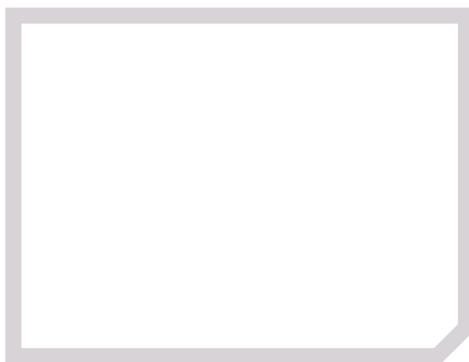


# Police accept crowd psychology findings

Psychological theory underpins some of the core recommendations in a report published late last year by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of the Constabulary (HMIC), the organisation charged with monitoring police performance. With damaging allegations of aggressive policing at the G20 protests last year, and an eye on the 2012 Olympics and other future large-scale public events, the HMIC report *Adapting to Protest – Nurturing the British Model of Policing* was commissioned to provide a thorough scrutiny of public order policing in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Alongside recommendations concerning practical issues, such as training inconsistencies between regional police forces and the lack of a core doctrine on the use of force, the report also includes a prominent chapter on crowd psychology. Based on a report to



JUSTIN TALUS | REPORTORIGINAL.CO.UK

the HMIC by Dr Clifford Stott at the University of Liverpool, the chapter explains how an outmoded view of the psychology of crowds as irrational and easily exploitable has led the police to rely on containment-based tactics such as those deployed at the G20 protests.

The HMIC report favours instead the

'Elaborated Social Identity Model' (ESIM), developed by the psychologists Professor Steve Reicher at the University of St Andrews, Dr John Drury at Sussex University and Dr Clifford Stott. The ESIM predicts that the inappropriate and indiscriminate use of force by the police, as was witnessed at G20, can actually create the psychology of a 'riot'. A unified sense of grievance is fostered among the crowd, leading normally peaceful individuals to form common bonds of identification with a violent minority in an effort to resist what they perceive as illegitimate police action.

Stott further explained to *The Psychologist* that years of social psychological research grounded in this model have highlighted the importance of dialogue between the police and protest groups, before, during and after public events. This approach can encourage the majority of crowd

## Mental health a policy priority

Last year ended with a rush of reports that, taken together, provide impressive evidence for the growing recognition among British policy makers and advisers of the importance of psychological health and needs.

Early in December the UK government launched its much-anticipated New Horizons programme, which aims to improve the well-being of

the nation and the care provided to people with mental health problems. The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) also published an independent review, *Realising Ambitions*, about employment support for people with mental health issues. And finally, the Young Foundation, a UK think-tank, published its report *Sinking and Swimming, Understanding Britain's Unmet Needs* about the

psychological needs of the nation and the importance of helping the minority of people who struggle to bounce back from adversity. British Psychological Society members led or advised on both the DWP and Young Foundation reports.

New Horizons is described by government as their 'new over-arching vision for mental health in England'. Flagship policy announcements included a new network of mental health coordinators in every Jobcentre Plus, the launch of occupational health advice lines, the national roll-out of the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies programme, as well as new plans to tackle mental health stigma.

New Horizons also draws heavily on recommendations made in the DWP *Realising Ambitions* report led by BPS Associate Fellow and Chartered Psychologist Dr Rachel Perkins. She told us: 'We looked at ways we can better support people who are out of work, and who have mental health conditions, to get and keep employment.' Recommendations in the report include ways that existing systems can work better and ways to implement evidence-based practice to extend support to those who need help. 'The report makes it clear

## HENRY MOLAISSON 'LIVES ON'

Over 400,000 enthusiasts tuned into a webcast last December, not for the latest film trailer or YouTube hit, but rather to watch scientists at the University of California, San Diego slice up the brain of Henry Molaison – the most famous case study in the history of contemporary psychology.

