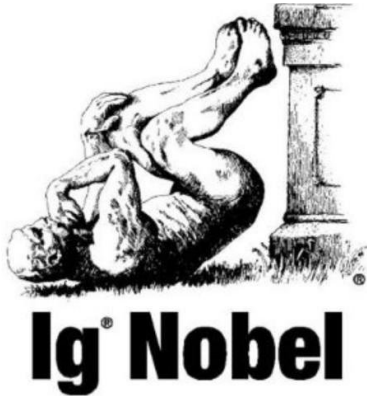


Boss revenge, self-colonoscopy studies win 2018 Ig Nobels

13 September 2018, by Mark Pratt



Anyone who's ever been so furious with their boss that they feel like exacting revenge really needs to listen to Lindie Liang.

Liang and her colleagues found that abusing a virtual voodoo doll instead of your boss will make you feel better without getting you fired or thrown in jail, according to a study that earned them a 2018 Ig Nobel, the annual prize sponsored by the science humor magazine *Annals of Improbable Research* for comical but practical scientific discovery.

Winners recognized Thursday included a Japanese doctor who devised a revolutionary new way to give yourself a colonoscopy; a British archaeology lecturer who figured out that eating human flesh isn't very nutritious; an Australian team that found that people who buy high-tech products really can't be bothered with the instruction manual; and Spanish university researchers who measured the effects of shouting and cursing while driving.

The prizes at the 28th annual ceremony at Harvard University were being handed out by real Nobel

laureates. The event featured a traditional paper airplane air raid and the premiere of "The Broken Heart Opera," performed with the help of Harvard Medical School cardiologists.

The winners, who as usual journeyed to Massachusetts at their own expense, also received a cash prize of 10 trillion virtually worthless Zimbabwean dollars. Each was given 60 seconds to deliver an acceptance speech before an 8-year-old girl complained onstage: "Please stop. I'm bored."

Liang, an assistant professor of business at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario, specializes in studying workplace aggression.

"We wanted to understand why subordinates retaliate when it's bad for them," she said. "We all know yelling at our boss is bad for your career. So what's the function of retaliation? Why do people keep doing it?"

Obviously, Liang couldn't ask people to beat their bosses. Instead, they were shown an online voodoo doll with their supervisor's initials. They then had the option to use pins, pliers or fire on the virtual doll.

The bottom line: People felt better after abusing the doll, or as Liang put it, "their injustice perceptions are deactivated."

Still, she doesn't endorse littering workplaces around the world with voodoo dolls for people angry at their bosses. Let's just have more civil workplaces to start with, she suggests.

James Cole, a lecturer in archaeology at Britain's University of Brighton, earned his Ig Nobel for a study on cannibalism that found that if you want a high-calorie meal, eating human flesh probably isn't the way to go.

Cannibalism is pretty common throughout human history, he said. But the accepted view is that humans have eaten other humans primarily for nutritional reasons. Cole found that the caloric value of humans isn't that high when compared with other animals we know our ancestors hunted and ate.

"We're not super nutritious," he said.

How did Cole determine the caloric value of a human? Don't worry. No humans were harmed in his study. He used a previously determined formula that bases body-part calorie counts on weight and chemical composition.

Dr. Akira Horiuchi, a pediatrician at Showa Inan General Hospital in Komagane, Japan, won for his self-colonoscopy study in which he used a colonoscope designed for children and sat upright rather than lying in the traditional supine position.

Horiuchi isn't recommending that you give yourself a colonoscopy in the comfort of your home. He said via email that many people are afraid of getting a colonoscopy, and he just wanted to show how easy it can be.

"If people watch a video of my self-colonoscopy, they think colonoscopy is simple and easy," he said.

People may laugh at the winners, but Horiuchi said winning an Ig Nobel brings attention to studies such as his that might otherwise be ignored.

The incidence and mortality rate of colorectal cancer in Japan are increasing, he said. If his work makes someone more willing to get a colonoscopy, he reasons, maybe he'll save some lives.

More information: www.improbable.com/

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