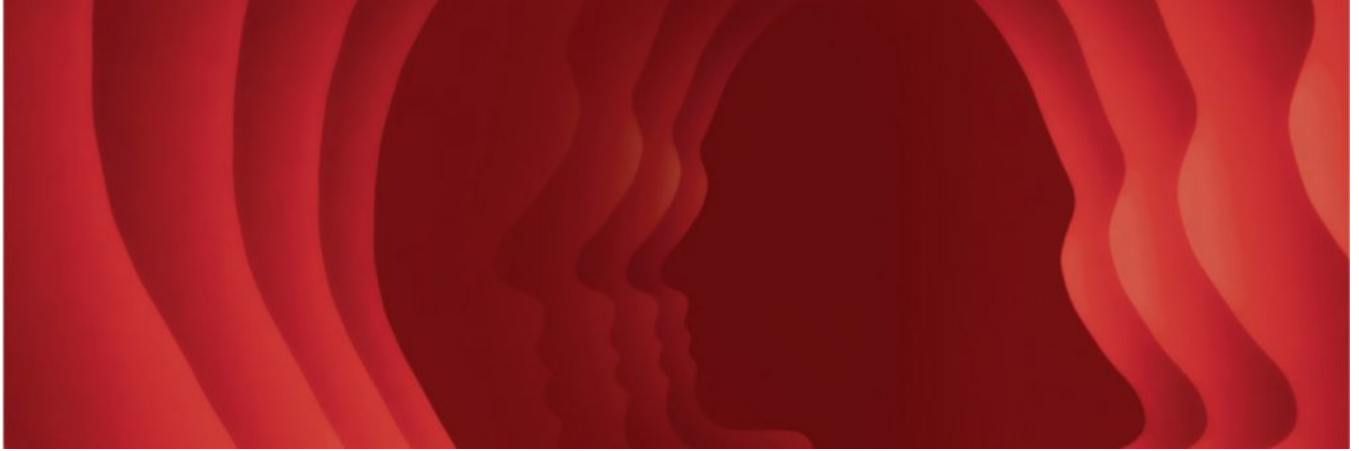# New Research in *Psychological Science*

September 16, 2022

[Personality Across World Regions Predicts Variability in the Structure of Face Impressions](#)
DongWon Oh, Jared D. Martin, and Jonathan B. Freeman

This research suggests that cultural learning plays a role in how people infer personality traits from faces. Oh and colleagues used international data sets of self-reported personality inventories and face-based trait judgments across 42 world regions and found that people's self-reported personalities were related to how individuals in those regions judged personalities based on faces. For example, in a region where aggressiveness and intelligence tend to co-occur, people tend to evaluate those traits more similarly in others' faces. In another study, data from 232 world regions indicated that people used the personality structure learned from their local environment to form lay beliefs about personality, and these beliefs influenced their face impressions.

[Perceptual and Cognitive Judgments Show Both Anchoring and Repulsion](#)
Jake Spicer, Jian-Qiao Zhu, Nick Chater, and Adam N. Sanborn

In cognitive psychology, anchoring occurs when judgments show a bias toward previously viewed values. However, in a similar task, a perceptual illusion demonstrates the opposite effect of repulsion. Spicer and colleagues united these two literatures and tested whether prior comparative decisions bias cognitive and perceptual judgments in opposing directions or whether anchoring and repulsion are two domain-general biases that may co-occur. They found that in both perceptual and cognitive tasks, anchoring and repulsion occur simultaneously. Results also indicated that the direction of the bias depends on the comparison value: Distant values attract judgments, whereas nearby values repulse judgments.

[The Evolution of Cognitive Control in Lemurs](#)
Francesca De Petrillo, Parvathy Nair, Averill Cantwell, and Alexandra G. Rosati

Cognitive control allows individuals to plan or adopt new strategies when the circumstances change. To identify the processes that promote the evolution of cognitive control in humans, De Petrillo and colleagues developed a novel battery that measures multiple aspects of cognitive control in primates (e.g., temporal discounting, short-term memory). They tested different lemur species with independent variation among ecological and social features and found that the lemurs' ecological rather than social characteristics best predicted patterns of cognitive control. These findings highlight the importance of integrating cognitive data with species' natural history to understand the origins of complex cognition.

Patterns of Implicit and Explicit Attitudes: IV. Change and Stability From 2007 to 2020
Tessa E. S. Charlesworth and Mahzarin R. Banaji

Charlesworth and Banaji examined long-term trends in implicit and explicit attitudes across 14 years (2007–2020) by analyzing more than 7.1 million implicit and explicit attitude tests drawn from U.S. participants on the Project Implicit website. They found that since 2007, bias decreased across all explicit attitudes; decreases ranged from 22% (attitudes about age) to 98% (attitudes about race). Implicit attitudes about sexuality, race, and skin tone also continued to decrease in bias, by 65%, 26%, and 25%, respectively. Implicit attitudes about age, disability, and body weight, however, continued to show little to no long-term change. Patterns of change and stability were generally consistent across demographic groups, indicating widespread change.