Molaison, known as HM in the literature, died last year having spent the majority of his life as a severe amnesic. For 53 hours, on 2–4 December, Jacopo Annese and his colleagues worked diligently, slicing Molaison's brain into 2401 paper-thin sections. The team first froze the brain to  $-40^{\circ}$  Celsius, before performing the slicing from front to back, in coronal section, perpendicular to the ground. The tissue slices will be preserved in slides and uploaded to create a whole-brain digital map that Annese has likened to a Google Earth of the brain. Staining was due to begin last month, a technique that will allow observers to see the cellular architecture of the brain. CJ

| The Brain Observatory is keeping a blog of the project, see [http://thebrainobservatory.ucsd.edu/hm\\_live.php](http://thebrainobservatory.ucsd.edu/hm_live.php)

members to identify with the police rather than with the minority who are bent on violence. 'We have seen major successes with policing based on our theories, such as the 2004 European Football Championships in Portugal,' Stott said. 'Our research on these successes suggests that there needs to be a systematic commitment in the police to creating genuine and ongoing dialogue, even with radicalised groups who are hard to reach.'

Stott and his colleagues have been working on the theoretical underpinnings to their recommendations since the 1980s. It has taken years of painstaking work, often with collaborating police forces, for them to obtain credibility in the eyes of organisations such as the HMIC. 'It's the ongoing relationship between scientists and practitioners that's allowed us to develop further evidence to validate our theory of the crowd. That scientific research along

with our links to the policing community has then formed the basis from which the HMIC were prepared to acknowledge the validity of the theory,' Stott told us.

'This is a case study of what social psychology should be doing in terms of achieving scientific "impact",' Stott added. 'Engaging with practical issues in a meaningful way should be a defining characteristic of our discipline. But I don't believe that it is. We've only achieved this major success for social psychology by coming outside of the laboratory. We've dealt with the difficulties of producing theory and data from crowd events that's valuable both to practitioners and to a sceptical scientific audience that tends to under-value qualitative research and see crowd psychology as some kind of parochial exercise.' CJ

**I HMIC report:** <http://bit.ly/6dUTDs>

**Dr Stott's report:** <http://bit.ly/5muAz9>

See also p.92

that health services must see employment and educational issues as a core part of their work and the outcomes of their work – it's not sufficient to focus on reducing symptomatology,' Perkins said. 'We must help people rebuild their lives and a core part of that is employment, pursuing your career.'

Dr Perkins is Director of Quality Assurance for South West London and St George's Mental Health NHS Trust and has spent many years setting up programmes that help people into employment, and showing that these can be effective. 'Very often outcomes speak louder than statements,' Perkins told us.

'I think it's vital that mental health professionals get involved at a broader level than just looking at health services,' Perkins added. 'I think that mental health

has to be across departments – it's all our business. And I found the DWP very interested and often a lot more constructive and positive than some other departments, as reflected in their

**Dr Rachel Perkins led the DWP report *Realising Ambitions***

## KEEN ON SCIENCE COMMUNICATION?

Would you like to experience how science is reported by spending from three to eight weeks with a national press, broadcast or internet journalist on a summer placement, working with them to produce accurate, well-informed news pieces about developments in science? Then the British Science Association Media Fellowships could be for you.

Applications are encouraged from UK-resident scientists, social scientists or clinicians, with a minimum of two years' postgraduate experience. For details see [www.britishecienceassociation.org/mediafellows](http://www.britishecienceassociation.org/mediafellows) and apply by 2 March 2010.

You can also nominate psychologists for the British Science Association Award Lectures. The organisers are looking for people in the early stages of their career who show outstanding skills in communication to a non-specialist audience. See <http://bit.ly/4Frxe6> for more details.

responses to some of my recommendations.'

