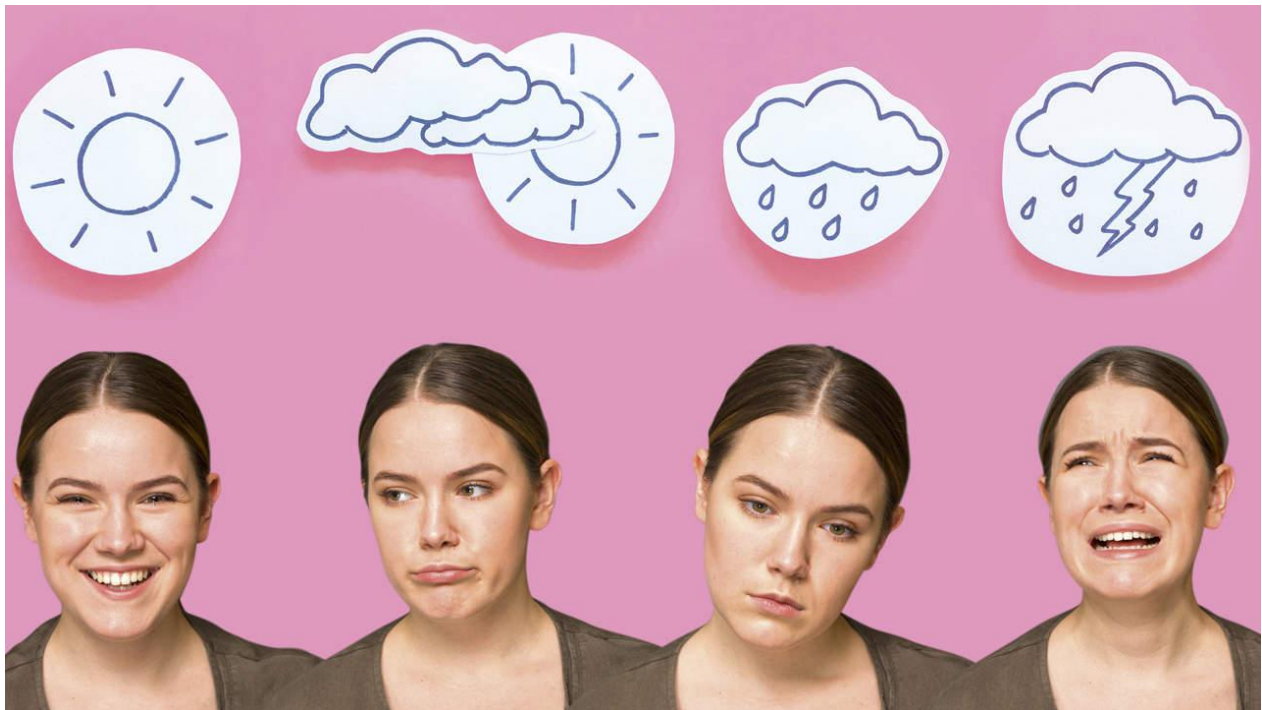


# Mood and Climate: The Psychology of Weather [C1]

Il nostro stato d'animo cambia in modo evidente a seconda della stagione dell'anno nella quale ci troviamo. Non si tratta di una coincidenza, ma di una scienza: il clima che ci circonda influenza ogni tipo di decisione che prendiamo e ogni nostro sentimento. Ne parliamo con un esperto.



Most people would agree that the weather can affect our [mood](#) and even our [behaviour](#). After weeks of rain, a sunny day can feel [uplifting](#), while a return of dark clouds can bring on [gloom](#) and even depression. [Yet](#) while reactions to weather are generic, individual responses can vary greatly; so much so, that it is difficult [to draw](#) any firm conclusions about the weather's influence on human psychology.

