THIS ISSUE:

The rule of three. P.2

How ambiguous racism can be more harmful than the blatant variety. P.3

Experimenter effects in the ganzfeld parapsychology experiment? P.4

Asian Americans and European Americans differ in how they see themselves in the world. P.5

Being paid by the hour changes the way we think about time. P.6

Animals – a reminder of our own mortality? P.7
The rule of three

Whether it’s in the financial markets or on the football pitch, most people believe in runs or streaks of luck. We tend to think that if a stock has risen for several successive days, or if a team has put together a string of wins, then the chances of a future good outcome are increased. However in most cases this belief is a fallacy because streaks are a natural part of any random sequence.

Now Kurt Carlson and Suzanne Shu report that the key moment we perceive a streak as having occurred is after three repeats – what they call the 'rule of three'. In other words, we don't read meaning into a repeat of two, and we don't read any additional meaning into streaks of more than three.

In one study, students were asked to decide how much fictional inheritance to invest in a stock. After hearing the stock had risen for one day or for two consecutive days, there was little increase in the amount they chose to invest. The largest jump in the students' investment decision came after they learned the stock had risen for three consecutive days. By contrast, hearing that the stock had risen for four, five or even six consecutive days didn’t make any further impact on their decision making.

Other support for the rule of three came from an analysis of basketball data and of how streaks are discussed in sports journalism.

Carlson and Shu say the 'rule of three' has implications in real life. For example, in sports gambling, a team that has won three games in a row will be overpriced (the majority will act as though the team has an increased chance of winning), while a team that has lost three in a row will be under-priced. "A savvy gambler (who is aware of the rule of three) might do well to bet against teams that have won three games in a row and bet for teams that have lost three games in a row," they said.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2007.03.004

Author weblink: http://www.fuqua.duke.edu/faculty/alpha/carlson.htm

Visit the Digest blog: www.researchdigest.org.uk/blog
How ambiguous racism can be more harmful than the blatant variety

Ambigious racism is more detrimental to African American students’ performance on a mental task, than is blatant racism, psychologists have shown. By contrast, the reverse is true for White students, for whom blatant racism is more distracting.

Jessica Salvatore and Nicole Shelton say their results reflect the fact that Black students have coping mechanisms at hand to deal with blatant prejudice, but are more distracted by an ambiguous scenario. “Uncertainty about others’ prejudice leaves marginalised individuals unable to discern which coping strategies would be most appropriate to the situation,” they said.

The researchers asked 250 Princeton undergrads to read fictitious job candidates’ CVs, followed by the hiring decisions of the pretend company they had applied for. Shortly afterwards the students completed the famous Stroop test, which measures cognitive control by repeatedly asking participants to name the ink colour a word is written in, while ignoring the colour name spelt out by the letters.

The Black students’ performance suffered more after they read about a White employer selecting an inferior White candidate over a better qualified Black candidate (ambiguous racism), compared with when they read about a White employer saying they had rejected a superior Black candidate because he had been a member of too many minority organisations (blatant racism).

However, for White students it was the blatant racism that was more distracting. The researchers said this was because the White students weren't used to dealing with overt racism and didn't even notice the ambiguous racism.


Author weblink:
https://weblamp.princeton.edu/~psych/psychology/research/shelton/index.php
Experimenter effects in the ganzfeld parapsychology experiment

An analysis of conversations that took place during ganzfeld parapsychology experiments has revealed researchers may have exerted an influence on their participants.

A ganzfeld experiment involves a ‘sender’ trying to project images from a video clip to a ‘receiver’ who is incubated, blindfolded, in a sound-proof room. The ‘receiver’ reports the images they believe they are receiving out loud to a researcher who notes them down. Crucially, the next stage involves the researcher reviewing these images with the ‘receiver’, before the ‘receiver’ attempts to identify the video clip seen by the ‘sender’ from among three decoys.

Robin Wooffitt analysed recordings taken from ganzfeld experiments held at the famous Koestler Parapsychology Unit in Edinburgh during the mid 1990s. He found that as the researchers reviewed the images reported by the ‘receivers’, they tended to respond in two distinct ways.

After a clarification by the ‘receiver’, researchers sometimes said “okay” and moved decisively onto the next item. Other times, however, they said “mm hm” with an inquiring tone. After hearing this, ‘receivers' typically tried to expand on their description, and as they did so, often ended up casting doubt on the clarity of their imagery.

Wooffitt said that a researcher’s choice to respond with “okay” or “mm hm” might seem inconsequential, but in fact the latter utterance clearly had an effect on the ‘receivers’ confidence in their imagery. Consequently, he said, “It is at least possible that they [the ‘receivers’] will have less confidence in relying on their imagery to identify significant events or themes in the video clips.”

If the researchers did influence participants in this way, could it help explain why sceptical researchers have tended to report more negative results than believers? Wooffitt told the Digest: "I think it has much more to do with the nature of one’s interactional style, and that doesn’t necessarily correlate with either sceptical or ‘pro-paranormal’ beliefs."

