

New Research From Psychological Science

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Read about the latest research published in *Psychological Science*:

[A Cognitive-Ecological Explanation of Intergroup Biases](#)

Hans Alves, Alex Koch, and Christian Unkelbach

People often evaluate minorities and out-groups negatively. These are usually novel groups and thus tend to be associated with unique attributes that differentiate them from other groups. But unique attributes are also more negative than positive because of their higher diversity and lower frequency. The authors propose a model that combines these two theories to explain the negative evaluation of minorities and out-groups. They showed participants information about two alien tribes and asked them to choose their favorite tribe. Most participants preferred the first tribe over the second when the unique attributes were negative but not when the unique attributes were positive. Participants also preferred the first tribe over the second when the negative traits were more diverse and when the positive traits were more frequent. When the positive traits were more diverse or the negative traits were more frequent, there was no evaluation bias favoring the first tribe. These results show that the information environment, in the form of how attributes are distributed, interacts with cognitive processing of group novelty to create intergroup biases.

[Object-Based Attention on Social Units: Visual Selection of Hands Performing a Social Interaction](#)

Jun Yin, Haokui Xu, Jipeng Duan, and Mowei Shen

Recent studies have suggested that information structure and object boundaries constrain visual attention selection. But can multiple objects in a social interaction be integrated for selective attention? In two experiments, the authors tested whether a handshake can be selected as a single object of attentional selection (rather than as two hands, separately). In several trials, they showed participants two pairs of hands. In each pair, one hand was in a handshake position with either the palm or the back of the hand facing out; the other hand was either also in the handshake position or was reversed (i.e., the thumb was pointed downward). When the hands returned to their initial positions, a cue flashed on the center of one hand, and then a target letter or a distractor symbol appeared on the center of each hand. Participants had to report the target by pressing a key. When the cue appeared in the wrong hand, participants identified the target faster if cue and target were in the same pair than if they were in different pairs. However, this effect occurred only when the pair was in the handshake position and in motion. These results show that the handshake selected attention. Thus, attention can select a grouped object whose components are connected by a social interaction.

[The Napoleon Complex: When Shorter Men Take More](#)

Jill E. P. Knapen, Nancy M. Blaker, and Mark Van Vugt

A popular belief known as the Napoleon complex holds that short men compensate for their height

disadvantage by displaying dominant behavior. The authors examined whether shorter men were more aggressive toward taller competitors in economic games. They tested pairs of men and compared their behavior in two games: a dictator game in which the player had unconditional power over the division of resources and an ultimatum game in which the player's division of resources could be rejected and incite retaliation. Shorter men kept more resources for themselves in the dictator game, regardless of the opponent's height. In the ultimatum game, shorter men kept more resources only if the opponent was not taller. When participants were also asked to prepare a hot sauce mixture for their opponents, as a measure of physically aggressive behavior, height had no effect. These results show that the Napoleon complex manifests itself in indirect aggressive behavior but not necessarily in direct or physically aggressive behavior. Thus, height predicts competitive behaviors in an absolute-power situation.

Sameness May Be a Natural Concept That Does Not Require Learning

Thomas R. Zentall, Danielle M. Andrews, and Jacob P. Case

Pigeons can learn how to peck colors that match or mismatch a stimulus. Does this behavior reflect learning the simple association between stimulus and response or might it reflect the concept of *sameness*? The authors trained pigeons to respond to colors by choosing either the matching or the mismatching color from a pair of colors. In the test phase, they replaced the matching or mismatching stimulus with a familiar stimulus to avoid pigeons' fear of novelty. Pigeons performed at the chance level when the matching stimulus was replaced (i.e., the correct stimulus in the matching task and the incorrect one in the mismatching task) but performed above chance when the mismatching stimulus was replaced (i.e., the incorrect stimulus in the matching task and the correct one in the mismatching task). These results show that pigeons learned to locate the matching color and either choose it or avoid it, depending on the task. This effect demonstrates that pigeons can use the natural concept of *sameness* and that their responses in a matching task are not exclusively stimulus-response associations.