

# New Research in *Psychological Science*

May 20, 2020



## [Anxiety Impedes Adaptive Social Learning Under Uncertainty](#)

*Amrita Lamba, Michael J. Frank, and Oriel FeldmanHall*



Individuals with anxiety may have less tolerance for uncertainty and, therefore, greater difficulty learning in uncertain contexts. Participants invested money in partners who then decided how much money to return to the “investors.” Unbeknownst to the participants, the return followed a researcher-determined pattern that changed across the experiment, creating uncertainty. Participants without anxiety quickly learned to stop investing when the partner was exploitative, whereas participants with anxiety overinvested in exploitative partners. Computational modeling attributed this pattern to reduced learning from negative events among anxious individuals, indicating a lack of adaptive social choice.

## [Making It Harder to “See” Meaning: The More You See Something, the More Its Conceptual Representation Is Susceptible to Visual Interference](#)

*Charles P. Davis, Gitte H. Joergensen, Peter Boddy, Caitlin Dowling, and Eiling Yee*



The meanings of things people see frequently appear to be partly represented in the visual system, this research suggests. Davis and colleagues show that a concurrent visual task (e.g., identifying a previously presented form) slows down the judgment of word meanings (e.g., is sunset an animal?, is breeze an animal?) in proportion to how much visual experience people have with the words’ referents (e.g., sunsets are seen but not breezes). Thus, having to visually scan through unrelated things while searching for something specific may interfere with our ability to think about the thing we are searching for. Think of those times you looked inside the refrigerator only to forget what you were looking for in the first place.

## [Strong Effort Manipulations Reduce Response Caution: A Preregistered Reinvention of the Ego-Depletion Paradigm](#)

*Hause Lin, Blair Saunders, Malte Frieese, Nathan J. Evans, and Michael Inzlich*



After exerting mental effort, people are likely to disengage and become uninterested in exerting further effort, this research suggests. Participants either counted symbols, which demanded high effort, or watched a wildlife video, which demanded low effort. Afterward, they performed a Stroop task in which they indicated the colors of letters used to write out color names. Lin and colleagues applied a diffusion model to the data and performed Bayesian analyses. The results showed that the high-effort task reduced participants' caution in responding but not their information-processing speed or inhibition.

#### [Higher-Level Meta-Adaptation Mitigates Visual Distortions Produced by Lower-Level Adaptation](#)

*Xinyu Liu and Stephen A. Engel*



The human visual system adapts to the environment to improve perception—a low-level adaptation that can have negative consequences, such as perception errors (e.g., in visual illusions). Liu and Engel investigated how the visual system may resolve these negative consequences. Participants observed flickering checkerboards that caused a normal face to appear distorted because of the referred low-level adaptation. Through repeated viewing, participants' visual systems adapted to the adaptation-distorted face. This process, which represents meta-adaptation, made the distorted face gradually appear more normal, indicating that it might be a general strategy to correct negative consequences of low-level adaptation.

#### [Transaction Frame Determines Preferences: Valuation of Labor by Employee and Contractor](#)

*Ilana Ritov and Amos Schurr*

Does an economy heavily reliant on freelancing and job contracts (vs. a traditional economy with fixed wages) change how individuals value labor? In three experiments, Ritov and Schurr found that individuals were willing to pay more in employment-wage settings than in contract-pricing settings, despite finding no evidence that the effort put into the task was higher in employment-wage settings than in contract-pricing settings. These findings support the idea that today's economic reality, in which wage setting is often replaced by contract pricing, might increase inequality among workers.