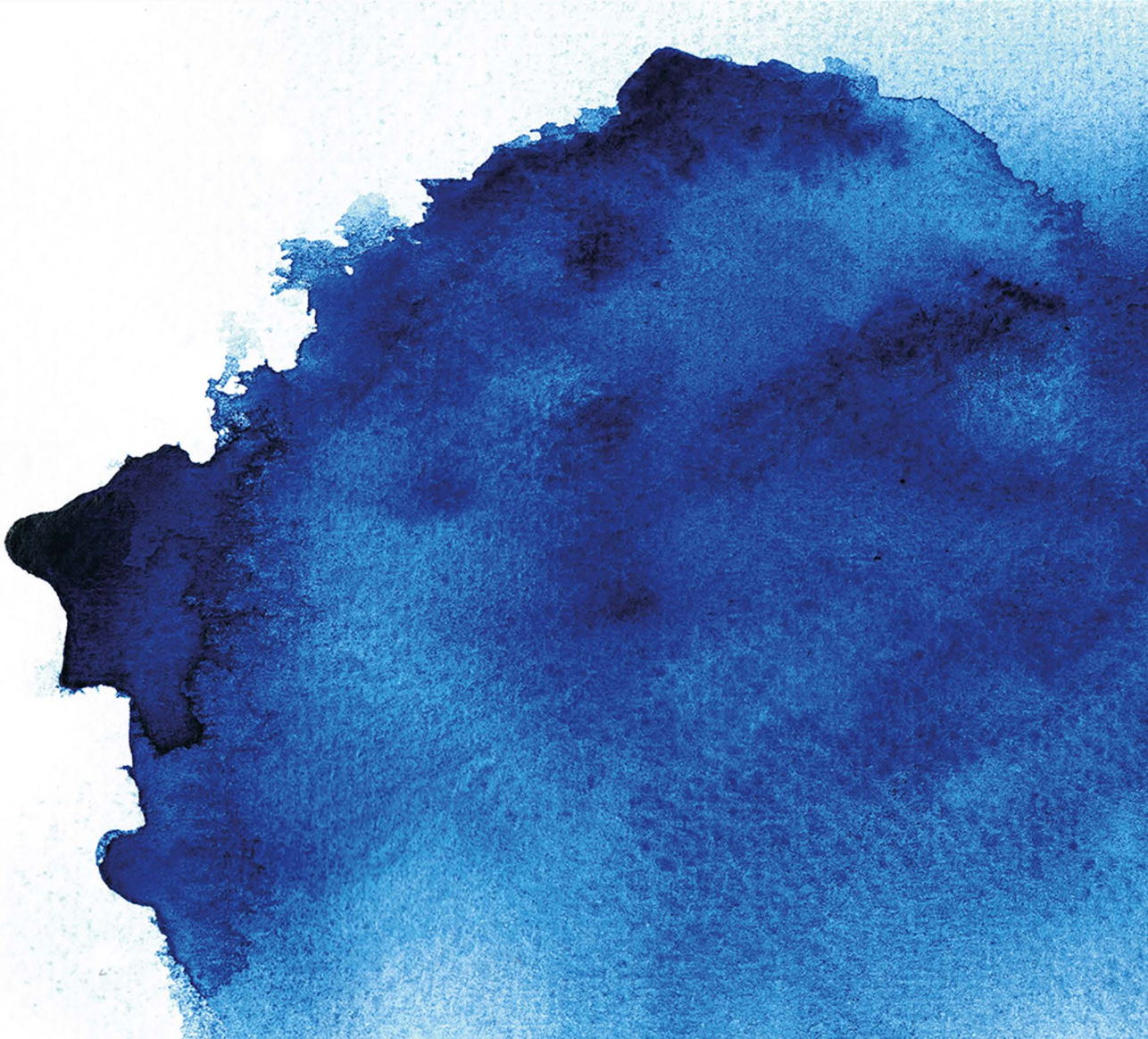


SIMPLY PSYCHOLOGY

FIFTH EDITION

MICHAEL W. EYSENCK



Simply Psychology

Simply Psychology, fifth edition, is an engaging and reader-friendly introduction to the key principles of psychology. Organised around the major approaches to the subject, it covers biological, developmental, social, and cognitive psychology, as well as individual differences.

