

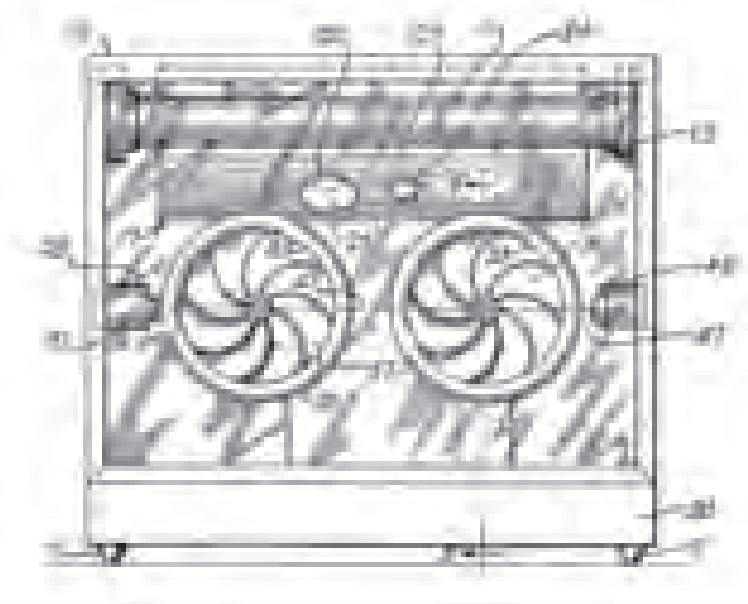
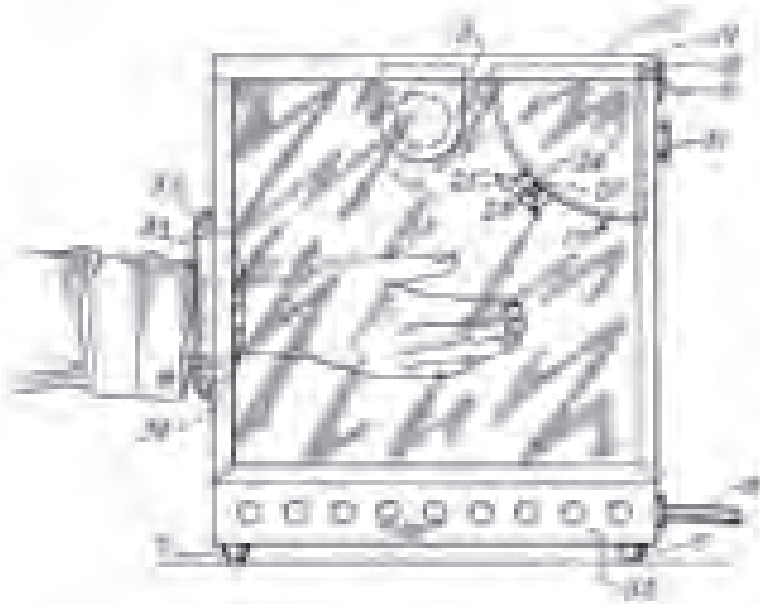
SPECIAL ISSUE

ANNALS OF

IMPROBABLE
RESEARCH



ORGY & HANDWASHING



How to Cater a Roman Orgy,
The Dirt on Handwashing,
Toilets: Where Do You Stand?

MAY | JUNE 2010 (volume 16, number 3) \$6.50 US | \$9.50 CAN



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*"When all other contingencies fail,
whatever remains, however improbable,
must be the truth."—Sherlock Holmes*

*"Science is the belief in the ignorance
of experts."—Richard Feynman*

Ptak: Tea Tasting in Mincing Lane

by John F. Ptak

Ptak Science Books

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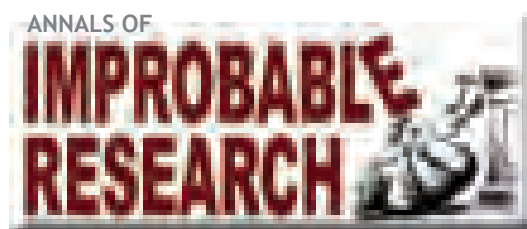
This photograph shows a moment in the history of tea tasting in Mincing Lane, the heart of London's tea trading industry. Note the row of cups, the size of the spittoon, and the slightly dirty and occasionally chipped cups.





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The features marked with a star (*) are based entirely on material taken straight from standard research (and other Official and Therefore Always Correct) literature. Many of the other articles are genuine, too, but we don't know which ones.



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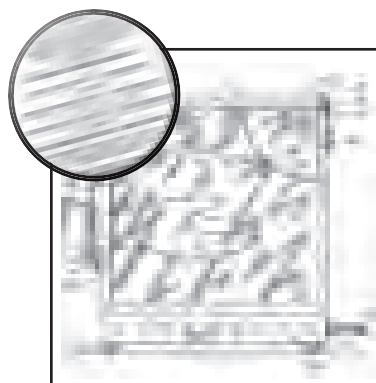
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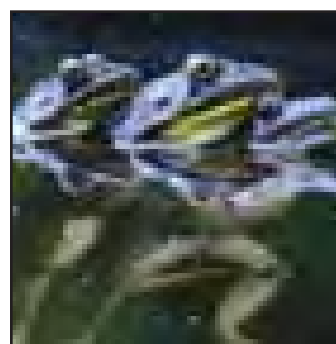
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On the Front Cover

A round, tiny chunk of a recipe for one sliver of an orgy (see page 7), and a boxy invention for handwashing (see page 8).



On the Back Cover

Three green frogs (two resident males in a small pond, and a visiting female) in apparent collective anaplexus, which lasted uninterrupted for a number of hours. Photo: Robert and Monika Wood, Roseland, Virginia.

Coming Events

- September 30, 2010 Ig Nobel Prize Ceremony
- October 2, 2010 Ig Informal Lectures

See WWW.IMPROBABLE.COM for details of these and other events.

Every Day

Read something new and improbable every day on the Improbable Research blog, on our web site: WWW.IMPROBABLE.COM



AIR Vents

Exhalations from our readers

NOTE: The opinions expressed here represent the opinions of the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinions of those who hold other opinions.

A Few of My Favorite Things

My favorite number is 29, and my second-favorite is 421101.

*Avery Le Queux
Bristol, England*

Least Favorite Author

Would you please stop publishing letters from members of the Le Queux family. They are all relatives of the idiot hack spy novelist William Le Queux, whose execrable scribblings inflamed the emotions of several generations of juvenile British spy enthusiasts. In case you are not familiar with the gentleman: William Le Queux was a majestically unskilled writer. He saw spies in the

woodwork, and wrote about them obsessively in lurid adventure books that became best sellers and that apparently inspired the British to form their now-famous spy agencies. The novels are worth reading to see that you could, at that time, at least if you were William Le Queux, make a good living by writing books where people repeated themselves over and over again and disjointed things happened to eminent personages. The British took these things as warnings. Yikes.

Here is a drawing my British great-grandmother made of William Le Queux. She did it to taunt her brothers, who believed in the “accurate reportings” of their favorite author. Two of those brothers grew up to become British “intelligence” agents. Each lived a long, happy life as a respected professional idiot.

*Trina Boll, Ph.D.
Perth, Australia*



Puzzle of the Disgruntled Children Solved?



Jin Park is mistaken—and I will tell you why. Park asked (*AIR Vents* 16:2) “Can anyone help me identify the disgruntled children in this photograph?”, giving a set of possible clues supplied long ago by one of his professors. Supposedly “three (3) of the children grew up to be famous scientists, one (1) grew up to be a famous international financier and criminal, two (2) are female, two (2) are male, one (1) famously loathed wearing shoes, two (2) were involved with theories about quarks, all (4) excelled at mathematics, and one was involved in a famous quarrel in Paris.”

Jin speculates that “at least one of the children is in distress and has to evacuate its bowels soon.” I can see why he might think that.

But the answer is staring us in the face—or rather, it is not. The child on the chair is missing its legs. No wonder that child is unhappy. The other children must be aware that that child is missing his legs. No wonder they are unhappy. Who took the legs? Will that thief return them? This, I suggest to you, is the real puzzle. I suspect Photoshop did it.

*Jerry Shejavali, Ph.D.
Goanikontes, Namibia*



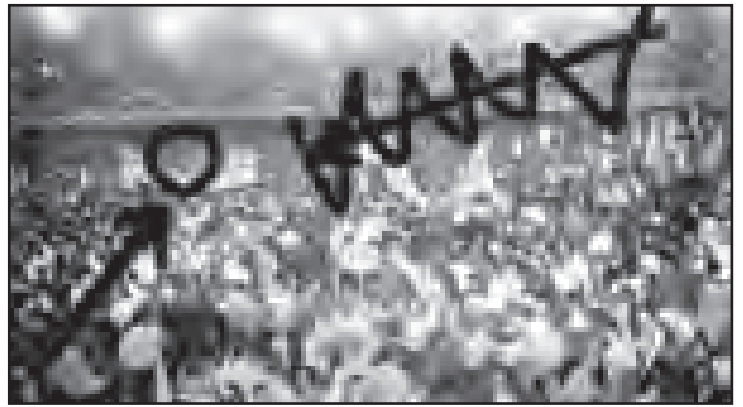
Opposes Man Who Opposes Danish Woman

Unlike Gerard Heffernon Graves (*AIR Vents* 16:2) and the others who “wish to go on record as opposing the views and sentiments”, etc., etc. “who work with Danish women who have and show off preserved whale penises”, I have no dog in the fight about whether you should “Please stop publishing and republishing that photograph of the Danish woman showing off her preserved whale penis to those men.” But like them I do “enjoy studying the delicate interplay of emotions evident in

the faces of the various individuals in the photograph, especially the different ways in which they seem impressed by the preserved whale’s penis.” And so I have spent two weeks visiting Copenhagen seeking to meet the individuals in the photograph.

I am sorry to say that I did not succeed. I did meet a man who strongly resembles the man in the middle of the photograph. But it was not the same man, an this new one had no strong interest in dried whale penises. I scoured many of the shops in downtown Copenhagen inquiring for dried whale penises, hoping that that would lead me to the right people. No success so far. I will return to Copenhagen next year and continue my search.

*Dr. Margaret Holm Larssen
Lycksele, Sweden*



Mel at a Convention

I must confess making a mistake in the specifics of how I identified the probable location of Mel, the little man who always appears in your pages, in the photograph which I sent you and which you published (*AIR Vents* 16:2) and which my uncle came into possession of shortly after the world war in the 1940s. I had drawn the customary arrow to indicate his location in the image. I still hope that your readers can help me identify the date and location of this event which I believe to be a convention or meeting of a scientific organization or perhaps of a political party, or maybe of some railroad employees.

I was also mistaken in wondering if the man in the middle is making a rabbit imitation with his fingers, as it is now clear to me that whatever he is imitating it is not a rabbit.

My new indicative marking indicates the location of the man I believe, for a variety of good reasons bolstered by a variety of slight reasons, to be Mel.

*Dr. Vreeland Heiss
Hamburg, Germany*

What’s New on Improbable TV

Check out the latest episode on Improbable Research TV. Then watch them all!

WHAT: Three-minute videos about research that makes people laugh, then think.

WHERE: On the web, at www.improbable.com and elsewhere.



