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# Soft Is Hard

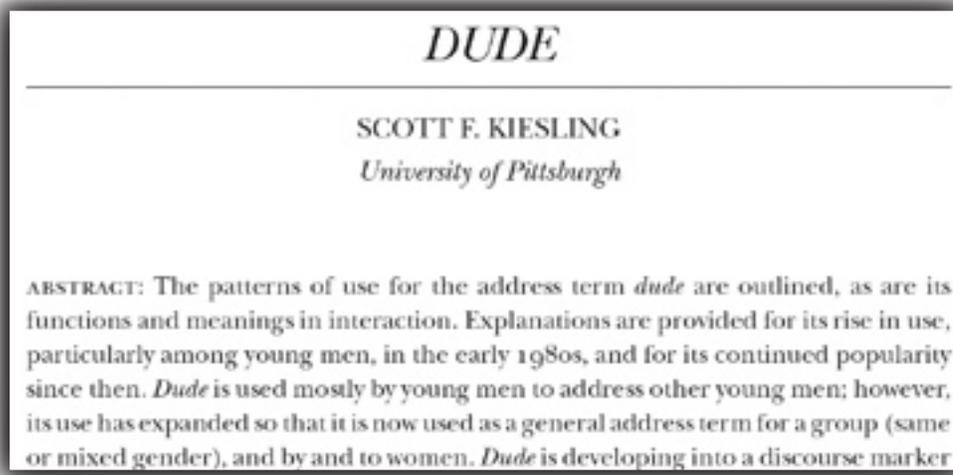
*Further evidence why the “soft” sciences are the hardest to do well*

*compiled by Alice Shirrell Kaswell, G. Neil Martin, and Bissell Mango*

## All About Dude

“Dude,” Scott F. Kiesling, *American Speech*, vol. 79, no. 3, Fall 2004, pp. 281-305. The author, who is at the University of Pittsburgh, reports that:

The patterns of use for the address term *dude* are outlined, as are its functions and meanings in interaction. Explanations are provided for its rise in use, particularly among young men, in the early 1980s, and for its continued popularity since then.



## To Describe Is to Forget

“The Misremembrance of Wines Past: Verbal and Perceptual Expertise Differentially Mediate Verbal Overshadowing of Taste Memory,” Joseph M. Melcher and Jonathan W. Schooler, *Journal of Memory and Language*, vol. 35, no. 2, April 1996, pp. 231-45. The authors, who are at the University of Pittsburgh, report that:

When participants generate a detailed, memory-based description of complex nonverbal stimuli (e.g., faces) their recognition performance can be worse than nondescribing controls. ... The present study explored this hypothesis by examining the impact of verbalization on the wine recognition of individuals of three categories of wine tasting expertise: Non-wine drinkers, untrained wine drinkers, and trained wine experts. Participants tasted a red wine, engaged in either verbalization or an unrelated verbal activity, and then attempted to identify the target wine

from among three foils. As predicted, only the untrained wine drinkers showed impaired wine recognition following verbalization. The results are explained in terms of the differential development of perceptual and verbal skills in the course of becoming an expert.

### The Misremembrance of Wines Past: Verbal and Perceptual Expertise Differentially Mediate Verbal Overshadowing of Taste Memory

JOSEPH M. MELCHER AND JONATHAN W. SCHOOLER  
*University of Pittsburgh*

When participants generate a detailed, memory-based description of complex nonverbal stimuli (e.g., faces) their recognition performance can be worse than nondescribing controls. This effect, termed verbal overshadowing, has been hypothesized to occur in situations in which domain-specific perceptual expertise exceeds verbal expertise. The present study explored this hypothesis

## Colour Goals

“Eye Colour and Reaction Time to Visual Stimuli in Rugby League Players,” M. Crowe and D. O’Connor, *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, vol. 93, no. 2, October 2001, pp. 455-60. The authors, who are at James Cook University, Townsville, Australia, report that:

In conclusion, there was no significant difference in reaction time to a visual stimulus or success in goal kicking between dark- and light-eyed Rugby League players.

## Unappreciated Incompetence

“Why People Fail to Recognize Their Own Incompetence,” David Dunning, Kerri Johnson, Joyce Ehrlinger and Justin Kruger, *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, vol. 12, no. 3, June 2003, pp. 83-7. (Thanks to Toby Sommer for bringing this to our attention.) Dunning and Kruger expand on their Ig Nobel Prize-winning work.



# Socially Scientific

*Notes on the intriguing behavior of human beings*

by Robin Abrahams

## The Face of Memory

Memory consists, among other things, of verbal information and of mental images. To illustrate this difference, I will often start a lecture on cognition by asking students to think of their home address. Then I ask them to think of how many windows are in their living room. Ostensibly, I do this to illustrate the different processes of recall and imagery. Really, though, it's just entertaining to watch 35 faces simultaneously go slack and 35 pairs of eyes roll back in their heads as they count the windows.

## God Is in the Details

Yogi brand Tea likes to feature inspirational sayings on the tags of their tea bags. A recent one urged the reader/drinker to “Repeat: Me and God, God and me are one.” Indeed. Presumably, you can tell which one God is because He has better grammar.

## Tips from Psychology

The great psychologist Alfred Adler was known for using the coffee shops of Vienna as an alternate workplace, much as writers and thinkers do today. Had the now-ubiquitous tip jar been invented in the late 19th century, he would have had an interesting conundrum to ponder. I am reliably informed by a barista of my acquaintance that most people do not contribute to the tip jar. However, there is one circumstance under which she is always given a tip: after she has made a mistake. Foam the perfect latte to order: the customer doesn't tip. Give the customer soy milk instead of cream, apologize profusely, and redo it: the customer tips at least a dollar. My barista friend swears this never fails. Surely Adler, who once wrote, “The chief danger in life is that you may take too many precautions,” would approve of her insight.

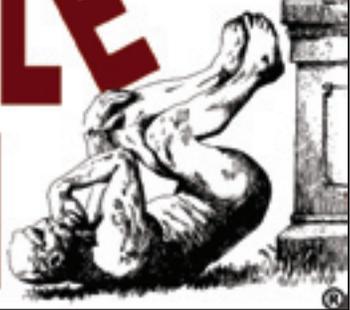
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