New Research From Psychological Science

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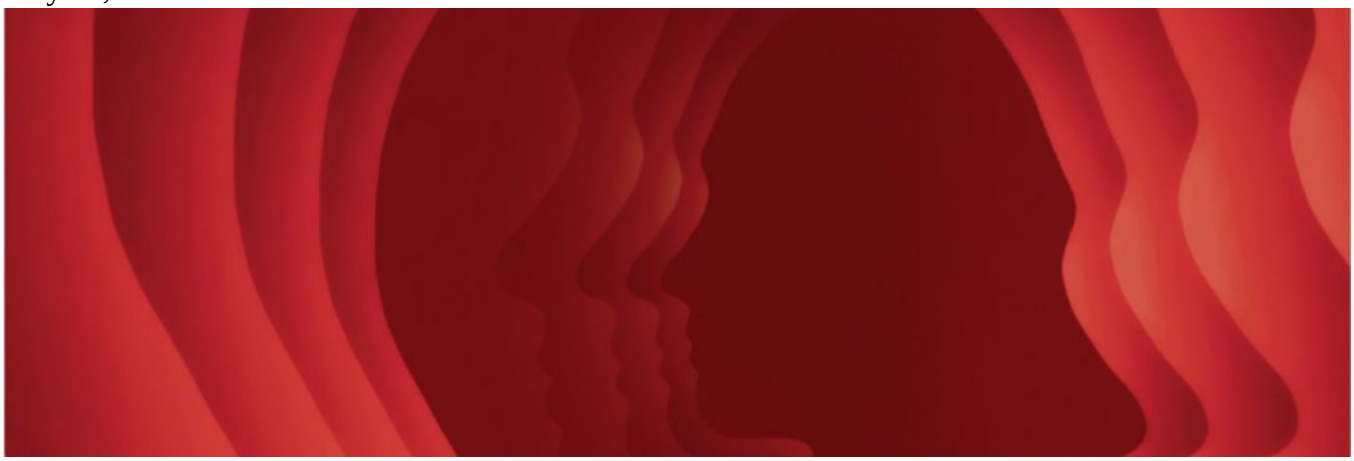

Read about the latest research published in *Psychological Science*:

Can a Good Life Be Unsatisfying? Within-Person Dynamics of Life Satisfaction and Psychological Well-Being in Late Midlife
Henry R. Cowan

Is having a good life (i.e., psychological well-being) always accompanied by feeling life satisfaction (i.e., subjective well-being, happiness)? To explore how life satisfaction and well-being are related, Cowan analyzed self-reports of midwestern participants followed through their late midlife (about age 50) between 2008 and 2017. In 2008, participants' personality traits (extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness) were assessed, and that and every following year, they self-rated their life satisfaction (e.g., "in most ways, my life is close to my ideal") and psychological well-being, defined by autonomy, environmental mastery (e.g., "I am quite good at managing the main responsibilities of my daily life"), personal growth, positive relationships, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Results indicated that participants' average level of life satisfaction was similar to their average level of psychological well-being, and in years in which those average levels varied, they did so for both variables (e.g., a year with higher life satisfaction was also a year with higher well-being). Well-being and life satisfaction were more connected in participants who scored higher on neuroticism and were independent for participants with very low neuroticism. Other personality traits, such as extraversion, did not contribute to the association between life satisfaction and psychological well-being. These results suggest that interventions to improve well-being may need to take into account personality traits, such as neuroticism.

Sexual Selection, Agonistic Signaling, and the Effect of Beards on Recognition of Men's Anger Displays
Belinda M. Craig, Nicole L. Nelson, and Barnaby J. W. Dixson

Can beards enhance recognition of threatening expressions such as anger? This research suggests that bearded faces can indeed be more accurately and quickly perceived as angry than clean-shaven faces. Participants saw photos of the same men displaying expressions of anger or happiness when bearded and when clean-shaven and decided whether each face was “happy” or “angry.” Participants were faster and more accurate at recognizing anger on bearded than on clean-shaven faces. In another experiment, anger was replaced by sadness, a negative but nonthreatening emotion, and participants were slower and less accurate at recognizing sadness on bearded than on clean-shaven faces, which indicates that beards do not enhance recognition of negative emotions in general. Bearded faces were also rated as more masculine and aggressive but also more prosocial (i.e., positive, helpful, friendly) than clean-shaven faces, indicating that beards do not enhance recognition of anger because of a stereotype associating beards with aggressiveness and anger. Craig and colleagues also used a computer-based emotion classifier and found that it provided higher confidence ratings when classifying angry bearded faces than when classifying angry clean-shaven faces. Given these results, the authors suggest that beards facilitate the recognition of anger because they enhance the prominence of the jaw, which, along with the mouth, is important in recognizing anger. Thus, beards may influence perceivers’ behavior, and, for example, professionals who have to respond to threats (e.g., police officers) may be quicker to perceive bearded men as threatening and to act on that perception.

Is There a Positive Association Between Working Memory Capacity and Mind Wandering in a Low-Demand Breathing Task? A Preregistered Replication of a Study by Levinson, Smallwood, and Davidson (2012)
Matt E. Meier

In a 2012 study, Levinson, Smallwood, and Davidson found that high working memory capacity (WMC) was correlated with a high likelihood of reporting mind wandering when individuals were probed throughout a task but not when they were asked to catch themselves mind wandering. To test this, Meier replicated Levinson et al.’s original study with a larger number of participants. In a breath-awareness task, participants were instructed to be aware of their in and out breathing movements and to count every time they exhaled. During this task, they either received prompts to report whether they were mind wandering (e.g., “Just now, where was your attention?”; 1 = completely on-task to 6 = completely off-task) or were instructed to report anytime they caught themselves off task. Contrary to the results of the original study, the present findings showed that participants who had scored higher in WMC measures reported less mind wandering when probed. Participants with higher WMC self-caught less mind wandering overall, but when the ratio of self-caught mind wandering to probe-caught mind wandering was calculated, higher WMC was associated with higher self-caught mind wandering. These results indicate that individuals with higher WMC may not necessarily report more mind wandering when probed during a task than individuals with lower WMC, but that when their minds wander, they may be more aware of it.

When Does One Decide How Heavy an Object Feels While Picking It Up?
Myrthe A. Plaisier, Irene A. Kuling, Eli Brenner, and Jeroen B. J. Smeets

Larger objects are usually perceived as heavier than smaller objects. Plaisier and colleagues examined

the time at which visual information about an object influences people's weight estimates while lifting it. In three experiments, participants lifted small and large objects by a handle and estimated the objects' weight. During the task, participants wore goggles that allowed them to see the whole time, did not allow them to see, or allowed them to briefly see at different points of the task. The size of the object influenced participants' weight estimates when they could see the object the whole time. Size also influenced the estimates when participants could see only before lifting the object and, to a lesser extent, after lifting the object. However, when participants could see only right after the object reached the maximum height to which they lifted it, the influence of size on the estimates was similar to when participants could see the whole time. Because the influence of the object size on the weight estimates decreased only when vision was provided more than 300 ms after liftoff, the authors suggest that it takes about 300 ms to reach a perceptual decision about a lifted object's weight. This study thus provides an account of the time course of the use of prior knowledge (e.g., the expectation that larger objects are heavier) in making a perceptual decision (e.g., an object's weight while being lifted).