Wooffitt added that by furthering our "understanding of the impact of the social dynamics in psychology experiments more generally”, his observations have implications beyond parapsychology research.


Author weblink: http://www.york.ac.uk/depts/soci/s_woof.html
Exploring differences in how Asian Americans and European Americans see themselves in the world

The way we see ourselves in the world can affect our answer to ambiguous questions like: “Next Wednesday's meeting has been moved forward two days. What day is the meeting now on?”

If you see yourself as moving through time, then you're more likely to think the meeting will be on Friday. By contrast, if you see time as passing you by, you're more likely to think the meeting has changed to Monday.

Angela Leung and Dov Cohen used ambiguous questions like this to test the contrasting perspectives of Asian Americans and European Americans.

For example, participants from these racial backgrounds were told about a scenario in which they had to gone to meet a friend at a skyscraper, but as they were in the lift going up to the 94th floor, their friend was in another lift heading down from the 94th floor to the reception.

Next, the participants were given a map showing the city 'Jackson'. They were asked to mark where the city 'Jamestown' was, which they were told ambiguously was the next city “after” Jackson on the north-south highway.

The idea is that participants who imagined the skyscraper story from their own perspective would mark Jamestown as the next city north of Jackson (because they'd imagined going up in the lift in the story), whereas participants who imagined the skyscraper story from their friend's perspective would mark Jamestown as being south.

Taken together with other examples of this kind, the researchers found Asian Americans were more likely to adopt the perspective of their friend in these social scenarios rather than to adopt their own perspective.

Leung and Cohen said this shows how our values our embodied in the way we see ourselves in the world. Asian Americans who place value on “thinking how your actions will look to other people” tend to visualise social situations from a third person “camera angle”. European Americans, by contrast, who value “knowing what you want” tend to visualise situations from their own perspective.


Author weblink:
http://www.socsc.smu.edu.sg/faculty/social_sciences/angelaleung.asp

Visit the Digest blog: www.researchdigest.org.uk/blog
Being paid by the hour changes the way we think about time

'Time is money' goes the adage. But do you think of time as having a monetary value? According to Sanford DeVoe and Jeffrey Pfeffer at Stanford University in America, your answer could well depend on whether you are paid by the hour.

If someone sees their time as having a financial worth, then it follows that any time they don't spend earning money is essentially lost revenue. DeVoe and Pfeffer found that of over 10,000 employees, those who were paid by the hour were significantly more likely to say that, given the choice, they would choose to work more hours for more money, rather than fewer hours for less money.

This held true even after controlling for a raft of factors like current weekly income and number of hours worked.

In a second study, 62 employees on an annual salary reported how much of their working life they had spent being paid hourly. As expected, those who'd spent more of their lives paid hourly were more likely to display a financial view of time, saying they'd rather work more hours for more money.

Some of these employees were also asked to translate their annual salary into an hourly rate. Doing this led employees who'd spent little, or none, of their life on an hourly salary, to view time as if they had previously worked on an hourly rate – again, being more likely to say they'd rather work longer hours for more money, than fewer hours for less.

The findings have implications for how we are paid and for the modern drive towards flexible working arrangements. You might think that the option of an hourly rate and flexible hours would free you up to spend more time on what really matters to you in life. These results suggest such an arrangement would lead you to view time as money, making it hard to resist working longer hours.


Author weblink: http://www.rotman.utoronto.ca/facbios/viewFac.asp?facultyID=sanford.devoe

Visit the Digest blog: www.researchdigest.org.uk/blog
**Animals – a reminder of our own mortality?**

Being reminded of our own mortality can sour our attitudes towards animals, psychologists have found.

Low self-esteem students who were reminded of their mortality and their similarity to animals subsequently reported more negative attitudes towards animals than low self-esteem students who weren’t given these reminders. The researchers said that, to the first group, animals had come to represent human “biological vulnerability and mortality”, thus provoking aversion and negative attitudes. They argue this is consistent with "Terror Management Theory", which states we deliberately avoid stimuli that remind us of our biological state.

Ruth Beatson and Michael Halloran of La Trobe University, Australia, reminded some student participants of their mortality by asking them to describe what will happen to them physically when they die.

The researchers also reminded the students of their relation to animals by playing them a video about chimp reproductive behaviour and asking them to think about how similar it was to human sexual behaviour.

Those students reminded of their own creatureliness and mortality subsequently showed the most negative attitudes towards animals, but only if they had low self-esteem. The attitudes of high-self esteem students were apparently unaffected by the video and morbid question.

Regardless of their self-esteem, other students who were reminded of their creatureliness, but who were not asked to think about their mortality, showed more positive attitudes to animals, as did another student group reminded of their mortality but not their closeness to animals. In other words, negative attitudes were only provoked when the mortality and creatureliness reminders came together.

The researchers said their findings suggest anti animal-cruelty campaigns must emphasise the inter-relatedness of humans and animals in a “non-threatening manner”.
