

APS 2021 Virtual Convention News Highlights: Annual ‘Meeting of the Minds’ in Psychological Science

May 11, 2021



The latest news and discoveries from the field of psychological science will be featured at the [2021 Virtual Convention](#) of the Association for Psychological Science (APS), held May 26-27. Researchers from around the globe will present noteworthy research and host live poster-session discussions covering topics such as the mental impact of COVID-19, racism and ethnic biases, politics and extremism, romance and relationships, and many others.

Registered journalists will have access to all meeting content free of charge. Registration information is at the end of this release and online in the [virtual press room](#).

The following summaries highlight a few of the meeting’s many noteworthy Flash Talks, which are on-demand 10–15-minute videos. All meeting content, including Flash Talks, will be hosted in the virtual main lobby.



Daily Awe Experience Decreases Feeling of Loneliness During COVID-19

COVID-19 shelter-in-place orders have increased feelings of loneliness, which can be a contributing factor in cardiovascular disease and other mental health consequences. A new study investigates the daily experience of feelings of “awe” on feeling of loneliness. Overall, experiencing feelings of awe makes people feel more connected to their surroundings, which helps protect them against the feeling of loneliness and its potential long-term mental-health consequences.

Are We All Mad Here? Anger as an Important Symptom of Maternal Depression

Maternal depression is a serious and prevalent public health issue. What symptom should be the target of maternal depression interventions and subsequent evaluation? A seemingly obvious answer might be, of course, depression. In a new study, however, researchers assert that anger and anxiety symptoms are underlying depression symptoms and outcome measurements should capture changes in anxiety and anger, in addition to depression.

COVID-19 Pandemic-Related Stressors and Mental Health Outcomes on Racial and Ethnic Minorities

The COVID-19 pandemic has imposed a unique set of stressors on daily life that negatively impact mental health. Even though racial and ethnic minorities have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, their mental health impacts are largely unknown. A new study of 644 veterans revealed that racial and ethnic minority veterans exhibited greater anxiety during the pandemic in comparison to White veterans. However, minorities also had greater pre-pandemic anxiety levels. These findings suggest that racial disparities in anxiety may have more to do with long-standing institutionalized racism than the impact of the pandemic.

Solitary Cannabis Use Frequency Mediates Associations of Pandemic-Related Stress with Cannabis Use Consequences

Emerging evidence indicates that cannabis use has increased since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. A new study suggests that the frequency of solitary cannabis use helps to explain the mechanism by which pandemic-related stress is associated with negative cannabis-related consequences. This finding is in line with prior literature demonstrating solitary cannabis use as a mediator for the relationship between social anxiety and cannabis use consequences.

Psilocybin Use Is Associated with Lowered Odds of Crime Arrests in U.S Adults

The United States has the largest prison population in the world with high rates of recidivism. The public health and economic costs of incarceration are staggering but solutions are elusive. Studies examining psychedelics have linked these compounds to reduced criminality. Psychedelic compounds are known to elicit perceptual shifts and mystical experiences that have profound and lasting personal and spiritual significance. This study suggests that use of classic psychedelic substances is associated with lowered odds of criminal arrests and adds to the growing literature suggesting positive outcomes associated with psilocybin use.

Pragmatic Function of Gestures

People gesture when they speak, especially when speaking is difficult due to language barriers. A new explanation for this behavior is that gestures signal a non-fluent speaker's intent to continue speaking despite interruptions in their speech. A study of 56 undergraduate students revealed a preference for gestures only when a non-fluent speaker could see the receiver. These results suggest that gestures serve a pragmatic function by signaling the speaker's intent to "do their part" as a conversational partner.

People of All Ages Demonstrate a Limited Ability to Distinguish between Original and Manipulated Images

Manipulated images can influence voting behavior, incite fear and violence, and foster dangerous global movements. Despite growing concern about the power of manipulated images to influence people's actions, few studies have explored just how well people can detect manipulations in images and the psychological processes underpinning this task. New research suggests that, across the lifespan, people struggle to accurately identify original and manipulated images and older adults performed worse than their younger counterparts. A short training video, however, did produce a small improvement in identifying manipulated images across all ages.

