

## **NATIONAL NEWS: Scientists display little tolerance of maverick colleagues**

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The scientific community in Britain is much less willing to tolerate "maverick" colleagues than its counterpart in Sweden, according to a study at Cardiff University.

British researchers tend to exclude controversial colleagues to avoid giving them scientific legitimacy. Swedish scientists have a more inclusive attitude - letting everyone have a say - because this is less likely to make enemies who could threaten the community from outside.

The conclusions were based on interviews with more than 30 biologists and biochemists working on genetic modification in Britain and Sweden. There was a representative mixture of researchers in universities and industry.

"I was surprised to find such a strong difference between the two countries," said Lena Eriksson, the study leader at Cardiff School of Social Sciences. "More narrowly confined boundaries [as in Britain] increase the likelihood of scientific controversies moving into the public domain, as the ousted scientists are forced to seek new audiences for their claims.

"A Swedish 'big tent' strategy, in which room is made for marginal views, could potentially serve to diminish the risk of all-out battles between scientists in the full glare of mass media," she said. "The difference, put in President [Lyndon B] Johnson's terms, would be that of standing inside the tent and pissing out, or outside the tent and pissing in."

The study, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, showed that British scientists tended to see controversies as "events" caused by dissenters lurking within the community and waiting to cause trouble; as soon as they were identified, they should be isolated to remove scientific legitimacy from their claims. Swedes saw controversies as a process - and fully-fledged "mavericks" as the dangerous result of a gradual ousting of scientists who ended up attacking a community that had rejected them.

Examples of mavericks include Arpad Pusztai, who was suspended from his post at the Rowett Research Institute in Aberdeen and banned from talking to the media after his preliminary results showed that a type of genetically modified potato harmed rats' immune systems; and Andrew Wakefield, who was asked to leave the Royal Free Hospital in London after claiming a possible link between autism and the vaccine for measles, mumps and rubella.