

Recycled Emotions

April 17, 2013

The Wall Street Journal:

Rage, I've discovered, encourages writing. A couple of years ago I wrote a column about collecting trash along my road upstate. Or rather I wrote a column where I tried, unsuccessfully, to decipher the mentality of those who habitually toss trash from their cars. Since then my annoyance with these reprobates has only grown—prompting a follow-up story.

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I decided to call Wesley Schultz, a professor of psychology at California State University at San Marcos, for added perspective. He's an expert on littering and those who do so.

"You might think littering by pedestrians would be unintentional," said Prof. Schultz, whose team observed almost 10,000 people at 130 outdoor public locations for a recently published national study, "Littering in Context: Personal and Environmental Predictors of Littering Behavior." However, he added, "Most littering is intentional."

I could have told him that, based simply on my jaundiced opinion of human nature. Also, that litterers, of whatever socioeconomic group, are probably ill-bred. "I'm not sure I'd go there," the professor said. "There is this notion that people who litter are generally male, younger and less educated. Our data suggests littering is quite broad. There are very small differences between men and woman; they litter with similar frequency. It's not so much about the person as the context."

Read the whole story: [*The Wall Street Journal*](#)