Social Media Addiction Predicts Excessively Valuing Happiness in Adolescents

The pursuit of happiness is a noble quest. Research suggests, however, that excessively valuing happiness can lead to higher levels of depression in adults and adolescents. A new study explores the possible negative consequences of adolescent addiction to social media on happiness. Researchers found that adolescents who are addicted to social media were more likely to excessively value happiness. Adolescents who are addicted to social media may be more likely to be subjected to unrealistic rosy portrayal of the lives of others. As adolescents are prone to social comparison, professionals who work with youth at risk of or experiencing depressive symptoms should consider suggesting that adolescents modify their social-media usage.

Test Anxiety in Primary School Children: A 20 Year Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis

Testing is a major part of every student's school experience and a high-stakes measure of a student's success. Not surprisingly, children and adolescents commonly experience testing anxiety, which can have significant negative outcomes later in life. A new review of the current body of research going back 20 years found that—among other conclusions—testing anxiety was higher among girls than boys, and

among Asian students compared to European and North American students. It also found that the association between test anxiety and mathematics performance was stronger among older children (compared to younger children) and that gender differences in test anxiety scores were more prevalent in North American samples (compared to Asian samples). The overall conclusion, however, is that more research is needed to find effective ways of reducing test anxiety among primary school children.

Political Memes and Partisan Discrimination in Job Recommendations

Political polarization is on the rise and social-media usage appears to be a contributing factor. But do meme wars go beyond sparking contentious online arguments? Can they impact a person's real-life opportunities? New research suggests they can, including a person's ability to find a job. Study participants were asked about their impressions of potential job applicants by scanning Facebook profiles with either pro-liberal or pro-conservative political memes. The results revealed that liberals rated the conservative user's suitability more negatively than the liberal's suitability and vice versa for conservatives. The findings suggest that online political expression could affect one's livelihood.

Looking for My Boo: Regulatory Focus Affects Online Daters' Expectations of Success and Desire for Partner Pursuit after Being Ghosted

A new study tests the causal link between being ghosted (being ignored, often without warning or explanation) and online daters' desire to pursue potential partners. The results suggest that after being ghosted, those who were focused on preventing future rejection expected to be less successful in future relationships, lessening their desire to pursue new potential partners. The results suggest that researchers should consider how online daters' behaviors after being ghosted may vary based on their motivations and expectations about future relationships.

Laypersons' Perceptions and Knowledge of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking

Public help is essential to combat the sex trafficking of minors, yet little is known about how laypersons perceive victims and perpetrators. New research reveals that the public's ability to recognize a potential trafficking scenario is limited even when it involves the youngest underaged victims. In addition, knowledge of sex trafficking did not make many participants immune to victim blaming, suggesting a clear need for better education on sex trafficking to reduce laypersons risk for misperceiving victims as culprits.

From Naming to Blaming: Using Ethnic/Geographic (vs. Medical) Virus Labels Increases Hostility, Xenophobia, and Stigma

New research examines the psychological impact of referring to the novel coronavirus as either COVID-19 or the "Chinese virus." Leading organizations in public health and psychology strongly discourage the use of the latter, which could foster prejudice and stigma. Supporting this view, research conducted in the first month after the global coronavirus pandemic was declared found that exposure to the "Chinese virus" label increased hostility and xenophobia among non-Asian and non-Chinese ethnic groups. It also increased shame and stigma-related reactions among some Chinese Americans. This research provides much-needed empirical evidence to inform communication of health information using appropriate medical terminology that does not foster prejudice or stigma.