The *Sinking and Swimming* report from the Young Foundation describes our society as 'brittle' and includes case studies from South Wales, London, Teesside and Bedford. The report asks 'why some people can cope with shocks and setbacks and others can't' and discusses the implications this has for public policy. It recommends a focus on helping people make transitions, whether from adolescence to adulthood, or from reliance on care to independence. Professor Nicholas Emler at the University of Surrey, a Fellow of the British Psychological Society, was

a key adviser to this report. CJ

**I New Horizons:** [tinyurl.com/nxor8j](http://tinyurl.com/nxor8j)

**Realising Ambitions:** [tinyurl.com/yics2x6l](http://tinyurl.com/yics2x6l)

**Sinking and Swimming:**

[tinyurl.com/ye7mqj](http://tinyurl.com/ye7mqj)

## ROYAL SOCIETY

The Royal Society reaches the grand age of 350 this year and is celebrating with a range of public events and special publications. Already available are the Trailblazing website which provides free access to 60 ground-breaking articles from the Royal Society journal archive, arranged along an interactive timeline (<http://trailblazing.royalsociety.org>). Among the featured articles are a 1952 paper by Alan Hodgkin and Andrew Huxley on the nervous impulse and a paper from 1980 by David Marr and Ellen Hildreth on edge detection in the visual brain. The Royal Society has also published open-access special review issues of its journals: *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A* and *B*. The latter includes a review paper by Uta and Chris Frith, 'The social brain: Allowing humans to boldly go where no other species has been'.  
**I** <http://bit.ly/8wSG0Q>

## 23rd BEST

The 23rd best job to have in the USA is to work as a clinical psychologist. That's according to a *CNN Money* analysis (<http://bit.ly/2qP7nf>), based on pay and growth prospects, that's ranked psychology one place above psychiatry. Clinical psychology was also listed as the sixth most beneficial profession to society based on professionals' views of their own jobs (GPs were number one). A separate listing by the *Wall Street Journal* (<http://bit.ly/8qSU64>), based on environment, income, prospects, physical demands and stress, placed psychologist as USA's 69th best job out of 200, with psychiatry at 98.

## 'RAIN MAN' DIES

The world lost one of its most unusual and remarkable minds last December with the passing of Kim Peek, aged 58. Nicknamed 'Kimputer' by his friends, Peek was the inspiration for the autistic savant character in the multi-Oscar-winning film *Rain Man*.

Peek himself was actually a non-autistic savant, born with brain abnormalities including a malformed cerebellum and an absent corpus callosum (the massive bundle of tissue that usually connects the two hemispheres). His savant skills were astonishing and included an encyclopaedic knowledge of history, literature, classical music, US zip codes and travel routes. It was estimated that he read more than 12,000 books in his life time, all of them committed to flawless memory.

In a 2005 article for *Scientific American*, the psychiatrist Darold Treffert and neuroscientist Daniel Christensen – both of whom had met and tested Peek – speculated that his extraordinary abilities could stem from neural backchannels that substituted for his missing callosum. 'Perhaps the resulting structures allow the two hemispheres to function, in certain respects, as one giant hemisphere,' they wrote.

Although outgoing and sociable, Peek struggled with abstract or conceptual thinking. He also had coordination problems. He walked with a sidelong gait and struggled to button his own clothes and brush his teeth. However, his coordination appeared to be improving with age, even to the extent that he had learned to play the piano several years prior to his death. 'Savantism offers a unique window into the mind,' Treffert and Christensen wrote in 2005. 'If we cannot explain it, we cannot claim full understanding of how the brain functions.'

**I** *New York Times* obituary: [www.nytimes.com/2009/12/27/us/27peek.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/27/us/27peek.html)  
*Scientific American* article: <http://bit.ly/84WyBq>

# Changing water-use

With torrents of rain and melted snow endlessly sluicing down the streets this winter it's easy to be dismissive of the need to conserve water. However, for its population size, the UK actually has less water than most other countries in Europe. Parts of the South East have even less of the wet stuff available per person than Syria and Sudan. With our population rising, the sustainable approach is to reduce our waste of water rather than to keep building more reservoirs. Moreover, water use contributes to the carbon emissions that are fuelling global warming. It's against this backdrop that last December the British Psychological Society co-sponsored an event targeted at water companies to help inform them about some of the psychological strategies being used in other environmental campaigns.

