

# New Research From Psychological Science

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## [Concreteness and Psychological Distance in Natural Language Use](#)

*Bryor Snefjella and Victor Kuperman*

Research has shown that people form more abstract mental representations, and use more abstract language, when thinking or talking about events that are distant from the self. Despite knowing this, researchers are still unsure of the exact form of this relationship. In a series of four studies, the authors examined the language used when discussing various physical distances, future and past time points, and social distance. They found that people generally used more abstract language when referring to topics distant from the self and that the pattern of linguistic concreteness was characterized by a curvilinear function of the logarithm of distance. This pattern matches predictions made by construal-level theory — an influential theory describing the relationship between psychological distance and abstraction.

## [A Second Look at Automatic Theory of Mind: Reconsidering Kovács, Téglás, and Endress \(2010\)](#)

*Jonathan Phillips, Desmond C. Ong, Andrew D. R. Surtees, Yijing Xin, Samantha Williams, Rebecca Saxe, and Michael C. Frank*

A basic theoretical question about theory of mind (ToM) — the ability to attribute mental states to others and to understand that others can have beliefs different from one's own — is whether it is an effortful process or occurs automatically. A 2010 study by Kovács, Téglás, and Endress provided support for the idea that ToM is automatic. In the current study, the authors sought to replicate these findings. Using a similar paradigm, they were able to replicate the previous findings but also found new interaction effects not consistent with the hypothesis that ToM is automatic. Further examination revealed that the observed effects were related to the presence and timing of attention checks used in the study, indicating the need for further examination into this aspect of human cognition.

## [Variation in Women's Preferences Regarding Male Facial Masculinity Is Better Explained by Genetic Differences Than by Previously Identified Context-Dependent Effects](#)

*Brendan P. Zietsch, Anthony J. Lee, James M. Sherlock, and Patrick Jern*

Women's preference for more or less masculine male faces is thought to be context dependent; however, this evolved-context-dependence account of female preference for face masculinity has recently been questioned. Identical and fraternal female twins performed a forced-choice task in which they had to choose between two images of the same man. In one image, the man's features had been masculinized, and in the other, they had been feminized. The researchers also assessed the women for

contextual factors that have previously been found to be related to masculine face preference, such as self-perceived attractiveness and pathogen disgust sensitivity. Genetic variation accounted for a much greater amount of the variation in facial masculinity preferences than did contextual factors, which casts doubt on the importance of contextual factors in this preference.