

## The Joys of Bill-Watching

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**Abstract.** This paper provides a brief account of Bill-Watchers Anonymous, an unofficial organization dedicated to the task of observing, and reporting on, a major figure in British clinical psychology. The aims and objectives are summarized. Some of the findings made by the members, based on direct observation and investigation, are highlighted. The essentially rewarding nature of this work is emphasized.

*Keywords:* Flooding, missionary position, noise phobia, observation, Yule's hump.

### Introduction

Bill-Watchers Anonymous (BWA) has been in existence for over 30 years. The organization was never formally established or inaugurated. It sort of grew, and evolved. Various individuals who were engaged in Bill-Watching happened, over a period of time, to discover one another, and they eventually got together as one group. The membership of BWA is, like the object of the organization's activities, large and growing; and, again like the object, very international. There are BWA members in Scotland, England, Wales, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Germany, Norway, Iran, Bosnia, Croatia, Canada, the USA, Australia, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Turkey. The members get together for an annual conference, and keep in touch very regularly by post, fax, telephone, e-mail and – in some cases – telepathy.

Well, what do Bill-Watchers do? The name is obviously self-explanatory. They simply watch Bill. Some people watch soccer, some watch rugby, and some others watch horse-racing. All these are legitimate leisure activities that they enjoy. Bill-Watchers have, as their main hobby, the exciting – and almost thrilling – activity of watching Bill. Their organization has no official status although, at one stage, the members considered registering it as a charity. It was the desire to remain free and fluid that prevented them from taking this step. So BWA remains an informal organization. Is it a covert organization? Not in the sense that a spy ring is covert. It is covert, however, in that it has no publicly available membership list, in that it has never made any public statement (not until now, that is), and in that it has never published – or audited – its accounts. There is a strong sense of solidarity among the members, and they work in total co-operation. Like members of the Brotherhood, BWA members, irrespective of what part of the world they come from, recognize one another effortlessly, without any name badges or introductions.

BWA members devote all their spare time to their chosen activity, which they find immensely exciting, at times almost orgasmic. They watch Bill singly, in pairs, in groups; by naked eye,

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through binoculars, via satellite links, and through electronic IT. The file, in the days when it was on paper, was enormous and heavy – predictably.

Why do Bill-Watchers do this? Do they plan to write a book, a kind of unauthorized biography? Such a work would surely be a best-seller, and may lead to a tremendously successful film, perhaps even a TV series. For now, there are no concrete plans in this direction. However, BWA members are very conscientious in their work, and they keep meticulous records of their observations. And, when and where needed, they undertake careful investigations in order to establish the facts of a given sighting or episode.

In this brief report, the first of its kind, Bill-Watchers are happy to present some of the data they have collected.

### **Findings**

Let us start with the most obvious fact: Bill is truly a heavyweight, in the King Kong mould rather than the Muhammad Ali mould. He is very adept at knocking out opponents, and he can go the full 15 rounds if needed. Bill's famous victories include KO's against those who tried to block psychology as a therapeutic discipline, vicars and other clergymen, and lead pollution. He is currently engaged in a hard-fought, long battle against T. Rauma. He has, it now seems, the upper hand.

Are there any defeats in Bill's impressive record as a heavyweight? Well, a sort of defeat, just one. He once went into battle with an opponent called Dys Lexia, a popular figure. He was determined to knock out and demolish this opponent for ever. For a while, he – and others – thought he had succeeded. But alas, no; Dys Lexia is back on his feet again, ubiquitous and formidable. However, Bill is no longer interested in this opponent, whom he now finds rather boring.

Bill's kindness and generosity have been repeatedly observed by Bill-Watchers. Every year at Christmas, he gives an Amaryllis plant to each of the office staff. He gives large sums of money, though never blank cheques, to a lady called Bridget. When his PA Eileen retired in the summer of 2003, Bill gave her a glass squirrel. He had to go from shop to shop in Colombo on a hot and humid day to find this item. He has always been kind and generous to his students, trainees and colleagues. The BWA archives have literally hundreds of examples of this.

What are Bill's interests? Well, water-colour painting is one. Fishing in Norway is another. Some years ago, he also enjoyed being Santa Claus in a local primary school. Other, more professional, ones include traumatic stress, school refusal, fostering and adoption, behaviour modification, research ethics and behavioural phenotypes (whatever that means). In addition, he has been closely associated with obesity and binge eating. He is also interested in the missionary position, although he acknowledges how risky it can be – not to himself but to others.

Bill's wide range of social and political interests can be gleaned from the press cuttings file of BWA. Some of the headlines they have collected over the years are:

- Bill to ban speeding drivers
- Bill to set up a Scottish parliament
- Bill to curtail welfare cheating
- Bill to phase out merit awards for doctors
- Bill to reduce teenage pregnancies

- Bill opposed by Tories
- Tessa Jowell urges MPs to support Bill

### **Some Bill episodes**

Some episodes recorded by BWA members are given below.

#### *London 1971*

Bill had suffered a phobia of sudden, loud noises (balloons bursting, cap-guns being fired, motor cycles, pneumatic drills) and had been referred to a world famous psychiatric clinic. A desensitization programme had helped him with all his fears except the one about balloons, and in 1971 Bill was treated for this with the flooding technique. This was remarkably successful. BWA has been able to access the original report of this treatment:

The therapist explained that the treatment would be unpleasant for a short time, but despite this Bill wanted to try it. After settling him in a very small room, the door was opened and about 50 fully inflated balloons were taken in. He was obviously scared by this. He cowered into his chair, started to sweat and shake, and put his fingers into his ears. He refused to burst any balloons himself, so the therapist immediately burst half a dozen. In the confined space, the noise was unpleasant. Bill started to cry, but the therapist continued bursting balloons until he (Bill) no longer flinched.