## [AWESTRUCK](#)

One person who has made a [concerted](#) effort to do so is Trevor Harley, Emeritus Professor of Psychology at the University of Dundee in Scotland. Harley has combined his twin passions of psychology and the weather by becoming one of the world's few psychometeorologists. Harley's fascination

with the weather began in his youth. [Among](#) his earliest childhood memories are experiencing a violent [thunderstorm](#), and of feeling awe [struck](#) by the transformation a heavy [snowfall](#) made to the world. He has been monitoring the weather around his home in Dundee (Scotland) for twenty-seven years. Given, he says, that “climate is what you expect to get and weather is what you actually get”, he believes that to [gauge](#) the climate you need a thirty-year weather [sample](#). In recent years, he says, he has recorded higher temperatures, heavier [rainfall](#) and an increase in extreme weather events.

## PHYSIOLOGICAL EFFECTS

In 2018 Harley published the book *The Psychology of Weather*, an exploration of how the weather we experience can influence everything, from what we buy to the way we think about life and death. To find out more, Speak Up contacted Harley. We began by asking him [to what extent](#) we are [at the mercy](#) of the elements. \*\*Trevor Harley (English accent): \*\*The weather affects us in many ways, both physiologically and psychologically. I think the physiological ones are obvious: when it gets too hot, people suffer from [heat stroke](#), [heat stress](#). We had a heatwave this summer in the UK, and the death [rate climbed](#) quite dramatically. Similarly, obviously, in cold winters, snow — people suffer from hypothermia. They can’t afford [heating](#) in particular. They tend to fall and [slip](#) on ice and break [limbs](#). But it is the psychological effects I’m most interested in. And virtually every type of weather has a particular psychological characteristic, corresponding thing that goes with it.

## FUN IN THE SUN

So, are people usually happier when the sun [shines](#)? **Trevor Harley:** When it’s sunny, we tend to be in a better [mood](#). Now, that isn’t always the case, because, believe it or not, there are a significant proportion of people who actually don’t like the sunshine. It’s hard to believe but it’s true. But sunshine is good for us: it [raises](#) our [mood](#); it has an effect on the chemical serotonin, which is a neurotransmitter in the brain and the drug which is affected by

the SSRI anti-depressants. Sunshine also stimulates the pineal gland, which is a small gland at the base of the brain, which produces a hormone called melatonin. Melatonin is involved in regulating our [sleep-wake cycle](#). When that goes wrong, as it does with [seasonal affective disorder](#), it affects our [mood](#), people become [prone](#) to depression. And that's why [lack](#) of sunshine in winter can cause quite severe depression. I'm a bit [prone](#) to it myself. So sunshine has all sorts of effects. It even [lowers](#) blood pressure. It's a good thing. It stimulates vitamin D production, which affects the immune system, and also affects [mood](#). Of course there is the [caveat](#) that sunshine obviously increases the possibility of skin cancer. But, if people are careful — just use common sense, [avoid](#) going out in the sun when it's extremely hot or high in the sky — sunshine in the right amount is pretty essential.

## TOO HOT TO HANDLE

However, heat such as that which [struck](#) Britain last summer can affect us negatively, says Harley. \*\*Trevor Harley: \*\*Heat affects us in various ways too. It increases the probability of people being violent. If you look at the distribution of [riots](#) across the world, they tend to happen on hot summer nights. There are lots of possible reasons. Obviously when it's hot, people tend to drink more alcohol, but [lab](#) experiments have shown that just increasing the temperature makes us angrier. So hot weather tends to make people angry and that leads to rioting. And also the [rate](#) of violent crime goes up. The hotter it is, the more likely violent crimes such as murder, robbery, [rape](#), assault... that [rate](#) increases, too. However, once it gets to a certain point, it can be too hot, and essentially then people are just too hot to be able to do anything. They just sit around, [sweating](#) and [complaining](#).

