

Commentary: Gavin Newsom’s wheel of vaccine fortune: When a game show is as good a metaphor as any

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Our perceptions of risk, as many insurance adjusters and sports teams with comfortable leads know, could be better. Academics study this. For a 2013 Assn. for Psychological Science [paper](#), 101 college students, in exchange for extra credit, were placed in a room with a tarantula (American research universities are the envy of the world) and tried to guess how far away the spider was. The students who were afraid thought the spider was much closer. Fear messes with our perceptions.

On the other hand, one of the most terrifying sentences you will ever read appears in an academic synopsis for a 2011 [Current Biology article](#), which concluded that humans “exhibit a pervasive and surprising bias: when it comes to predicting what will happen to us tomorrow, next week, or fifty years from now, we overestimate the likelihood of positive events, and underestimate the likelihood of negative events.” The risk of divorce, car accidents, getting cancer, our life expectancies, our career success, how smart our kids are — you know what? Maybe it’s better not to think about it. As George Orwell put it, “Most people get a fair amount of fun out of their lives, but on balance life is suffering, and only the very young or the very foolish imagine otherwise.”

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