The scene was set by Kirsten Reeves, Head of the Sustainable Behaviours Unit at Defra (the Department for Food and Rural Affairs). She said that about two-thirds of people claim to be trying to control their water use, but that around 18 per cent say they don't want to, probably won't or haven't even thought about it. Changing people's water use is further hampered by beliefs such as that water is never lost but simply goes round in a circle (although true, it doesn't then necessarily fall where it's needed and energy is subsequently required for processing, pumping and heating), and by the fact that many water behaviours, such as showering, are conducted privately. This lack of visibility can make it difficult to establish sustainable social norms like those that are emerging for recycling.

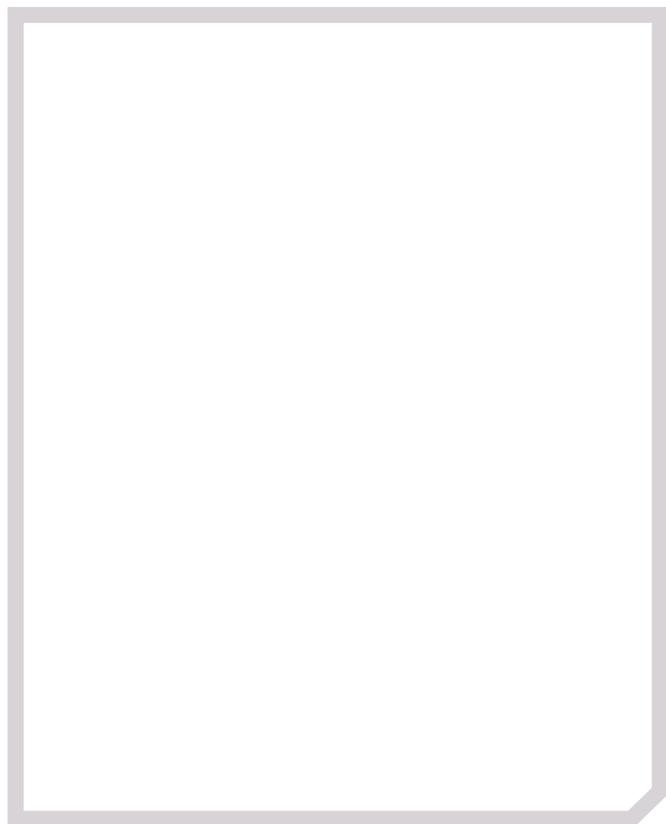
An overview of the social norms literature was provided by psychologist Dr John

McAlaney of the University of Bradford and independent social researcher Kathryn Rathouse, who co-organised the day with the NGO Waterwise. They described how powerfully our own actions are influenced by how we think other people behave. Pioneers in the field include US psychologist Robert Cialdini who's demonstrated, for example, that people are far more likely to re-use their hotel room towels if a sign tells them that the previous occupant did so than if the card had the usual wording about protecting the planet.

Our tendency to be influenced by other people's behaviour wouldn't be so bad for the environment if we were accurate judges of what the norms are. Unfortunately, most of us over-estimate other people's profligacy, an error that then allows us to self-justify our own wasteful habits. In relation to water use, for example, a UK survey showed that 90 per cent of people believed that they use an average or less than average amount of water. Efforts to redress these misconceptions have already begun. A 2009 Waterwise poster campaign in association with the National Union of Students, for example, featured athlete Kriss Akabusi and the tagline '53% of 18-24 year olds take 10 minutes or less in the shower'.

Shower use is an important behaviour for campaigns to target. There's a widespread belief that showering is more economical than taking a bath and yet one need only shower for more than 10 minutes (less in a power shower) to use more water than a typical bath. What's more, shower use is one of the faster-growing water use behaviours, perhaps because of their convenience and the proliferation of luxury walk-in showers. As well as campaigning for shorter shower times and other frugal

# behaviour



behaviours, Waterwise also encourages the take-up of water-conserving technologies, such as aerated shower heads and garden water butts.

