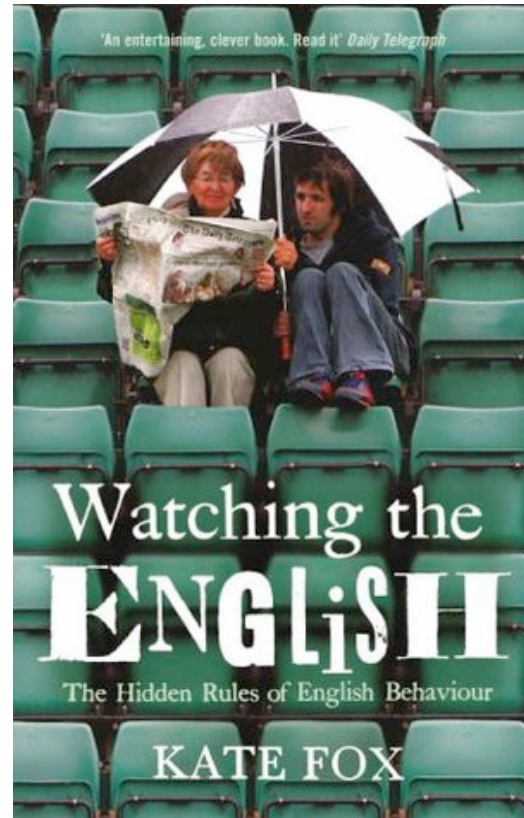


Defining Englishness



Kate Fox, *Watching the English*, 2004

The book is about the hidden rules of English behaviour; it was written by Kate Fox, an anthropologist who wanted to provide a 'grammar' of English behaviour. These rules do not necessarily have to be universally obeyed by everyone in English society: however, they are usual enough to help us understand and define the national character.

The method that the author follows throughout her research is known as 'participant observation', which means participating in the life and culture of the people one is studying, to gain an insider's perspective and, at the same time observing them as a detached, objective scientist.

Ten defining characteristics

Core

1. Social dis-ease

Reflexes

2. Humour

3. Moderation

4. Hypocrisy

Outlooks

5. Empiricism

6. Eeyorishness

7. Class-consciousness

Values

8. Fair play

9. Courtesy

10. Modesty

1. The core: social dis-ease

With the term 'social dis-ease', we refer to the English lack of ease, discomfort and inhibitions in the field of social interaction; their embarrassment, awkwardness, obliqueness, fear of intimacy and general inability to engage in a normal and straightforward fashion with other human beings.

When the English feel uncomfortable in social situations, they either become over-polite (**reserve**), or loud, violent and obnoxious (**hooliganism**). According to Fox, the English deal with this problem through the use of **facilitators** (games, pubs, clubs, weather speak, cyberspace, pets, alcohol...), but it is never entirely curable.

Reflexes

The automatic, unthinking ways of being/of doing things, “default modes”.

2. Humour

3. Moderation

4. Hypocrisy

2. Humour (*when in doubt, joke*)

For the English, humour is the most effective antidote to their social dis-ease. What is distinctive about English humour is its pervasiveness and supreme importance in English everyday life and culture. In other cultures, there is a place and time for humour: among the English it's **a constant**, a 'default mode'.

English humour also involves the taboo on earnestness, irony ('Typical!') and understatement ('Not bad' meaning brilliant).



3. Moderation (*we do everything in moderation, except moderation*)

It's the avoidance of extremes, excess and intensity of any kind. English penchant for order and tendency to compromise, focus on domesticity and security; moderate industriousness and moderate hedonism.

Phrases: 'For the sake of peace and quiet',
'A nice cup of tea'

4. Hypocrisy

The English are renowned for their hypocrisy, and most of their politeness/modesty/fairness is hypocritical, but most of their hypocrisy is a form of politeness: concealment of real opinions and feelings to avoid causing offence or embarrassment.

Phrases: on average, every other 'please', 'thank you', 'sorry', 'lovely' is hypocritical.

Outlooks

The English way of looking at and understanding things, their 'worldview'.

5. Empiricism

6. Eeyorishness

7. Class-consciousness

5. Empiricism

It includes the **anti-theory**, anti-abstraction elements of the English philosophical tradition and their preference for the factual, concrete and common sense, their down-to-earthness, **pragmatism**, realism, **distaste for artifice and pretension**.

Phrases: 'at the end of the day', as a matter of fact', 'in plain English'.

6. Eeyorishness

The English tendency to **incessant moaning**, the English **chronic** (but sunny) **pessimism**.



It's totally **ineffectual** (they never complain directly to the source of the discontent, but only to each other, and proposing practical solutions is forbidden by the moaning rules), but is socially **therapeutic** (a facilitator of social interaction and an opportunity for displays of wit).

Almost all social moaning is **humorous mock-moaning**: real, tearful despair is not allowed (except among intimates).

Phrases: the catchphrase 'Typical!', 'never mind', 'the country is going to the dogs', 'what did you expect?'

7. Class-consciousness

What is distinctive about the English class system is:

- a. the degree to which class (and class anxiety) determines their taste, behaviour, judgements and interactions;
- b. the fact that class is not judged at all on wealth, and very little on occupation, but purely on **non-economic indicators** such as speech, manner, taste and lifestyle choices;
- c. the acute sensitivity of their class-radar systems;
- d. their denial of all this and their squeamishness about class.

