



Andrew Newton

Intelligence and Communication

Collected Articles

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# Smarter than your parents

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Our ancestors were pretty stupid compared to our own children, who are definitely getting smarter. We already know that this learning curve has risen significantly in the last 200 years, and really shot up since the early 1950's.

The Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC) first came into use in 1947 and is still widely used today. The WISC test's ten subtests measure various cognitive skills, including vocabulary, storage of information, arithmetic and the ability to solve various mathematical and practical problems. What becomes obvious, when the results of these tests are looked at in any detail, is that children who score highly on one type of subtest, are likely to excel on others, if not all of them.

But this is by no means the full story, because the type of intelligence measured by Wechsler has changed considerably. Let's take a simple example and ask some children a question. "What do rabbits and dogs have in common?" A child from the 1950's would probably reply that dogs are used to hunt rabbits, whereas a child of the new millennium would be more likely to simply say they were both mammals.

This is a perfect example of how technology and the resulting changes in society have influenced perception. Of course if you were to ask the same question of a child from certain far-eastern countries, the answer might be that they both taste delicious.

But I digress... What is important here is not that the 21<sup>st</sup> century child views rabbits and dogs as being part of the mammal family, but that the similarity no longer has importance. What is of concern to the 21<sup>st</sup> century child, is which is more useful and under one's control.

Our ancestors however, were no less intelligent when it came to rabbits and dogs, it's just that their intelligence was directed along different lines and had its feet firmly set upon everyday reality. In strict psychological terms, it is the inability to cope with everyday life that marks people out as suffering from mental illness. This indicator of mental illness (one of many) is worthy of note for the professional hypnotherapist or NLP practitioner, and for obvious reasons. You might find one day that you are suddenly and unexpectedly playing with fire.

In today's disposable society, WISC subtests that include the ability to mend clothes or darn socks are irrelevant. Conversely, we have become more adept at finding ways to solve new and more complex problems, particularly in the fields of science and technology – in other words, we have learned new ways around previously learned rules.

It started with the industrial revolution in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and continued throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century when survival meant increased years at school if one was to achieve one's aspirations. When high school diplomas became the norm, more people wanted degrees and now that degrees are being handed out like confetti (there are now degrees in tourism and travel for instance) more and more people desire PhD's, and some people will do anything to have one, as we shall see in a later chapter.

Economic progress has produced a generation of middle-class parents who now have higher expectations of their children's academic success. As a result, these parents spend

time providing more cognitively challenging activities for their children to enjoy. All this pushes the intelligence average higher.

But! Shock Horror! This increase in intelligence has done absolutely nothing to inoculate people against credulity! If anything, people are even more stupid now that they have disposable income than they were when their primary concern was where the next meal was coming from.

It is astonishing the number of people who pay over large amounts of money to widows of Nigerian businessmen who wish to deposit millions of dollars into their bank accounts for a small 'release fee' of just a few thousand pounds, followed by another few thousand pounds, until the target of this increasingly popular scam either gives up or goes bankrupt.

This credulity, which, it has to be admitted, does go hand in hand with suggestion, is part and parcel of why so many people have bought books which promise to make them thin, or even more outrageous, rich. Still, if they weren't buying get rich quick books, they would probably be buying Professor Frotteur's Guaranteed System for winning at the casino or the racetrack. The only people who get rich from those books are the people that wrote them. And yet still they fly off the shelves...

Nonetheless, the language of better educated human beings has also endowed those same humans with greater understanding of the world as well as more complex language skills. That, at least, *has* enhanced critical acumen somewhat.

The most positive gain has been the ability to think on one's feet, rather than rely solely on a set of rules and reduced family sizes. The obvious point here is that a family with two children will have a more pleasant existence than a family with fourteen children – more disposable income, better education, and better prospects, despite anything the Pope might say to the contrary.

Reduced family size means that parents have more time to answer the unending questions (particularly the eternal question, *Why?* posed by their offspring. Enhanced problem-solving skills and spatial awareness skills for example, have seen that chess grand masters as well as inventors, writers (the list is endless) are getting younger.

TV programmes are much more complex today than they were in the days when the best thing ever was the Morecambe and Wise Christmas Show. In the 1960's and 70's (the so-called golden age of television) most programmes were self-contained episodes that could be repeated in no particular order.

Compare episodes of police dramas from the golden age to the crime series of today. The new ones are far more complicated in terms of character development, interweaving storylines that arch over not just episodes, but seasons, and the complexity of the information contained in just one storyline.

# Smarter than the average bear!

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Lifetime studies have shown that IQ (Intelligence Quotient) is fixed at an early age. So whichever way you look at it, and however smart you *think* you are, you'll always be stuck with what you've got. The good news is that IQ is far from being the only thing that determines success in life!

Research shows – and life proves – that IQ isn't even the most important factor. A lot of people drift through life never knowing exactly how smart they really are. IQ is a difficult thing to measure and takes no account, for example, of artistic or musical ability, or how 'streetwise' you might be. But new research provides some interesting clues linking early life experiences to, amongst other things, high intelligence.

If any of the following personality traits apply to you, you might just be in a high IQ group.

## **Do you sometimes suffer from anxiety?**

We've all been taught to believe that anxiety is a negative emotion, and often, it is, but anxiety is a two-way street. Guess what? People with symptoms of severe anxiety achieve higher IQ scores than those with milder symptoms, and most people who suffer with anxiety achieve higher verbal IQ scores!

It's often the case that individuals who experience high levels of anxiety are also the most focused and effective at executing tasks – *especially when they find themselves under pressure!*

## **Were you an early reader?**

A study of 2,000 pairs of identical twins in the UK found that despite their identical genes, the twins who started reading earlier achieved higher IQ scores (both verbal and nonverbal) than their siblings.

Of course the natural inclination is to believe that the kids who learned to read early did so because they were smarter to begin with, but nothing could be further from the truth. Learning to read early actually did have a developmental impact – in the long run, it really did make those kids smarter.

