

# New Research From Psychological Science

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## [Revisiting the Marshmallow Test: A Conceptual Replication Investigating Links Between Early Delay of Gratification and Later Outcomes](#)

*Tyler W. Watts, Greg J. Duncan, and Haonan Quan*

In 1990, Shoda, Mischel, and Peake showed that preschoolers' ability to wait to eat a marshmallow or other treat (i.e., to delay gratification) was related to their later cognitive and social achievements and development. In this article, the authors did a conceptual replication of the marshmallow test using data from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, a more diverse and nationally representative sample than the one in the original study. Children did the marshmallow test at 4.5 years old, and academic achievement was measured at Grade 1 and at age 15. The authors replicated the finding that preschoolers' gratification delay was related to academic achievement. This effect was even more remarkable for children whose mothers had not completed college. However, when the authors controlled for background characteristics such as early cognitive ability or home environment, the relation between delayed gratification and academic achievement decreased. These results suggest that interventions focused on increasing children's ability to delay gratification might be less successful in the future.

## [Visual Darkness Reduces Perceived Risk of Contagious-Disease Transmission From Interpersonal Interaction](#)

*Ping Dong and Chen-Bo Zhong*

In several experiments, the authors put participants in dark or bright environments by manipulating the light intensity or having them use sunglasses. After asking participants to perform a neutral task that also served as a cover-up story for the dark environments, the authors had a confederate coughing and sniffing. They then told participants that they were going to participate in an unrelated study and asked them to estimate their risk of catching six types of diseases. Participants in dark environments were more likely to underestimate the risk of catching a contagious disease than participants in bright environments. This effect occurred only for contagious diseases and was replicated in a classroom study. In addition, participants in dark environments perceived their social distance to the contagion source to be greater than did participants in bright environments. The effect of darkness was smaller for participants who already thought of psychological distance in abstract terms (high construal level) than for those who usually conceived of psychological distance in concrete terms (low construal level). These results suggest that darkness reduces risk perceptions of contagion by increasing perceived social distance and triggering a high construal level.

## [The Interpersonal Sunk-Cost Effect](#)

*Christopher Y. Olivola*

The “sunk-cost” effect happens when people pursue an inferior alternative only because they have already invested nonrecoverable resources in that alternative. This represents a fallacy because previous sunk investments should not influence present decisions, especially when better alternatives are available. The author tested whether this fallacy occurred when someone else had made the sunk investments. He tested more than 6,000 participants in eight experiments, where he presented different scenarios with different sunk investments that could have been made by the participant or by someone else. Participants were then asked to choose between alternatives that either honored the sunk investment or not. The sunk-cost effect was even larger when someone else had made the sunk investment than when the participants had made it. Social desirability does not explain this effect because it occurred even when the investor would not be aware of the decision and regardless of the type of relationship with the investor. These results narrow the possible explanations for the sunk-cost effect and support a relationship between intrapersonal and interpersonal decision-making processes.