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- further reading and evaluation boxes
- structured essay and self-assessment questions
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Michael W. Eysenck is one of the best-known psychologists in Europe. He is Professor Emeritus in the psychology department at Royal Holloway University of London, UK, and Professor Emeritus at the University of Roehampton, UK. He is especially interested in cognitive psychology (about which he has written several books) and most of his research focuses on the role of cognitive factors in anxiety within normal and clinical populations.



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Simply Psychology

Fifth Edition

Michael W. Eysenck

Fifth edition published 2022
by Routledge
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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First edition published by Psychology Press 1996
Fourth edition published by Routledge 2017

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Eysenck, Michael W., author.
Title: Simply psychology / Michael W. Eysenck.
Description: Fifth edition. | Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY : Routledge, 2022.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2021040862 (print) | LCCN 2021040863 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Psychology.
Classification: LCC BF121 .E97 2022 (print) | LCC BF121 (ebook) |
DDC 150—dc23
LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021040862>
LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021040863>

ISBN: 978-0-367-60785-2 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-0-367-55015-8 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-003-10049-2 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003100492

Typeset in Sabon
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

Access the companion website: www.routledge.com/9780367550158

To my family with love

The greater the ignorance the greater the dogmatism.
(Sir William Osler, Canadian physician)



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About the author

Michael W. Eysenck is one of the best-known psychologists in Europe. He is Professor Emeritus and Honorary Fellow at Royal Holloway University of London and Professor Emeritus at the University of Roehampton. He is especially interested in cognitive psychology (about which he has written numerous books), and most of his research focuses on the role of cognitive processes and biases associated with anxiety within both healthy and clinical populations.

He has published 63 books. His previous textbooks published by Psychology Press include *An Introduction to Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 2nd Edn (with D. Groome), *AQA Psychology: AS and A-Level Year 1*, 6th Edn (2015), *Fundamentals of Cognition*, 3rd Edn (with M. Brysbaert) (2018), *Memory*, 3rd Edn (with A. Baddeley and M. C. Anderson), and *Cognitive Psychology: A Student's Handbook*, 8th Edn (with M. Keane). He has also written many articles on topics within the AS Psychology specification for the journal *Psychology Review*, and has given talks at numerous A-level conferences.

In his spare time, Michael Eysenck enjoys seeing family (including his two grandchildren), travelling (Covid permitting!), walking, bridge, an occasional game of golf, kayaking, and playing with his cat Lola. He is (unusually) a keen supporter of Crystal Palace and (less unusually) Manchester United Football Clubs.





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Preface

There has been a dramatic increase in the number of students of psychology in recent years. This increase has happened at all levels, and includes GCSE, AS level, A level and university degree courses. In addition, there are many more students of nursing, education, business studies and so on who study psychology as part of their course. This book will be of use to all students who are starting to study psychology.

There are two main approaches to writing a simple introduction to psychology. One is to leave everything that is hard or challenging; this is what might be called the “filleted” approach. The other is to present a more rounded account of modern psychology in a simple and accessible way. I have done my best to follow the second approach. Whether I have succeeded or not is for the readers of this book to decide for themselves.

This is the fifth edition of *Simply Psychology*. I have mostly retained the structure of previous editions. However, there are now two chapters (rather than one) devoted to the important area of abnormal psychology. In addition, all the chapters have been extensively updated and some are very different from the previous edition.

I would like to thank the very friendly and efficient staff at Psychology Press, including Fred Coppersmith and Lucy McClune.

In my opinion (I may be biased!), psychology is the most interesting subject you can study. An important part of my intention in writing this book is to try to convince you of that. Media coverage often makes it look as if psychologists have only succeeded in “discovering” things everyone has always known. I feel very strongly that this state of affairs tells us more about the media than it does about psychology. I hope, as you read this book, you will find yourself agreeing that psychological research goes considerably beyond the obvious. In fact, such research is full of important insights into human behaviour that can benefit (and already have benefited) society greatly.

