

Why do children hide by covering their eyes?

A cute mistake that young children make is to think that they can hide themselves by covering or closing their eyes. Why do they make this error? A research team led by James Russell at the University of Cambridge has used a process of elimination to find out.

Testing children aged around three to four years, the researchers first asked them whether they could be seen if they were wearing an eye mask, and whether the researcher could see another adult, if that adult was wearing an eye mask. Nearly all the children felt that they were hidden when they were wearing the mask, and most thought the adult wearing a mask was hidden too.

Next, Russell and his colleagues established whether children think it's the fact that a person's eyes are hidden from other people's view that renders them invisible, or if they think it's being blinded that makes you invisible. To test this, a new group of young kids were quizzed about their ability to be seen when they were wearing goggles that were completely blacked out, meaning they couldn't see and their eyes were hidden, versus when they were wearing a different pair that were covered in mirrored film, meaning they could see, but other people couldn't see their eyes.

This test didn't go quite to plan because out of the 37 participating children, only seven were able to grasp the idea that they could see out, but people couldn't see their eyes. Of these seven, all but one thought they were invisible regardless of which goggles they were wearing. In other words, the children's feelings of invisibility seem to come from the fact that their eyes are hidden, rather than from the fact that they can't see.

Now things get a little complicated. In both studies so far, when the children thought they were invisible by virtue of their eyes being covered, they nonetheless agreed that their head and their body were visible. They seemed to be making a distinction between their 'self' that was hidden, and their body, which was still visible. Taken together with the fact that it was the concealment of the eyes that seemed

to be the crucial factor for feeling hidden, the researchers wondered if their invisibility beliefs were based around the idea that there must be eye contact between two people – a meeting of gazes – for them to see each other (or at least, to see their 'selves').

This idea received support in a further study in which more children were asked if they could be seen if a researcher looked directly at them whilst they (the child) averted their gaze; or, contrarily, if the researcher with gaze averted was visible whilst the child looked directly at him or her. Many of the children felt they were hidden so long as they didn't meet the gaze of the researcher; and they said the researcher was hidden if his or her gaze was averted whilst the child looked on.

'...it would seem that children apply the principle of joint attention to the self and assume that for somebody to be perceived, experience must be shared and mutually known to be shared, as it is when two pairs of eyes meet,' the researchers said.

Other explanations were ruled out with some puppet studies. For instance, the majority of a new group of children agreed it was reasonable for a puppet to hide by covering its eyes, which rules out the argument that children only hide this way because they are caught up in the heat of the moment.

The revelation that most young children think people can only see each other when their eyes meet raises some interesting questions for future research. For example, children with autism are known to engage in less sharing of attention with other people (following another person's gaze), so perhaps they will be less concerned with the role of mutual gaze in working out who is visible. Another interesting avenue could be to explore the invisibility beliefs of children born blind.



In the *Journal of Cognition and Development*



Off the rails

In the *Journal of Business and Psychology*

Derailment is when a manager with a great track record hits the skids, often spectacularly. It's highly undesirable, for the disruption and human harm it can involve, and its costs.

As a result, organisational researchers have developed measures of 'derailment potential' that consider key suspect behaviours such as betraying trust, deferring decisions, or avoiding change. Work to date has confirmed that managers fired from organisations are judged to be higher in these derailers, but these were post-hoc judgements that could have reflected biased hindsight rather than honest evaluations.

To avoid this, a new study led by Marisa Carson utilises database information on 1796 managers from a large organisation to examine behaviours rated *during* employment tenure, by between eight and ten sources – from subordinates to supervisors. Drawing on staff turnover data, the study confirmed that individuals exhibiting more derailment potential behaviours were more likely to later be ejected from the organisation. In addition, they were more likely to leave early of their own volition, suggesting they jumped before they were pushed.

The study also looked beyond the behaviours exhibited to the traits that might be behind them, through a personality inventory, the Hogan Development Survey (HDS), that all managers had completed.



digest



Introverts use more concrete language than extraverts

In the *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*

The researchers were exploring the philosophy that derailment isn't caused by a deficit in positive traits such as conscientiousness, but the presence of additional, unhelpful qualities, measured in the HDS, that resemble features of clinical disorders. These traits come in three areas: 'moving away from people' such as a cynical, doubtful disposition, 'moving against people' including manipulation and a tendency to drama, and 'third area of 'moving towards people' involving an abiding eagerness to please and defer to others.

Carson's team predicted each of these areas would predict derailment behaviours, but in the analysis only one mattered: moving against people. This factor also predicted turnover of both kinds, and its effect on turnover was brokered by higher derailment behaviours. The story here, then, is that qualities that rub up badly against others, such as attention-seeking, idiosyncrasy, over-confidence and rule-bending translate into red-flag behaviours that predict early exit from the organisation.

The research provides some support for screening for these types of tendencies early in a manager's career, in order to inform decisions about future role as well as identifying priority areas for training and development. These efforts are likely to pay off in the long run.

This item is taken from the Society's Occupational Digest, written and edited by Dr Alex Fradera. For more, see www.occdigest.org.uk.

Your personality is revealed in the way you speak, according to new research. Introverts tend to use more concrete words and are more precise, in contrast to extraverts, whose words are more abstract and vague.

Previous studies on the links between personality and language have tended to focus on the content of what different personalities choose to talk about. For example, extraverts are more likely to talk about family and friends, and to use words like 'drinks' and 'dancing', which makes sense given that people matching that personality type are expected to spend more time socialising.

Camiel Beukeboom and his co-workers took a different tack, asking 40 employees at a large company in Amsterdam to describe out loud the same five photos depicting ambiguous social situations. Participants were told that 'there are no right or wrong answers' and given as long as they wanted to describe each photo. Their answers were recorded and transcribed for later coding. Three days later, the participants also completed a personality questionnaire.

Participants who scored higher in extraversion tended to describe the photos in terms that were rated by an independent coder as more abstract. For example, they used more 'state verbs' (e.g. Jack loves Sue) and adjectives, and they admitted to engaging in more interpretation – describing things that were not directly visible in the pictures. On the other hand, the higher

a person scored in introversion, the more concrete and precise their speech tended to be, including more use of articles (i.e. 'a', 'the'), more mentions of numbers and specific people, and more distinctions (i.e. use of words like 'but' and 'except').

The differences make sense in terms of what we know about social behaviour and the introvert-extravert personality dimension, with the introverted linguistic style being more cautious, and the extravert style being more casual and vague.

The researchers said their results have far-reaching implications because we know based on past research that the contrasting speech styles are interpreted differently. For instance, they said behaviour described in abstract terms, in the style of an extravert (e.g. Camiel is unfriendly), is usually attributed to personality, as opposed to the situation, and therefore interpreted as enduring, more likely to occur

again, yet harder to verify. By contrast, behaviour described in more concrete terms, in the characteristic style of an introvert (e.g. Camiel yells at Martin), tends to be interpreted as situation-specific, and as more believable. 'Thus an introvert's linguistic style would induce more situational attributions and a higher perception of trustworthiness than an extravert's style,' the researchers said.

The findings also complement past research showing how conversations between two introverts usually involve discussing one topic in more depth whereas two extraverts dance around more topics in less detail.

'By talking at different levels of abstraction, extraverts and introverts report information differently,' the researchers concluded, 'and induce different recipient inferences, memories, and subsequent representations of the information exchanged.'



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