Improbable Research Review

Improbable theories, experiments, and conclusions

compiled by Dirk Manley, Improbable Research staff

Chinese Jumpy About Eggs

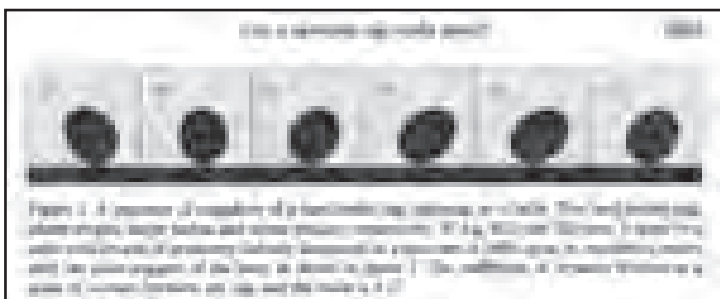
“Egg Phobia in Retirement Homes: Health Risk Perceptions Among Elderly Chinese,” C.Y. Lew-Ting, *Culture Medicine and Psychiatry*, March 1997, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 27–51. The author, who is at National Taiwan University, reports that:

Cholesterol has become a commonly-discussed issue in the daily lives of the 203 residents interviewed, and many of them were found to be preoccupied with the risk involved in excess consumption (especially of egg yolks).

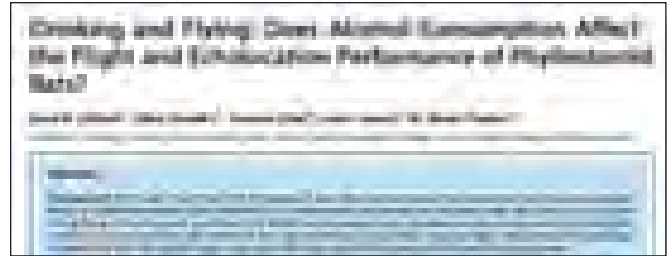
Jumpy Japanese Eggs

“Can a Spinning Egg Really Jump?”, T. Mitsui, K. Aihara, C. Terayama, H. Kobayashi, and Y. Shimomura, *Proceedings—Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences*, October 8, 2006, vol. 462, no. 2074, pp. 2897–2905. (Thanks to Michael Friedlander for bringing this to our attention.) The authors report that:

Simultaneous three-way observation of optical, acoustic and electric properties demonstrates a theoretical prediction that a spinning prolate spheroid can spontaneously lose contact with the table in the course of its rising motion when the contact friction is weak and the spin is large enough.... The measurements show good agreements with numerical simulations. It is also visually shown that a spinning hard-boiled egg can jump.



Detail from the Mitsui/Aihara/Terayama/Kobayashi/Shimomura spinning egg study.



When Bats Guzzle and Fly

“Drinking and Flying: Does Alcohol Consumption Affect the Flight and Echolocation Performance of Phyllostomid Bats?” Dara N. Orbach, Nina Veselka, Yvonne Dzal, Louis Lazure, and M. Brock Fenton, *PLoS 1*, vol. 5, no. 2, February 2010, p. e8993. (Thanks to investigator Jens Hansen for bringing this to our attention.) The authors, at the University of Western Ontario and at the University of Regina, Canada, report:

In the wild, frugivorous and nectarivorous bats often eat fermenting fruits and nectar, and thus may consume levels of ethanol that could induce inebriation.... We predicted that bats fed ethanol would show impaired flight and echolocation behaviour compared to bats fed control sugar water, and that there would be behavioural differences among species.

We fed wild caught *Artibeus jamaicensis*, *A. lituratus*, *A. phaeotis*, *Carollia sowelli*, *Glossophaga soricina*, and *Sturnira lilium* (Chiroptera, Phyllostomidae) sugar water (44 g of table sugar in 500 ml of water) or sugar water with ethanol before challenging them to fly through an obstacle course while we simultaneously recorded their echolocation calls. We used bat saliva, a non-invasive proxy, to measure blood ethanol concentrations ranging from 0 to .0.3% immediately before flight trials. Flight performance and echolocation behaviour were not significantly affected by consumption of ethanol, but species differed in their blood alcohol concentrations after consuming it.



We welcome your suggestions for this and other columns. Please enclose the full citation (no abbreviations!) and, if possible, a copy of the paper.

Improbable Medical Review

Improbable diagnoses, techniques, and research

compiled by Bertha Vanatian, Improbable Research staff



Matrimonial Cheese Ailment

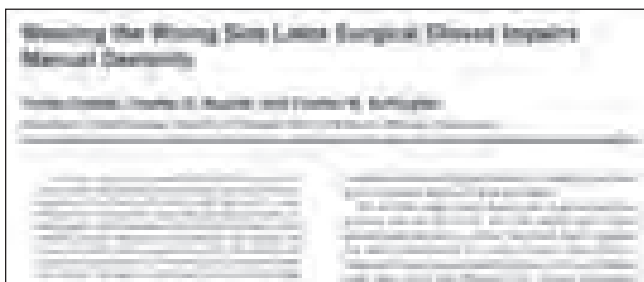
“Lumbar Pain in a Married Couple Who Likes Cheese: Brucella Strikes Again!” G. Taliani, A. Bartoloni, A. Tozzi, F. Bartalesi, G. Corti, and F. Paradisi, *Clinical and Experimental Rheumatology*, vol. 22, no. 4, July–August 2004, pp. 477–80. The authors, at the University of Florence, Italy, report:

A 69-year-old man living in Florence reported fever and acute lumbar pain one month after transurethral resection of a superficial transitional cell carcinoma of the bladder.... After 2 months the patient’s wife presented with fever and lumbar pain, and brucellar spondylitis was diagnosed as well. An extensive epidemiological examination revealed that 8 months earlier the family had eaten unpasteurized goat cheese and serological examination of the entire family showed that 3 out of 4 members had significant titres of brucellar antibodies.

Wrong Size Surgical Gloves: Consequences

“Wearing the Wrong Size Latex Surgical Gloves Impairs Manual Dexterity,” Tomas Drabek, Charles D. Boucek, and Charles W. Buffington, *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Hygiene*, vol. 7, no. 3, March 2010, pp. 152–5, DOI 10.1080/15459620903481660. (Thanks to Tom Gill for bringing this to our attention.) The authors, at University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, report:

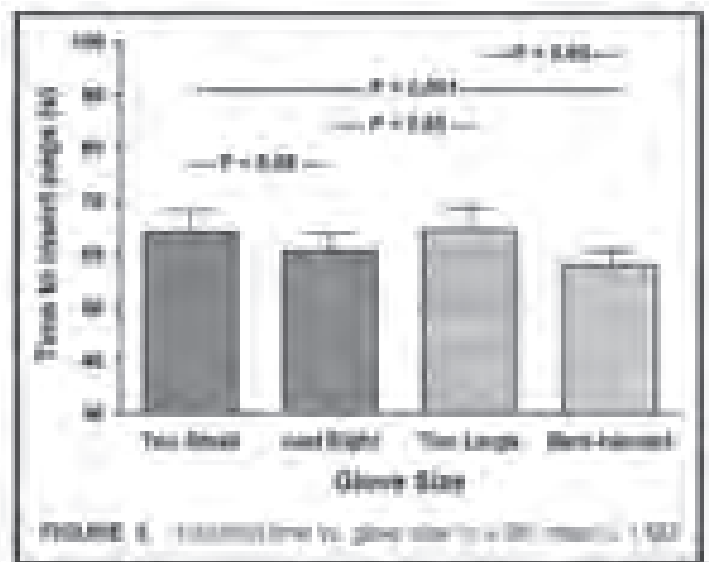
We tested the hypothesis that wearing the wrong size gloves impairs manual dexterity.... The subjects reported that the too-small gloves limited hand motion or hurt their hands, whereas the too-large gloves were clumsy but comfortable. Health care workers should wear gloves that fit properly when doing tasks that require manual dexterity. If the preferred size is unavailable, wearing gloves that are too large seems the best alternative.



Spinning Suspected in Dizzy Discus Throwers

“Dizziness in Discus Throwers is Related to Motion Sickness Generated While Spinning,” P. Perrin, C. Perrot, D. Deviterne, B. Ragaru, and H. Kingma, *Acta Otolaryngologica*, vol. 120, no. 3, March 2000, pp. 390–5. (Thanks to Ellen Josephs for bringing this to our attention.) The authors, at University Hospital, Nancy, France, explain:

Discus throwers sometimes report dizziness, a condition never experienced by hammer throwers. We investigated whether this susceptibility was related to the sensitivity of the thrower or to the type of throwing achieved.... Video analysis evidenced that during hammer throwing, visual bearings can be used more easily than during discus throwing. Moreover, there is a loss of plantar afferents and generation of head movements liable to induce motion sickness, such as Coriolis acceleration.



Detail from the Drabek/Boucek/Buffington glove study.

< The Drabek/Boucek/Buffington glove study.



How to Cater a Roman Orgy

By Corky White

Professor of Anthropology

Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts, USA

As a very young caterer in the late 1970s, I learned lessons the hard way every day. I catered for people who knew their food, and so I tried to make things I hoped they'd not yet had, to avoid comparison. Cooking off their grid and mine often meant making dishes for the first time. I took on every challenge knowing I would inevitably curdle or burn or undercook. But taking on a Roman orgy was a whole different kettle of fermented anchovy sauce.

A Harvard University professor, who will remain nameless, asked me to cater a Roman dinner, hereafter known as the Orgy. Considering the money (and not, in my innocence, the potential for blackmail), I took the job. I went to the lowest level—of Harvard's Widener Library—and found Apicius (see page 7) and other texts giving clues to the foods of the Roman Empire.

Translations to 1970s Cambridge weren't always easy. Stuffed larks? No problem: frozen quail, stuffed with a parmesan herb stuffing. Anchovies in oil with herbs came straight from Boston's Little Italy. Nightingales' tongues? Nowhere in our most exotic butchery were there packets of these. The smallest tongues I could find were from calves. I thought, what would a nightingale's tongue resemble... little, slippery, wormy...snails! Periwinkles from Chinatown!

With a hatpin, I plucked each of the little buggers out of their chambers and stir-fried them with garlic and green herbs. A nightingale sang in Harvard Square, or might have, except I had its tongue.

With no orgy cookbook in front of me, I had to use my imagination. Honey cakes seemed to epitomize the evening, and I made them in buttocky shapes drenched in a nut-honey mixture.

I had thought about what to wear as costume, and summoning up dignity, decided to dress as a caterer in my long black apron. I carried the boxes of delicacies through the Doric columns of the host's Victorian Cambridge home. The neighborhood brings together quite different styles: Olde Englede Colonial and New England clapboard, both decorous to a fault, making the fantasy of an orgy all the more titillating. The house had been swept free of furniture, the floors laid with oriental carpets and strewn with pillows. Incense wafted from standing brass braziers in which little electric bulbs were hidden. I took the food into the kitchen. Our host said, "Oh, just leave directions for the servers," and I swore inwardly: surely you'll let me just watch? At that point, the doorbell rang, and I opened the door on a pair of perfectly matched and fetchingly attired

Above: The house in which the alleged orgy ostensibly occurred. Drawing by Nan Swift, Improbable Research staff.

male undergraduates, wearing tiny chitons that barely covered their toned bodies in draped cloth. They even sported *Demetrius and the Gladiator* sandals, trussed up the legs.

There was a guest list near the door and I caught a peek: they were all male faculty whose names I recognized from the Classics and English departments. I left soon afterwards with instructions to return by noon the next day to pick up my dishes. (Noon? What low expectations he had! Surely orgies go on for days!)

