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In Brief

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Coffee lovers, drink up



Older women who drink more coffee than average have reduced odds of developing dementia, finds a study in the [*Journals of Gerontology, Series A: Biological Sciences and Medical Sciences*](#). Researchers found that among 6,467 women age 65 and older, those who drank more than the median level of caffeine were significantly less likely to develop dementia or cognitive impairment than those who drank below the median amount. The "above-median" caffeine drinkers drank an average of about 261 mg of caffeine per day, the equivalent of two to three cups of coffee.

Support for LGBTQ teens

Previous research has found that teens who have supportive relationships with adults outside school are less likely to have suicidal thoughts and plans. But lesbian, gay, bisexual and questioning teens are less likely to get that support than their heterosexual peers are, according to a new study in the [*American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*](#). Researchers analyzed data from 22,843 Boston-area high school students. They found that not only did lesbian, gay, bisexual and questioning teens have significantly less adult support than their heterosexual peers, but that the support they did get was associated with less of a protective effect.

Social/spatial relations

Men generally do better than women on tests of spatial abilities, but a study in [*Psychological Science*](#) suggests that reframing a spatial task as a social one can eliminate that disparity. Researchers asked 135 college students (65 men, 70 women) to do a spatial perspective-taking task that involved looking at a picture with several objects (such as a cat, a tree and a car) and imagining standing at one, facing the other and pointing at the third. In this version, men outperformed women. But when the researchers swapped the starting object for a human figure and described the task as a social rather than a spatial one, the gender performance gap disappeared. The researchers suggest women may underperform on spatial tests because of low expectations and characteristics of the tests, rather than a lack of spatial ability.

Alcohol and stress



A new medication could help high-stress people with alcohol use disorder cut back on drinking, finds a clinical trial published in [Neuropsychopharmacology](#). Researchers tested the compound, ABT-436, which blocks the effects of the stress-related hormone vasopressin. In a 12-week clinical trial with 150 alcohol-dependent participants, those who took ABT-436 had significantly more days on average when they didn't drink any alcohol than participants who took a placebo (51.2 versus 41.6 days). Also, participants with higher baseline stress levels responded better to ABT-436 than those with lower stress levels did.

Catching psychosis early



A new predictive model could help mental health professionals identify people about to experience a first psychotic episode better than current methods do, finds a study in [Translational Psychiatry](#). The researchers analyzed data from 40 patients considered "ultrahigh-risk" for psychosis. **The new model—which combines information from a patient's medical history, clinical assessment and biomarkers—accurately identified 70 percent of the patients who would experience a psychotic episode within a year**; the current criteria would only have identified 28 percent, the researchers found.

The dog ate my homework

Adults do no better than chance at determining when children are lying, finds a meta-analysis in [Law and Human Behavior](#). The researchers analyzed 45 studies with a total of 7,893 adult judges and 1,858 children (ages 3 to 15). Overall, adults identified lies correctly only 47.5 percent of the time, though they were able to correctly identify true statements 63.8 percent of the time. The researchers also found that professionals such as teachers and social workers were slightly better than laypeople at identifying lies.

A lifetime of warmth



Men who grow up in warm families feel more secure in their romantic relationships into their 80s, finds research in [Psychological Science](#). The study examined data from 81 participants in a six-decade study of Harvard undergraduates that began in 1938. Researchers looked at

early interviews with the participants and their parents about their childhoods; midlife interviews in which they discussed work, health and relationship challenges; and finally late-life interviews in which the participants, in their 70s and 80s, discussed their current relationships. Men who grew up in nurturing family environments were more likely to have secure attachments to their romantic partners late in life, and that association could be explained, in part, by better emotion regulation skills in midlife.

Smart apes

Great apes can understand that another creature's actions can be spurred by false beliefs—a cognitive feat once thought unique to humans—suggests research in [Science](#). The researchers used eye-tracking technology to observe chimpanzees, bonobos and orangutans as they watched videos in which a human actor looked for a hidden object. In each video, the actor saw where the object was initially placed, but in one version, the object was later moved while the actor wasn't looking. The apes looked at the location where the actor would believe the object to be, even when the apes knew it had been moved. The research is the first to show that nonhuman primates possess this theory of mind.

