

# FALL 2005

## Foreign Affairs

By David A. Kenny

Given the above title, readers of this column might expect something pretty juicy. I am afraid that I will disappoint those readers. This column has a very serious purpose. We have heard of globalization and some of us are for it and others of us are against it, but globalization is something that we must accept for relational science. We are the International Association for Relationship Research and not the United States Association for Relationship Research. It then follows that our two flagship journals, *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* and *Personal Relationships*, are international journals. I duly note that the first editors of both journals were not born in the United States. Why is it then that many of us who are from the United States write articles as if all of the readers are from the United States? As social scientists we all know about egocentrism, failure to take another's perspective, and ethnocentrism, but many of us forget these important lessons when we write a scientific paper. All too often we say things in our paper that are virtually incomprehensible to readers not from the United States. I say this as someone who is expert at writing papers that are incomprehensible.

Perhaps the problem might be better understood by reading an excerpt of a paper by an Italian colleague. It is from the method section:

Participants were run as couples and were from Umbria. They were placed in a room of 16 m<sup>2</sup> and a temperature of 18 degrees. All couples were run between 14:00 and 18:00. To create a relaxing atmosphere, music by Uzeda, Afterhours, Marlene Kuntz, and Massimo Volume was played. In the control condition, participants viewed an RAI video of Deputy Prime Minister Gianfranco Fini delivering a speech concerning a recent editorial in *Avvenire* about the EU regulations on Gazprom. Participants were paid €5,00.

To have an issue on which there were gender differences, we chose football and fashion. For football, possible topics were Roberto Baggio's penalty kick in FIFA's 1978 World Cup and the relative merits of Lazio versus Inter. For fashion, the debate was between Roccobarocco and Coin.

You think this is far fetched? Read now a rough translation into "United States-ese" and it may seem less incomprehensible:

Participants were run as couples and were from the Northeast. They were placed in a room of 50 ft<sup>2</sup> and a temperature of 75 degrees. All couples were run between 2

and 6 PM. To create a relaxing atmosphere, music by Carrie Underwood, Bo Bice, and William Hung was played. In the control condition, participants viewed a CSPAN video of Vice-president Cheney delivering a speech concerning a recent editorial in the Daily News about the FDA regulations on Merck. Participants were paid \$6.

To have an issue on which there were gender differences, we chose baseball and fashion. For baseball, possible topics were the Mike Piazza and Roger Clemens confrontation during the 2000 MLB World Series and the relative merits of the Royals versus Cardinals. For fashion, the merits of Nordstrom versus Target were debated.

Let me try, as best I can (and it is difficult), to re-write the paragraph in way that would make it relatively comprehensible to all:

Participants were run as couples and were residents of a city with a population of half a million. They were placed in a small room and comfortable temperature. All couples were run in the afternoon. To create a relaxing atmosphere, popular music was played. In the control condition, participants viewed a video of a boring speech by a public official. Participants were paid a small fee for participation.

To have an issue on which there were gender differences, we chose sports and women's clothing. For sports, we chose a famous incident in a popular sport and the relative merits of two teams. For fashion, the debate was between an upscale and a downscale retail establishment.

You may note that, in making the description more comprehensible, some of the detail in the description is lost. Our communication colleagues know that "broadcasting" usually results in a loss of information. However, we could post on the web details from our studies. I, for one, would pay for the loss of information to avoid the becoming an ethnocentric discipline.

How can those of us from the United States avoid such writing? Find a colleague from outside the United States and offer to read one of their papers and help with English and journal formatting. Ask them to read your paper to remove material aimed for residents of the United States.