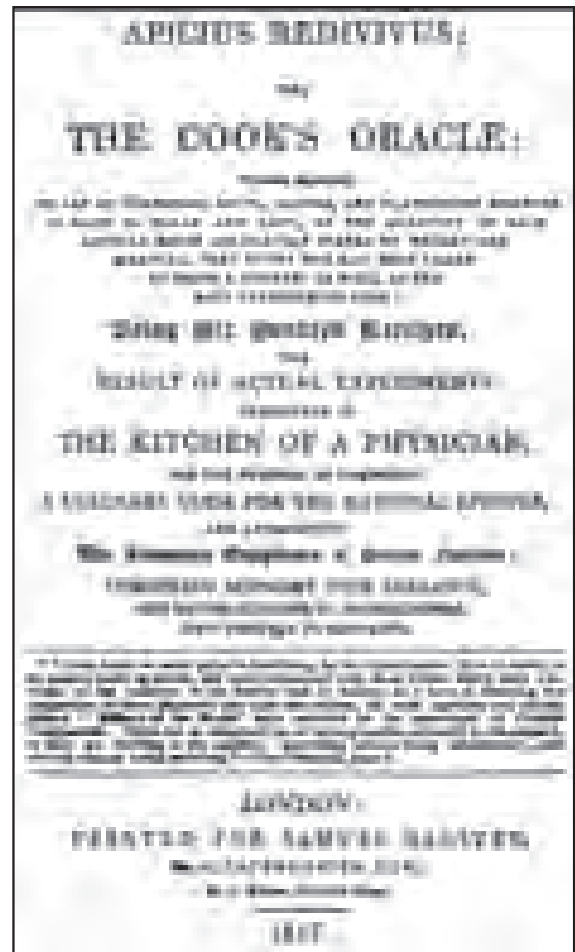
I came back at about 11 the following day, a tad early, expecting (or hoping) to find the floor littered with sated or expired bodies, spilled wine and pieces of clothing. It was disappointingly empty and clean, and our host, clad in monastic old-school pajamas and robe, had a bowl of Cheerios breakfast cereal in his hand.

Was the orgy a bust? Perhaps Cambridge was not ready for deeply researched classical debauchery. Perhaps I neglected to add some crucial ingredient to the nightingales' tongues. Come on, are Cheerios the tail of the dog in the Playboy Penthouse? Well, there's no meal you can't learn something from. Next time I'll leave out the saltpeter.

A Note About Apicius

De re Coquinaria (On the Subject of Cooking) is a Roman cook-book from the late 4th or early 5th century C.E. The author is unknown, though the word "Apicius" which appears to be a made-up name, is associated with the text. The word "Apicius" has come to be associated with a decadent passion for food.

An 1817 edition of the source of the recipes. >



Recipe for Honeycakes

Syrup:

2 cups cane sugar, melted slowly in heavy pot with ½ cup water. Allow to come to a simmer, stir to dissolve all sugar, and simmer for five minutes. Take off flame and add ½ cup honey and 1 tsp rosewater. Add 1 cup roasted pistachios when the syrup has cooled. Set aside.

Cakes:

1 cup butter	1 tsp baking powder
¾ cup sugar	½ tsp ground cardamom
½ tsp baking soda	4 cups flour
½ cup light olive oil	1 egg white, beaten lightly
½ cup milk	cinnamon sugar for dusting

Cream butter and sugar until fluffy. Add olive oil and milk mixed with baking soda, gradually. Add baking powder, cardamom and flour. Shape into small balls. Brush egg white on one side of a ball and "glue" it to another, pressing them slightly to achieve "buttock" effect. Place on cookie sheet two inches apart. Bake at 350 degrees for about twenty minutes until slightly browned. Blush them with cinnamon sugar. Cool; serve dosed with syrup and pistachios. Eat messily and lick each other's fingers.



Hand Sanitizing: Another Look

by John Trinkaus, Baruch College, City University of New York

John Trinkaus was awarded the 2003 Ig Nobel Prize in literature for meticulously collecting data and publishing more than 80 detailed academic reports about things that annoyed him.

This new study is the second in a series Professor Trinkaus is publishing in the Annals of Improbable Research. The first, "Hand Sanitizing: An Informal Look," appeared in AIR 15:6.

Background: The First Study

An informal inquiry was conducted in the summer of 2009 as to the number of people who stopped at the entrance of a building to cleanse their hands.

The building, adjoining a teaching hospital in the suburbs of a large northeastern city, housed the private practice offices of about 80 physicians and other healthcare professionals. Immediately inside the door was a prominent hand sanitizing station with a sign directing people to cleanse their hands before proceeding into the building. Using convenience sampling, a total of 500 people were observed for compliance with the instruction. Recognizing the methodological limitations, such as possible double counting, about 3% of the people wearing some kind of medical garb or hospital ID badge (who were judged to be healthcare workers), and approximately 6% of the people not thus identified as healthcare workers (their clients), obeyed the instruction.

This Follow-up Study: Details

To glean some additional information, the study was replicated in the fall of 2009, when people were no longer in a possible tranquil-summer mode, and were perhaps into an H1N1-and-other-variations-of-flu-alarmed state.

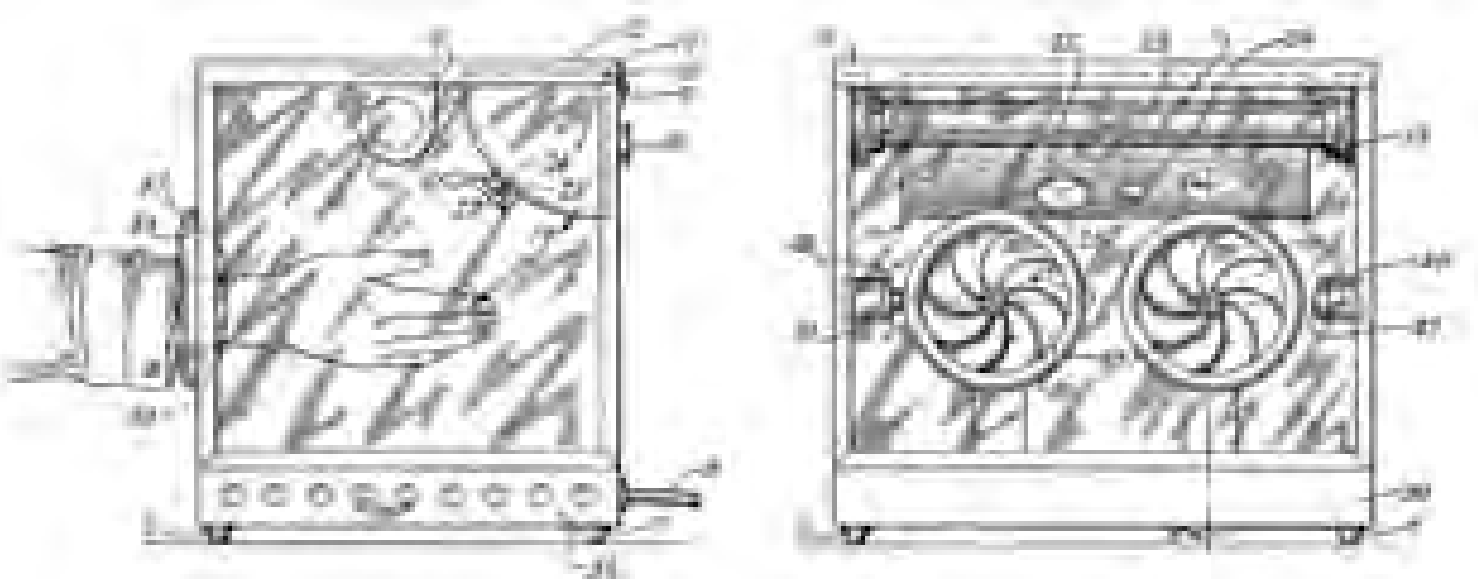
The setting was about the same as for the previous inquiry, except that the sign had been changed from a "must" to a "please" request for use of the sanitizer. As the weather was colder than during the first study, a number of people were now wearing coats. Thus, it was not really practical to determine, simply by observation, which people were healthcare workers and which were their clients.

Results

Out of the 500 people observed, 21 (4%) used the sanitizer.

As this result was about the same as that noted in the previous inquiry, it may be that a heightened perceived disease threat was insufficient to bring about a behavioral change.

There was, however, one result that changed between the two studies. In this new inquiry, a little more than 1% (specifically: seven) of the people were observed to have used the sanitizer when leaving the building. In the first study, not a single person was observed to do so. Whether these seven people had also sanitized their hand when entering is unknown; the question is an interesting aside.



Detail from a 1957 patent for a public hand-sanitizer device (U.S. patent #2814081, granted to Lincoln L. Stephenson).

Handwashing Research Review

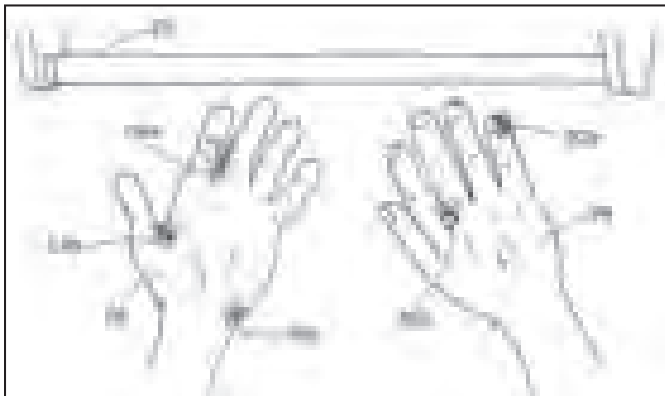
Highlights from the handwashing literature

compiled by Alice Shirrell Kaswell, Improbable Research staff

Wash When Watched

“Effects of an Observer on Conformity to Handwashing Norm,” Darhl M. Pedersen, Sheila Keithly, and Karie Brady, *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, vol. 62, no. 1, February 1986, pp. 169–70.

Observed women after elimination in a public restroom to determine the effects of the presence or absence of an observer on the likelihood of handwashing. 18 of 20 subjects in the presence of another and 3 of 19 who were not observed washed. The difference in frequency of handwashing between the 2 groups was significant. Results suggest that handwashing after going to the bathroom appears to be a behavior that results primarily from social pressure.



Detail from the Jones handwashing technique analysis patent.

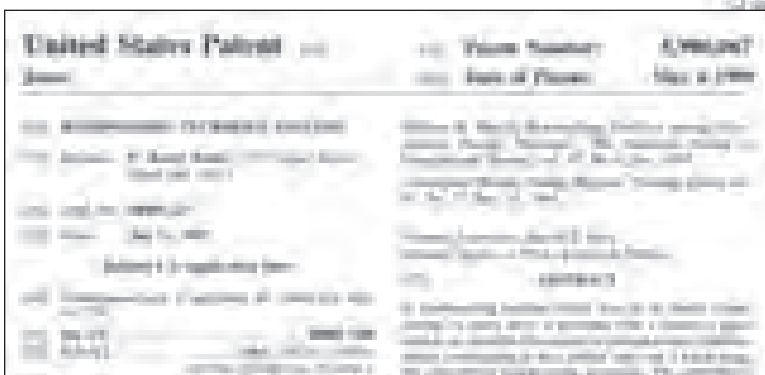
Handwashing Technique Analysis Method Patent

“Handwashing Technique Analysis,” U.S. patent #5,900,067, issued May 4, 1999 to C. Kerry Jones. The patent explains:

A handwashing medium which may be in liquid, cream, powder or spray form is provided with a detection agent such as an invisible fluorescent or phosphorescent additive, which combination is then rubbed onto one’s hands using the individual’s handwashing technique. The individual’s hands are rinsed with water as in the normal handwashing fashion and the hands are then exposed to an activating agent such as an ultraviolet (UV) light source where the invisible detection agent is fluorescent. Areas missed during handwashing retain the fluorescent additive and are clearly visible due to fluorescence.



Further detail from the Jones handwashing technique analysis patent.



