

This Week's Citation Classic

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Easterbrook J A. The effect of emotion on cue utilization and the organization of behavior. *Psychol. Rev.* 66:183-201, 1959.
[Institute of Psychiatry, University of London, London, England]

This review argued that emotional arousal acts consistently to reduce the range of cues an organism uses, and that reductions in range of cue utilization from this and other causes serve to organize or disorganize action depending on the behavior observed. [The *Social Sciences Citation Index*® (SSCI)® indicates that this paper has been cited over 260 times since 1966.]

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"As our 'chutes opened, our bodies swung, and the fellow from the starboard door hit my helmet with his boots. Stunned, I made a bad landing and hit my head on the ground. My 'spatio-temporal field' shrank and slowly expanded. I swear I stopped to observe this phenomenon and mark its psychological significance!

"This accident influenced the empirical generalization Dick Solomon permitted me to publish six years later. Of course, the mind had been prepared, and more work was to follow. In particular, my MA thesis research had served to generalize some observations made by D.R. Davis,¹ with G.C. Drew and others, using 'the Cambridge cockpit' during World War II—including one which I encoded in the general statement, 'Marginal acts drop out under stress.' And I had often been reminded of that notion during later field studies of military problems. For instance, people found it hard to notice or remember what had to be done outside a warm tent when -40°F air was moving at 40 mph.

"Back at university in 1957, I found the psychological literature had ad-

vanced 15 years in seven. A lot of reading was required, so I worked out a schedule. Sticking to it was difficult though. Reports touching on the 'marginal omissions' notion kept diverting me. Sometimes they linked up with one another and that excited me. Before long, I deduced that I was interested in this subject matter, should cease treating it as intrusive, and consider working on it for my doctorate. So I wrote it up and passed it on to Hans Eysenck as an introduction to a thesis proposal.

"Economic events worked out so that I never got around to testing the propositions of this paper, but did my doctorate on alcohol in relation to stress. Maybe that was for the best. Others were able to design clever tests which had not occurred to me. A character in 'Pogo' once said something like, 'You must always word the answer so as not to spoil the question.' My wording may have spoiled the questions for me.

"Apparently this was an essay whose time had come. It seems to have stimulated research and to have introduced the term 'cue utilization' into our jargon. Psychology in the late-1950s seems to have been ready for a behavioristic analysis of attention which had some compatibility with the dominant Hullian learning theory. Perhaps we also had a fondness for simplicity.

"But I think the paper also contained a kernel of truth. No doubt its proposition about proficiency needed modification to accommodate Kahneman's² points about in-task learning and arousal. Perhaps the implicit model also needed revision to account for voluntary attention, as Wachtel³ suggested and Kahneman implied. In any case, such considerations finally penetrated my better judgement, and helped motivate preparation of my recent book on voluntary behavior."⁴

1. Davis D R. *Pilot error*. London: HMSO, 1948. Air publication 3139A.

2. Kahneman D. *Attention and effort*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973. 246 p.

3. Wachtel P L. Anxiety, attention, and coping with threat. *J. Abnormal Psychol.* 73:137-43, 1968.

4. Easterbrook J A. *The determinants of free will: a psychological analysis of responsible adjustive behavior*. New York: Academic Press, 1978. 259 p.