## CLIMATE AND CHARACTER

The British are famous for obsessing about the weather. We asked Harley if climate can influence the personality of the people living in a country. **Trevor Harley:** In terms of national characteristics there has been some research looking at how climate affects personality, and it is really what you would expect from popular [belief](#): the idea of people being more [hot-blooded](#) as

you approach the equator. Well, as I said earlier, the hotter it is, the angrier people get, more passionate, more romantic. Whereas the nearer we get to the poles, the more [staid](#), reserved they tend to be. Now Britain tends towards the reserved, quiet personality type. And I think that is in part [due to](#) the weather.

## HISTORIC IMPACT

Not only can the weather [shape](#) our personality, it can also affect the economic development of a country. **Trevor Harley:** I think also the weather here has had a big effect on history because it's [wet](#), and that [gave rise](#) to plenty of water and that [enabled](#) the Industrial Revolution, with [waterpower](#), [water mills](#) and so on, ready access to water for [smelting](#)... So I think it's had a big effect on our national psyche, but also on our history.

## BLOWN AWAY

Harley is not a fan of strong wind. He does, however, have an interesting theory as to why people in the past might have appreciated it. **Trevor Harley:** Wind is actually my least favourite sort of weather, and when I'm out walking Beau, my dog, I can [bear](#) most things — heavy rain I don't care, but wind I really dislike. It is true that there are circumstances in which people welcome a bit of wind — a [sea breeze](#), if it's very hot. But that doesn't happen very often. Wind used also to have the advantage of [lifting fog](#). And in particular in Britain in the forties and fifties was very [prone](#) to smog in big cities, a combination of smoke and [fog](#). And that happened when there were big areas of high pressure over us without much wind. The wind would lift it and [clear](#) the smog. So my mother liked a good breeze, "a good blow", as she said, because she thought it was good for the [lungs](#). But now, we don't get smog since the Clean Air Act, and I think that most people aren't that [keen](#) on it any more. Generally now we have more extreme weather events, people are a bit more worried about weather [disruption](#) and what severe storms can do to infrastructure. [www.trevorharley.com](http://www.trevorharley.com) Everyday Dialogues: Talking About the Weather

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# Glossary

- **caveat** = avvertenza
- **belief** = credenza
- **waterpower** = idroelettrico
- **fog** = nebbia
- **lungs** = polmoni
- **smelting** = fondere
- **disruption** = perturbazione
- **to draw** = estrarre
- **at the mercy** = alla mercé
- **slip** = scivolare
- **sleep-wake cycle** = ciclo circadiano
- **shape** = dare forma
- **limbs** = arti (braccia o gambe)
- **sea breeze** = brezza marina
- **gauge** = valutare
- **lab** = laboratorio
- **due to** = dovuto a
- **enabled** = permettere
- **behaviour** = comportamento
- **to what extent** = fino a che punto
- **bear** = sopportare
- **Among** = tra
- **snowfall** = nevicata
- **rape** = violazione
- **keen** = entusiasta
- **prone** = incline
- **sweating** = sudare
- **seasonal affective disorder** = disturbo affettivo stagionale
- **lack** = mancanza
- **struck** = colpire
- **concerted** = organizzato
- **awestruck** = stordito
- **heating** = riscaldamento

- **lowers** = ridurre
- **riots** = disturbi
- **sample** = campione
- **rainfall** = precipitazione
- **heat stroke** = colpo di calore
- **gave rise** = dare luogo a
- **clear** = schiarire
- **avoid** = evitare
- **lifting** = alzare
- **mood** = stato d'animo
- **staid** = formale
- **gloom** = tristezza, malinconia
- **hot-blooded** = passionale
- **shines** = brillare
- **raises** = elevare, incoraggiare
- **uplifting** = edificante
- **Yet** = comunque
- **thunderstorm** = temporale
- **heat stress** = stress da calore
- **rate** = indice
- **climbed** = elevarsi
- **complaining** = lamentarsi
- **wet** = umido
- **water mills** = mulini di acqua