

MONITOR ON PSYCHOLOGY

In Brief

July/August 2017

Sick and Lonely



Loneliness can exacerbate the symptoms of the common cold, suggests a study in [*Health Psychology*](#). Researchers gave 213 healthy participants surveys that measured their self-perceptions of loneliness and the size and strength of their social networks. Then, the researchers exposed the participants to the cold virus. Three out of four participants developed a cold; those who felt lonely were no more likely to become sick than those who didn't. However, among participants who did get sick, lonely people reported significantly more severe symptoms than those who didn't feel lonely.

Older mothers, happier kids



Older mothers are less likely to scold and physically punish their young children than younger mothers are, and their children have fewer behavioral and social problems, suggests a study in the [*European Journal of Developmental Psychology*](#). Researchers examined data from 4,741 pairs of mothers and children who participated in a Danish longitudinal study. At ages 7 and 11, children of older mothers had fewer behavioral, social and emotional difficulties than children of younger mothers, though the association did not hold at age 15. Also, older mothers were less likely to verbally and physically punish their children at ages 7 and 11, and less likely to verbally punish at age 15.

Choosing the right treatment



A brain scan might help clinicians figure out which patients with depression will respond better to medication and which to psychotherapy, finds a study in the [American Journal of Psychiatry](#). In the study, researchers assigned 122 patients to 12 weeks of either cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) or an antidepressant medication. Before treatment, they used fMRI to scan the patients' brains and evaluate the level of connectivity between the subcallosal cingulate cortex, which is involved in emotion processing, and three other brain areas. Patients with more connectivity between the brain regions fared better with CBT, while patients with less connectivity fared better with the medication.

Hero worship

Infants as young as six months old show a preference for "heroes" over passive bystanders, suggests research in [Nature Human Behaviour](#). Researchers showed infants two videos in which one cartoon character chased and bumped into another, while a third character watched. In one video, the third character then intervened, getting between the aggressor and victim. In another video, the third character zipped away. When the infants were then shown real-life replicas of the two third characters, they were significantly more likely to choose (by touching) the one who had intervened.

Wait for the signal

Children younger than 14 don't have the perceptual and motor skills necessary to cross the street safely against oncoming traffic, finds research in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance*. Researchers tested 96 children and adults in a 3D simulator. All participants tried 20 times to cross a one-lane virtual road with cars passing at 25 miles per hour, one car every 2 to 5 seconds. Children under 14 were not able to safely judge the oncoming traffic: 6-year-olds would have been struck by a vehicle in 8 percent of the trials; 8-year-olds in 6 percent of trials; 10-year-olds in 5 percent of trials; and 12-year-olds in 2 percent of trials. Fourteen-year-olds and adults crossed the street safely in all trials.

Antidepressants in pregnancy

Children whose mothers take antidepressants in early pregnancy are at no greater risk of developing autism or attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) than other children, despite previous research suggesting a linkage, finds a study in the [Journal of the American Medical Association](#). Researchers looked at data from more than 1.5 million children born in Sweden from 1996 to 2012. After controlling

for other risk factors, such as parental age and education, the researchers found no increased risk for autism or ADHD among children whose mothers used antidepressants in the first trimester of pregnancy. They did, however, find that **those children were about 1.3 times more likely to be born prematurely.**

Colorism and suspension



African-American girls with darker skin complexions are almost twice as likely as their white peers to be suspended from school, but African-American teen girls with lighter skin tones are not more likely to be suspended than white peers, finds a study in [School Psychology Quarterly](#). Researchers examined data from almost 7,000 teenage girls who participated in the National

Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health. The researchers found that the association between skin tone and suspension held after controlling for individual and school-level characteristics, including student-teacher relationships, discipline history, and school size and type. Previous research has shown that African-American children face harsher disciplinary sanctions than white children in school. The new study adds nuance by demonstrating that "colorism" plays a role in these disparities.

Emotional placebo

The placebo effect may work to ease emotional as well as physical pain, suggests a study in the [Journal of Neuroscience](#). Researchers tested **40 participants** who had recently broken up with their romantic partners. In separate trials, they were shown pictures of their exes and were subjected to a hot physical stimulus on their arms, all while inside an fMRI scanner. The researchers found that **similar brain regions were activated during the participants' experiences of emotional and physical pain.**

Then, the participants were given a nasal spray: One half were told it was an analgesic to reduce pain, the other half that it was a saline solution. Afterward, participants were again tested in the scanner. **Those in the placebo group reported feeling less emotional and physical pain, and showed brain changes that backed that up:** Activity increased in an area of the midbrain called the periaqueductal gray that helps modulate various pain-related brain mechanisms.