What could be more interesting or important than achieving a better understanding of our fellow human beings? Enjoy psychology!

Introduction

1



What is psychology?

Psychology is amazingly wide ranging – indeed, it is relevant to almost everything in our everyday lives, as Sigmund Freud was the first to recognise. Here are just a few examples. Some psychologists are involved in treating mental disorders in increasingly effective ways. Forensic psychologists are engaged in offender profiling and tracking down serial killers and other criminals. Still other psychologists (health psychologists) are hard at work trying to persuade us to adopt healthier lifestyles with less smoking and drinking and more physical exercise.

What are the common elements in the very diverse activities of psychologists? Historically, the most frequent definition of “psychology” was that it is the scientific study of behaviour. However, this definition is too limited because most psychologists try to understand *why* people behave in certain ways. This requires that they consider internal processes and motives. Thus, we arrive at the following definition:

Psychology is a science in which behavioural and other evidence (e.g., individuals’ reports of their thoughts and feelings; patterns of brain activation) is used to understand the internal processes leading people (and members of other species) to behave as they do.

Until comparatively recently, a majority of people did not believe that psychology is a science. However, recent evidence suggests that is changing. Richardson and Lacroix (2021) found 91% of people now accept that psychology is a science, even though most of them thought chemistry, physics, and biology were more scientific than psychology.

Why do I (and the vast majority of psychologists) believe psychology is a science? A detailed answer to that question is provided in Chapter 3. However, the brief answer is that psychologists’ use of the experimental method is of central importance to the claim that psychology is scientific. The experimental method involves assessing the impact of one variable on another under controlled experimental conditions.

Here is a concrete example of how use of the experimental method can provide clearer scientific evidence than other approaches. There is considerable evidence that children who watch the most television violence tend to be more aggressive than those watching less television violence (see Chapter 7). Such findings are limited because we do not know whether watching television violence causes aggressive behaviour or whether having an aggressive disposition leads to increased watching of television violence. Use of the experimental method would entail randomly allocating some children to watch television violence whereas others do not watch it. The findings would indicate whether watching television violence has a causal impact on aggression. The take-home message is that the experimental method is the optimal way of obtaining definitive evidence about causality.

As you read this book, you may find yourself bewildered (I hope not too bewildered!) by the numerous approaches psychologists have adopted in their attempts to understand human behaviour. The main reason for these different approaches is because our behaviour is jointly determined by several factors including the following:

- The specific stimuli presented to us
- Our recent experiences (e.g., being stuck in a traffic jam)
- Our genetic endowment
- Our physiological system
- Our cognitive system (our perceptions, thoughts, and memories)
- The social environment
- The cultural environment
- Our previous life experiences (including those of childhood)
- Our personal characteristics (including intelligence, personality, and mental health)

We can see the importance of the above factors by considering “road rage” – an angry motorist threatens physical violence to another motorist. Their behaviour may depend partly on the genes they have inherited leading them to develop an aggressive personality. It may depend in part on their childhood experiences (e.g., violence within the family). It may also depend on their clinical history (e.g., a record of psychopathic or antisocial behaviour).

Still other factors may be involved in causing someone to exhibit road rage. It may depend on their thoughts and feelings (e.g., the other motorist reminds them of someone they despise). It may depend on their physiological state. For example, their internal bodily state may be highly aroused and agitated because they are late for an important appointment or have a very stressful job. Finally, their behaviour may depend on cultural factors – expressing one’s anger by physically attacking someone is less unacceptable in some cultures than others.

We have seen that there is no *single* “correct” explanation of the man’s road rage. Probably several of the factors just discussed contributed to his behaviour. Thus, the scope of psychology has to be very broad to understand human behaviour. More generally, psychology is a multidisciplinary science that has benefited from the research and theoretical contributions of physiologists, neuroscientists, sociologists, biologists, biochemists, geneticists, and others.

How useful is psychology?

