

## Feeling Insignificant

There was a full moon on a clear night last week, and I had to discontinue whatever random act I was performing at the time to take it in. I couldn't help admiring the stars beyond it, contemplating the sheer vastness of the universe, and relating it to the serendipitous collection of insignificant molecules that comprises my corporeal existence.

This is why I try to avoid looking up at night. It's hard to maintain an elevated sense of your own self-worth when compared to the mind-numbing scale of the cosmos.

Those of us with fragile egos get enough reminders of our own insignificance in our humdrum daily lives. For example, in a men's room not long ago I repeatedly passed my wet hands in front of a motion-detecting paper towel dispenser, and nothing happened. The guys before me and after me both had no trouble tripping the sensor.

The paper towel dispenser presumably has no axe to grind when it comes to deciding who gets towels and who doesn't. If it thinks that I don't exist, what makes me think that I do? Why should I trust my own opinion over a disinterested third-party janitorial device?

Come to think of it, I have had sporadic luck with other perceptive mechanisms as well, like automatic door openers. I always assumed I was the one triggering the response, but if I really don't exist it could have been reacting to the real people right behind me.

Lots of things can cause you to question your visibility, if not your existence. A guy about my age recently told me that he was once out for a walk, and he saw two college-age girls who were wearing very little Spandex jogging toward him. He straightened up, sucked in his stomach and did his best to look like The World's Most Interesting Man in the Dos Equis beer commercials.

As they approached him, one of the young women pressed one of her nostrils shut with her forefinger and snorted the contents of the other on the sidewalk in front of him. He reported thinking that if there was a stature lower than “insignificant,” that’s where they would rank him.

Compounding my own angst is a distressing article I read in Newsweek a while back about recent developments in cosmology that indicate the possibility that the universe we live in may be merely one of billions other universes (called a multiverse). The other universes share the same space, but most are separate from ours, made from different kinds of particles and governed by different forces.

Great. This means that on days that I become despondent about my lack of significance in the grand scheme of things, the truth could be that - even so - I am overestimating my worth by a factor of billions.

Going the other direction, it seems logical that the narrower one’s focus the more significant one will appear to be. When I consider my stature in my own house, it’s reassuring to know that I rank first – right after LuAnn and our two cats. Wait, is that the same as ranking last? I thought I might place higher, but evidently LuAnn is in possession of the cats’ proxies. Maybe my focus will need to be narrowed to my own bathroom.

No, I’ve decided I’ll just “man up” and forge ahead. I’ll bet even The World’s Most Interesting Man has these same insecurities but is immensely successful at concealing them. Or maybe he just never looks up at night.

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