To Sit or Not to Sit

A Physician's Reasons Why Men Should Stand

by John Gamel

Professor of Ophthalmology

University of Louisville

Louisville, Kentucky, USA

Western Europe is abuzz with the latest flare-up in the war between the sexes, and for the moment, the women seem to be winning. If outrage continues to mount, it will soon be not just uncool and politically incorrect for a man to urinate while standing up, but out and out ILLEGAL. Yes, the liberated women of France and Germany and Holland have vowed to put their men down—on the toilet. They carry placards showing a huge red X scrawled across a man standing to urinate. They shout: “Laissez tomber votre pantalon, et asseyez vous! (Drop your trousers and sit!)” “Behalte deine Tropfen fuer dich (Keep your drips to yourself!)” “Toch niet weer een vieze plas op MIJN badkamer vloer (Not another filthy puddle on MY bathroom floor!)”

Their motives, or so they insist, have nothing to do with penis envy and everything to do with hygiene. On the face of it, their argument seems to hold water. No one enjoys stepping in a puddle of urine. Given the distance between the toilet bowl and the penis of an upright man (approximately 24 inches, depending on anatomic variations), and factoring in the width of the bowl itself (approximately 12 inches), it becomes clear that only the sharpest aim can hit the target every time. In such a precarious setting, even a moment's loss of focus will scatter errant drops on the floor. On the other hand, if every man sits to urinate, the bathroom floors of Europe will remain pristine. Or so goes the logic of the women.

Forgive me, ladies, but I beg to differ. Before joining the fray, let me establish my credentials: during my life, I have urinated approximately 118,000 times (five times a day for 65 years) and on countless occasions have watched other males urinate in public restrooms. (I am not a voyeur, of course; all of these glimpses were caught from corner of my eye, with no intention to invade the privacy of others.) Furthermore, during medical school, I spent four years studying the human body. Combining my knowledge from these sources, I must warn the mothers and wives and

cohabit ees of Europe that their efforts to sustain the purity of their bathroom floors will surely come to naught, defeated by the anatomy and physiology of the male genitourinary tract.

The first fact to be faced: most of the stray “sprinkles” that so enrage European women occur not during the act of urination itself, but immediately afterward, during a ritual men learn as part of their potty training. By “ritual” I refer to the various maneuvers required to discharge the urine remaining in the urethra (the muscular tube that delivers urine to the tip of the penis) once the bladder is empty. Nor is the act merely symbolic or recreational. A man who tucks away his penis without performing these maneuvers will dribble half an ounce of urine into his underwear, causing an embarrassing stain in the crotch of his trousers, or an even more embarrassing streak down his trouser leg. To avoid this debacle, every sentient male, after every urination, carefully squeezes or “milks” his member to assure that no stray drops remain within the urethra.



The author's toilet.

Unfortunately, some men pursue this goal with excessive vigor, indulging in what can only be described as “shaking off the last drop.” It is precisely these movements—and not the free-falling stream itself—that deposit most of the unwanted urine on lavatory floors throughout the world. (And sometimes, given a sufficiently vigorous shake, on the walls, or even on the ceiling.)

Let me interrupt my argument for a moment to address the mortified gasps from some female readers. I know your “drying off” ritual is far more civilized than the one described above, but this difference derives only in part from the inherent uncouthness of men. We must also consider anatomy: the female urethra spans only a miniscule length in comparison to that of the male, and as a result, it harbors only a tiny dollop of urine. The male ritual seems barbaric to women because they need only daub themselves with a tissue to remove the few drops remaining on the external genitalia.

Granted, their method is more aesthetic, but it's not our fault that a discrete little wipe doesn't serve our needs. We can't help it.

To reiterate my point, men scatter urine not so much during the actual urination as during the "shaking off" that follows. As a result, forcing men to sit while emptying their bladders will serve little purpose, since no man wants to shake himself off while remaining seated on the toilet. To do so he must run the risk—a great risk indeed for the famously well-endowed men of Western Europe—that his instrument will bash against the toilet seat, or dip into a bowl teeming with coliform bacteria. Because of this reasonable and compelling reluctance, all the obedient men who sit to void their bladders will inevitably defeat the purpose of sitting by rising to scatter their offensive droplets on the floor.

But all is not lost. Eons ago, a hydraulic genius designed the perfect instrument for receiving urine from the male organ with a minimum of mess and bother. I speak here of the lowly urinal, the gleaming porcelain icon that adorns public toilets throughout the western world. For those female readers who have never visited a men's restroom, let me describe this icon: its bowl is broad as a toilet bowl but sits much higher from the floor, at just the right level to encourage a direct hit from a majority of the men who stand before it. Better yet, the urinal comes with a backsplash to catch any misguided drops, while the push of a button flushes all its surfaces with a cleansing gush of water. Voila! What more could a man or woman ask?

Any nation that bans urinals will pay for this folly with an increase in floor-soiling when millions of men stand up to shake off their drops over a toilet located two feet below their penis. Let us remember that the toilet was designed for defecation rather than urination, and, as noted above, it serves the latter purpose rather poorly, while for the urinal, the very opposite is true.

Unfortunately, urinals give no help on the family front, since few of them are installed in private homes. But we must not lose hope: the solution is at hand. In fact, every home already contains the solution, and it rests only a few feet from the toilet itself. Let us consider the sink, a porcelain instrument whose opening spans a greater width than the toilet, and whose height above the floor brings it much closer to the average male instrument. The young and short-legged among us must stand on our toes or use a stool, but this is a small price to pay for urine-free floors. By my calculation, considering only the physics of hydraulic trajectory, urine aimed at a sink by a man of normal height is 8.5 times less likely to go astray than when aimed at a toilet.



The author's sink.

Furthermore, this logic applies equally to both urination and to the drip-dispersing ritual that follows.

Yes, I can hear the howls of protest. Urine in the sink? Yuck! Indeed, our culture is replete with disparaging references—"piss on it," "filthy as piss," "I don't give a piss"—but rest assured that such prejudice is for the most part misguided. Which is to say, urine has long suffered a bum rap. To quote *Merriam-Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*:

Urine: liquid to semisolid matter that is produced in the kidney and discharged through the urinary organs, that is typically (as in normal man) a clear transparent amber-colored slightly acid fluid which is essentially a watery solution of end products (as urea, uric acid, and creatinine) of protein metabolism, inorganic salts, and complex pigments, and that constitutes the major true excretion of the vertebrate body.

What *Merriam-Webster* leaves out is the most important fact of all: urine from a normal male is also sterile, completely free of bacterial contamination. In fact, as any soldier trained in desert warfare will attest, this warm, salty liquid serves as an excellent wound cleanser, provided contamination is avoided by delivering the stream directly from its source. In my paean to urine, however, I will not go so far as to advocate its consumption. Though the habit is unlikely to cause serious harm, those "alternative" practitioners who insist it will cure a variety of ills can offer not one jot of scientific evidence to support this idiocy.

Despite urine's innocuous nature, when contaminated it provokes an aesthetic and hygienic disaster by offering an excellent growth medium for bacteria. After an hour or two in a warm environment, these organisms produce breakdown products that stink to high heaven. This problem is easily avoided, however, by the simple expedient of washing away the urine soon after it is voided.

So at last we have the solution to our excretory dilemma. First, encourage men to continue using the urinals in public toilets, while at home insist they both urinate and squeeze their last dribbles into the sink rather than into the toilet, then rinse the sink with a generous splash of water. To facilitate this, the wise hostess will keep a plastic cup nearby. Let me close my argument by noting that this procedure offers a spectacular bonus: even the most efficient modern toilet consumes more than a gallon of water with each flush, while a sink can be rinsed with only a few ounces. Thus if every man on earth pursues this excellent regimen, we will save billions of gallons of water every day, thereby preserving the environment for future generations.



A forest.
Photo: Kentucky Division of Forestry.

The Sound-ness of Tree Falls

by Martin Melchior
Stream Ecologist
Lake Mills, Wisconsin, USA

If a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound? Many have treated this as a philosophical question, with little to show for their efforts. I, on the other hand, see it as a practical question that can be answered by careful observation and measurement. With the help of an assistant and several sub-assistants, I have answered the question.

The research was conducted in the Chequamegon and Nicolet National Forests, in the state of Wisconsin.

My results show two things. First, that if a tree does fall in the forest, and no one hears it, it does indeed make a sound. Second, that while out-of-state recreationalists mispronounce the name “Chequamegon” in 75% of cases, Wisconsin residents mispronounce the word in only 62% of cases. I also learned the scores of some hockey games.

Here are the details.

Large Woody Debris

Large woody debris (LWD) plays an important role in stream habitat, for fish, macroinvertebrates and other forest dwellers. A fairly thorough search of the scientific literature turned up no existing data concerning the sound of falling LWD in forests.

Gathering the Sounds

I used directional microphones, professional electronic audio recording equipment, personal observation, and some very inexpensive young assistants, to monitor the accumulation of large woody debris in old-growth forests of northern Wisconsin from June 1999 through July 2001.

I hired an impoverished undergraduate student to collect nearly 20,000 hours of audio/video tape in scenic areas in the Chequamegon and Nicolet National Forests. Video footage was collected with a Hitachi Z900 video camera and audio data was collected using a Shure SM58 microphone and three Shure DM 25 directional microphones with parabolic collector dishes. Recordings were made on a Tascam 850 8-track digital recorder and Yamaha 16-channel mixing board.

I made this impoverished undergraduate watch all of the tapes and make a record of every instance in which large woody debris fell to the forest floor.

A team of undergraduate sub-assistants was employed to monitor the equipment from a Chevy van parked outside the National Forest boundary. Decibel tests were made just

outside the van to make sure that the sub-assistants couldn't hear any actual trees falling, as that would have interfered with them hearing the transmitted sounds (or lack of sounds) of other trees falling or not falling elsewhere.

Observation times and decibel values for events were correlated with field reconnaissance of the actual debris. Video footage and audio footage were reviewed, and fallen trees were verified by personal observation and measurement.

Numbers, Data, Figures, Statistics, Figures, Data, Numbers

Through the efforts of my assistant and sub-assistants, I collected over 20,000 hours of video/audio tape. Twenty incidences of large woody debris falling were recorded, including the fall of two entire trees. The remaining incidences were really large branches, which if you stood them upright, could pass for trees in the judgment of some observers. In order to do proper statistical analysis, I created some additional data and included that too.

Decibel levels were adjusted based on the distance of the incident from the microphone. Using the inverse square law and some other plausible mathematical equations, I transformed the data, presenting the decibel level as it would sound to a person standing 20 feet from the impact point. I tried to remove the trend line from the graph but my Excel spreadsheet program wouldn't let me do it. Each falling LWD event did show a positive decibel reading, and I found good correlation ($R^2=0.789$) between LWD length and decibel level. (See Figure 1.)

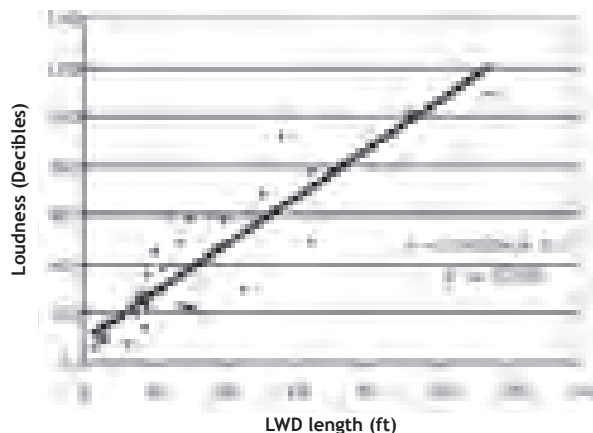


Figure 1. Loudness and LWD size.



Another forest.
 Photo: Kentucky Division of Forestry.



Still another forest.
 Photo: Kentucky Division of Forestry.