Most people think psychology is a fascinating subject (which it is!). We all want to understand ourselves and other people, and that is the central goal of psychology. However, there is much controversy concerning the usefulness of psychology. Sceptics argue that psychology tells us things we already knew (the science of the bleeding obvious?). They also argue that laboratory findings often fail to generalise to everyday life because laboratory research is so artificial. Finally, sceptics claim most psychological research is trivial (e.g., rats running through mazes).

One of the most common criticisms of psychology is that it is “just common sense”. Here we discuss four major problems with that criticism (a fifth problem is considered shortly). First, as Kelly and Barker (2016, p. 116) pointed out, “If changing behaviour was simply about making common sense simple changes and good choices then we would all be able to make whatever changes we wanted to whenever we wanted, but we do not.” In fact, most people find it agonisingly difficult to change their health-related behaviour (e.g., eating less; stopping smoking), which suggests we have a much more limited understanding of ourselves than we like to believe.

Second, many findings in psychological research differ greatly from what most people would have predicted based on common sense. For example, Milgram (1974) found 65% of his participants were willing to administer potentially lethal electric shocks to a middle-aged man with a heart condition (see Chapter 15). Psychiatrists predicted that only 0.1% of participants would do this, which is 1/650th of the actual figure!

Third, common sense is only based on drawing conclusions from observations, whereas psychology involves detailed experimental testing and attempts to distinguish among alternative explanations of phenomena. As we have seen, laboratory research allows us to study behaviour under well-controlled conditions using the experimental method. As a result, we can identify the determinants of behaviour more clearly than is possible through simply observing people in everyday life. The advantages of experimental control (i.e., our ability to manipulate factors to see how they influence behaviour) greatly outweigh any disadvantages of artificiality.

However, it is not always possible to use the experimental method fully. It can most easily be used when we want to study the effects of the *immediate situation* on behaviour (see Figure 1.1). However, our behaviour is also influenced by several other factors that cannot be manipulated. These factors influence recent events (e.g., row with partner), our physical health, our personality, childhood events, genetic factors, cultural expectations, and so on.

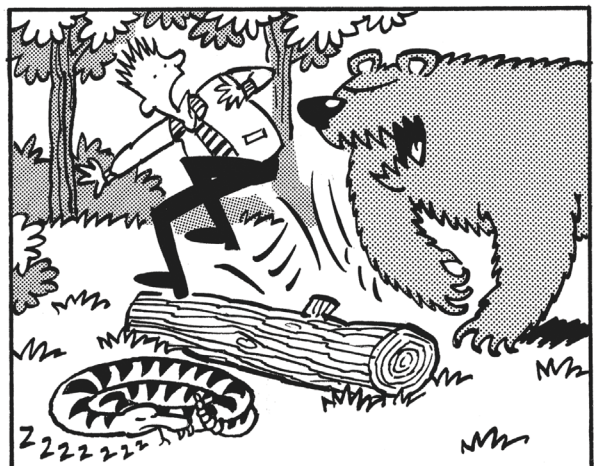


Figure 1.1

Fourth, common sense does not form a coherent set of assumptions about behaviour. Consider the commonsensical views contained in proverbs. Several pairs of proverbs express opposite meanings to each other. For example, “Absence makes the heart grow fonder” can be contrasted with, “Out of sight, out of mind”. Since common sense involves such incompatible views, it cannot be used as a sound basis for understanding human behaviour.

Below is a short quiz so you can see for yourself whether the findings in psychology are obvious (many items are based on those used by Furnham, 1988). For each item, decide whether it is true or false.

Psychology quiz	
1 Flashbulb memories (i.e., vivid memories of dramatic world events like 9/11) are exceptionally accurate and long-lived.	TRUE/FALSE
2 In making decisions, committees tend to be more conservative than individuals.	TRUE/FALSE
3 In small amounts, alcohol is a stimulant.	TRUE/FALSE
4 Physically attractive adults have better social skills and physical health than unattractive ones.	TRUE/FALSE
5 Very intelligent children tend to be less strong physically than those of average intelligence.	TRUE/FALSE
6 Patients with amnesia have very poor long-term memory but can still acquire many skills such as learning the piano.	TRUE/FALSE
7 People’s behaviour in most situations depends far more on their personality than the situation itself.	TRUE/FALSE
8 A schizophrenic is someone with a split personality.	TRUE/FALSE

The correct answer is “False” to most of the questions. However, the correct answer is “True” to questions 4 and 6. Unless you already know a lot about psychology, you probably had several wrong answers – thus, psychology is *not* simply common sense!