Fear in the Theater of the Mind: Differential Fear Conditioning With Imagined Stimuli
Lauryn Burleigh, Xinrui Jiang, and Steven G. Greening

From fears of monsters in the closet to the internal replay of traumatic events of our past, mental imagery plays an important role in how we acquire and generalize fear responses. This research suggests that both real and imagined images engage learning processes in similar ways, so that people can acquire fear responses to otherwise neutral objects. Burleigh and colleagues showed that participants acquired fear conditioning to both viewed and imagined objects, as measured via self-reported fear responses and skin conductance. After the acquisition of fear for visual objects, the fear response generalized to imagined objects, and similarity, fear acquired for imagined objects generalized to visual ones.

The Language of Social Touch Is Intuitive and Quantifiable
Sarah McIntyre et al.

This research suggests that strangers might effectively communicate using touch. Participants performed a task involving a sender touching the forearm of a receiver to express non-verbal social messages such as love, attention, happiness, sadness, gratitude, and calming. In two experiments in which sender and receiver shared a close relationship, receivers could identify the messages. Using 3D hand tracking, McIntyre and colleagues made precise measurements of the contact area, velocity, and duration of the touches that effectively communicated the messages, developing standardized touch expressions. In two other experiments, a stranger (i.e., the experimenter) conveyed these touch expressions and the

participants were still able to identify the messages.

[Psychosocial Resilience to Inflammation-Associated Depression: A Prospective Study of Breast-Cancer Survivors](#)
Andrew W. Manigault et al.

Manigault and colleagues examined whether psychosocial resilience related to psychosocial resources (e.g., social support) might mitigate the effects of stress on inflammation-associated depressive symptoms. In a longitudinal study of women with breast cancer (N = 187), they measured cancer-related stress and psychosocial resources—social support, optimism, positive affect, mastery, self-esteem, and mindfulness—after diagnosis and measured depressive symptoms and inflammation for 2 years starting after diagnosis. For women who reported having more psychosocial resources, these resources mitigated associations between stress and depressive symptoms and between stress and inflammation-related depressive symptoms. These results highlight the importance of psychosocial resources in managing stress and inflammation-associated depressive symptoms.

[Losing Sight of Piecemeal Progress: People Lump and Dismiss Improvement Efforts That Fall Short of Categorical Change—Despite Improving](#)
Ed O'Brien

This research suggests that when attempts to eradicate a major problem (e.g., climate change) fail, people might dismiss smaller but critical steps to address it. Across 14 experiments, O'Brien documented how people perceive and respond to relative progress in different parts of the world. As improvement efforts played out, participants had a tendency to dismiss them if they fell short of categorical reform despite representing progress. This dismissal was driven by the belief that falling short signals an absence of serious intent to change. Critically, participants underrewarded and underinvested in efforts toward "merely" incremental improvement. In all experiments, participants lumped together absolute failures with anything that was not an absolute success, highlighting a unique blindness to gradations of progress.

[Good-Enough Production: Selecting Easier Words Instead of More Accurate Ones](#)
Mark J. Koranda, Martin Zettersten, and Maryellen C. MacDonald

Word choice—lexical selection—is driven by alignment with the intended message (e.g., to talk about a young feline, we choose the most aligned word, kitten). But word accessibility also appears to shape word choice (e.g., cat is more accessible than kitten), this research suggests. Koranda and colleagues designed an artificial lexicon containing high- and low-frequency pseudowords that were more and less accessible, respectively. The pseudowords' meanings corresponded to compass directions. Participants earned points by choosing a high- or low-frequency word to indicate compass directions. Participants were more likely to produce high-frequency words even when they were less aligned with messages.

[The Social Effects of an Awesome Solar Eclipse](#)
Sean P. Goldy, Nickolas M. Jones, and Paul K. Piff

Goldy and colleagues used Twitter data (N = 2,891,611 users) to examine the social impact of a historic, awe-inspiring celestial event: the 2017 solar eclipse. Relative to individuals residing outside the eclipse's path, individuals inside it exhibited more awe and expressed more prosocial, affiliative, humble, and collective language and less self-focused language. These traits were also more pronounced relative to these individuals' pre-eclipse levels and relative to individuals residing inside the eclipse path who did not experience awe. These findings indicate that astronomical events may induce awe and thus foster prosocial tendencies.