

UNCOMMON KNOWLEDGE

SURPRISING INSIGHTS FROM THE SOCIAL SCIENCES | BY KEVIN LEWIS



WESLEY BEDROSIAN FOR BOSTON GLOBE

Bullying, choosing a double major, and a mystery in the bathtub

YOU MIGHT THINK that MBA students at MIT can easily deduce how much water is in a bathtub, based on the flow of water in and out. But you'd be wrong! Said bathtub is just one example of a "system" with "stocks" (e.g., water level) and "flows." Other examples are greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, customers in a store, or money in your bank account. Researchers at MIT, Carnegie Mellon University, and George Mason University found that most of their students had trouble understanding even supposedly straightforward systems with one stock, one inflow, and one outflow. The researchers conclude that the poor performance reflects a fundamental flaw in how we think about accumulation.

Cronin, M. et al., "Why Don't Well-Educated Adults Understand Accumulation? A Challenge to Researchers, Educators, and Citizens," Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes (forthcoming).

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