

The two psychologies of the pandemic: from 'fragile rationality' to 'collective resilience'

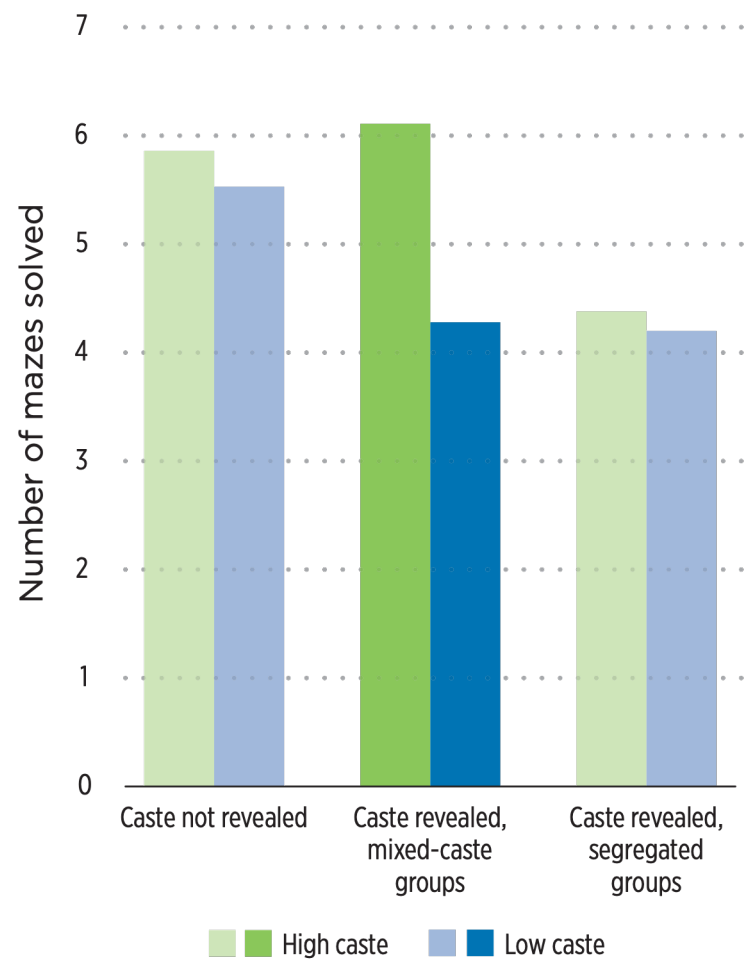
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The model makes the man?

- Crucial message of this afternoon: it matters which model of man you use in policy (e.g., fragile & individualistic vs resilient & social)
- Not merely because it should be sufficiently accurate in order for policy to achieve the intended effects
- But also because the model of the human actor can change the very human actor which it aims to capture
- Policy emphasizing Covid rule-breaking (rather than solidarity) summons the individual self, rather than the social self (Steve Reicher).
- This may result in distrust of others (who are busy breaking the rules, apparently) and increased rule-breaking (everyone does it, I won't be the outsider/saint/sucker staying at home).
- Similarly, policy emphasizing citizenship, community spirit, solidarity can achieve high rule adherence (if followed through congruent action in terms of resources)
- Policy can activate certain elements in an actor, while subduing others; it can trigger a certain "self", activate a certain behavioural script, through social identity dynamics
- Following the pandemic rules: citizen or sucker?



Source: Hoff and Pandey 2014.

Social identity : powerful policy tool?