How to end therapy

Psychologists of different theoretical orientations have common goals and use a similar process when terminating therapy with a patient, finds a study in [Psychotherapy](#). Researchers surveyed 65 psychologists from the psychoanalytic/psychodynamic, experiential/humanistic, cognitive/cognitive-behavioral, systemic/interpersonal, multicultural and integrative/eclectic orientations about how they proceed when they and a patient mutually agree to end therapy. The researchers

identified eight common factors that characterized the approaches of psychologists of all orientations, such as processing the feelings of the patient and therapist, discussing the patient's future functioning and coping, and helping the patient use new skills beyond therapy.

Health apps



Mobile app-based health interventions can improve health outcomes and behaviors in children, finds a meta-analysis in [JAMA Pediatrics](#). Researchers analyzed 37 studies with almost 30,000 participants, each of which tested the efficacy of a mobile app designed to address a health issue such as immunizations, diabetes, asthma, obesity or others. The apps used different methods, including providing personalized reminders and information, recording disease symptoms and offering interactive feedback. The researchers found that the apps significantly improved health behaviors and outcomes in the children and were particularly effective when caregivers were involved in the intervention.

Wild ideas



Too much structure can put a damper on creativity, suggests a study in [Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes](#). Researchers asked 186 undergraduate participants to build an alien with LEGOs. They gave half of the participants 442 LEGO bricks neatly organized by color and shape, and gave the other half the same 442 bricks jumbled together in a box. Participants who were given the jumbled LEGOs built significantly more creative aliens than those given the organized box, as judged by a panel of raters. Participants in the "disorganized" condition also spent more time on the task: 16.8 minutes as compared with 11.5 minutes, on average. In a follow-up experiment, the researchers also found that when people were asked to make sentences from a list of 100 words, they came up with more creative sentences when the words were presented at random than when they were organized into categories.

A humble mind



Contrary to stereotypes, a study in [Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin](#) found no difference between liberals and conservatives, or between religious and nonreligious people, in their level of "intellectual humility" — the ability to recognize

that one's beliefs might be wrong. In a series of experiments, the researchers also found that **intellectual humility was associated with openness, curiosity and tolerance of ambiguity.** In addition, the researchers concluded that people high in intellectual humility were less likely to fault politicians for "flip-flopping" and were **better at distinguishing strong, fact-based arguments from weak ones.**

Tetris therapy

A brief intervention involving the computer game Tetris might help reduce patients' intrusive memories after a traumatic event, finds research in [Molecular Psychiatry](#). Researchers tested the intervention on 71 patients waiting in a hospital emergency room within six hours after being in a car accident. They instructed the patients to bring the memory of the car accident to mind, and then to spend 20 minutes concentrating on playing Tetris on a hand-held game unit. Participants who tried the intervention reported 62 percent fewer intrusive memories in the week after the event than a control group of accident victims. The researchers hypothesize that concentrating on the visuospatial game could help disrupt memory consolidation in the aftermath of the trauma.

Opioid treatment and health reform

States that expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act saw a corresponding increase in buprenorphine prescriptions, an opioid-replacement therapy that is one of the most effective methods to treat opioid addiction, finds a study in [Medical Care](#). Researchers examined Medicaid spending data from 2011 to 2014 and found that in the 26 states and the District of Columbia that expanded Medicaid coverage in 2014, there was an average 70 percent increase in buprenorphine prescriptions compared with 2011. In states that didn't expand Medicaid that year, there was no significant increase.

Drinking with strangers



Alcohol may provide more social lubricant among strangers than among friends, suggests a meta-analysis in [Psychology of Addictive Behaviors](#). Researchers analyzed 21 alcohol-administration studies with 2,046 participants, in which participants drank alcohol in the presence of other people. Participants who did not know each other beforehand self-reported or demonstrated more social-emotional enhancement effects from the alcohol (such as feeling more relaxed and talking more) than participants who drank alcohol with people they knew.

Superagers

The brains of "SuperAgers" — people over age 80 whose memory is as good as the average middle-aged adult — shrink more slowly than those of their cognitively average peers, finds research in the [*Journal of the American Medical Association*](#). Previous research had shown that SuperAgers have thicker cortices than average agers, but researchers weren't sure whether that was because their cortices started out thicker or shrank more slowly. In this study, researchers used MRI to measure the change in cortical thickness among 24 SuperAgers and 12 age-matched controls over 18 months. They found that the annual decline was 1.06 percent for SuperAgers and 2.24 percent for the control group.

Psychosis risk

Young people who experience a first episode of psychosis have greatly elevated risk of dying in the next year, but despite that risk, many receive little or no treatment, finds a study in [*Schizophrenia Bulletin*](#). Researchers used insurance claims data to identify more than 5,000 people ages 16 to 30 who had a first episode of psychosis in 2008–09. These young people were 24 times more likely to die over the next 12 months than their same-age peers without psychosis. The researchers also found that 61 percent of these patients received no antipsychotic medication and 41 percent received no individual psychotherapy over the first year following the episode.

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