The afternoon heard talks on the formation of habitual behaviours, and how best to alter them, from psychologist Professor Bas Verplanken at the University of Bath and independent social marketing consultant Paul White. Habits, including many water-use behaviours, are mindless behaviours rendered largely impervious to changes in attitudes and intentions, Verplanken and White explained. Campaigners therefore need to target those instances when habits are most susceptible to being broken, such as when people's circumstances change. Leaflets for home movers would be an example of such an approach.

Lastly, Dr Sarah Darby of the University of Oxford

described research from the field of energy use showing how people's consumption can be reduced by providing them with better, more informative feedback. 'Smart meter' domestic energy use displays and more informative bills have been shown to reduce long-term consumption by up to 10 per cent. Malta is apparently the first country in the world with plans to roll out combined electricity and water smart metering for every home. Here in the UK the idea is just beginning to filter through to the water industry – the French-owned firm Veolia Water UK provides bills that tell customers how much water they've used and how this compares to the usage of an efficient household of their size. **CJ**

**I The event was funded by the Society's Public Engagement Grants Scheme: see [www.bps.org.uk/pegrant](http://www.bps.org.uk/pegrant)**

## RESEARCH FUNDING NEWS

Project grants (£100,000 to £750,000) are available from the BUPA Foundation and the Alzheimer's Society for research into the **causes, cure, care and prevention of dementia**. Suggested topics include:

- ▮ the management of anxiety, agitation and other behavioural symptoms without the use of antipsychotic drugs
- ▮ how best to train staff in communicating with, understanding the needs of, and caring for people with dementia

The closing date for applications is 28 February 2010.

▮ [www.bupafoundation.com/asp/specialist/this\\_years\\_theme.asp](http://www.bupafoundation.com/asp/specialist/this_years_theme.asp)

The American Psychological Foundation is offering Wayne F. Placek Awards. These awards support scientific research to increase the general public's **understanding of homosexuality and to alleviate the stress that gay men and lesbians experience**. Proposals are especially encouraged for empirical studies that address:

- ▮ heterosexuals' attitudes and behaviours toward lesbians and gay men, including prejudice, discrimination, and violence
- ▮ family and workplace issues relevant to lesbians and gay men
- ▮ subgroups of the lesbian and gay population that have historically been underrepresented in scientific research

UK researchers are able to apply and application from graduate students and early career researchers are also encouraged. The closing date for applications is 1 March 2010.

▮ [www.apa.org/apf/funding/placek.aspx](http://www.apa.org/apf/funding/placek.aspx)

Funding is available from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (USA) for clinical research projects that design and/or develop cognitive remediation strategies that will enhance the outcomes of **substance use disorder treatments**. UK researchers are eligible to apply. The closing date for letters of intent is 8 March 2010.

▮ [tinyurl.com/yghda94](http://tinyurl.com/yghda94)

The Leverhulme Trust is offering **Early Career Fellowships** to provide career development opportunities for those researchers at a relatively early stage of their academic careers but with a proven record of research. Applicants may not currently hold, or have already held, a full-time established academic position in a UK university. The closing date for applications is 11 March 2010.

▮ [tinyurl.com/ymm3qa](http://tinyurl.com/ymm3qa)

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) has a Scholarship Scheme to fund **research into safety and accident prevention**. Applications can be submitted under the themes of: Road; Home; Work; Water and Leisure; Safety Education; General Safety. Grants of up to £20,000 are available. The closing date for nominations is 2 April 2010.

▮ [tinyurl.com/yhd8foo](http://tinyurl.com/yhd8foo)

The National Institute for Health Research, Evaluation, Trials and Studies Coordinating Centre (NETSCC) is commissioning research into **Community Engagement Approaches to Improve Health and Reduce Health Inequalities**. Research proposals should seek to answer the question: What approaches to community engagement are effective and cost effective in improving health and reducing health inequalities? The closing date for nomination is 14 April 2010.