Data collection took place near the Chequamegon National Forest boundary.

I encountered a number of people, and observed that many of them pronounced the name “Chequamegon” incorrectly. To analyze pronunciation of the word “Chequamegon” (it should be pronounced “Shuh-wa-muh-gun”), I recorded how each of them pronounced the word, and I also inferred each individual’s home state from the information displayed on their car license plates.

In technical terms: I treated the proper pronunciation as the “original condition,” and a mispronunciation as the “treatment condition.” I will not again refer to these technical terms.

Later, listening to the voice recordings, I recorded the approximate spelling of the mispronounced words, using the Franklin phonetic method of English pronunciation. Jaccard’s Coefficient (first described by an investigator named Jaccard, in 1912), a qualitative community comparison index, was used to assess differences in the syllables present.

Both Wisconsin natives and non-residents were asked about their feelings regarding mispronunciation. (See Table 1.)

I also collected and recorded the box scores from that weekend’s National Hockey League (NHL) games. I gathered this data using a radio and a pencil. A computer was used to reduce the NHL data to table form. (See Table 2.)

Results

In any discussion of falling trees and the sounds they make, it is important to define the term “sound.” I define sound to mean a compression or fluctuation of air molecule density and location that can be interpreted by a device that measures that compression or fluctuation.

Sound levels were found to be inversely proportional to the distance from the microphone. It is indeed possible that although a sound is made, people may not hear it, because decibel levels may be below the threshold of human hearing.

Table 1. Survey of feelings of people who mispronounced the word “Chequamegon”

	<i>Cared</i>	<i>Didn’t Care</i>
Minnesota	84	16
Illinois	4	96
Wisconsin	34	76

Table 2. NHL scores for the weekend.

Los Angeles	1	Edmonton	4
Minnesota	5	Montreal	6
Ottawa	3	Boston	1
NY Rangers	2	NY Islanders	3
Colorado	2		
Chicago	2		

My results show the following:

1. I discovered that, in every instance that I was able to monitor, when large woody debris falls in the forest and there is no one there to hear it, it does make a sound.
2. I discovered that many people, natives as well as visitors to the region, mispronounce the word “Chequamegon.” To assure the statistical significance of this finding, I included mention of it approximately three times in this report.
3. I also discovered that one of the five NHL games resulted in a tie score.

Discussion

Some of this information could be used to monitor the accumulation of large woody debris near streams, and could serve as an ice-breaker at parties of the kind where people like to argue about whether a tree makes a sound if it falls in the forest and nobody is there to hear it. I have previously observed that if you talk about science at a party, people will flock to you if it is the kind of party where people like to argue about whether a tree makes a sound if it falls in the forest and nobody is there to hear it.



Ig® and Beyond

Some further research adventures of Ig Nobel Prize winners

compiled by Nan Swift, Improbable Research staff

The Last Supper: Too Big a Meal?

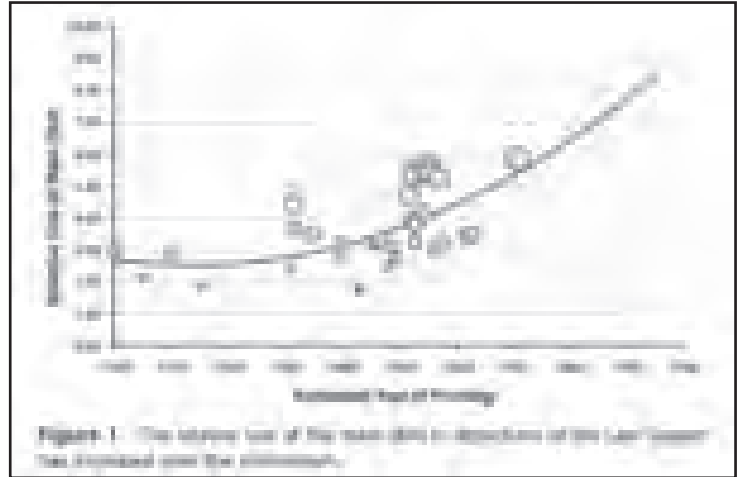
“The Largest Last Supper: Depictions of Food Portions and Plate Size Increased Over the Millennium,” Brian Wansink and Craig S. Wansink, *International Journal of Obesity*, March 23, 2010, pp. 1-2, DOI 10.1038/ijo.2010.37. Brian Wansink was awarded the 2007 Ig Nobel Prize in nutrition for exploring the seemingly boundless appetites of human beings, by feeding them with a self-refilling, bottomless bowl of soup. The authors, who are brothers, explain:

Portion sizes of foods have been noticeably increasing in recent years, but when did this trend begin? If art imitates life and if food portions have been generally increasing with time, we might expect this trend to be reflected in paintings that depict food. Perhaps the most commonly painted meal has been that of Jesus Christ’s Last Supper, chronicled in the New Testament of the Bible. A CAD–CAM analysis of the relative food-to-head ratio in 52 representative paintings of the Last Supper showed that the relative sizes of the main dish (entree), bread, and plates have linearly increased over the past millennium.

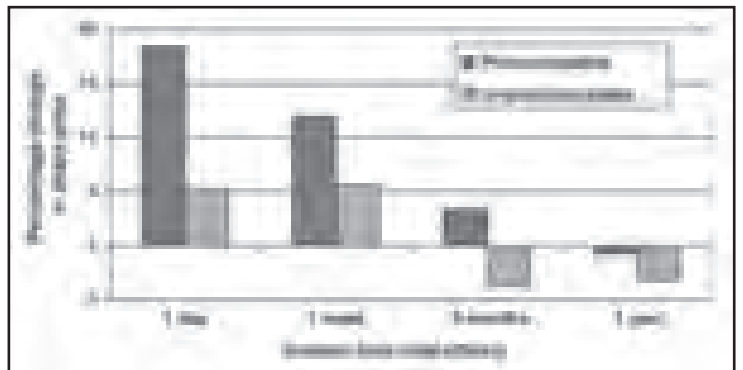
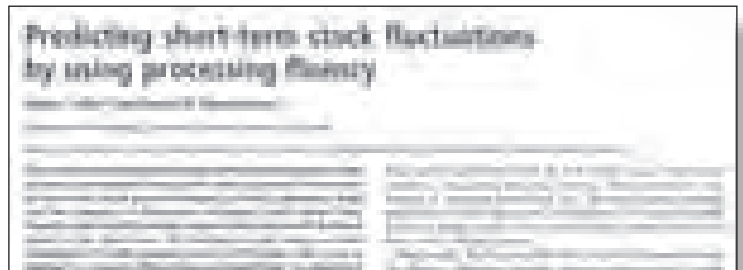
Stock Up on Pronounceable Names

“Predicting Short-Term Stock Fluctuations by Using Processing Fluency,” Adam L. Alter and Daniel M. Oppenheimer, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, vol. 103, no. 24, June 13, 2006, pp. 9369-72. Oppenheimer won the 2006 Ig Nobel Prize in literature for his report “Consequences of Erudite Vernacular Utilized Irrespective of Necessity: Problems with Using Long Words Needlessly.” The authors, at Princeton University, report:

Three studies investigated the impact of the psychological principle of fluency (that people tend to prefer easily processed information) on short-term share price movements. In both a laboratory study and two analyses of naturalistic real-world stock market data, fluently named stocks robustly outperformed stocks with disfluent names in the short term. For example, in one study, an initial investment of \$1,000 yielded a profit of \$112 more after 1 day of trading for a basket of fluently named shares than for a basket of disfluently named shares. These results imply that simple, cognitive approaches to modeling human behavior sometimes outperform more typical, complex alternatives.



Detail from the Wansink/Wansink last supper study.



Detail from the Alter/Oppenheimer stock term study.

Dr. Unger's Knuckle-Cracking Adventure

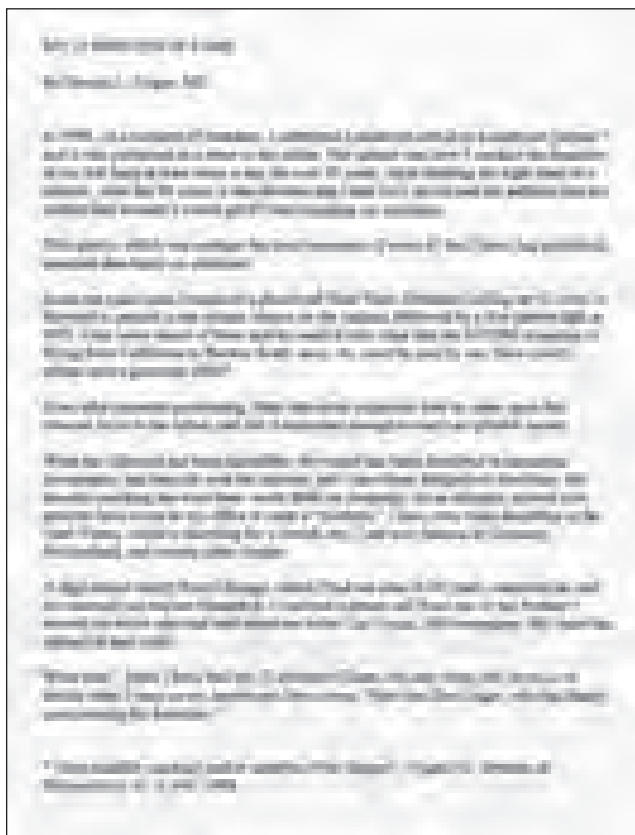
A letter from an Ig Nobel Prize winner

*By Dr. Donald Unger
Thousand Oaks, California, USA*

Dr. Donald Unger was awarded the 2009 Ig Nobel Prize in medicine, “for investigating a possible cause of arthritis of the fingers, by diligently cracking the knuckles of his left hand — but never cracking the knuckles of his right hand — every day for more than sixty (60) years.” Dr. Unger took part in the Ig Nobel Prize Ceremony and, two days later, in the Ig Informal Lectures (for details, see *AIR* 15:6).

In February 2010, at the special Improbable Research session that was part of the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, in San Diego, he gave a public talk and demonstration, to overwhelming acclaim.

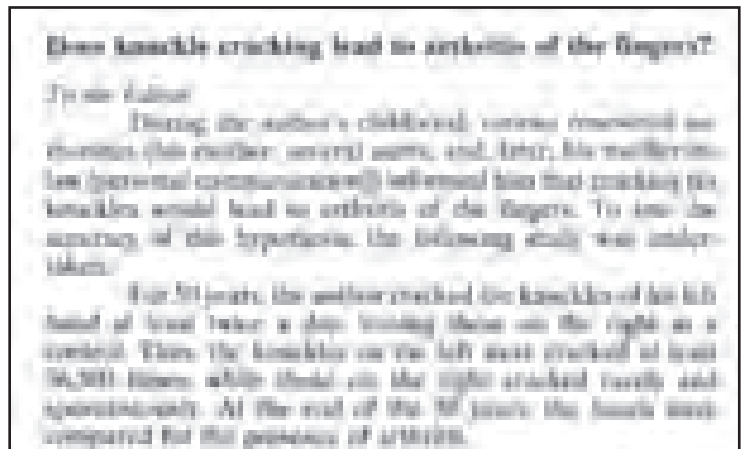
Then he sent us this letter:



Dr. Unger's April 2010 letter.



Dr. Unger demonstrating his craft at the Ig Informal Lectures, at MIT, in October 2009. Photo: Robin Abrahams / Improbable Research staff.



*Dr. Unger's study, published after fifty years of knuckle-cracking, but more than a decade before he was awarded the Ig Nobel Prize: “Does Knuckle Cracking Lead to Arthritis of the Fingers?” (*Arthritis and Rheumatism*, vol. 41, no. 5, 1998, pp. 949-50).*



Dreams of times past: a school of heavily-moustached gentlemen strain for krill in the warm coastal waters of the Bahamas.

