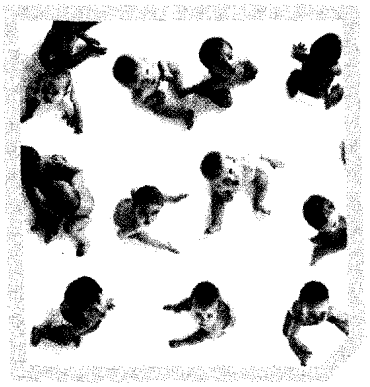
Population pressures

It was exciting to see a social psychologist starting to work in animal conservation (Careers: 'Social psychology in the lion's den', February 2014). We must hope that Jackie Abell's work is as successful as what Don Harris described in 'Improving aircraft safety'. Early in the article Abell outlined the near-quadrupling of the human population of sub-Saharan Africa within the last 50 years as causing the lions' plight, but later, although she mentioned empowerment of women and better medical care, she omitted the major factors which could directly influence the situation – family planning and governments in the region having a policy on population. This is a very common attitude. Population growth gets mentioned in many contexts, but usually only so that it can be catered for or its ill effects mitigated.



Although the world percentage rate of growth has been falling, the absolute rate is still rising, and last year the UN revised its projections upwards to 9.6 billion by mid century and nearly 11 billion by 2100. Much of this growth will be in Africa, but Britain, also, has just experienced the largest growth over a 10-year period (to 2011) since records began and, without positive intervention, the rate is not expected to slow. At a time when we are hoping to reduce the human impact on world resources and limit carbon emissions, whilst still lifting the poorest out of poverty and malnourishment, this is perhaps the most important problem we face today.

Are there any psychologists thinking about or working on the question of how to manage populations to a sustainable level? Persuading parents to restrict their families to two children or persuading governments (ours included) to think about optimum size of population is surely a worthwhile task for anyone. Would readers be interested in *The Psychologist* giving us an issue devoted to this topic? Would the Society consider establishing a Section on population issues?

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NOTICEBOARD

I am a trainee in counselling psychology and am conducting a study looking at practitioners' perspectives into the **role of romantic relationships in adolescents' well-being and adjustments**. I am recruiting practitioners who have current clinical experience working with adolescents for individual interviews. Please contact me if you are interested in taking part in my study. Your help will be most appreciated.

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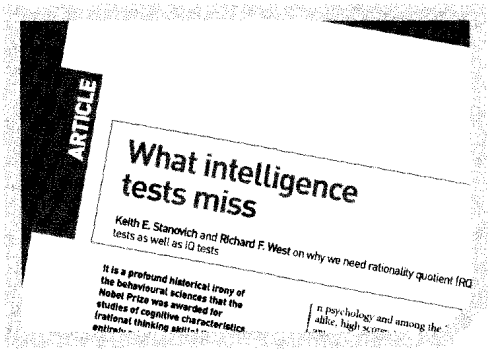
Intelligence and rationality

Stanovich and West in their article, 'What intelligence tests miss' (February 2014), promise a rich range of tests of rationality, but provide only two crumbs. Imagine studying a menu only to be told that the chef has yet to start locating the recipe, let alone sourcing the raw materials. For the moment, would Sir and Madam like to sample the olives?

We are promised RQ (rationality quotient) tests, but the article only contains two crumbs, which turn out to be simplistic puzzles, such as finding the price of a ball to accompany a bat or the probability of catching a rare virus. Later on we are told to expect 'tasks' not 'tests'. Currently these tasks, 'give us, at a minimum, a hint at what comprehensive assessment of the particular component would look like'. Imagine a restaurant that offered a hint of what we might be eating in 10 years' time.

What they call 'the particular component' is one of 18 components of rationality divided into three columns: Fluid Rationality, Crystallised Facilitators and Crystallised Inhibitors, which are already well known as successful and unsuccessful achievements. For example,



the authors' components include: resistance to miserly information processing; risky decision making maximising expected value; financial, literacy and economic thinking, and dysfunctional personal beliefs. Achievements, for example, the Nobel Prize, are assessments made by individuals, groups and organisations that cannot possibly be measured by artificial standardised tests. Each achievement is created by a combination of situational and individual factors and is, therefore, unique. How could there possibly be tests that assessed the 'particular component' of doubling sales, negotiating political agreements or creating a novel psychological theory?

It is their article, not an intelligence test, that misses the fundamental distinction between potential to acquire and actually acquiring knowledge and skills. In 1903 Binet published an intelligence test that saved slow-learning children from being punished because they were supposed to be too lazy to get to grips with their lessons as quickly and competently as their fellow pupils. Since then a wide variety of intelligence tests have helped clinicians, employers and teachers identify people's potential to acquire knowledge at different levels of complexity and to develop skills to different levels of proficiency.

Stanovich and West's article and work is actually about the identification and development of reasoning skills that, combined with other factors, might help us all produce more rational explanations, judgements and decisions. So, roll on 2024 when all will be revealed.

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