▮ [tinyurl.com/yzwmw4st](http://tinyurl.com/yzwmw4st)

info

For more, see [www.bps.org.uk/funds](http://www.bps.org.uk/funds)

Funding bodies should e-mail news to Elizabeth Beech on [elibee@bps.org.uk](mailto:elibee@bps.org.uk) for possible inclusion

# Step away from the cookie jar!

Out on a shopping trip after lunch, you buy a couple of boxes of chocolates to put in storage for enjoyment over the festive break. You're not particularly hungry, and you see no obvious problems with the plan. Later that night, however, the munchies kick in and before you know it you're raiding the cupboard, tearing open the box and gorging yourself. According to a new paper by Lorán Nordgren and colleagues, such lapses occur all too frequently because of our inability, when satiated, to fully recognise the power of our visceral needs when hungry, tired or lustful. They call

this the 'cold-to-hot empathy gap'. They say that when we're satiated, as we are most of the time, we overestimate our ability to resist temptation – a phenomenon they've dubbed the 'restraint bias'.

The researchers first demonstrated this in relation to mental fatigue. One group of students performed an easy two-minute memory task whilst a second group completed an arduous 20-minute version. The group who'd completed the easy version subsequently rated their ability to overcome mental fatigue more highly than the group who'd performed the arduous task. What's more, the easy group said they planned to leave more of their coursework until the last week of term, consistent with their inflated belief in their ability to work through fatigue.

A second study involved students who were either arriving or leaving the college cafeteria. The students ranked seven snack bars from least favourite to favourite and then had to choose one bar to take away. If they brought it back in a week's time, they'd get to keep the bar and win \$4. You guessed it – compared with the hungry students arriving at the cafeteria, the departing students (who'd eaten) rated their self-control more highly, were more likely to

choose to take away their first or second favourite snack bar, and were more likely to eat that bar during the following week.

It doesn't end there. In a third study, the researchers contrived to influence beliefs about self-control by giving student smokers a bogus implicit test of impulse control. Later, the students were challenged to watch the film *Coffee and Cigarettes* whilst abstaining from smoking. They were promised a greater cash reward the more difficult they made the challenge for themselves. In this case, students given bogus test feedback indicating they had high self-control were more likely to opt for greater temptation – holding the cigarette in their hand rather than having it on the desk – and they were more likely to give in to that temptation.

Finally, Nordgren's team tested the idea that 'restraint bias' could explain why drug addicts are so prone to relapse. They recruited 55 participants through a smoking-cessation programme, all of whom had been smoke-free for at least three weeks. Those who said they had more impulse control also tended to say they wouldn't be trying so hard to avoid temptation, such as the company of other smokers. Four months later, those with the inflated sense of impulse control were more likely to have relapsed.

'The restraint bias suggests that people are willing to experiment with addictive drugs simply because they believe they can overcome the addiction,' the researchers said. 'An urgent task for future research is to test whether enduring shifts in impulse-control beliefs can be created.'

## What does a doodle do?

In the January issue of *Applied Cognitive Psychology*

You know you're bored when you start shading in the squares of your notebook. Apparently it's a habit that could be helping you to concentrate.

In a neat little experiment, Jackie Andrade asked 40 participants to listen to a monotone two-and-a-half-minute phone message about arrangements for a party. They were told the message would be dull, that there was no need to memorise it, but that they should write down the names of the people who would be able to attend the party. Crucially, half the participants were also told to 'doodle' as they listened, by shading in the squares and circles of their note-paper.

Afterwards, the doodlers had noted fractionally more of the correct names (7.8 on average vs. 7.1 – a statistically significant difference). What's more, moments later, the doodlers also excelled in a surprise memory test of the guests' names and the places mentioned in the message, recalling 29 per cent more details than the non-doodlers.

Andrade said more research is obviously needed to find out how doodling helps us maintain our attention. However, her theory is that by using up slightly more mental resources, doodling helps prevent the mind from wandering off the boring primary task into daydream land. This study is part of an emerging recognition in psychology that secondary tasks aren't always a distraction from primary tasks, but can sometimes actually be beneficial.