Empathy around the world



On a list of the world's most empathetic countries, the United States ranks seventh out of 63, according to a study in the [Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology](#). Researchers surveyed 104,365 adults in 63 countries about their levels of empathy, with questions such as, "I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective." Ecuador ranked as the world's most empathetic country; Lithuania came in last (many countries were excluded for small sample size). The researchers also found that countries higher in empathy had higher average levels of collectivism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, self-esteem, emotionality, subjective wellbeing and prosocial behavior as well.

Nose to the grindstone

Baby boomers, Gen Xers and millennials all have equally strong work ethics, contrary to popular stereotypes that label some generations hard-working and others slackers, suggests research in the [Journal of Business and Psychology](#). The meta-analysis examined 77 studies spanning more than 40 years and three generations. All the studies aimed to measure participants' endorsement of the "Protestant work ethic"—the idea that success comes through hard work and that work is central to life. The researchers found no significant differences in the work ethic of the three generational cohorts.

The lying brain

Telling small lies may desensitize our brains and lead to ever-bigger lies, suggests research in [Nature Neuroscience](#). The researchers used functional MRI to scan **80 participants'** brains as they played a computer game in which they could benefit from lying to an unseen partner. When participants told an initial small lie, their amygdala showed a strong response. But as their lies escalated throughout the game, the amygdala response got smaller. The researchers suggest that the reduced amygdala response could reflect a reduced emotional response to dishonesty and that further research could explore whether the same slippery slope principal might apply to other behaviors, including violence and risk-taking.

Rudeness at work

Incivility can be contagious in offices, leading to a downward spiral of condescension, sarcasm and other uncivil behavior at work, finds research in the [Journal of Applied Psychology](#). The researchers followed 70 employees for two weeks, asking them to answer questions and complete tasks three times per workday. Being on the receiving end of rude behavior increased employees' mental fatigue and reduced self-control, which led them to act rudely to others later in the day, the researchers found. These "incivility spirals" were more frequent in offices perceived as "political," defined as an environment where workers do what is best for them rather than best for the organization.

Unwelcome at school



Black students feel less welcome at high schools where black students are suspended disproportionately more often than white students, according to research in the [Journal of Educational Psychology](#). Researchers analyzed data from 19,768 teens at 58 suburban and rural high schools in Maryland. Black students at schools with a larger "discipline gap" felt their school was less fair and welcoming, felt less belonging and had more adjustment problems than black students at schools with a smaller discipline gap, even after controlling for factors such as socioeconomic status, gender and overall suspension rates. Previous research has found that discipline gaps are not due entirely to differences in conduct.

Transgender health disparities

Transgender and gender-nonconforming people are less likely than cisgender individuals to have health insurance and a primary-care physician, finds research in [Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity](#). The researchers analyzed data from 6,450 respondents to the 2008 National Transgender Discrimination Study (the most recent available data) and compared them with 21,780 respondents to the National Health Interview Survey. They found that transgender and gender non-conforming people were significantly more likely to be

uninsured (18.8 percent) than cisgender people (16.6 percent). They were also less likely to visit a doctor's office that year (59.7 percent versus 75 percent) and more likely to visit an emergency room (4.1 percent versus 1.2 percent) for medical care.

Depression and the pill



Women who use hormonal contraception are more likely to take antidepressants, suggests a study in [JAMA Psychiatry](#). Researchers analyzed the medical records of more than a million Danish women and teenage girls (ages 15 to 34), and found that those who took a combined estrogen/progestin pill were 23 percent more likely to take antidepressants than those who didn't use hormonal birth control. Progestin-only pill users were 34 percent more likely, those with a hormonal IUD were 40 percent more likely, and patch users were twice as likely as nonusers to have an antidepressant prescription.

For direct links to the research cited in this section, visit our digital edition at www.apa.org/monitor/digital.