So far, I have mentioned only a few of the most popular misconceptions many people have about human behaviour. Many more are discussed by Lilienfeld et al. (2010) in their book, *50 great myths of popular psychology*. Here are some popular mistaken beliefs people have: most people use only 10% of their brain power; extra-sensory perception is a well-established scientific phenomenon; hypnosis is useful for retrieving memories of forgotten events; individuals commonly repress their memories of traumatic experiences; happiness is determined mostly by our external circumstances.

Hindsight bias

Since many findings in psychology do not correspond to common sense, why do so many people claim such findings are unsurprising or obvious? In other words, why do they argue, “I knew it all along.” The answer lies in **hindsight bias**. When you know some outcome (e.g., Trump becoming American President in 2017), you believe you regarded that outcome as more likely beforehand than was actually the case. Even warning people in advance about hindsight bias generally does not reduce it (Pohl & Hell, 1996).

What causes hindsight bias? There are various reasons. For example, Roese and Vohs (2012) argued that most people prefer order and predictability in their lives and hindsight bias satisfies those preferences. Hedden (2019) suggested hindsight bias is often not really a bias at all. He argued that it is typically adaptive to update our beliefs by taking account of new information. From that perspective, there is generally little point in remembering what you mistakenly used to believe.

Whatever the precise causes of hindsight bias, it is a problem for teachers of psychology. This is because it makes students somewhat unimpressed by many findings in psychology!

Findings: simple and complex

In spite of the existence of hindsight bias, I must admit some findings in psychology are actually obvious. For example, you will not be surprised to hear that practice has beneficial effects on long-term memory. However, this simple finding is uninformative about the relative benefits of different forms of practice (see below).

Suppose you need to remember material from a textbook for a test next week. Is it better to spend nearly all your time studying or to study the material but also spend some time testing yourself to see how much you can remember? In a study by Karpicke et al. (2009), 57% of students chose restudying and only 18% chose testing (the others chose other strategies). In fact, however, testing is typically superior to restudying in the laboratory and the classroom (Schwieren et al., 2017; see Chapter 25).

In sum, simple findings in psychology are often fairly obvious and predictable. However, that is rarely the case with more complex findings, which are generally hard for non-psychologists to predict or to explain.

Cross-cultural psychology

Planet Earth is home to over seven billion people living in a huge range of cultures and conditions. However, this richness and diversity is not reflected in psychological research (see Figure 1.2). The overwhelming majority of this research has been on people from Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) societies (Henrich et al., 2010). WEIRD societies account for only 12% of the world’s population. However, 96% of the participants in research published in leading psychology journals are from these societies (Arnett, 2008). Even several years later, in 2014, the participants in 94% of the research publications in a leading journal (*Psychological Science*) were drawn from Western countries (Rad et al., 2018).

KEY TERM

Hindsight bias:

the tendency to be wise after the event using the benefit of hindsight.



Figure 1.2

There are large differences in attitudes and behaviour across cultures (Henrich et al., 2010). As Westen (1996, p. 679) pointed out,

By twentieth century Western standards, nearly every human who has ever lived outside the contemporary West is lazy, passive, and lacking in industriousness. In contrast, by the standards of most cultures in human history, most Westerners are self-centred and frenetic.

As a result, it would be ill-advised to generalise from WEIRD cultures to the rest of mankind.

How do cultures differ?

There is an important distinction between individualistic and collectivistic cultures (Hofstede, 1980). **Individualistic cultures** emphasise independence, personal responsibility, and each person's uniqueness. In contrast, **collectivistic cultures** emphasise interdependence, sharing of responsibility, and group membership.

