keeping this myth alive. More recently the every growing popularity of games and books that are designed

to improve and enhance your brains capacity and ability survive on this myth.

However, evidence from clinical neurology and neuropsychology, highlight the flaws and mistruths of this myth. It has been revealed that if one was to loss far less than 90% of our brain to accidences or a disease it would have devastating results for intellectual functioning.

Myth #2: It's Better to Express Anger than to Hold It in

Another deeply engrained notion in pop psychology is the belief that we must 'release' our anger and feelings of trouble before we can get over them. Several popular psychotherapies are centred around the cathartic interventions and on the assumption that venting anger is healthy." Punch a pillow or punching bag. And while you do it, yell and curse and moan and holler," is advises by Bantam Doubleday Dell, (1995). " Punch with all the frenzy you can. If you are angry at a particular person, imagine his or her face on the pillow or punching bag, and vent your rage physically and verbally." Although, this type of behaviour may help one feel better in the short term, there is ample psychological research that suggests that expressing anger openly may not have long term effects. For example, in an early classic study, Patterson (1974), found that playing aggressive sports like football results in increases in aggression, also playing violent videogames, in which participants rate bloody assassinations on a 5-point scale, is associated with heightened aggression. (Anderson, Gentile & Buckley, 2007)

Myth #3: Low Self-Esteem Is a Major Cause of Psychological Problems

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The importance and role of self-esteem has long been a vital component in pop psychology, and is seen as a prime causality of unhealthy behaviours, including violence, depression, anxiety, and alcoholism. For example, Nathaniel Branden stated in his book *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*, that he “cannot think of a single psychological problem—from anxiety and depression, to fear of intimacy or of success, to spouse battery or child molestation—that is not traceable to the problem of low self-esteem.” (Branden, 1994, p. 12). Research, however, has shown that low self esteem is not strongly associated with poor mental health. For example, in a comprehensive review, Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, and Vohs (2003) found that although self-esteem is positively associated with school performance, better school performance appears to contribute to high self-esteem rather than the other way around. Perhaps most surprising of all, they found that “low self-esteem is neither necessary nor sufficient for depression.”

Myth #4: Opposites Attract

The idea that “opposites attract” is one of the most common notions of popular psychology. Cultural movies, novels, and television shows all romanticise this notion. This belief is also manipulated by the Internet dating community. For example, on one site called “Soul match,” Harville Hendrix, Ph. D. (described as a “relationships expert”) states that “It’s been my experience that only opposites attract because that’s the nature of reality. The great myth in our culture is that compatibility is the grounds for a relationship—actually, compatibility is grounds for boredom.”

There is however, contrary research that suggests that the ideas from the likes of Hendrix are wrong. Many studies have shown that people with similar personalities are more likely to be attracted to and socialise with each other than people with dissimilar personalities. For example, Morell, Twillman & Sullaway, (1989) found people with a Type A personality style, prefer dating partners who have a Type A personality. Similarity, Lazarus (2001) found that in personality traits predicts not only initial attraction, but marital stability and happiness.

Myth #5 Full Moons Cause Crimes and Madness

The final myth involves authors linking the full moon to certain phenomena such as, strange behaviours, psychiatric hospital admissions, suicides, accidents, crimes, heavy drinking, dog bites, and many more (Carrol, 2003). The word “lunatic” originates from the Latin term Luna, or moon. Several studies have revealed that this idea is still embedded into popular culture. For example a study by Owens & McGowan (2006) revealed that up to 81% of mental health professionals believe in the lunar effect. Furthermore, in 2007, England instituted a policy to place more police officers on duty during full moon nights (Pugh, 2007).

It's believed that Psychiatrist Arnold Lieber (1978) popularized the idea that there was a relationship between the full moon and behaviour. He believed that because the moon affects the tides of the earth, it is plausible that the moon would also affect the brain. However,

in 1985, the lunar effect was studied but no evidence was found that the full moon is correlated to any strange behaviours. (Rotton & Kelly, 1985).

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