## **Did you take music lessons as a child?**

There are a large number of studies that have been carried out which prove beyond any and all doubt that musical training enhances verbal intelligence and executive function, a skill that's crucial to focus and self-control.

Having said that, the popular myth that listening to Mozart improves intelligence is simply not true, but... listening to Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Schubert, Schumann, Wagner, Mahler, Bruckner, The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Frankie Goes to Hollywood and so on, *does* improve intelligence. Why? Because appreciating the meaning, the politics and the history behind the music makes you more intelligent. And improves your ability to recognise patterns.

Also, playing in orchestras and bands means that children learn to become part of a finely tuned (pardon the pun) ensemble. Making music together promotes ideas of co-operation and working together toward a common goal, as well as discipline and responsibility.

### **Do you have a good sense of humour?**

Some of the world's finest comedians have very high IQ scores. This is because they are able to see and make connections between otherwise seemingly unrelated subjects. From the genius political comedy of Lenny Bruce to the observational humour of Michael MacIntyre, the world's best comics achieve high scores in both verbal intelligence and abstract reasoning, not to mention the ability to engage in witty repartee. All these skills are the result of very sharp minds!

So intelligence is not always self-evident – not everyone is as smart as they pretend to be, while some are actually smarter than they thought they were.

### **Are you left-handed?**

Many years ago, when the rules of conformity were rigidly enforced, left-handed children were forced to learn to write with their right hands. Today, in more enlightened times, it turns out that may have been a mistake. There are some very definite benefits. For example – one large and therefore significant study demonstrated that left-handedness is associated with the ability to think outside the box, a trend particularly prevalent in males. It is also now considered a sign of intelligence.

# Is this you?

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## **The four personality clusters we all fall into...**

Experts from Northwestern University sifted through data from more than 1.5 million questionnaires. Their research suggests that everyone falls into one of four distinct clusters of personality types.

### **Average**

Average people are high in neuroticism and extraversion, but low in openness. The typical person falls into this cluster, with females more likely than males to fall into the Average type.

### **Reserved**

The Reserved type is emotionally stable, but not open or neurotic. They are not particularly extroverted, but can be somewhat agreeable and conscientious.

### **Role Models**

Role Models score low in neuroticism but high in all the other traits. The likelihood that someone is a role model increases dramatically with age. These are people who are dependable and open to new ideas. These are good people to be in charge of things.

Life is easier if you have more dealings with role models. More women than men are likely to be role models.

### **Self-Centred**

Self-Centred people score very high in extraversion and below average in openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness. These are people you don't want to hang out with. There is a very dramatic decrease in the number of self-centred types as people age, both with women and men.

Believe it or not, the great psychologists Freud and Jung believed that personality is dictated by which star sign you were born under – and of course they were wrong. And thank goodness for that! Mind you, there are probably some tree-hugging mystic types out there who still think that is the case.

Most psychologists now believe that the seemingly complex range of human personality is an illusion, that the personality can be reduced down to just FIVE basic types. This is the new thinking, and even if only for simplicity's sake, it makes good sense.

But after years of observation, measurement, research and serious study, it seems that the human personality seems to be limited to just five dimensions, which give us a NEW MODEL from which to work:

**Openness / Conscientiousness / Extraversion / Agreeableness / Neuroticism**

**Openness** is simply the degree to which a person is open to new experiences. These are curious and broad-minded souls, although they sometimes get bored easily. Nonetheless, they are good at tolerating ambiguity and seeing situations from different perspectives.

They are also good at finding solutions to problems. They are usually wise and have a good sense of humour; they are often unconventional but tend to make good hypnotic subjects because they are also imaginative and creative.

Conversely, low scorers on openness tend to be conventional, set in their ways, are more likely to find practical solutions to problems, and are much more comfortable with familiarity.

**Conscientiousness** points to those who are organised, conscientious and methodical. They are happier with more structured and predictable lives. They are more likely to be persistent, reliable and hard working. They display perseverance, opt for step-by-step solutions and generally do well in the work environment.

They are more likely to be able to forego short-term rewards in favour of long-term gains. They are normally punctual and most irritatingly, have balanced diets. They are not people who engage in high-risk pursuits, nor do they take risks. Everything they do is carefully worked out and thought through.

Low scorers tend to be less reliable, but more easy-going. Low scorers are also harder to get motivated, but find it easier to adapt to changing circumstances,

**Extraversion** displays the need for stimulation from others and from the environment. Typically, they are impulsive, optimistic, great in the company of other people and first to dance on the table at a party. They are more likely to become leaders, rather than followers, but they can sometimes let themselves (and others) down by having more sexual partners than is the norm and they are more likely to cheat!

Low scorers on extraversion tend to be more reserved, limit themselves to a small group of friends, prefer a quiet night in to a night on the town, and are not easily distracted. They also prefer a more intelligent type of humour - more *Have I Got News For You?* than *Carry On Up The Khyber*.

**Agreeableness** is measured by the degree to which individuals care about others. They are trusting, and are themselves trustworthy. They are friendly, cooperative, altruistic, kind, affectionate, likeable, all round nice people. They are less likely to cheat, are happier in monogamous relationships, and less likely to divorce.

Low scorers are more aggressive and competitive. They can even be hostile and tend to be stuck seeing things only from their own point of view. They value being right more than anything and have little or no interest in other people's feelings. They can also be tough minded and are not so easily taken advantage of.

**Neuroticism** indicates the degree to which individual is emotionally stable or able to cope with stressful situations. Neurotic types are more prone to worry or anxiety. Sometimes they exhibit an unfortunate tendency to blame others for their own misfortunes.

Universally, they need to be loved, they can sometimes be over-possessive, and are dependent on others to a greater degree than would be regarded as normal.

Low scorers tend to be more calm, relaxed, emotionally secure, and emotionally resilient. They are not so bothered when things don't quite go their way. They also have more of a natural ability to cope with anxiety.