AIR Teachers' Guide

Three out of five teachers agree: curiosity is a dangerous thing, especially in students. If you are one of the other two teachers, *AIR* and *mini-AIR* can be powerful tools. Choose your favorite *hAIR*-raising article and give copies to your students. The approach is simple. The scientist thinks that he (or she, or whatever), of all people, has discovered something about how the universe behaves. So:

- Is this scientist right—and what does “right” mean, anyway?
- Can you think of even one different explanation that works as well or better?
- Did the test really, really, truly, unquestionably, completely test what the author thought he was testing?
- Is the scientist ruthlessly honest with himself about how well his idea explains everything, or could he be suffering from wishful thinking?
- Some people might say this is foolish. Should you take their word for it?
- Other people might say this is absolutely correct and important. Should you take their word for it?

Kids are naturally good scientists. Help them stay that way.

May We Recommend

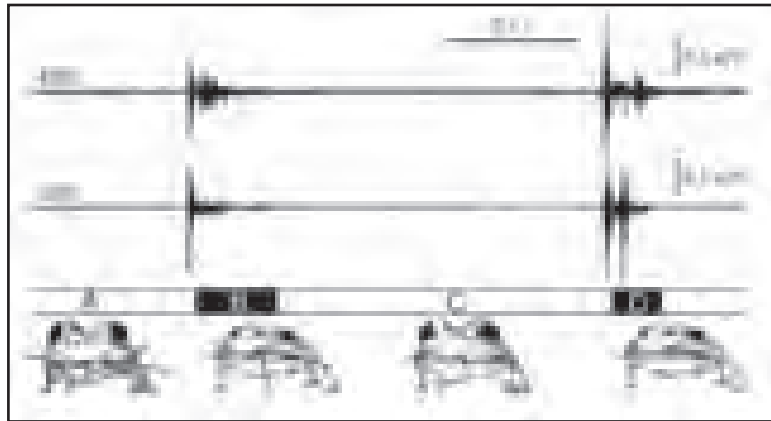
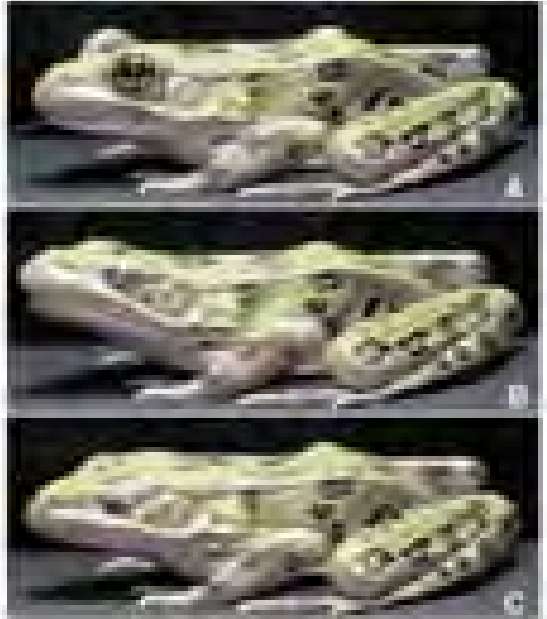
Items that merit a trip to the library

compiled by Stephen Drew, Improbable Research staff

Eye, Swallow, A Frog

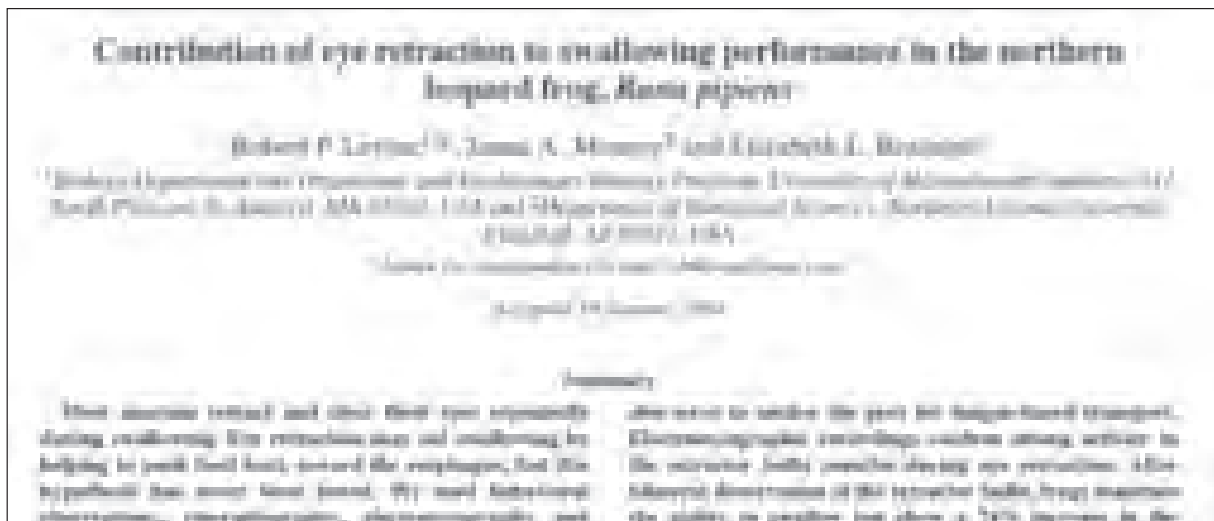
“Contribution of Eye Retraction to Swallowing Performance in the Northern Leopard Frog, *Rana pipiens*,” R.P. Levine, J.A. Monroy, and E.L. Brainerd, *Journal of Experimental Biology*, vol. 207, no. 8, March 2004, pp. 1361–8. (Thanks to Anna Suarez for bringing this to our attention.) The authors, at University of Massachusetts Amherst and at Northern Arizona University, report:

Most anurans retract and close their eyes repeatedly during swallowing. Eye retraction may aid swallowing by helping to push food back toward the esophagus, but this hypothesis has never been tested.... Our results indicate that, in *Rana pipiens* feeding on medium sized crickets, eye retraction is an accessory swallowing mechanism that assists the primary tongue-based swallowing mechanism.

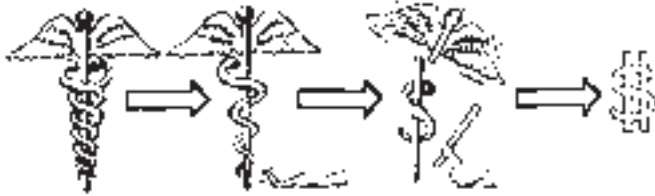


Detail from the Levine/Monroy/Brainerd frog swallowing study.

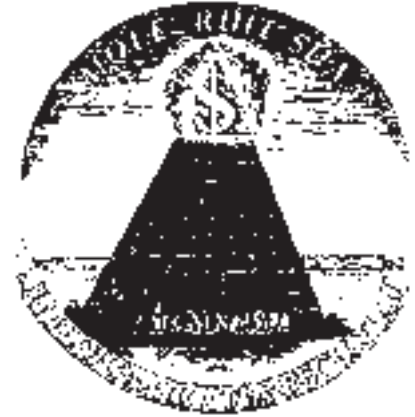
Further detail from the Levine/Monroy/Brainerd frog swallowing study.



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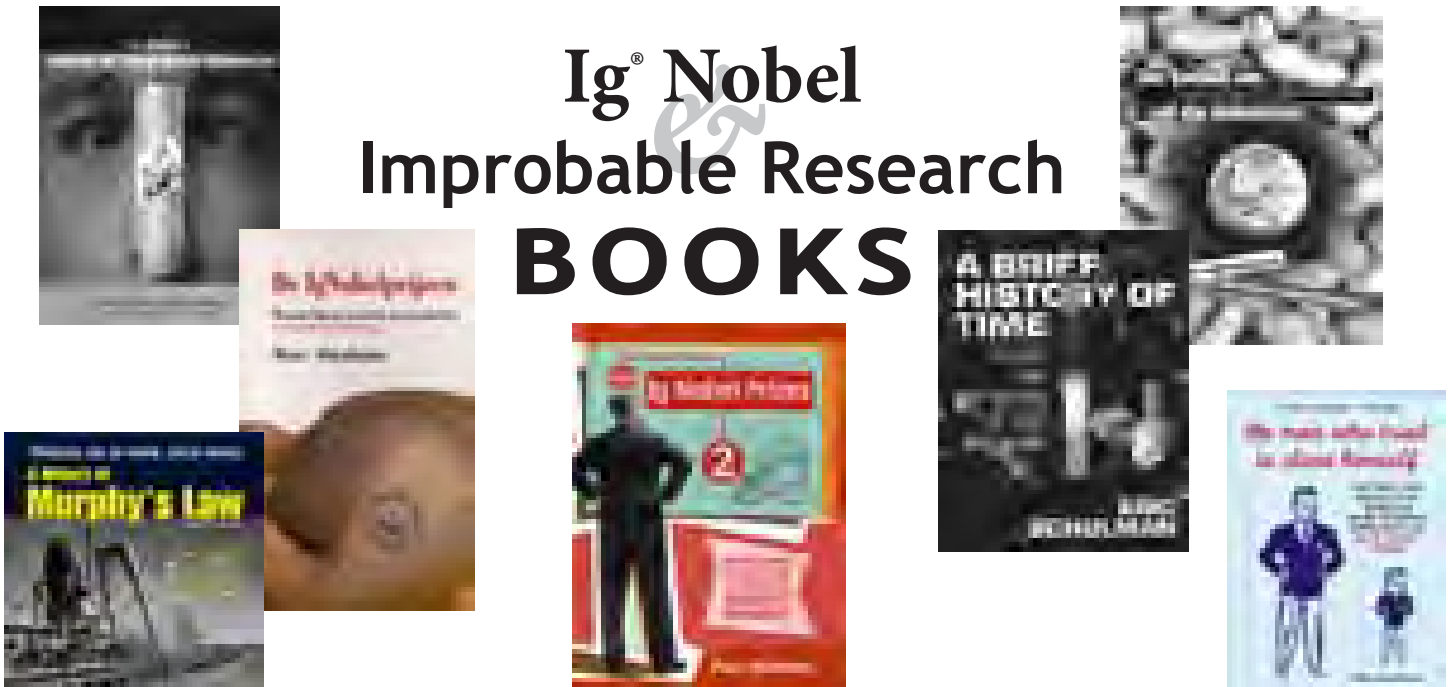
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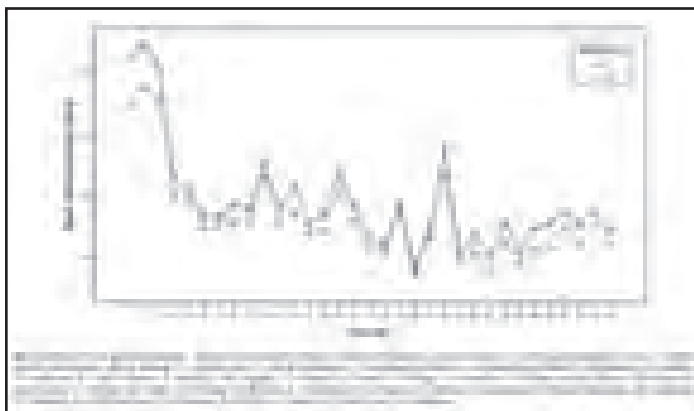
Further evidence why the “soft” sciences are the hardest to do well

compiled by Alice Shirrell Kaswell and Bissell Mango, Improbable Research staff

A Beauty-Map of London

“A Beauty-Map of London: Ratings of the Physical Attractiveness of Women and Men in London’s Boroughs”, Viren Swami and Eliana G. Hernandez, *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol. 45, no. 5, 2008, pp 361–6. The authors, at the University of Westminster, U.K., report:

In 1908, Francis Galton discussed anecdotal data he had collected for the compilation of a ‘beauty-map of the British Isles’. Based on his discussion, the present study attempted to compile a more empirical beauty-map of London. A community sample of 461 Londoners completed a questionnaire in which they rated the physical attractiveness of women and men in London’s 33 boroughs, as well as their familiarity with those boroughs. Results showed a significant interaction between borough and rated sex, with women being rated as more attractive across boroughs, and three boroughs in particular (the City of London, the City of Westminster, and Kensington and Chelsea) being rated high in physical attractiveness.