Potential Benefits of Sexting: Increase Sexting Behavior Linked to Higher Sexual Satisfaction and Sexual Responsibility

Sexting—the sharing of sexual messages and images—can carry significant risks in casual relationships and is a serious problem for underage individuals, with possible criminal repercussions. However, in a committed adult relationship, sexting may improve intimacy, strengthen relationships, and improve communication. A new study among young adults in long-term, commitment relationships also showed that sexting behavior predicted higher sexual satisfaction and an improved knowledge of safe sex practices and sexually transmitted infection. Further studies should explore if sexting itself causes the increase in sexual responsibility or if there are other factors at play.

New Third-Person Singular Pronoun ‘Hen’ Is Truly Gender-Inclusive

As society better understands the importance of accurate and inclusive gender pronouns, existing terms, like the combined “he/she” or the singular “they,” may not suffice. A new addition to the Swedish language—the gender-neutral pronoun “hen”—offers an intriguing alternative. In two separate surveys, researchers found that he/she evoked bias by suggesting that all genders were either one or the other, whereas the term hen was perceived as being truly gender inclusive.

Badass Vs. Babe: Dispositional Sexism Moderates Men’s Ratings of Military Leadership Potential for Women with Sexually Dimorphic Faces

Leadership... do you know it when you see it? Recent news reports have used the term “badass” in headlines to refer to successful West Point graduates, but that description may not paint an accurate picture of how men in the military see their female counterparts. Contrary to expectations, a new study found that male military cadets rated the leadership potential of women with masculine facial features to be lower than their more feminine-faced peers. This research found that masculinity hurt rather than helped women’s leadership ratings.

Exploring Right-Wing Extremism in Online Spaces – Can We Use Big Data to Predict Offline Action?

Data show there has been an alarming increase in right-wing terrorist activity during the past five years, with online forums and social-networking sites providing a breeding ground for extremist views. But are there specific markers of online behavior that can predict future risk? New research analyzing approximately 200,000 online posting may help scientists and law-enforcement personnel identify whether online behavior can be used to infer risk of offline extremist action.

Good Guys with Guns? Exploring the Violent and Aggressive Tendencies of Male Gun Carriers in the United States

A familiar trope among gun advocates is “The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun.” But does increased gun ownership and carrying reduce instances of gun violence? Mounting evidence suggests not. New research indicates that men who carry guns may pose a greater threat to public safety than the hypothetical crime they intend to thwart. This study may inform gun violence prevention efforts and serve as a catalyst for future research.

Christian No More: Christian Americans Are Threatened by Their Impending Majority-Minority Status

Christian Americans are poised to become a minority in the United States within the next 20 years. A new study reveals that when presented with this information, Christians were more likely to believe that their religion and religious freedoms were under attack. Additionally, study participants who reported feeling their religion and religious freedoms were threatened also reported stronger endorsement of Christian nationalist beliefs. These findings offer insights into why many Christian Americans may feel targeted for their faith and suggest that appealing to these fears may be an effective tool for politicians on the right to strengthen support for conservative political candidates.

Speak up! Mistaken Beliefs about How Much to Talk in Conversations

Meeting new people at a party can be a socially awkward situation. How much should you speak to be likable? How much should you speak to be more interesting? New research suggests that people mistakenly believe that they should speak less than 50% of the time when they want to be liked, but more than 50% of the time to be interesting. The truth is: people find those who talk more to be both more interesting and more likable.

[PRESS REGISTRATION](#)

The APS media office provides complimentary [registration](#) to members of the press for the express purpose of gathering news and information to produce media coverage of the APS annual convention. Editors of scientific journals, educators, the business side of news media, and for-profit corporations (among others) will not be accredited as press and must register as regular attendees. To register as media, email news@psychologicalscience.org.

A media-briefing announcement will be issued closer to the meeting.

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The Association for Psychological Science is the leading international organization dedicated to advancing scientific psychology across disciplinary and geographic borders. Our members provide a richer understanding of the world through their research, teaching, and application of psychological science.