To the list above, I'm going to be cheeky and add another two categories:

### **Morning People / Evening People.**

This indicator of personality does exactly what it says on the can.

MORNING TYPES are good with facts and figures but not so adept when it comes to abstract thinking. They will rely on logic rather than intuition. They will be introverted and self-controlled as well as eager to make a good impression on others.

EVENING TYPES on the other hand have a more creative outlook on life and are usually more prepared to take risks. They are certainly more independent, less likely to conform and more impulsive.

Go through the list of personality types above again and see how many people you know that fit into these categories. Then see which ones apply to you. Spotting personality traits will give you more of an insight into your client's psychological makeup and make you a better therapist.

In a survey of over 1,000 people on 400 typical behaviours, researchers at the University of Rochester, US, carried out a study aimed to identify the typical behaviours of each of the main personality types. Participants in the study were asked if they performed each of the 400 behaviours, and how often. The results were then compared with their personalities. The results have been published in the journal *Personality And Individual Differences*.

The study revealed that each personality had its own unique behaviours and here are some of their findings:

Extroverts are much more likely to tell dirty jokes, are more likely to drive cars faster than 75mph, gamble and go to the pub.

Those with agreeable personalities are more likely to sing in the shower. They also have behaviours that benefit others.

People with higher intellects are more likely to swear, eat spicy breakfasts and walk around the house naked.

Conscientious people are more focused on avoiding irresponsible behaviours.

If you suffer from having a short temper, you're probably not as smart as you think you are. Angry people are more likely to overestimate their intelligence levels than those with a calmer disposition. This is because being angry is linked with high levels of narcissism, as well as a greater belief in their abilities and competence. Those with a short fuse are also more likely to have problems maintaining a stable relationship,.

This is because individuals with high levels of narcissism struggle to establish bonds with others as they are always trying to dominate them. There is a relationship between anger and various cognitive functions. Anger differs significantly from other negative emotions like

sadness, anxiety or depression. Anger is more approach oriented and associated with optimistic risk perception and general optimistic bias.

So do people with higher levels of anger have a higher belief in their abilities and competence?

After carrying out two studies with a total of 528 participants, researchers found people with a quick temper overestimate their intelligence. Participants were asked about their temper and to rate their own intelligence on a 25-point scale. The researchers then asked the participants to take an intelligence test to check whether the self-reported levels of intelligence tallied with the real thing.

Individuals with an elevated propensity for anger do have a tendency to overestimate their abilities, i.e. thinking that they are smarter than they actually are. This type of anger is associated with narcissism. The researchers found no relationship between the participants' temper and their level of intelligence – only how they perceived their own abilities. The tests also showed angry people often had problems forming relationships.

It seems that individuals with high levels of narcissism do not establish deep, intimate bonds with others, but rather surpass and dominate others. This research was reported in a paper published in the journal *Intelligence*.

Anger is associated with problems in relationships – experiences of anger can result in thoughts such as, 'I am smart' and 'You are stupid', which may, in turn, cause problems in creating positive relations with others.

# Streetwise

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Adults who struggle as kids often turn out smarter than those who had stable, privileged upbringings and a private education.

It's a fact of life – some kids come from dysfunctional families or broken homes. Some of them played truant from school, they got into bad ways, they shoplifted and they committed crime to get money for drugs. It would be easy to assume that these people, as poorly educated as they might be, might also turn out stupid.

Surprisingly, they're not. Many of them developed a different kind of intelligence. True, some have used their intelligence to fine tune skills of guile and deception, but others have used it to achieve success and build worthwhile and productive lives. For instance, it's well known that many entertainers – especially comedians – had miserable childhoods.

You might call this different sort of intelligence being 'streetwise' and in a lot of cases that would be a wholly appropriate description. Either way, many of those who suffered as children do have a different kind of emotional and practical intelligence from the rest of us. My question is... why?

A deprived upbringing often means that individuals will develop unique abilities and skills in order to cope with living in high-stress environments. Speak to anyone who endured childhood in an orphanage or in social care. Listen to their stories and ask how it affected their lives as adults. Most of all, ask them how they learned to survive.

The will to survive is an evolutionary adaptation that allows people to respond to hardship in different ways and develop new skills. Each story, each experience, is unique. Each survival strategy is developed to cope with a world that is all too often unfair and unjust.

Researchers at the University of Utah have looked at studies of individuals – especially children – from high-stress backgrounds that suffered the kind of trauma associated with a tough upbringing, and analysed how it enhanced specific types of thinking.

Children who grow up in low-socio-economic conditions inhabit a world where there are other people around who have more power and are more powerful than them. This is a very different environment than people from middle-class backgrounds experience.

The first 'specialness' they uncovered was people who suffer serious long-term trauma seem to have better memories. There is a possibility that a more finely tuned memory stops similar things happening to them in the future. For instance, children who had experienced negative interactions with people could remember them much more clearly than those with whom they had positive interactions.

They also found children who had 'verbally aggressive' parents were better at recognising emotions.

What is not yet clear is whether these children already possessed enhanced memory ability and used it to raise themselves out of perdition, or learned – at an unconscious level – how to use that memory to protect themselves from future harm or abuse. What is clear, is that, while some may have abdicated their lives to helplessness, many of them have refused to become second-class citizens and have used past experience to achieve.

Whereas most previous studies have been concerned with what is wrong with them, the Utah study has attempted to find out what's *right* with them, and this has to be a real, not to mention positive, step in the right direction. Being able to predict how people might develop as a result of deprived childhood stress could be an important and effective way to better identifying and understanding their talents.

Yes, stress is bad, and can nurture long-term negative effects, but in many cases its positive effects are too often overlooked.

Researchers believe that understanding this cognitive survival mechanism will be of use in future research and could help schools tweak their curriculum for low-ability students.