Phrases: ‘that sort of *background*’, ‘what do you expect from a jumped-up grocer’s daughter?’, ‘posh tart’, ‘green-wellie’, ‘Worcester woman’.



Green wellies



Values

The English ideals, moral standards and guiding principles.

8. Fair play

9. Courtesy

10. Modesty

8. Fair play

A quasi-religious obsession, it's not an egalitarian concept, but the idea that **everyone should be given a fair chance, providing they observe the rules and don't cheat.**

It's an underlying theme in most aspects of their unwritten etiquette, not just the games and sports: fair play has a central role also in queuing, round-buying, table manners, driving, flirting business, etc. English penchant for **compromise**, their tendency to **support the underdog**, and so on.

Phrases: 'to be fair', 'fair enough', 'on the one hand...on the other hand',

The Mirror, 6 June 2014

England 1-2 Italy: This was a defeat, but a defeat with honour and encouragement for Roy Hodgson's team

England fell short against Italy, but Roy Hodgson's young side should be praised for their brave and positive performance



There is such a thing as defeat with honour.

And there is defeat that brings encouragement.

England's defeat to Italy on Saturday night fitted both those categories.

This was far, far removed from the dispiriting, desperate, negative exit to Italy at Euro 2012.

9. Courtesy

The English are often admired for their courtesy and condemned for their reserve. The truth is that **their reserve IS a form of courtesy** (called 'negative politeness'): the English judge the others by themselves and assume that everyone shares their **obsessive need for privacy** – so they mind their own business and ignore them.

Phrases: 'sorry', 'please', 'thank you', 'I'm afraid that', 'Nice day, isn't it?', ...

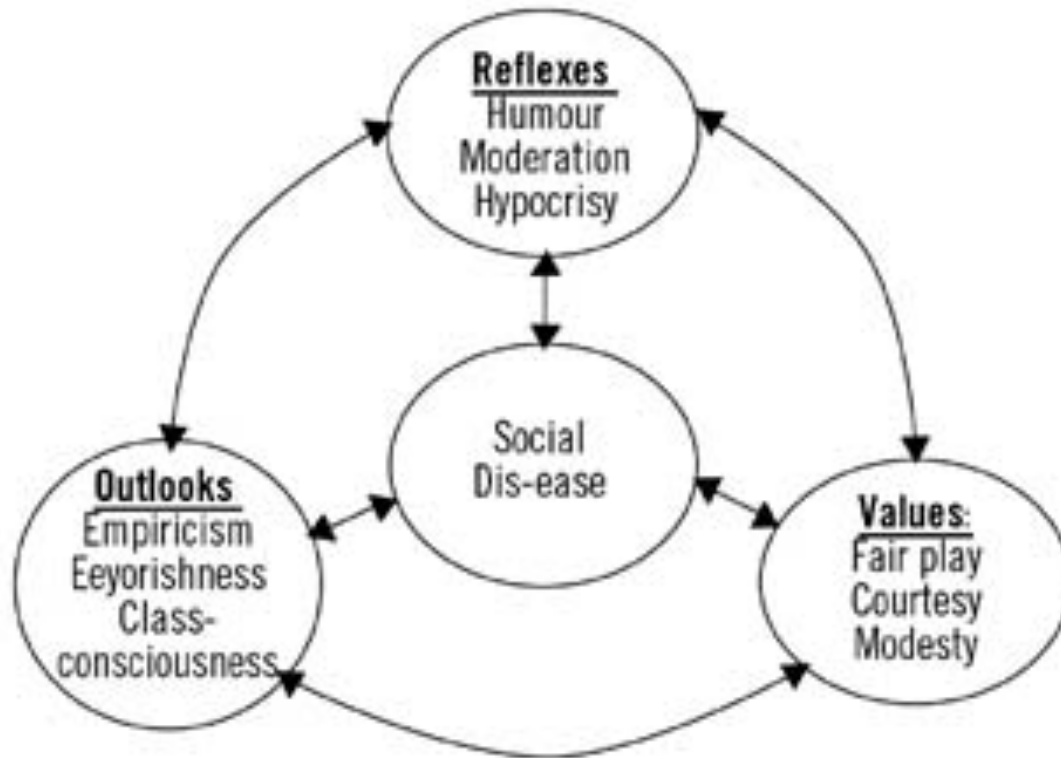
10. Modesty

The English are not more naturally modest than other nations, but they have strict rules about **the appearance of modesty**, including prohibitions on boasting and any form of self-importance, and rules prescribing **self-deprecation and self-mockery**.

The modesty that they actually display is often false or **ironic**: everyone knows that a self-deprecating statement probably means the opposite of what is said. English modesty is often **competitive** and is used to counterbalance arrogance.

Phrases: 'don't blow your own trumpet', 'don't be clever', 'I do a bit of sport' (meaning I've just won an Olympic medal').

Fox's diagram



The clusters are all linked to one another and with the central 'core'.

Englishness is a dynamic system

Causes

According to Fox, the social dis-ease is the central core of Englishness, but the causes of this dis-ease are difficult to identify.

English climate?

History?

Public schools?

Geography?

A mixture of several factors, including Britain's geographical features.

England is not just an island, but a relatively small, overcrowded island, and these conditions might have produced a reserved, inhibited privacy-obsessed people.