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## Ideas

### UNCOMMON KNOWLEDGE

# What happens to cities when their newspapers die

## And more surprising insights from the social sciences

By **Kevin Lewis** | FEBRUARY 16, 2014

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## When a newspaper dies

WHAT DO NEWSPAPERS do for a city? A recent study offers some evidence, based on what happens when they disappear. As the recession and the transition to online media hit newspaper revenues, two major newspapers closed in Denver and Seattle, respectively, in 2009. Data from Census Bureau surveys indicate that civic engagement (e.g., socially responsible purchasing, helping to run a community organization)—but not mere socializing—declined in those two cities more than it did in comparable cities during the same period. The decline in Denver was especially acute; the newspaper there had reached a larger share of the market and went completely out of business.

*Shaker, L., "Dead Newspapers and Citizens' Civic Engagement," Political Communication (Winter 2014).*

## **Sing yourself bilingual**

YOU CAN LEARN a foreign language à la Rosetta Stone, or you can learn a foreign language à la Rolling Stone. In a recent study, English-speakers who heard and repeated unfamiliar Hungarian phrases in a singing format were subsequently better able to recall and produce the phrases, compared to English-speakers who learned the phrases in a regular speaking format.

*Ludke, K. et al., "Singing Can Facilitate Foreign Language Learning," Memory & Cognition (January 2014).*

## **Fake gender, real confidence**

MANY PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDIES have shown that negative stereotypes (e.g., that females are bad at math) can be self-fulfilling, a phenomenon called "stereotype threat." There's also a phenomenon called "stereotype lift," in which you get a boost from simply being aware of negative stereotypes attached to your competitors. Weirdly, this effect also seems to hold true for assumed identities. In a computer-based experiment, "participants who were arbitrarily represented by a male avatar and competed against two ostensible female avatars showed strongest performance compared to others on the arithmetic task. This pattern occurred regardless of participants' actual gender, pointing to a virtual stereotype lift effect."

*Lee, J.-E. et al., "Does the Mask Govern the Mind?: Effects of Arbitrary Gender Representation on Quantitative Task Performance in Avatar-Represented Virtual Groups," Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking (forthcoming).*

## **But I feel like I just ate!**

FEEL HUNGRY? It depends when you last ate—but, according to a new set of experiments, it might also depend on external cues telling you how relatively long it's been. Diners at a Panera Bread restaurant who were asked to denote when they last ate in the context of a long time scale—thus making the last meal seem relatively recent—subsequently ordered a lower-calorie meal. Likewise, people who were made to think that more time had elapsed—even by researchers surreptitiously speeding up a clock—since first hearing a song or viewing a photograph got more enjoyment out of experiencing it again.

*Galak, J. et al., "How Perceptions of Temporal Distance Influence Satiation," Journal of Experimental Social Psychology (forthcoming).*

## **Upbeat president? Look out**

THERE'S A LOT to be said for having a sunny outlook in life. But a new study suggests that too much

optimism from politicians or the media means we'd better get ready for tough times ahead. An analysis of inaugural addresses since Franklin Delano Roosevelt revealed that the use of more positive emotion and future tense was associated with a more negative change in gross domestic product and unemployment four years later. Also, an analysis of articles appearing in the Money section of USA Today during the onset of the recent financial crisis revealed that the use of more positive emotion and future tense was associated with more negative performance of the Dow in subsequent weeks. In neither case was there a reverse association (i.e., economic statistics predicting subsequent word usage).

*Sevincer, T. et al., "Positive Thinking about the Future in Newspaper Reports and Presidential Addresses Predicts Economic Downturn," Psychological Science (forthcoming).*

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