Normally, schools, social workers, psychologists and society in general focus on making stressed children feel less stressed – just like their more privileged peers. If schools were to give these children more leeway to pursue their own interests, if they gave them more opportunity to express themselves, to find their own niche, it might encourage them to show their hidden strengths and talents.

# Brain training doesn't make you smarter

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Practising a game like Sudoku or using a brain training app might make you better at it, but it won't boost your IQ or general brain power. Instead, if you want to sharpen your mind, you will get more benefit by exercising more, socialising more, and making sure you get enough sleep.

The makers of computerised games expected people to perform better if they practised on brain training machines, but it turned out, they were wrong.

In fact those who did the brain training did not perform any better than people who didn't, suggesting the numerous mobile apps do not work in the way people were told they would.

Researchers at Western University in London, Ontario, studied the effect of brain training games in an experiment involving 72 people. People in one group used a brain-training game, designed to improve people's working memory, on a computer for 13 hours over a period of 20 days. The working memory is the part of the brain responsible for learning, storing information and preventing memory loss.

The group then did a test similar to the one they had been training on, alongside a second group of people who didn't train at all.

Sadly, high scores in the training game did not translate to higher scores in the final test, and people who had 'trained' their minds did not perform better. In other words, people who trained for a long time for one test and got really good at it, showed no improvement whatsoever in similar tests, let alone anything in a more general sense such as IQ.

The researchers agreed that better sleep, regular exercise, healthier diet and better education is what we should be focussed on.

If you're looking to improve your cognitive self, instead of playing a video game or playing a brain-training test for an hour, you would do better by going for a walk, or meeting a friend and engaging in intelligent conversation. In short, brain-training doesn't have any effects which transfer over to general intelligence tests.

There is convincing evidence that brain training does not lead to improvements beyond the task you practiced. So any kind of 'brain training' or emotional training – including mindfulness and meditation – won't make you more intelligent, spiritual or happier... it will just make you better at meditating and being mindful... and for no apparent gain.

# Intelligence improved

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Contrary to conventional wisdom, IQ is not fixed. Intelligence can be boosted throughout adulthood simply by mixing with more intelligent people, or taking on more intellectually stimulating jobs, challenges, hobbies and interests.

The traditional nature versus nurture argument, that intelligence is mainly the result of one's genetic make-up, with environmental factors – education, social interaction and nutrition – exerting their effect, is not entirely accurate. Neither is the notion that IQ is fixed by the age of 18.

James Flynn, emeritus professor of Political Studies and Psychology at the University of Otago in New Zealand, argues that people can upgrade their intelligence any time in their lives.

Professor Flynn's work is widely recognised – a lifetime of research has led to the discovery of a long-term increase in the intelligence of populations – a phenomenon now known as the Flynn Effect – and has resulted in an average rise of three IQ points every decade since 1930.

The primary cause is believed to relate less to genetic make-up and more to a combination of factors including better education, nutrition and an increasingly complex world that is more intellectually stimulating and challenging.

Professor Flynn believes that intellectual stimulation from others is crucial to this increase – the more you use your brain, the stronger and more efficient it gets.

However, the reverse is also true – so people who share a home, workplace or whose main social contact is with the intellectually challenged risk seeing their IQ levels decrease rapidly.

Flynn analysed the results of 65 years' worth of US intelligence tests and correlated the results with people's ages. This enabled him to compile new IQ 'age tables.' He found the 'cognitive quality' of a family affects the IQ of all members – especially children.

It can move them forward or hold them back, depending on the gap between their brightness and that of their siblings and/or parents.

A bright ten year-old with brothers and sisters of average intelligence will suffer a five to ten point IQ disadvantage compared to a ten-year-old with equally bright siblings.

However, children with a low IQ could gain six to eight points by having brighter siblings or other special educational advantages to help pull them up.

Flynn has concluded that although your genes and early life experiences determine about 80% of intelligence, the remaining 20% is linked to lifestyle. This means that people can raise their IQ, or allow it to fall, by ten or more points simply because of the company they keep.

The bottom line is that the best way to boost IQ levels is to socialise with bright friends and find an intellectually challenging job and marry someone smart.

# Blessed are the meek...

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**“...blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth...” Matthew 5:5**

In these more enlightened and paralytically correct times, you have to be careful of applying labels to people. Calling an individual an antisocial loner can get you into hot water – you even have to be careful referring to someone as ‘socially awkward’ in case it offends people who are, er... socially awkward – a bit clumsy, or people who find themselves on their own at parties. Yet it’s OK to tag them with less prejudicial, though more interesting labels, such as Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Aspergers Syndrome, or worse, Autistic. But these are medical terms, so it’s alright.

However, it's now high time to recognise that whatever the label, these human beings can not only make a positive contribution to humanity, but have already proved they have the ability – and the talent and inspiration – to make a unique and vital contribution to progress. It’s time we started to realise that they are – quietly brilliant.

Here are some of the most common traits applicable to the above, and I challenge you to see if you see anyone you recognise:

They can be obsessed with numbers, patterns, machines; they have an obsessive interest in narrow subjects; they are happy performing repetitive tasks; and they have a lack of sensitivity to social strictures.

A lot of them end up as computer geniuses because although they are socially awkward, they find it easy to communicate with others electronically, without the socially awkward business of meeting face to face, shaking hands, engaging in small-talk... that sort of thing.

Dyslexics learn early on how to delegate tasks (getting others at school or college to do homework for them, for example) and they tend to gravitate to activities that do not demand formal qualifications and involve little reading or writing. Some of the most successful business people are dyslexic, most notably Richard Branson, Charles Schwab, and Steve Jobs.

Approximately 30% of entrepreneurs suffer from Dyslexia, compared with 10% of the total population and only 1% of managers.

In the case of Attention Deficit Disorder, people who are unable to focus on one thing for too long can also be the same people who find it second nature to be able to think outside the box. They are consistently more likely than the rest of us to come up with unique solutions, new and better ideas and more efficient ways of doing things.

