

New Research in *Psychological Science*

July 23, 2021



[Coping With Health Threats: The Costs and Benefits of Managing Emotions](#)

Angela M. Smith et al.



Smith and colleagues examined how people coped with the health threat of COVID-19. They tracked two U.S. samples across 3 months and measured their emotions, reappraisal of emotions (i.e., changing the way they think about the threat to manage their emotions), health behaviors, and mental health. Compared with participants who reappraised less, participants who reappraised more subsequently reported less fear about the threat and better mental health. Reappraisal that led to more socially oriented emotions predicted both better mental health and health behaviors, whereas reappraisal that led to less negative emotions jeopardized the adoption of recommended health behaviors.

[Beyond the Shape of Things: Infants Can Be Taught to Generalize Nouns by Objects' Functions](#)

Cecilia Zuniga-Montanez, Sotaro Kita, Suzanne Aussems, and Andrea Krott



Although infants spontaneously label novel objects by their shape (e.g., all kivs are round), this research suggests that they can be trained to use function instead (e.g., all kivs make noises), the method favored by adults. Zuniga-Montanez and colleagues taught 17-month-olds to focus on the functions of novel objects they were labeling. Compared with untaught infants, these infants became more likely to label objects by their function (function bias). These findings suggest that infants might show a spontaneous shape bias when learning words because shape is perceptually more accessible than function, but a function bias can be accelerated with training.

[The Effects of Handwriting Experience on Literacy Learning](#)

Robert W. Wiley and Brenda Rapp

Handwriting might lead to faster learning of new letters and greater generalization to untrained tasks

than typing or visually learning (i.e., detecting and matching letters), this research suggests. Adults were trained to identify and learn Arabic letters by using either handwriting, typing, or visually matching. Later, they were tested in letter recognition, letter naming, letter writing, word spelling, word reading, and letter discrimination. All participants learned letter recognition, but those who learned by handwriting learned it fastest. This group's knowledge of how to write the letter also strengthened their performance in the other tests, beyond reading and spelling letters and words.

[Exploring the Facets of Emotional Episodic Memory: Remembering “What,” “When,” and “Which”](#)

Daniela J. Palombo, Alessandra A. Te, Katherine J. Checknita, and Christopher R. Madan



How does emotion impact the memory of an event? Participants watched videos that included negative or neutral target images. Afterward, they responded whether they had seen each target image (“what”), at what point of the video the image had appeared (“when”), and which of the other five images appeared in the same video (“which”). Compared with neutral images, negative images enhanced participants’ memory for “what” but reduced their memory for “which.” Participants were also more accurate in estimating the “when” of negative images but tended to estimate that neutral images had appeared later than they actually appeared.

[The Bilingual Advantage in Children’s Executive Functioning Is Not Related to Language Status: A Meta-Analytic Review](#)

Cassandra J. Lowe, Isu Cho, Samantha F. Goldsmith, and J. Bruce Morton



Do bilingual children have better executive functioning than monolingual children? This meta-analysis suggests they do not. Lowe and colleagues synthesized data from studies that compared the performance of monolingual and bilingual participants between the ages of 3 and 17 years in executive-function domains such as decision-making and working memory (1,194 effect sizes). They found a small effect of bilingualism on participants’ executive functioning, which was largely explained by factors such as publication bias. After accounting for these factors, bilingualism’s effects were indistinguishable from zero, suggesting that bilingual and monolingual children perform at the same level in executive functioning.

[Are Preschoolers’ Neurobiological Stress Systems Responsive to Culturally Relevant Contexts?](#)

Ka I Ip et al.

Ip and colleagues examined changes in cortisol, an important stress-related hormone, among preschoolers living in China, Japan, and the United States. In each culture, preschoolers showed different reactivity to different stressors: An achievement-related stressor increased cortisol response among Chinese preschoolers, interpersonal-related stressors increased cortisol response among Japanese preschoolers, and only the anticipation of separation at the beginning of each session increased cortisol among U.S. preschoolers. These findings suggest that, from an early age, sociocultural variables appear to influence individuals’ responses to stress.

[Parents Fine-Tune Their Speech to Children’s Vocabulary Knowledge](#)

Ashley Leung, Alexandra Tunkel, and Daniel Yurovsky



Leung and colleagues explored how parents adjust their speech to match their children's individual level of vocabulary. They asked parent-child pairs to play a game in which parents guided their child to select a target animal from a set. Parents produced more references for animals they thought their children did not know, indicating that parents fine-tuned their referring expressions to their children's language knowledge. Parents also appeared to learn about their children's knowledge throughout the game and adjusted their references accordingly. These findings suggest that child-directed speech supports children's language learning because it is tuned to individual children.

[Children With More Uncertainty in Their Intuitive Theories Seek Domain-Relevant Information](#)

Jinjing (Jenny) Wang, Yang Yang, Carla Macias, and Elizabeth Bonawitz



Children appear to choose to learn more about something if they know just enough to find it interesting but not so much that it becomes boring. Wang and colleagues assessed preschoolers' existing knowledge about three domains (e.g., biological transmission). Afterward, the children heard stories related to each of the domains (e.g., Jesse had a cold and played volleyball with Max) and decided whether they wanted to seek domain-relevant information (e.g., did Max get a cold?) or domain-irrelevant information (e.g., did Max make the volleyball team?). Children with immature knowledge (or at a middle stage of development) appeared to be more likely to seek domain-relevant information than children with more mature knowledge.