

# New Content From *Current Directions in Psychological Science*

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## [Vitamin S: Why Is Social Contact, Even With Strangers, So Important to Well-Being?](#)

*Paul A. M. Van Lange and Simon Columbus*

Van Lange and Columbus discuss three propositions to support the idea that, besides close relationships, interactions with acquaintances and strangers can also be beneficial to well-being: (a) Most interactions with strangers are benign, (b) most strangers are benign, and (c) most interactions with strangers enhance well-being. The researchers present findings supporting these propositions and showing that most interactions with strangers represent low conflict of interest and low-cost cooperation. They discuss research tying social interactions with happiness and suggest that brief interactions (even a smile) with strangers can be beneficial in times like the COVID-19 pandemic, when many people are deprived of social contact.

## [Fundamental Motives Illuminate a Broad Range of Individual and Cultural Variations in Thought and Behavior](#)

*Corey L. Cook, Jaimie Arona Krems, and Douglas T. Kenrick*

According to the fundamental-motives framework (Kenrick et al., 2010), recurring challenges and opportunities during human evolution led to motivations for self-protection, disease avoidance, social affiliation, status seeking, mate acquisition, mate retention, and kin care. These fundamental motives are thought to influence psychological processes and direct cognition and behavior. Cook and colleagues review the research connected with the fundamental-motives framework, which also covers individual and cultural variations in motives and the physiological correlates of motives. The authors show how the framework might connect seemingly disparate areas of research and integrate conflicting findings, and they propose future directions of research.

## [Placebos and Movies: What Do They Have in Common?](#)

*Fabrizio Benedetti*

Movies can induce psychological and physiological responses, such as fear or love, even though the viewer knows everything is fictitious. Placebos might act through similar mechanisms. For example, even if a patient knows that a syringe has a fake painkiller, the sight of the syringe might trigger the release of pain-relieving chemicals in the patient's brain. Both movies and placebos may lead to fiction-induced physiological and psychological responses. Benedetti thus suggests that placebos can be conceptualized as rituals, actions, and fictions within a framework that emphasizes the power of psychological factors in everyday life.

### [Life-Span Learning and Development and Its Implications for Workplace Training](#)

*Margaret E. Beier*

Beier focuses on working-age people (18–70 years old) to describe age-related changes in abilities and motivation that affect lifelong learning. She reviews research indicating that older adults can learn when the new content matches their prior knowledge and interests. In older age, knowledge increases but reasoning might decline, and socioemotional motivations appear to become more important while new learning is perceived as more effortful. These changes have implications for workplace training and development. For instance, self-paced learning environments and interventions that scaffold previous knowledge and serve socioemotional goals might facilitate workplace training.

### [The Major Health Implications of Social Connection](#)

*Julianne Holt-Lunstad*

Holt-Lunstad discusses the evidence for links between social relationships and mortality and between social relationships and morbidity as well as the possible mechanisms for these links. Social connection can be examined in terms of its components: structure (e.g., network size, marital status), functions (e.g., social support), and quality (e.g., relationship satisfaction). Low levels of these components appear to be associated with increased health risks, and high levels appear to be associated with health protection. Further investigation may help to identify the causal mechanisms for the role of social connection in health. These mechanisms may then be leveraged in prevention, intervention, and policy efforts.

### [Evidence and Implications From a Natural Experiment of Prenatal Androgen Effects on Gendered Behavior](#)

*Sheri A. Berenbaum and Adriene M. Beltz*

Studies of women with congenital adrenal hyperplasia (females who were exposed to excess androgens during gestation and typically born with masculinized genitalia, which is usually modified shortly after birth) can reveal the contributions and interplay of prenatal hormones and socialization to gendered behavior. Such studies have indicated that prenatal androgens appear to have strong masculinizing effects on preferred activities, moderate effects on spatial skills, and small or no effects on gender identity and gender cognitions. Berenbaum and Beltz analyze these findings and their implications and explain their compatibility with gender equality.

### [Children's Reputation Management: Learning to Identify What Is Socially Valued and Acting Upon It](#)

*Gail D. Heyman, Alison M. Compton, Jamie Amemiya, Sohee Ahn, and Shuai Shao*

Heyman and colleagues propose that the foundations of the skills needed to understand what other

people value and to adjust one's behavior accordingly are already in place in childhood. These skills help to address some of the challenges involved in making inferences about what is socially valued—recognizing and interpreting evidence, weighing and integrating evidence, and generalizing across people—and some of the challenges involved in acting according to what is socially valued—anticipating consequences, adjusting to different audiences, and coordinating goals. Although these challenges persist in adulthood, children appear to already have some basic skills to manage their reputations.

### [Forms and Functions of the Social Emotions](#)

*Daniel Sznycer, Aaron Sell, and Debra Lieberman*

Sznycer and colleagues suggest that understanding structures engineered by natural selection, such as social emotions, requires hypotheses about their adaptive function. Social emotions appear to have the overall function of recalibrating social evaluations in humans. For example, gratitude functions to consolidate cooperative relationships with other individuals who are perceived as valuing one's welfare; pride functions to capitalize on opportunities to become more highly valued by others. The researchers map the adaptive functions of anger, gratitude, shame, and pride (all related to social evaluation) and explain how these conjectures may help to understand how people feel under these emotions.