Studies suggest that people with ADD are six times more likely to end up running successful businesses than the rest of us.

ADD sufferers are also more likely to take risks. That's not a problem for business though, because the more pedantic managers will serve as a balance. In fact, if the two are able to work together, each understanding the other’s strengths (and weaknesses) there could well be a recipe for success. The eccentric genius working in the lab and the people-savvy

manager who charms the customers could make a formidable team. It certainly worked for Google and Facebook.

Like does seem to attract like. That's why cliques form at school, at university, at work, and at parties. Psychologists from the University of Georgia have found this unwritten rule also applies to people with personality disorders, and that includes psychopaths and narcissists.

Dysfunctional people are more likely to make friends with, or even get married to, people who are also dysfunctional. Psychopathic and narcissistic people seem to be much more tolerant of others who share their personality traits. Not only that, but they get on better with them than they do with 'normal' people. People with dysfunctional personalities are better at dealing with people who are similarly dysfunctional. Thus neurotics get on well with other neurotics, eccentrics get on better with other eccentrics, and so on.

Other research has found that narcissists are often initially likeable but tend to have increasingly negative interactions over time – narcissists don't like competition! – and one would expect that when two antagonistic people get together, there'd be fireworks, but in fact the opposite is true. So people who are dysfunctional in similar ways actually get on much better with their dysfunctional peers.

Having met a few in my time, especially in the whacky world of show business, I always suspected this would be the case. And I believe it makes sense. Dysfunctional people's tolerance of similar traits in their peers might point to one reason why negative personality traits are so difficult to treat. It also goes some way to explain why people with negative personality traits don't want to be treated. Because of this tolerance, there are very few therapeutic approaches available with which to deal with severe personality disorders.

It's also possible we could be about to witness the next step in Human Evolution. Brainy people tend to marry other brainy people. Professor Simon Baron Cohen of the University of Cambridge discovered that students who study mathematics, physics, or engineering are more likely to have autistic relatives than students who study English or the arts. He has also found that when people with technological or very mathematical brains produce offspring, those offspring are more likely to suffer from Asperger's or autism.

Technicians in Eindhoven in the Netherlands, a major European technology hub, are two to four times more likely to have children with autism. I do not regard autism as an illness – I regard it as a gift.

The important thing to understand is that modern technological societies simply cannot operate without these new minds. We need them now more than ever! We simply have to accept the misfits and the socially awkward because they are now undeniably part of the human survival strategy. Their genes too will be passed on to their offspring and thus evolution will take another dramatic turn. I view this prospect with excitement.

The guy that's ignored at the office party has the keys to the future. Better be nice to him.

# Can we read body language accurately?

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It has long been understood that speech is less than half of communication – facial expression and body language also make a vital contribution. Talking with our hands helps us to get our meaning across to others. When we speak, we conduct our conversation as we would conduct an orchestra, directing the listener's attention to meaning, emphasising important points and steering the conversation from one theme to another.

When we talk, ideas flow at speed and people must be able to understand, process and coordinate their own contribution to the conversation.

The transition between taking turns to speak during a conversation is very fast – a mere 200 milliseconds elapse between the contribution of one speaker and the next.

By closely observing speech, scientists found that gestures that end before a sentence is finished give visual cues that the speaker is about to end. This helps us formulate our response more quickly.

Gestures are hugely important in conversation. People answer questions more quickly when you move your hands or head as you talk.

Scientists analysed the interaction of seven groups of three participants. The groups were left alone in a recording suite for twenty minutes, during which their interaction was filmed with three high-definition cameras.

The researchers focused on analysing question/response sequences because they are prevalent in normal conversation. They found that there were strong visual components to most questions asked and answered. These took the form of body signals such as communicative head or hand movements and appeared to profoundly influence language processing.

So, questions accompanied by gestures get quicker responses than questions without gestures. Responses come even earlier when gestures end before (rather than after) the question has finished being asked.

Where gestures did not end early, additional information conveyed by head and hand gestures may help us better understand, process or predict what is being said in conversation.

You might think you can work out someone's mood based on whether they are smiling or scowling, but facial expressions are, in fact, very poor indicators of our inner feelings.

Scientists at Ohio State University, US, analysed muscle movement in hundreds of faces connected to a specific feeling and compared it with each participant's actual emotions at the time.

They found that attempts to detect or define emotions based on facial expressions were almost always wrong.

So can we truly detect emotion from facial expressions? The answer is... no you can't.

Not everyone who smiles is happy. Not everyone who is happy smiles. If you're happy for a whole day, you don't go walking down the street with a smile on your face. You're just happy.

Some people claim they can detect whether someone is guilty of a crime or not, or whether a student is paying attention in class, or whether a customer is satisfied after a purchase.

The Ohio State research shows that those claims are completely wrong, and it can be dangerous if you try to determine those things.

In one experiment, the scientists showed participants a picture cropped to display a man's face with his mouth open in an apparent scream. On first glance it appeared the man was extremely annoyed, but when they saw the whole image, it was actually a soccer player celebrating a goal.

Imagine how this might be used in cities like London, which has a large amount of security cameras.

If in the future this is used to single out people based on how they behave, that would be very dangerous.

The findings were presented at the annual meeting of the *American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS)*.

Mentalists and 'mind readers' claim to be able to guess what people are thinking by reading their body language as easily as they're able to read a headline in a newspaper. The truth is – they can't... and this is why...

'Trick of the mind' exponents like Derren Brown\* are seemingly able to read and manipulate the minds of others, implanting ideas at will and drawing thoughts out of brains as easily as a magician pulls a rabbit out of a hat. Their amazing feats of mentalism however are more routinely based on simple trickery rather than a genuine ability to read body language, and you can easily find out how they really do it from any of hundreds of books dedicated to the art of mentalism and mind control, available from any good magic shop or Amazon.com.