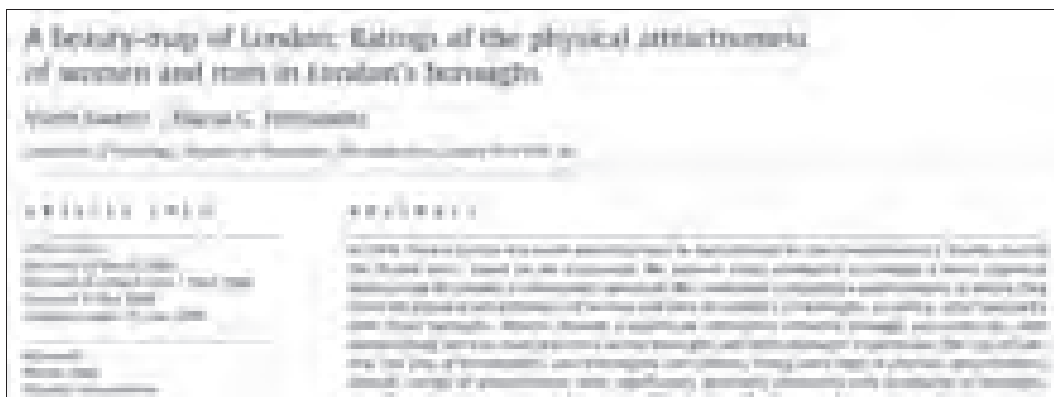


Metaphors: Heaviness and Heavy Things

“Weight as an Embodiment of Importance.” Nils B. Jostmann, Daniel Lakens, and Thomas W. Schubert, *Psychological Science*, vol. 20, no. 9, 2009, pp. 1169–74. (Thanks to Martin Gardiner for bringing this to our attention.) The authors, at University of Amsterdam and Utrecht University in the Netherlands and Instituto Superior de Ciências do Trabalho e da Empresa in Lisbon, Portugal, report:

Four studies show that the abstract concept of importance is grounded in bodily experiences of weight. Participants provided judgments of importance while they held either a heavy or a light clipboard. Holding a heavy clipboard increased judgments of monetary value (Study 1) and made participants consider fair decision-making procedures to be more important (Study 2). It also caused more elaborate thinking, as indicated by higher consistency between related judgments (Study 3) and by greater polarization of agreement ratings for strong versus weak arguments (Study 4). In line with an embodied perspective on cognition, these findings suggest that, much as weight makes people invest more physical effort in dealing with concrete objects, it also makes people invest more cognitive effort in dealing with abstract issues.

Detail from the Swami/Hernandez beauty map study.



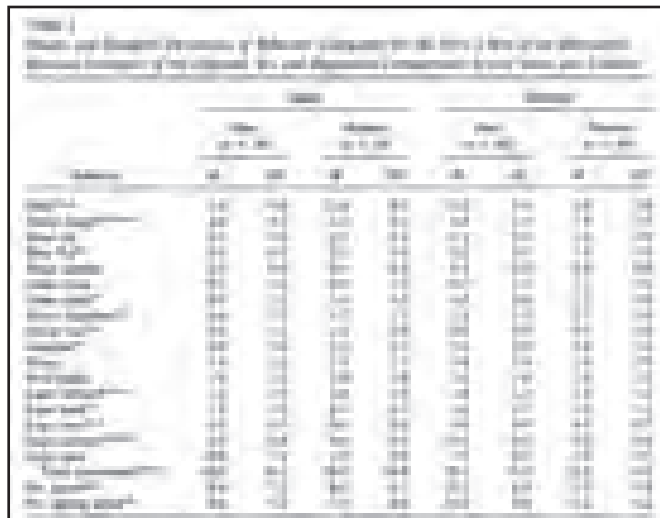
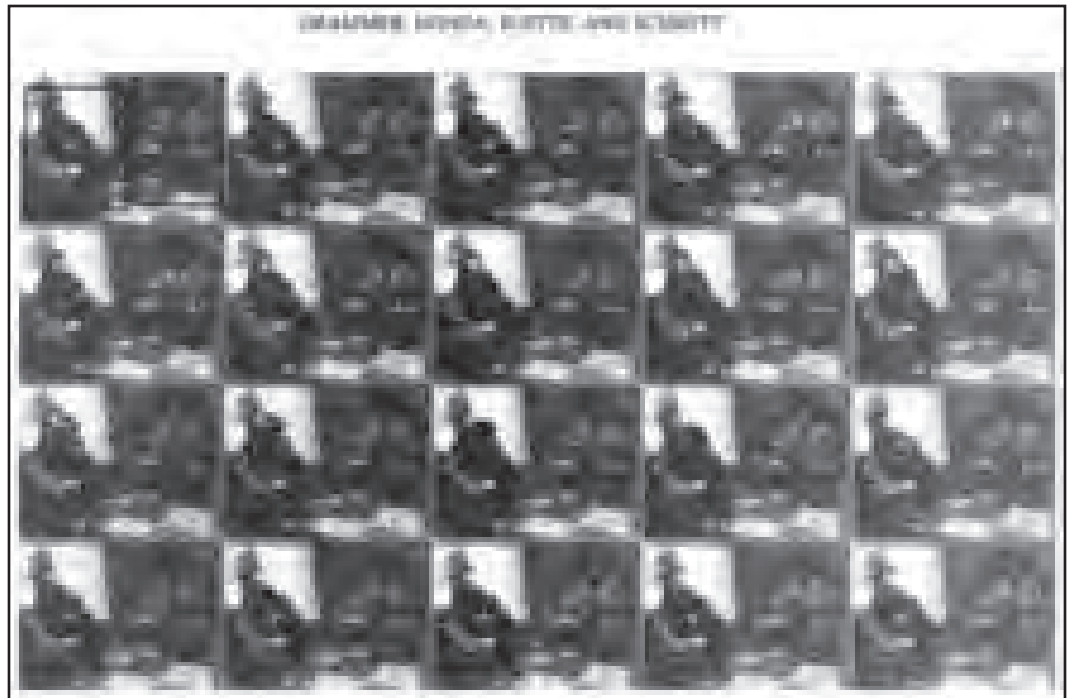
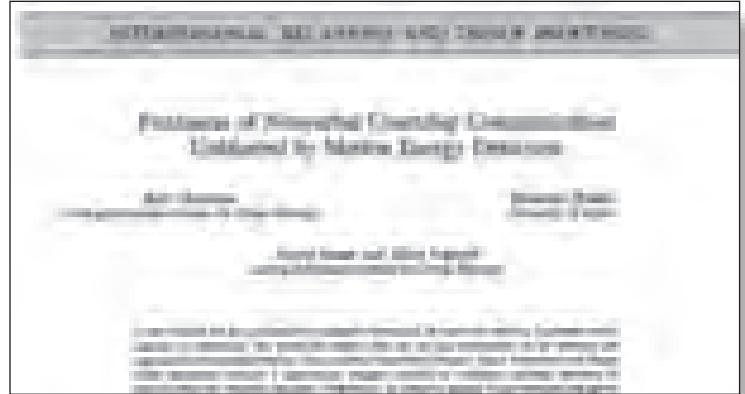
Fuzziness of Nonverbal Courtship Communication, Unblurred

“Fuzziness of Nonverbal Courtship Communication Unblurred by Motion Energy Detection,” K. Grammer, M. Honda, A. Juette, and A. Schmitt, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 77, no. 3, 1999, pp. 487–508. The authors, at Ludwig-Boltzmann-Institute for Urban Ethology, Vienna, Austria, explain:

Cross-cultural comparison (Germany, Japan) of unobtrusively filmed initial interactions between 2 opposite-sex strangers revealed no consistent courtship repertoire of directly observable behavior categories. Furthermore, an extensive analysis of gaze behavior and speech revealed differences between the countries but also showed no consistent relation to interest.

Data from the Grammer/Honda/Juette/Schmitt study on the fuzziness of nonverbal courtship communication unblurred by motion energy detection: “Instance of a female hair flip preceded by hand movement. An original film sequence from the study is shown (40 frames, every second frame skipped).”

∨ Further data from the Grammer/Honda/Juette/Schmitt study.



Metaphors: Coffee Temperature and Interpersonal Warmth

“Experiencing Physical Warmth Promotes Interpersonal Warmth,” Lawrence E. Williams, and John A. Bargh, *Science*, vol. 322, no. 5901, October 24, 2008, pp. 606–7, DOI 10.1126/science.1162548. The authors, at the University of Colorado at Boulder and at Yale University, report:

[We] hypothesized that experiences of physical warmth (or coldness) would increase feelings of interpersonal warmth (or coldness), without the person’s awareness of this influence. In study 1, participants who briefly held a cup of hot (versus iced) coffee judged a target person as having a “warmer” personality (generous, caring); in study 2, participants holding a hot (versus cold) therapeutic pad were more likely to choose a gift for a friend instead of for themselves.

Puzzling Solutions

Solution to Last Month's Puzzler

by Emil Filterbag, Improbable Research staff

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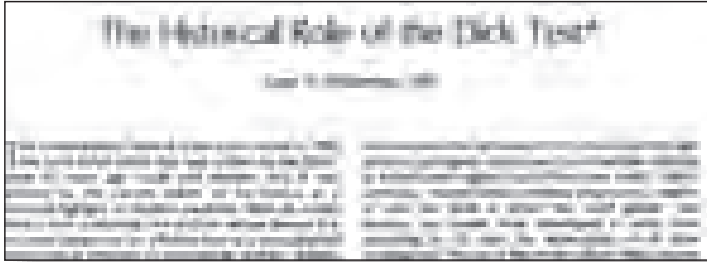
Boys Will Be Boys

Research by and for adolescent males of all ages and sexes

compiled by Katherine Lee, Improbable Research staff

Historical Role of the Dick Test

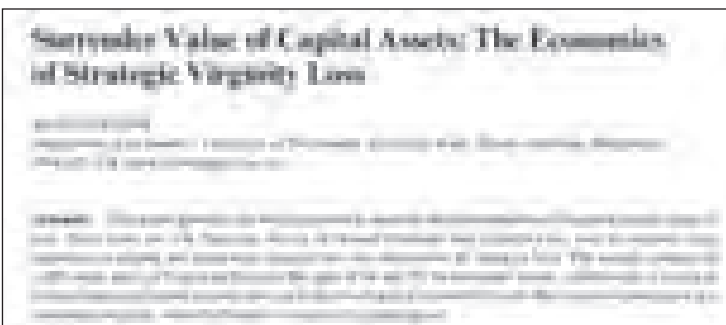
“Landmark Perspective: The Historical Role of the Dick Test,” Gene H. Stollerman, *Journal of the American Medical Association*, vol. 250, no. 22, December 9, 1983, pp. 3097–9.



