

Interactive comment on “Geoscience on television: a review of science communication literature in the context of geosciences” by R. Hut et al.

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I found the paper informative and well supported by evidence and its discussion insightful. I would recommend some minor textual revisions.

Very trivially, on p5 the phrase 'as it is the most important source to learn about science' might be better [hrased - I suggest something along the lines of 'as it is the main source of science information for the general public'. A little lower down (line 15) 'that is' could be removed with benefit to the elegance of the sentence. In line 17 'to inform them of what happened with their money' is OK but a little gauche. Suggest 'towards the taxpayers who have a right to know what has been done with their money'.

C1

Page 13, In 10: 'phenomena' should read 'phenomenon'.

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Here we come to the substantive issue of scientists' reluctance to 'speak outside their areas of expertise' - see line 13: 'outside their expertise'. I would suggest 'outside what they regard as their expertise' here, and indeed throughout. The difficulty scientists have in this area is that they define their areas of expertise over-minutely. In fact, as far as the public is concerned, a scientist's area of expertise is a lot broader than they (the scientists) would think, and the public would be correct. When journalists ask scientists to comment 'more broadly' they are asking for the opinion of someone who is vastly more qualified in (probably) ALL areas of 'science' than 99.9% of everyone watching/listening. The problem here is scientists' habit of only ever mixing with other scientists - it gives them a warped view of what expertise means in the real world. And it impinges on their reluctance to tread on the toes of others ('Oh, you should speak to Professor Dingbat on THAT topic, not me'). Professor Dingbat isn't there, and can't be found in time. You are there, and your opinion might not be up to Dingbat standards of authority but as near as makes no difference when seen from afar.

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I am not generally impressed by 'draw-a-scientist' experiments, as cited in line 22. When people are asked to 'draw a scientist' they interpret this to mean 'draw a caricature of a scientist', and they oblige. The question is interpreted as 'make a drawing I will recognise as representing a scientist'. Most people's graphic skills are not up to doing much else, anyway. If you ask anyone today to 'draw a railway train', most of them will draw a steam engine at the front, irrespective of whether they have ever actually seen one. Almost nobody in society ever knowingly meets 'a scientist' - they are too few. There are more members of Badminton Racquets Clubs in the UK than there are people with scientific qualifications, and yet most people do not know anyone who belongs to one. It is hardly surprising that stereotypes persist in this information

C2

vacuum.

The story about Dara O'Briain (and others) being asked to conform to stereotypes and refusing (ie refusing to don a white labcoat) is interesting, because I have an anecdote in this context of stereotyping and identification of 'who has the expertise'. A BBC geology TV series broadcast in the 1990s featured a team of presenters, led by a well known 'talent' who however had no special knowledge of geology. Among the subordinate presenters (each of whom did a segment or two linked by the talent) was a qualified geologist with extensive communications experience as a journalist. She also acted as (unpaid, unofficial) scientific script editor for the entire series.

However, when it came to taking the 'team photo' for Radio Times in front of the Old Man of Hoy, the photographer asked the female geologist to 'give the hammer' she was holding to the talent, standing centrally. This she resolutely refused to do, because she regarded herself as the only qualified geologist on the show, and the hammer was HER badge of office not to be usurped!

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