However, entertainment is one thing – I have no problem with a little mild deception if it amuses us – I mean, nobody really believes the magician is *actually* sawing his assistant in half – but when reading body language is sold as a valid part of therapy, there is cause, and need, for scepticism.

There is a mountain of vacuous nonsense written about body language. Much of this emanates from Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) and deserves to be viewed with suspicion. However, there is some base-line body language that is possible to interpret.

Language – the words and sentences used to make our intentions known to others and help us understand others' intentions toward us – are only part of communication. It's our non-verbal communication skills that tell the real story.

Non-verbal communication makes up three quarters of our ability to communicate. Within weeks of being born we learn the meaning of a whole physical language, from a mother's smile to a sibling's frown. From there on, how we sit, how we stand, where we look and what we do with our hands and feet give us clues about the thoughts, sincerity and mood of others.

Most of the time, we can pick up on other people's non-verbals due to our accumulated experience of what they mean. We can sense the difference between a real and a false smile. (A real smile is in the eyes.) By the time babies are just seven months old, they have already acquired basic social skills and can understand what their parents are doing. Seven-month-old toddlers can not only observe but can also understand and imitate social interactions.

An innovative collaboration between neuroscientists and developmental psychologists that investigated how infant's brains process other people's actions provides the first evidence that directly links neural responses from the motor system to overt social behaviour in infants.

36 seven-month-olds were studied while they were wearing an electroencephalography (EEG) cap that measured brain activity. Each baby observed a member of the research team reaching for one of two toys. Immediately afterward, the baby was allowed to select one of the toys – mostly they chose the toy selected by the researcher.

So this 'imitation game' begins at a very early age. Like it or not, and completely irrelevant of what we say, our bodies give away important clues about what we are really thinking. You don't need a degree in psychology to know when someone is flirting with you or when we find ourselves in a threatening situation.

Quite unconsciously, the direction of our line of sight can give clues to the way we process information. Looking down and to the right *might* indicate we are processing feelings and emotions, looking up and to the left *might* show that we are remembering images, while a horizontal gaze *may* mean that we are remembering sounds.

HOWEVER... as interesting as all this sounds, it does not take into consideration left or right brain dominance or left or right-handedness. It doesn't take into consideration which way we learned to do it when we were copying the way mum did it when we were still a baby. Neither does it consider the need to know someone well before it's possible to pick up very subtle signals.

To make the formula work, it's necessary to ask a few test questions in order to establish some baseline results that will provide a template for recognisable patterns. But it's important not to let the person you're doing this. If they are aware you're doing it there's always the danger confirmation bias might creep in and change their behaviour. In any case, once someone knows what the point of the experiment is, the results will almost certainly become skewed. The other thing to bear in mind is that psychopaths are known to have an unconscious (and uncanny) ability to both mask and fake signals.

Most important, this whole theory of direction of line of sight is as yet, *entirely untested*. There has been no serious research into the accuracy of the theory, although devotees of NLP swear by it. So again, fine for the purposes of entertainment, but not so fine if it's being used as a therapeutic tool. What if the practitioner gets it wrong? How will that affect the outcome of the session?

Trying to simulate the correct body language to suit the occasion is a mistake. Putting on a show never works – you can be sure that the person you're trying to impress – or manipulate – will see right through it. Behaving naturally is the best route to gaining trust.

The way people move and the way they hold themselves plays a key role in identification. Faces and facial expressions are important in the same way the spoken word is an important part of communication, but we also take a mental snapshot of someone's body,

their gestures and mannerisms. The better we know someone, the better we are able to recognise, interpret and predict their body language because we have evolved to be sensitive to human movement. We can even judge someone's emotional state simply by observing their movement, expression, eyes and even their breathing – but this is something we do unconsciously.

Researchers at the School of Psychology at the University of Aberdeen, led by Dr Karin Pilz, have proved this by creating a pair of computer-generated characters, and getting 16 participants to identify them by observing their body language. One of the characters performed professional karate movements, while the other did the same but in a more amateur way. When their faces were swapped over, the participants were still able to identify them based on their movement.

The study showed that the less we are able to recognise someone, the more we rely on watching them in action. This means that we are able to recognise people from a distance even if we are unable to see their faces. The study confirmed this by using faces that had the same hairstyle, ears and face outline, so that people were not distracted by other factors.

What we really need is a checklist of typical poses and positions in order to try to understand, or at least guess their meaning. But be warned – although interpreting body language might appear to be a matter of common sense – most of what follows is only a rough guide and may not be entirely accurate! For instance, there may be lots of reasons why people sit up straight or slouch back in their seats. There may be reasons why people move from side to side in a swivel chair (try sitting in one and not doing it!) It doesn't necessarily mean that you're unconsciously saying no!

So here we go...

Resting your head on your hand with your elbow on the table may show you're bored – *or maybe you're just tired?*

Resting your head on your hand with your with your forefinger on your cheekbone may show that you're interested – *or maybe you're trying to intimidate the person opposite; it could also be interpreted as arrogance on your part.*

Sitting forward with your arms crossed on the desk could indicate a closed and defensive position and could mean you're probably not open to starting a conversation. *Or perhaps you're having difficulty hearing the person opposite.*

Uncrossing your arms and opening your hands could mean you're open to conversation. *Or maybe it's because you think the other person is talking nonsense.*

How you look at a person's face could possibly have an impact on communication. The direction of another person's gaze might be of help if you're trying to work out what they're thinking and this method is often used in lie detection. *It shouldn't be – it's not guaranteed to be accurate because it takes no heed of mood or stress!*

Focusing your gaze on the nose indicates friendliness (not your own nose, obviously.) *Or maybe they've got a big nose.*

Fixing your eyes on their forehead is a dominating gaze – it entails looking above natural eye-line and it might help you to take control of a situation. *On the other hand it might be seen as aggressive or arrogant, even menacing.*

Looking at the nose and down towards the mouth area indicates sensual intent. *How did they test this?*