After much persuasion, Bill used his feet to push balloons against a nail held by the therapist. In rapid succession, 20 were burst in this fashion, and Bill no longer flinched. Next, following further verbal pressure, he agreed to burst one by hand, whilst keeping the other hand covering one ear. Immediately, about 30 more were presented in quick succession. Lastly, he was persuaded to burst about six, while both ears were uncovered.

At this stage, the first session was terminated. In one and a half hours approximately 220 balloons had been burst. The patient was a little shaken by the experience, but agreed to return the next afternoon for a second session.

The second session was started by surrounding Bill with 100 to 150 balloons, and telling him to burst them. Initially, he was still anxious, but energetic verbal persuasion coupled with actual prompting (i.e. moving his hand to the balloon, and gradually withdrawing adult pressure) soon had him bursting the balloons with occasional signs that he was actually enjoying the experience.

The session lasted 45 minutes, and by the end of it he was bursting balloons next to his uncovered ears, bursting them with his bare hands, and stamping on them in a determined fashion. During this second session, 320 balloons were dispatched. The total cost of balloons for the two sessions was £4.50.

Bill has remained free of this phobia ever since.

*Brighton 1982*

Bill was due to give his presidential address at the BABCP (it was known as the BABP then) annual conference in July 1982. Ten minutes before the scheduled event, he was seen frantically running about on the hotel corridor, wearing a scanty towel. He had left his room to take a shower, and had evidently locked himself out of the room. Did he deliver his address in the end? Of course he did, and he did so brilliantly. Was he still in his towel? The report is silent on this.

*Cork 1998*

In September 1998, Bill went to the EABCT congress in Cork. His plane landed in the evening in pouring rain. The taxi he got into had no windscreen wipers, so the driver had to stop the car every few minutes to clear the windscreen with his hands. Eventually, Bill arrived at the conference centre, wet and tired. The registration desk gave him his room key, and he walked the 400 yards to the residential block in heavy rain, dragging his heavy suitcase behind him. As he opened the door and got into his room, he found that there was someone lying in his bed. So Bill had to walk the 400 yards back to the registration office to get matters sorted out. (Well, that is his version of the story. BWA members, naturally, wanted to investigate this. They were able to find the registration form that Bill had sent to the conference organizers several weeks before the event. In response to the standard question “Any accompanying person?” Bill had written: “Yes, please”).

*Sri Lanka 1999*

Bill went to Sri Lanka, with two colleagues, to run a trauma counselling workshop in November 1999. The organizers of the event, who had not met Bill before, sent him a fax the day before his departure from London. BWA has obtained a copy of this. It read:

Dear Professor,

We are very pleased that you have agreed to come to Sri Lanka to run a workshop on trauma. The opening ceremony will be a formal event, and will be shown live on national television. We would very much like all participants to wear their national costume for this occasion. We understand that you are Scottish, and we also understand that men in Scotland wear a short quilt as their national costume, with a furry, pouch-like thing dangling in front. We shall be much obliged if you would please wear this costume for the opening ceremony.

Did Bill comply with this request? The BWA record, unfortunately, does not tell us.

*Sri Lanka 2000*

Bill went again to Sri Lanka with the same two colleagues in May-June 2000, to run another workshop on trauma. This was held in the lovely beach resort of Bentota. After the busy three-day event, Bill stayed on in the place for two more days, as he wanted to rest before undertaking a trip to the Far East. Did he succeed in having a restful time? According to the report of BWA observers, he did not. Throughout this time, he had been pursued by a large,

female German tourist who had taken a fancy to him. It is recorded that Bill defended himself with both cunning and power.

### Postscript

Bill has always aroused interest and curiosity among all sorts of people, and as a result various rumours and myths have grown around him. Many years ago, someone from Wales (not a member of BWA) became interested in one such rumour. He carried out an investigation and published his findings in, of all places, an educational psychology journal. In this paper, illustrated with line drawings, he stated that he wanted specifically to examine whether there was evidence to support the existence of what he called “Yule’s hump”. He went on to say: “The results are inconclusive but may . . . give some support to the notion of a small hump”. BWA members, who have had the opportunity to observe Bill more closely and far more frequently than this researcher was able to, do not agree.

In more recent years, BWA members have been intrigued by the persistent rumour that Bill has gender identity problems. Some have alleged that he has always wanted to be a female. BWA has deployed several teams of investigators to look into this. They have found no real basis for this allegation, with the exception of one solitary photograph. This photograph, taken in November 1998 in the lobby of the Trans Asia Hotel in Colombo, shows a beaming Bill holding what appear to be two large king coconuts against his chest. (You can see this picture on the BWA website.) Does this count as evidence that Bill yearns to be a woman? The consensus among BWA members is that it does not. They do not consider it to be evidence of a transsexual tendency. Rather, they say, it is evidence of Bill’s sense of humour. Yes, that is something worth noting. Bill has a great sense of humour, including a wonderful ability to laugh at himself. Perhaps that is what endears him so much to Bill-Watchers. And to others.

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