The December issue of *Psychological Science* reports that we overestimate our ability to resist temptation

## 'I wanted a new challenge'

In the December issue of *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*

It's not many generations ago that workers expected to have a job for life, most probably one that followed in the footsteps of their father. In many of today's richer societies, it's all different. Longer education and greater individual choice mixed with mergers, take-overs and bankruptcies mean that people's careers are typically punctuated by a series of distinct transitions or chapters. But how do people perceive these transitions and does this vary between cultures?

To find out, Katharina Chudzikowski and her colleagues interviewed a mix of over a hundred nurses and blue- and white-collar workers from five countries – Austria, Serbia, Spain, US and China. Their stand-out finding? Workers in the US didn't ever attribute a career transition to an external cause, such as conflict with a boss. Not once. Instead they tended to mention internal factors, such as their desire for a fresh challenge. By contrast, workers in China almost exclusively stressed the role played by external factors. Meanwhile, workers in the European nations were more of a mix, attributing their career transitions to both internal and external factors.

The researchers said a lot of the transitions reported by the participants, especially in the US and Europe, were positive. Generally speaking, people are known to be biased towards attributing positive events to themselves, and so it's perhaps little wonder that many

workers attributed all these positive career transitions to internal causes. 'In addition,' the researchers said, 'in many cultures "being in charge" of one's life is positively valued. Conversely, reconstructing crucial career transitions as purely triggered by external circumstances does not convey a great amount of competence.'

Where workers showed a greater tendency to attribute their career transitions to external causes, this seemed to be related to the influence of a collectivist culture and an economy in flux. 'Countries with more dynamic economic change show a stronger emphasis on organisational and macro factors,' the researchers said.

Other interesting cross-cultural differences emerged. Some German-speaking interviewees cited *Wirtschaft* as a factor – a word that can mean economy, industry, commerce or business world, but which also has mythical-religious undertones. There's no real English equivalent.

## Why we're poor at remembering to whom we've told what

In the December issue of *Psychological Science*

Most of us seem to be far better at remembering who's told us what compared with to whom we've told what. Psychologists characterise this as a distinction between 'source memory' and 'destination memory', and according to Nigel Gopie and Colin MacLeod, the latter is surprisingly under-researched. They argue that the self-focus associated with disclosing information, rather than receiving it, disrupts the processes that would otherwise associate what was said and to whom. So if you're fed up with hearing 'you told me that already!', try focusing less on yourself and more on your listener the next time you share an anecdote.

Gopie and MacLeod got 60 undergrads to look at pictures of famous faces – half of them received a single fact from each face, in written form; the other half told a fact to each face. Afterwards the students were tested on their memory for which facts were associated with which faces, and those

who'd received facts performed significantly better than those who'd told facts. Memory for the facts themselves, by contrast, was no different between the two groups.

The researchers then tested the idea that destination memory is weak thanks to the self-focus associated with disclosing rather than receiving information. Students who told facts to famous faces using personal pronouns ('I' and 'my') were even worse than usual at remembering to whom they'd told what. By contrast, destination memory was improved when students were trained to focus more on the famous face (by instructing the participants to say each famous person's name before disclosing a fact to them) before sharing a fact with it.

'It is remarkable that source memory has received intense research attention, whereas destination memory has been almost entirely overlooked,' the researchers said.



The material in this section is taken from the Society's **Research Digest** blog at [www.researchdigest.org.uk/blog](http://www.researchdigest.org.uk/blog), and is written by its editor **Dr Christian Jarrett**. Visit the blog for full coverage including references and links, additional current reports, an archive, comment and more.