The direction in which people look might give clues as to whether they are remembering, or thinking about images or sounds. *Possibly... but how would you know unless you ask them. In which case, why not just ask them?*

If you suspect someone isn't telling you the whole truth, you could try watching what they do with their hands. If they're rubbing their eyes or the back of their neck, these can be signs of deception. *But not always. Some people rub the back of their neck when they feel fed up with something and people can rub their eyes when they are reluctant to see or understand something. Then again, it could also just mean that their eyes are tired.*

The way we position our legs can be a big indicator of how we are feeling. Someone who is sitting with crossed legs and has tucked the toe of the top leg behind the calf of the other is likely feeling shy (*or needing to go to the loo*) but a person who is sitting with their bottom on the edge of the chair, knees bent, and hands poised on the edge of the seat - as if they are about to stand up at any moment are people who are likely itching to get away. *Or they might be waiting to start an argument.*

A word of warning for men: if you sit with your legs open, with one foot resting on your knee and your hands behind your head, people will assume you are an over-confident know-it-all and crucially, women won't like it. *And neither do men... actually.*

Sitting up straight with your feet on the floor and your hands in front of you makes it easier to communicate with others. *This one is true, if only because it's more dignified.*

Someone absent-mindedly touching their sleeve or cuffs might be trying to calm their irritation or agitation. *Or, it might be that they are bored. Or they might be Prince Charles.*

If someone habitually sits with their arms crossed, with fingers tucked under their arms and their thumbs pointing upwards this is usually a sign that they are at least temporarily, closed and aloof. *Or they could just be cold.*

If you want to feel more confident and composed you should place your palms together. *Then at least you'll be ready to pray.*

Somebody holding their arms behind their backs suggests that they are feeling tense and uncomfortable. *Or perhaps they are bored and impatient.*

If they're holding one arm with the other, it usually (*but not always*) means they are feeling agitated. The higher up they hold their other arm, the more agitated they may be - *or maybe they're just suffering from bad circulation. My grandfather did, and that's what he use to do to relieve it.*

If someone has their hands in their pockets with their thumbs poking out, they are possibly feeling confident and superior. *Or they are members of the aristocracy.*

Someone patting you on the back during a hug is a sign that they feel uncomfortable and are secretly hoping you will let go as soon as possible. *This one is true. I do it all the time. The longer they hang on, the more vigorously I pat them, the clingy-touchy-feely creeps.*

The direction someone's feet are pointing might be an indication of how they feel about you. If their feet are pointing towards you it is said they are generally interested. *Try facing someone with both your feet pointed in a different direction to understand how ridiculous this assertion is.*

However, if you are standing in a group of three and the other two have their feet pointed towards each other, they might be hoping you will go away. *Or freemasons.*

Obvious really isn't it? Or is it just wishy-washy pseudo-scientific nonsense? But according to some, it's all you need to know to practice your people-watching skills and start guessing what they are thinking.

\*Note to lawyers. Derren Brown is a contradiction. I admire his unflinching efforts to expose the fakery of spirit mediums, faith healers and religious flim-flam artists, and even the bollocks that is NLP. Derren Brown is first and foremost an entertainer, and a good one – in fact I believe he is the best in his field. His knowledge of the psychology of magic and illusion is second to none. His naughtiness however emanates from his refusal to acknowledge that a lot of what he does uses hypnosis. His denial of this one fact makes him slightly hypocritical, especially when he so obviously delights in exposing others. But then again, it's only entertainment, so who cares...?

# Reading the audience

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It's one of the golden rules of entertainment. A true artist can read an audience within two seconds of walking onto a stage, and some can even second guess their mood as they by listening to the murmur of an expectant audience before the curtain goes up. That's when one of the other golden rules of entertainment comes into play – giving the audience what they want, rather than what you think they should have.

There's another equally important rule – having the ability to communicate with everyone, even the guy sat in the corner at the back – especially the guy sat in the corner at the back – because if you can communicate with him, then you're communicating with everyone in the theatre.

But the ability to deliver the goods isn't enough – you have to know in advance what the goods are, and that can change not only from performance to performance but from moment to moment in this unstable business we call show. One misplaced ad-lib and everything you've built over the last two hours can come tumbling down. Audiences have very long memories.

Charismatic entertainers and great orators (think Churchill, Cicero, Roosevelt) are born, not made. Theirs is the natural untutored talent to hold an audience in the palm of their hand, theirs is a gift that can't be explained or taught – you've either got it or you haven't. Those unique brains are naturally wired to can instantly assess the expectation of the crowd.

These subtle audience cues can be used to register social information. Looking out at a crowd of faces, the special brain can determine the average mood of 50 or 5,000 individuals. Interpreting the highs and lows of a large crowd requires a special skill and it has to be accomplished at lightning speed. It's hard to recover from slip-ups.

Have you ever given a speech and felt it might not be going well? A quick look at the audience will give you some clues but you have to feel what they feel.

To find out more about how this process works, we can look at a new study from the University of California, Berkeley. Researchers there have confirmed that our brains determine the average mood of a crowd by looking at facial expressions. I do it by listening to them – every guffaw, every chuckle, every sigh, every cough – it all registers in my unconscious, helping me to instantly collate all the variants and react to the mix of emotions.

Audiences are never uniform. An audience is made up of individuals – all different, with different ways of looking at the world, different standards and different expectations. Each individual expression can be an important social indicator, acting as a signal for everything from enjoyment to boredom to excitement to danger.

When addressing an audience, you're interpreting a hundred thousand years of human civilisation. Variations in experience in the crowd all have to be interpreted and a tacit understanding of meaning established between performer and audience.

The researchers at Berkley conducted a series of experiments in an attempt to discover how the brain detects variance in a crowd. First, groups of volunteers were shown sample

sets of faces, some which showed the same or similar emotions, like anger. Next they were shown faces that displayed a variety of different expressions and emotions.