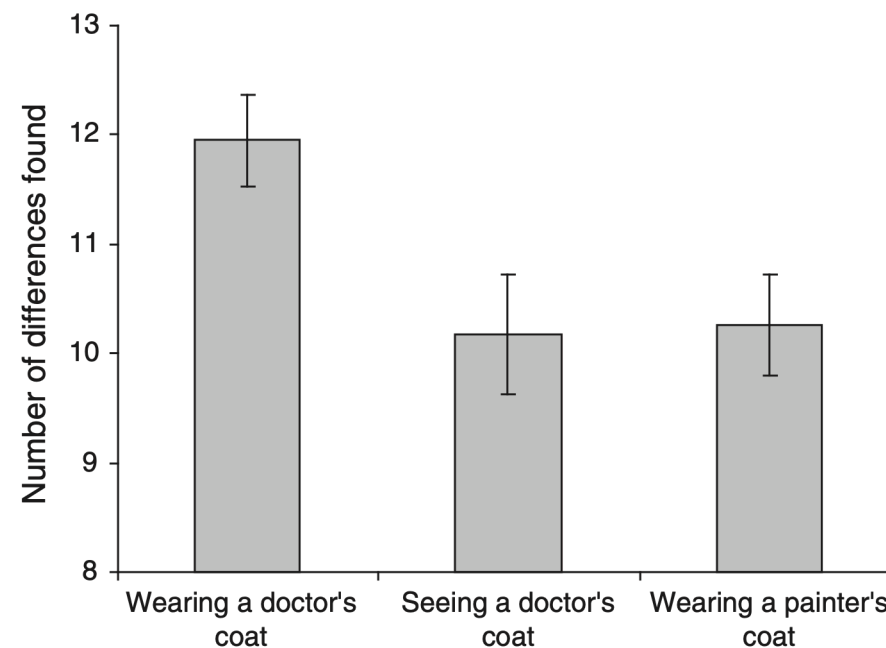


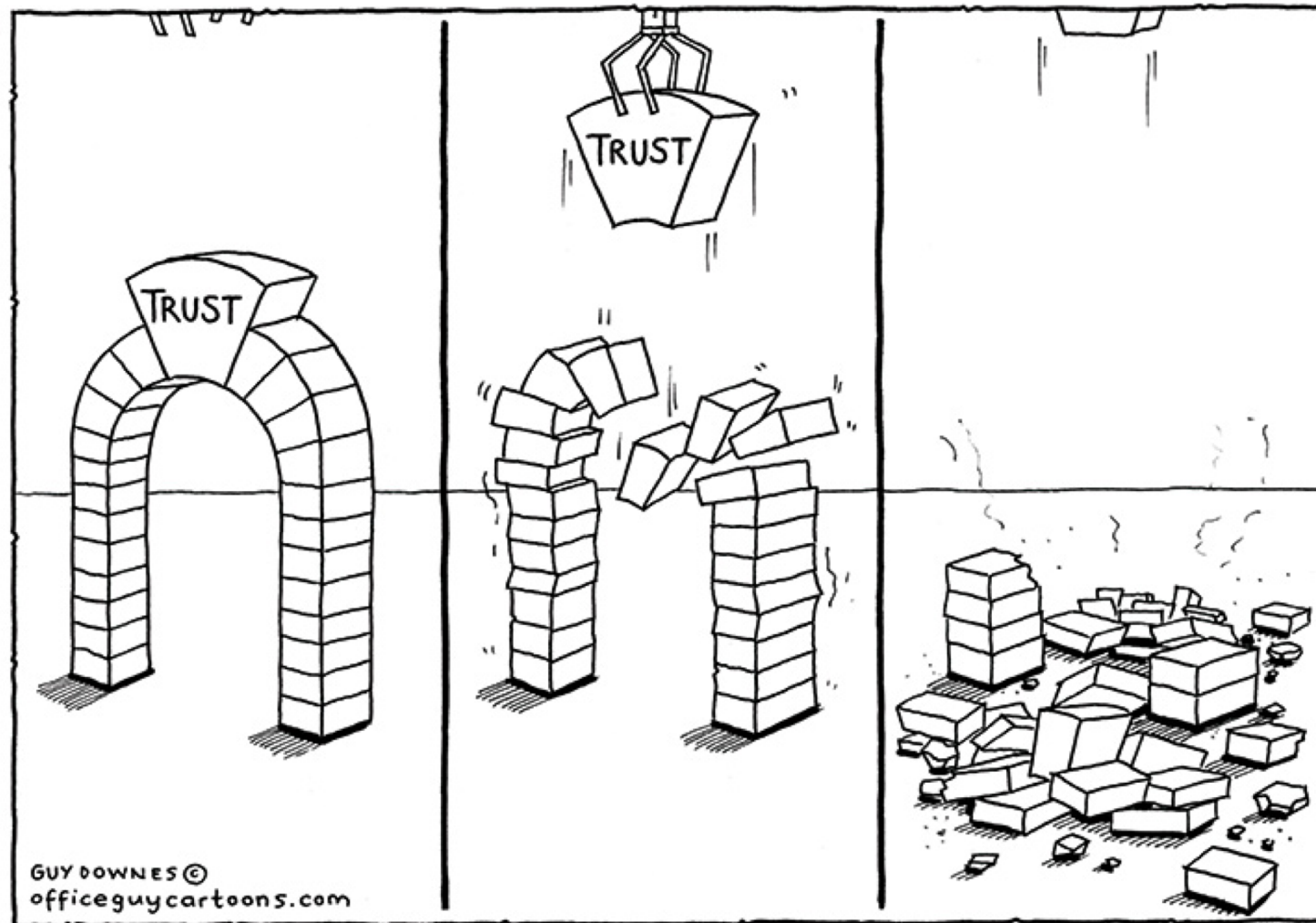
Fig. 2. Sustained attention (number of differences found in the comparative visual search tasks) as a function of experimental condition. Error bars represent ± 1 SEM.

The cement of society

- The social-psychological effects of policy may last over time and may have an impact in other areas, beyond the original setting (spill-overs)
- Important intangibles carry today's innovation-driven high-change economy: social relationships, shared identity, trust, social resilience, cooperation (social capital); cognitive, social and emotional skills, mental health, personal resilience (mental capital)
- Bad Covid-19 policy (inconsistent, divisive, reinforcing inequalities, triggering distrust, cynicism, anxiety, depression, despair) may erode society's mental and social capital; these effects may linger and affect economic recovery
- Importance of this type of effects? Psychological impact assessment of policy (similar to the now standard environmental impact assessment)?
- Should social identity be used as a policy tool in society? Risk of instrumentalisation (as in the case of cognitive psychology, looted for insights to develop “nudge” policies. Risk of means and ends reversal.

Mind the model (and model the mind)

- Economics: great concern about quality and validity of models of the economy, looking for a new ways to understand and capture economic dynamics
- Adjust model of human actor: bounded rationality, or driven by heuristics
- But today's lecture shows that a crucial feature of humans may still be lacking in models: the human actor itself is a variable
- Depends on what is activated (citizen or sucker), and nd on social and mental resources (anxious, depressed, or isolated persons arguably have higher levels of “bounded rationality”)
- Feedback loop: inequality reduces social and mental capital, and this in turn affect the “rationality” of the actor, leading to suboptimal decision-making and further loss of income (poverty trap)
- Endogeneity of features of the actor: does this matter? Does it matter enough to change the outcome of models?
- In any case: economics needs psychology, and not just for behavioural economics



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