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# A psychologist says

Harriet Gross reflects and campaigns

The start of each year typically involves making self-improving resolutions for the coming twelve months – in my case more exercise and fewer treats are regularly on the list. The likelihood of my sticking to these resolutions beyond the first few weeks is low, but I can take comfort from Richard Wiseman's recent finding, widely reported here and elsewhere (e.g. Canada's *Globe & Mail*), that 78 per cent of people fail to keep their resolutions. Wiseman identifies several factors for successful resolution keeping, notably the identification of clear outcomes or goals achieved by small steps, success criteria and the opportunity for rewards. Behaviour change is one of the core businesses of psychology, so these factors are perhaps predictable from a range of studies of behaviour change for health or personal development; it is still good to see them raised as a psychological concern in the media albeit in a lighthearted seasonal context.

After 10 years on the Society's (now) Media and Press Committee, I have resolved to step down in 2010 and this is my last Media page. Reflecting on my decade of committee activity round conference and research outputs and on the way these appear in the media, there is no doubt that psychology is

a frequent player in media stories. Some of this is driven by press releases of research, for which the Society's record of success is renowned and even envied. Some of it comes from the helpful availability of individual psychologists willing to talk to the media on their areas of expertise. However, given the centrality of behaviour change and decision making, not just to the relative frivolity of new year resolutions, but to major issues of our current social and political worlds – not least climate change, economic stability, anti-terrorism, and even mental health and well-being – it is perhaps surprising that there is still no routine inclusion of psychology when such issues are discussed and presented in the media.

While many psychologists are carrying out fantastic fundamental and applied work into these crucial social issues this tends to be largely behind the scenes. This seems to me to create two different outcomes for psychology. One is that psychology or psychological issues tend to be contained within specialist publications or programmes, such as the excellent BBC Radio 4's *All in the Mind* presented by Claudia Hammond, or to be addressed by 'stars', psychologists who have long-standing media

links, such as Tanya Byron, Richard Wiseman, Oliver James, Cary Cooper and others. It is important to say that in making this observation I intend no criticism of individuals. The second is that psychological issues are sometimes presented by those who are not originally psychologists. A classic example of this would be Robert Winston's role as presenter of the *Child in Our Time* series.

A much more recent example that relates to both of these outcomes is the relative absence of psychological discussions around the Copenhagen Summit – either concerning the nature of managing complex group decision making or how to encourage environmentally sustainable behaviours. I did



## Psychological ideas presented by non-psychologists

not hear one reference in news coverage to 'a psychologist says', despite the clear understanding and effective models of the relationships between our ability to consider future consequences of current actions and willingness to make unpopular decisions for change. There were acknowledgements of the psychology of the situation – for example in newspapers or blogs – but this was not supported by psychological evidence or comments from

psychologists. In one of the few news items I found where explanations for our failure to take action to reduce climate change were accounted for as psychological, it was a sociologist ([tinyurl.com/yj5z84b](http://tinyurl.com/yj5z84b)).

So, after 10 years my question is why is psychology not in the news more than it is? I wonder whether there is something about psychology itself that has led us to this compartmentalising or outsourcing of our contributions to the public debates despite the work going on behind the scenes?

One of the reasons might be the nature of the beast. Psychology is about examining evidence and looking at the balance of probabilities rather than about certainties; it can thus appear equivocal rather than categorical. A single clear message is what we frequently hear the media are looking for; others are perhaps more willing able or confident to deliver. Our simple message is that human behaviour is complex, and we should not shy away from this. Psychology is a mature enough discipline to be able to stand by its findings and be prepared to stick its neck out.

A further factor might be the reluctance of some psychologists to see the media as an appropriate place for their work or research. This may be changing as the impact agenda for research rolls out through institutions – after all, publicly funded work needs public visibility. As some of those who have embraced it have found, the media can even be a tool for research as well as dissemination.

But if we want to get psychology as the first port of call when major issues are discussed I wonder whether what we really need is something embedded in the system. Maybe this should be my new year's resolution – campaigning for 'psychology' correspondents in the main news channels. That's a goal. Let's see how well I do...

contribute

The Media page is co-ordinated by the Society's Media and Press Committee, with the aim of

promoting and discussing psychology in the media. If you would like to contribute, please contact the 'Media'

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