They found that perceived mixed emotions from a crowd made it more difficult to interpret the average mood. A crowd displaying a uniform set of emotions made it much easier for volunteers to reach a more reliable average. The study revealed that the brain is sensitive to variance in a sea of faces.

Performers don't always have that advantage because like individuals, audiences are all different. Same theatre, same show, same material, different audience.

But back to the lab... The results of the experiments suggest that one can recognise how united or divided a crowd is, and this is useful information for anyone contemplating having a go at public speaking. It's especially the case when faced with an aggressive audience.

Natural born leaders, like great orators or great entertainers have a natural charisma. But, contrary to popular belief, charisma is a two way street. Charisma only works when both parties – orator and crowd – are singing from the same hymn sheet. If they don't agree with what you're saying in first place, there can be no charisma and thus no charismatic leader.

Hitler had charisma and it was at it's most impressive when things were going well. But when things started to go badly wrong, the charisma started to evaporate, and Hitler stopped making public appearances and ceased giving speeches, because his followers no longer wanted to listen to a rhetoric that was no longer relevant.

I learned these lessons in the mid 1980's when faced with late night audiences at the Royal Court Theatre in Liverpool. I knew how to deal with it. I can deal with it now. But it still can't be taught.

The same could be said of the subtle art of persuasion – something that has also been honed to perfection over the last hundred thousand years.

Persuasion is part of the way human beings learn to cooperate. It's also a quality that comes naturally to those who enthusiastically pursue success and leadership, and it's easy to master if you follow these simple rules...

Persuasive people persuade – they don't tell or demand, and are never pushy – they just understand the principles of rapport and establishing relationships with others. They are able to inspire trust in others and establish their ideas with an easy, natural confidence.

Being pushy is guaranteed to turn people off and make them resistant to your ideas. It's subtlety that wins people over. The trick is to be calm, collected and above all, patient. Good ideas speak for themselves so you don't need to be overly persistent – if the idea is that good, it will soon get their attention!

Urgency undermines persuasion, so you must learn to tread lightly. Trying to force people to agree quickly makes it more likely they will stick rigidly to their own position. Any impatience on your part will only serve to make them more determined to dig their heels in. Good ideas are often difficult to process instantly, so it's a good idea to remember that patience really is a virtue.

There's a balance to be struck here however, because you shouldn't be a shrinking violet either. Presenting ideas as questions – 'do you think I should...?' etc. makes it look like you're seeking approval, which in turn is likely to make you seem unconvincing.

If you can turn ideas into interesting facts, it will make them more attractive. Whatever happens, don't introduce qualifying phrases such as 'I'm reasonably sure...' or 'it maybe...' Remember, you have to at least *appear* confident.

Being persuasive means that you also have to exercise a little give and take. You will have to give ground occasionally. You don't have to be right all the time and it will do no harm to do the odd favour for someone. In the long run, being human is the best way to get others to like you and thus win them over.

It's important to know your audience, something I learned very early on as an entertainer! You have to speak their language. That doesn't mean using the same words and phrases as them, it means you have to identify with them – you have to understand them. All human beings are different so you must know when to tone it down or pump up the volume, depending on whether you're interacting with shy individuals or loud and aggressive types.

Remember too that everyone has an imagination. If you can use words to paint pictures, your persuasiveness is going to increase. Using visual imagery and metaphor is good – telling interesting or exciting stories can breathe life into your ideas. Good stories (keep them short and to the point) will create images in the minds of your audience that are easy to relate to and hard to forget.

Be aware of your own body language. Standing up straight with your head up and being able to look people in the eye exudes confidence. It will make you *feel* more confident too. You need to speak clearly and audibly. It's not too hard and takes just a couple of minute's practice. This will engage people a lot more than if you're slouching and mumbling into your drink.

Whatever happens, don't fold your arms – this is defensive and rude. And don't lean in to people while your talking to them – invading other's personal space is definitely a no-no! How you present yourself, how you speak, is just as important as what you're saying.

Smiling from time to time also helps, but beware the vacuous, cheesy grin. If you can smile during conversation, the person you're talking to will likely do the same – and feel closer to you. People who are enthusiastic when they talk about their ideas do tend to smile – and the effect can be contagious.

A powerful tactic in the art of persuasion is being able and ready to concede a point. Modestly admitting that your argument is not perfect shows that you're open minded and willing to make adjustments. That's a much better image than stubbornly sticking to your guns. You need your audience to know that you have their best interests at heart and that you're actively listening to what *they* have to say. Genuinely persuasive people are interested in, and respect, other's opinions and accept them as valid.

One of the biggest mistakes people make is failing to listen to what others are saying. This is because we are concentrating more on what we are going to say!

So it's a good idea to ask lots of questions. People like it if you're interested in them and care about what they have to say. You'll be surprised how much respect you earn if you are willing to ask questions.

Persuasive people make sure they use the other person's name every time they see them. Your name is part of your identity, and it feels good when people use it. Don't overdo it though because the over use of someone's name is very likely to become irritating.

People will begin to accept what you have to say once they have a sense of what kind of person you are.

In a negotiation experiment carried out at Stanford University, students were asked to reach agreement about a certain topic in class. Without instruction of any kind, 55% of the students successfully reached an agreement, but when students were instructed to introduce themselves and share their background before negotiating to reach agreement, 90% of the students succeeded.

The trick is to avoid getting too caught up in the back and forth of the negotiation. The human being you are communicating with is a person, just like you, not your opponent. No matter how compelling your argument, if you fail to connect on a personal level, you will remain unconvincing.

It's true that those who appear genuine and honest are the most persuasive. Our natural ability to spot a fake creates cognitive dissonance – you don't need a degree in psychology to know when you're in the company of a loudmouth. People are far more likely to trust you if you come across as genuine.

Persuasive people know who they are. They're confident enough to be comfortable in their own shoes. By concentrating on what drives you and makes you happy as an individual, you become a much more interesting and persuasive person than if you attempt to win people over by trying to be the person you're not, or the person you think others want you to be.

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