

5-3-2017

Experimental Psychology

University of Dayton

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news_rls

Recommended Citation

University of Dayton, "Experimental Psychology" (2017). *News Releases*. 10980.
https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news_rls/10980

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Marketing and Communications at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in News Releases by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact frice1@udayton.edu, mschlange1@udayton.edu.

LATEST NEWS

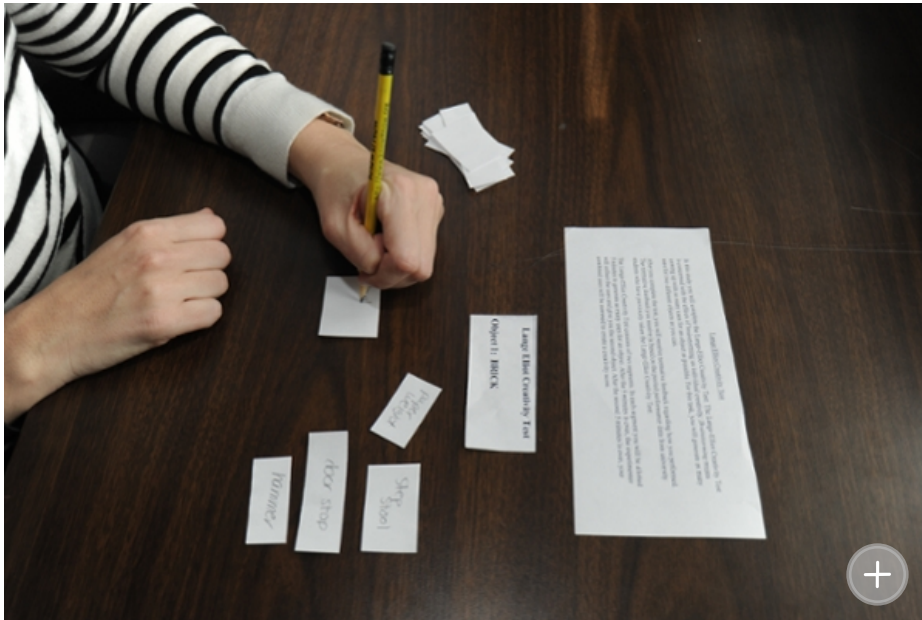
UD in the News
June 15-22

Two national education publications talked to Chief Information Officer Tom Skill about cybersecurity. Politifact interviewed Bob Brecha in the renewable and clean energy engineering graduate program about whether greenhouse emissions are down. Quartz featured aviation historian Janet Bednarek in an article comparing airports around the world.

[READ MORE](#) 

Briefly Speaking

Sharpen your writing, leadership and entrepreneurship skills at the Antioch Writers Summer Workshop and Center for Leadership events. Black



Wednesday May 3, 2017

Experimental Psychology

Think you're good at something? Better than the average person? Turns out, your thoughts may be able to improve your performance.



A new paper from University of Dayton associate professor of psychology [Erin O'Mara](#) used five experiments to show how self-enhancement — or the motivation to have and maintain a positive sense of self — improves how someone does on a task, specifically when self-enhancement is focused on that task.

The results were published in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, a peer-reviewed publication by the American Psychological Association.

"We were trying to understand the motivation to see yourself positively," said O'Mara, who worked with Lowell Gaertner at the University of Tennessee.

"Previous research has examined how that motivation impacts psychological well-being, but in this set of experiments we were

interested in how it affects actual performance on tasks," she said. "I think it's really important to know what function the motivation can serve and how it can influence our lives."

One experiment randomly assigned people to write about how they are better than others at enduring discomfort, using examples from the last week. Everyone was then asked to put their arm in the bucket of icy water — or to endure discomfort — as a part of the experimental procedure.

The people who first wrote about their ability to endure discomfort, thereby engaging in task-specific self-enhancement, kept their arm submerged for almost a minute longer, in part because they had more confidence in themselves to complete the task successfully, O'Mara said.

The creativity experiments asked people to list uses for a brick and then a candle. Those who first wrote about how they are more creative than others, using examples from the last week, generated more uses and more creative responses.

While the research builds on the scientific understanding, O'Mara cautioned self-enhancement can't make the impossible possible.

"When it's focused on a specific task, self-enhancement is showing an improvement in performance," she said. "But to say, 'I'm better than other people at this one thing' doesn't mean you're going to perform better than others at everything. Our findings specifically ruled out this possibility."

In other words, thinking about how great of a runner you are should improve your performance in a race, but not in a spelling bee, O'Mara and Gaertner write.

They also note self-enhancement alone is not a good tool to improve performance.

"For athletes interested in improving their game or musicians wanting to improve their recitals, we recommend practice and more practice," they write. "Self-enhancement without practice would likely be a fast track to failure."

Madonnas exhibit opens June 25.

[READ MORE](#) 

In Solidarity with Laudato Si'

The University of Dayton is among the nearly 600 U.S. Catholic institutions that signed the Catholic Climate Declaration that affirms the Paris Agreement and supports actions to meet its goals.

[READ MORE](#) 

The full study is available online: [Does Self-Enhancement Facilitate Task Performance?](#)

For more information, contact Meagan Pant, assistant director of news and communications, at 937-229-3256 or mpant1@udayton.edu.

SHARE



TOPICS

 [Humanities and Social Sciences](#)  [Research](#)