In spite of its popularity, the individualism–collectivism distinction has various limitations. First, the concepts of “individualism” and “collectivism” are very broad. As Fiske (2002a, p. 83) pointed out, “IND [individualism] amalgamates Thomas Paine, Vincent van Gogh, Mahatma Gandhi, Michael Jordan, Hugh Hefner, and Adolf Hitler into one category!”

Second, individualism and collectivism are not opposites of each other as was assumed by Hofstede (1980). Triandis et al. (1993) found individualism and collectivism were essentially independent of, or uncorrelated with, each other.

Third, what is true at the cultural level is not necessarily true at the level of individuals within that culture. Triandis et al. (2001) found only 60% of those living in individualistic cultures had individualistic beliefs, and only 60% of those in collectivistic cultures had collectivistic beliefs.

Fourth, other distinctions among cultures are also important. For example, Saucier et al. (2015) found that cultural differences in religious beliefs and practices were much greater than those in individualism–collectivism. These findings reflect the major role that religious beliefs play in individuals' treatment of other people and how they perceive themselves.

KEY TERMS

Culture: the values, beliefs, and practices shared by members of a given society.

Individualistic cultures: cultures (mainly in Western societies) in which the focus is on personal responsibility rather than group needs.

Collectivistic cultures: cultures (such as many in the Far East) in which the focus is on group solidarity rather than individual responsibility.

Miyamoto et al. (2018) proposed a major development of the notion of individualism–collectivism. They argued that those of high socio-economic status within any given culture have more freedom than those of low status to adopt whatever values they choose. In a large-scale study of 60 countries, high status was positively associated with self-orientation (individualism) within most cultures: this was because they have greater resources.

Overall, there was no relationship between socio-economic status and other-orientation (collectivism). However, high socio-economic status was associated with other-orientation in some countries traditionally regarded as collectivistic (e.g., Japan; China; South Korea). In contrast, it was negatively associated with other-orientation in some countries traditionally regarded as individualistic (e.g., USA; Australia; New Zealand).

What do these findings mean? First, we need to focus *separately* on individualism and collectivism. Second, the extent to which those within a given culture espouse individualistic and collectivistic values depends on the resources they have *and* on long-established cultural values.

Cultural influences: fixed or variable?

It is generally assumed that our culture has a fixed and constant impact on us. However, that assumption is incorrect. Cultural influences affect us most when we are in situations making culture-relevant information easily accessible. Brannon et al. (2015) presented African Americans with images related to American culture (e.g., classic American food) or African American culture (e.g., African American soul food). Images related to American culture produced self-interested behaviour whereas those related to African American produced more cooperative behaviour. Thus, cultural influences are flexible and context-dependent.

Conclusions

Since people's behaviour is strongly influenced by their culture, we must be cautious about assuming that findings obtained in American or European research are necessarily applicable elsewhere. It is also important not to assume that some cultures are superior to others (e.g., Western cultures are “developed” whereas non-Western ones are “undeveloped”) (see Figure 1.3). It is arguable that there is “a materially advanced but spiritually bankrupt culture in the West, a spiritually developed and relatively socially stagnant culture in the East, and a developed social consciousness, but relatively undeveloped material culture in Africa” (Owusu-Bempah & Howitt, 1994, p. 165).

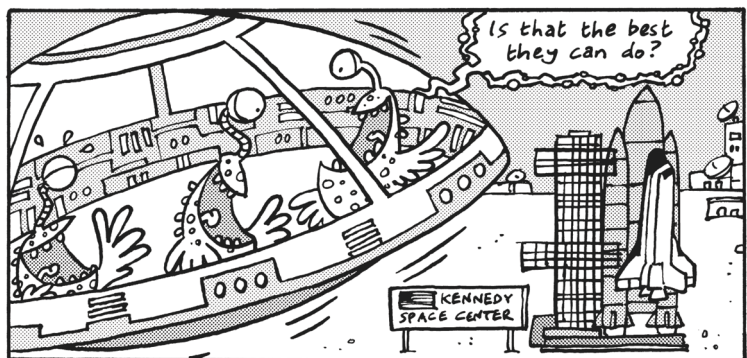


Figure 1.3