

PSYCHOLOGY

The Power of Disgust

People more prone to experience disgust see things differently. They even appear to have greater powers than the rest of us at detecting contamination.

In one study, undergraduates were asked to make subtle distinctions between shades of light and dark gray. A questionnaire also measured the students' disgust sensitivity. Those with higher disgust sensitivity were better at perceiving differences at the light end of the spectrum, suggesting a greater ability to detect impurities.

The same paper describes another study in which students were shown images of cockroaches, garbage and other disgusting stuff, and then were asked to make subtle visual distinctions. This had no impact on the performance of participants who rated low on disgust sensitivity. But the images significantly improved the light-shade performance of those highly sensitive to disgusting stimuli.

"The Faintest Speck of Dirt: Disgust Enhances the Detection of Impurity," Gary D. Sherman, Jonathan Haidt and Gerald L. Clore, Psychological Science (online Nov. 5)

BEHAVIOR

How to Be a Better Liar

For liars, it seems, practice very nearly makes perfect. Chinese re-

searchers asked three groups of young adults to answer questions about themselves, in some cases truthfully and in others falsely, and tracked reaction times as a measure of how difficult participants found it to lie. The scientists found that members of the group given practice before a second round of testing were able to get their reaction times for deception down to almost the same as their reaction times when telling the truth.

A second group was told the results of the first trial and exhorted to do better—but not given practice. That group also improved in the second trial. A control group given an irrelevant task between trials made no improvement.

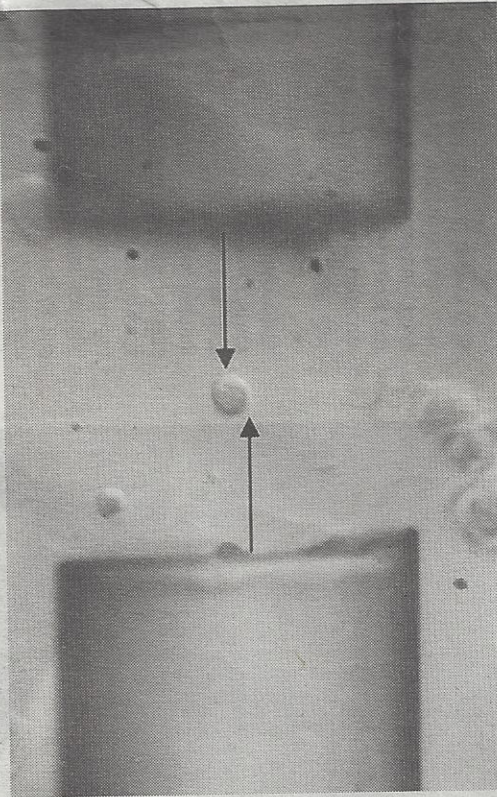
"A Repeated Lie Becomes a Truth? The Effect of Intentional Control and Training on Deception," Xiaoping Hu, Hao Chen and Genyue Fu, Frontiers in Psychology (November)

BIOMECHANICS

The Horse Sense Of Cave Dwellers

Who's primitive? Cave dwellers beat many of their highly trained latter-day successors at drawing animals.

Hungarian researchers analyzed 1,000 images of four-legged animals and found that the cave artists were far more accurate at portraying the animals' much misunderstood gait. Before the work of photographer Eadweard Muybridge, who published his classic "Animal Locomotion: An Electro-Photographic Investigation of Consecutive

**MICROSCOPIC MANIPULATION**

OPTICAL fibers (left and right) can manipulate a human muscle cell, center.

A high-tech equivalent of an infinitesimal wrench can manipulate the tiniest of particles, including a single living cell.

The laser system—dubbed a fiber-optic spanner, the British word for a wrench—uses flexible optical fibers to move microscopic particles in any direction by nudging them with protons. Scientists at the University of Texas (Arlington) developed the technique and have used it to rotate human muscle cells without harming them. The researchers, who reported their work in the journal *Optics Letters*, say the system might one day be used to examine embryos or to judge malignancy by a cell's response to being rotated.

Phases of Animal Movements" in 1887, modern artists got the gait wrong 83.5% of the time, the scientists found. Post-Muybridge, the error rate fell to 58%.

But prehistoric artists got the gait wrong just 46% of the time. That's quite an accomplishment, given that an artist

choosing a gait by mere chance would have an error rate of 73%, the researchers wrote.

"Cavemen Were Better at Depicting Quadruped Walking than Modern Artists: Erroneous Walking Illustrations in the Fine Arts from Prehistory to Today," Gabor Horvath, Etelka Farkas, Ildiko Boncz, Miklos Blaho, Gyorgy Kriska, PLoS ONE (Dec. 5)

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