



Explore SVB's Global
Treasury Solutions: [Click Here.](#) >>>

Silicon Valley Bank >
Global Treasury Solutions

Dow Jones Reprints: This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers, use the Order Reprints tool at the bottom of any article or visit www.djreprints.com

See a sample reprint in PDF format.

Order a reprint of this article now

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

WSJ.com

WEEK IN IDEAS | OCTOBER 16, 2010

Week in Ideas: Christopher Shea

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Angry People See Guns

Police responding to a crime scene often feel an emotional surge. But those who specifically experience anger are more likely to make the kinds of perceptual errors that lead to an innocent person getting shot, according to a new study.



[View Full Image](#)

Getty Images

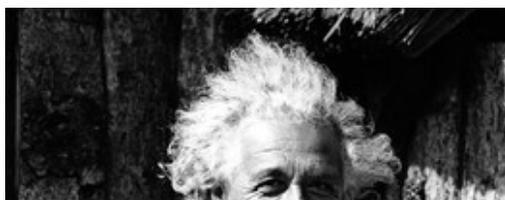
Psychologists at Northeastern University primed test subjects by asking them to write essays that would elicit such emotions as happiness, anger, sadness or disgust. The subjects then sat down at a computer, where they were shown a series of urban and suburban scenes.

The final scene, which flashed for 750 milliseconds, included a person holding either an innocuous object, like a wallet or cellphone, or a gun. The subjects had to decide quickly whether a gun was present.

Test subjects in the happy, sad, disgusted and "neutral" mindsets made some mistakes, but they were equally distributed between false positives and negatives. Angry subjects were significantly more likely to see a gun where none existed.

One bright spot: Given a chance to second-guess themselves, almost all the subjects knew when they'd made a mistake. Even the briefest pause before a fateful decision could save a life.

"Emotion Guided Threat Detection: Expecting Guns Where There Are None," Jolie Baumann and David DeSteno, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology (October)



PSYCHOLOGY

The Graying Professoriate: Maybe Not All Bad News

The Nobel Prize-winning economist Gary Becker and a former National Institutes of Health director


[View Full Image](#)

Getty Images

Albert Einstein

are among the many observers who have wondered whether the 1994 end of mandatory retirement for professors in the U.S. will lead to less innovation (if it has not already).

But a Dutch psychologist's new analysis of dozens of studies of scholarly productivity suggests that such fears are overstated. He begins with a survey of studies of IQ, finding that while cognitive ability does decline after age 67, the trend is quite modest until age 80, and many 80-year-olds do not show significant deterioration.

What's more, studies of scholarly productivity over the life span are more inconclusive than conventional wisdom suggests. Several studies from the 1970s and '80s did find that productivity peaked between ages 35 and 44. But others, including a 2006 study of members of the National

Academy of Sciences, showed a resurgence after age 60. And the research often does not take into account structural incentives. A Norwegian study, for instance, found that the 60-plus demographic used to slack off but now surpasses some younger cohorts—now that Norway has raised publication standards for all its professors.

Overall, the new paper concludes that the best predictor of future productivity is past productivity, with age only a minor variable. It may be the European system, which still has mandatory retirement (at 65 or 67), that is the idea-squelcher.

"The Graying of Academia: Will It Reduce Scientific Productivity?" Wolfgang Stroebe, American Psychologist (October)


[View Full Image](#)

Getty Images

ECONOMICS

'Moneyball,' Cricket-Style

How much difference can one small break at the start of a career make over a lifetime? Quite a bit, according to two International Monetary Fund researchers, who used the sport of cricket to study the role of chance in job markets.

The authors took advantage of a natural experiment involving 790 "test cricketers" from seven nations—elite players chosen for international matches—who made their debuts from 1950 to 1985. A key to the study is that cricket is a sport with a substantial home-field advantage. Players get used to the way balls behave in a given climate and to the feel of their (literal) home turf. Therefore, the players deemed lucky by the researchers were those assigned to make their test-match debut at home, while the "unlucky" ones started abroad.

Unsurprisingly, batters who made their debuts at home hit for a higher average in their first

international matches. Those players then disproportionately got invited back for more test matches.

National selection committees apparently do not take into account the burden faced by players who begin their careers "away." As a result, a player's performance in his very first match ended up correlating with performance over a full career. Broadly, the research "suggests that luck might figure more widely in labor market outcomes than commonly believed." More narrowly, it shows there's a glaring opportunity in yet another multibillion-dollar sport for managers who grasp stats.

"What Can International Cricket Teach Us About the Role of Luck in Labor Markets?" Shekhar Aiyar and Rodney Ramcharan, IMF Working Paper (October 2010)

POLITICAL SCIENCE

Looking the Part

The tendency to judge politicians on superficial qualities such as looks appears to be universal. Consider this new study: Researchers asked American and Indian test subjects to judge the fitness for office of Mexican and Brazilian politicians, based on photographs alone. Their answers, it turned out, largely matched who had won the elections in question.

Previous research has found that appearance is a surprisingly strong predictor of electoral success. This new study finds that the effect transcends race and culture. Just knowing which candidates the American and Indian participants favored based on appearance (and Americans and Indians overwhelmingly favored the same candidates) allowed the researchers to predict the winners in 68% of Mexican elections and 75% of Brazilian elections.

According to the study, appearance matters most when elections focus on individual candidates instead of parties—and when the costs of acquiring information about candidates are high.

"Looking Like a Winner: Candidate Appearance and Electoral Success in New Democracies," Chappell Lawson, Gabriel S. Lenz, Andy Baker and Michael Myers, World Politics (October)

Copyright 2010 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our [Subscriber Agreement](#) and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit www.djreprints.com