The Economics of Strategic Virginity Loss

“Surrender Value of Capital Assets: The Economics of Strategic Virginity Loss,” Alan Collins, *Journal of Bioeconomics*, vol. 2, no. 3, October, 2000, pp. 193–201, DOI 10.1023/A:1012278611320. (Thanks to Maricar Jagger for bringing this to our attention.) The author, at the University of Portsmouth, reports:

This paper provides the first econometric analysis of rationalizations of virginity loss in terms of love. Data from the UK National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles are used to estimate logit equations to predict the claim that virginity loss was occasioned by being in love. The sample consists of 2,269 males and 1,476 females between the ages of 16 and 59. In economic terms, a dichotomy is found in terms of male and female virginity loss, such that to a degree it is possible to infer that sex is for males more of a consumption good, whilst for females it is more of a capital good.



A Balloon Will Be Observed Floating in the Commode

“Simplified Balloon Expulsion Test,” David E. Beck, *Diseases of the Colon and Rectum*, vol. 35, 1992, pp. 597–8. The author, at USAF Medical Center, Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, reports:

The balloon expulsion test is a simple and inexpensive method to evaluate a patient’s ability to expel and retain stool. In conjunction with other methods, it assists in identifying patients with outlet obstruction or incontinence. A simplified method of performing a balloon expulsion test is described...

The patient is instructed to use a commode and attempt to pass the balloon. After passage the balloon will be observed floating in the commode. It can easily be grasped with a biopsy forceps and appropriately discarded.

Ancient Flatus

“Flatus Profuse Present in the Muscles’: Subcutaneous Emphysema of the Lower Abdominal Wall and Thighs, Described in 1593 by Fabricius Hildanus,” Erwin J.O. Kompanje and Ben van der Hoven, *Surgical Infections*, vol. 10, no. 4, 2009, DOI 10.1089=sur.2008.075.

Between 1598 and 1641, 600 medical and surgical observations made by the famous German surgeon Guilielmus Fabricius Hildanus (1560–1634) were published in his *Observationum et curationum chirurgicarum centuriae I–VI...*;

One of the case reports, published as Observatio LXX in the fifth *Centuria*, bears the title (in translation) “Of flatus, profuse present in the muscles”....

The presence of gas in the superficial tissues of the abdominal wall or thighs is a rare feature and can be a late sign of an otherwise-obscure intra-abdominal abscess with gas-producing bacteria. Fabricius Hildanus almost certainly was the first to document this rare feature in 1593, and judged it important enough to describe in his *Centuriae*.

Simplified Balloon Expulsion Test

David E. Beck, Lt. Col., U.S.A.F., M.D.

From the Department of General Surgery, Wright-Patterson Air Force Medical Center, Dayton, Ohio (Dr. Beck)

The balloon expulsion test is a simple and inexpensive method to evaluate a patient's ability to expect and contract in conjunction with other methods. It is used in assessing patients with rectal obstruction or pseudo-obstruction. A simplified method of performing a balloon expulsion test is described. **Key words:** Colitis ulcerosa, Constipation, Balloon expulsion, Defecation

experiment is done in reverse. The normal air then withdraws from the anus, forcing the air to the bottom of the balloon tip. The patient's pulmonary pressure then the balloon to the stomach, and the abdominal cavity contains the balloon.

DOES CLEAVAGE WORK AT WORK? MEN, BUT NOT WOMEN, FALSELY BELIEVE CLEAVAGE SELLS A WEAK PRODUCT

The Buyer's Market For Cleavage: An In-Depth Look

"Does Cleavage Work at Work? Men, But Not Women, Falsely Believe Cleavage Sells a Weak Product," Peter Glick, Karyna Chrislock, Korinne Petersik, Madhuri Vijay, and Aleksandra Turek, *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, vol. 32 no. 3, September 2008, pp. 326–35. (Thanks to Lee Loizeau for bringing this to our attention.) The authors, at Lawrence University, Appleton, Wisconsin, explain:

We examined whether men, but not women, would be distracted by a female sales representative's exposed cleavage, leading to greater perceived efficacy for a weak, but not for a strong product. A community sample of 88 men and 97 women viewed a video of a female pharmaceutical sales representative who (a) had exposed cleavage or dressed modestly and (b) pitched an ineffective or effective product. Although men were not more distracted or persuaded by cleavage, they gave the cleavage-exposed (versus nonexposed) sales representative more favorable hiring recommendations in the ineffective-drug condition and less favorable ratings in the effective-drug condition. Women generally rated the sales representative similarly regardless of cleavage exposure. On a postexperimental questionnaire, men, but not women, believed that female sales professionals ought strategically to use sex appeal to distract from a weak (but not a strong) product.

The Glick/Chrislock/Petersik/Vijay/Turek cleavage study.

Detail from the Glick/Chrislock/Petersik/Vijay/Turek cleavage study.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Hiring Recommendations: Doctor's Interest and Request

Sex	Product	Cleavage	Interest	Request
Men	Ineffective drug	Exposed	4.17	3.50
		Modest	3.50	3.50
	Effective drug	Exposed	3.50	3.50
		Modest	3.50	3.50
Women	Ineffective drug	Exposed	3.50	3.50
		Modest	3.50	3.50
	Effective drug	Exposed	3.50	3.50
		Modest	3.50	3.50

Icky Cutesy Research Review

Research reports that are icky and/or cutesy

compiled by Alice Shirrell Kaswell, Improbable Research staff

Cutesy: Headache, Dear

“Now Dear, I Have a Headache! Immediate Improvement of Cluster Headaches after Sexual Activity,” M. Gotkine, I. Steiner and I. Biran, *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery, and Psychiatry*, vol. 77, no. 11, November 2006, p. 1296. (Thanks to David Karr for bringing this to our attention.) The authors, who are at Hadassah University Hospital in Jerusalem, explain that:

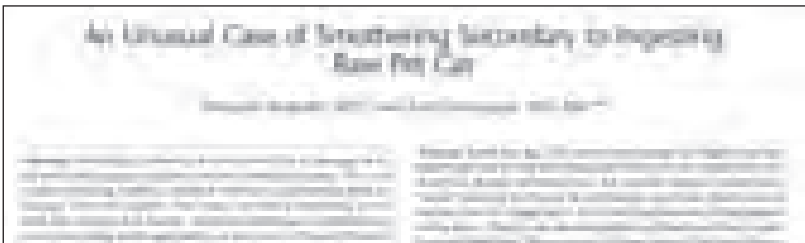
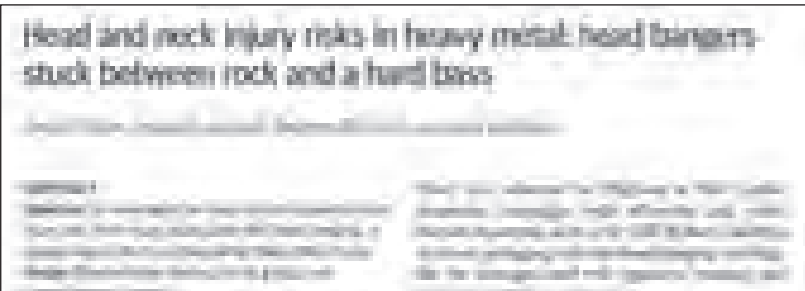
The precise pathogenesis of cluster headaches is unknown, but a hypothalamic generator has been postulated as the cause of the disorder. In two patients with typical cluster headaches, sexual activity alleviated the episodes. This association may shed some light on the pathogenesis and treatment of this incapacitating disorder.

Cutesy: Head Bangers and Their Mettle

“Head and Neck Injury Risks in Heavy Metal: Head Bangers Stuck Between Rock and a Hard Bass,” Declan Patton and Andrew McIntosh, *British Medical Journal*, vol. 337, 2008, p. a2825. The authors, at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, report:

Objective: To investigate the risks of mild traumatic brain injury and neck injury associated with head banging, a popular dance form accompanying heavy metal music.

Conclusion: To minimise the risk of head and neck injury, head bangers should decrease their range of head and neck motion, head bang to slower tempo songs by replacing heavy metal with adult oriented rock, only head bang to every second beat, or use personal protective equipment.



Icky: Gnaw on a Raw Cat

“An Unusual Case of Smothering Secondary to Ingesting Raw Pet Cat,” Margaret Redpath and Anny Sauvageau, *American Journal of Forensic Medical Pathology*, vol. 31, no. 2, June 2010, pp. 31-3.

Presented here is the case of a 39-year-old woman with a history of bipolar disease who was found dead in her living room floor by her neighbors. Her hands were covered in scratches and her pet cat was found disemboweled in the kitchen with its tail hacked off. On autopsy her stomach was found to be full of cat intestines, adipose tissue, and strips of fur-covered skin. An intact left kidney and adipose tissue were found lodged in her throat just above her epiglottis. After a complete investigation, the cause of death was determined to be asphyxia by smothering due to animal tissue.



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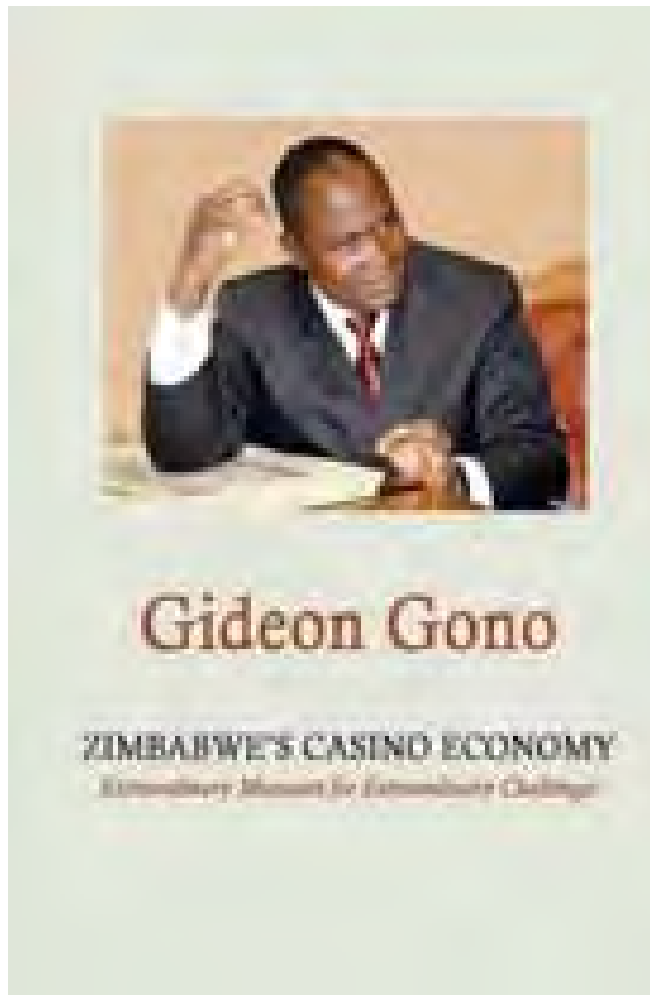
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2009 Ig Nobel Mathematics Prize

The prize was awarded to Gideon Gono, governor of Zimbabwe's Reserve Bank, for giving people a simple, everyday way to cope with a wide range of numbers—from very small to very big—by having his bank print bank notes with denominations ranging from one cent (\$.01) to one hundred trillion dollars (\$100,000,000,000,000).

REFERENCE: *Zimbabwe's Casino Economy—Extraordinary Measures for Extraordinary Challenges*, Gideon Gono, ZPH Publishers, Harare, 2008, ISBN 978-0-79743679-4.

The Zimbabwean nation's inflation
Has led to the wide circulation
Of bills that would be
More easy to see
If they used scientific notation.



Gideon Gono's book explains why he had the national bank print bills in a wide range of denominations, and why that was a good thing.

The Zimbabwean one cent bill and the Zimbabwean hundred trillion dollar bill.



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What is this picture? (see page 1)



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