

New Content From *Current Directions in Psychological Science*

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[Drinking Together and Drinking Alone: A Social-Contextual Framework for Examining Risk for Alcohol Use Disorder](#)

Kasey G. Creswell

Creswell proposes a framework for examining the risk for alcohol use disorder (AUD) that focuses on the importance of the context in which drinking occurs. The author reviews research comparing antecedents and consequences of social and solitary drinking in adolescents and young adults. Creswell shows that social drinking appears to be linked to enhancing positive emotions and social experiences, whereas solitary drinking appears to be linked to coping with negative emotions. This social-contextual account of AUD might allow clinicians to better understand why individuals drink and help to identify the best approach for clinical interventions.

[Investigating the Language Comprehension of Typical Children and Children With Autism](#)

Letitia R. Naigles

The Longitudinal Study of Early Language (LSEL) has been following the talk, understanding, and interactions of typically developing children and children with autism spectrum disorder. Naigles summarizes the findings of the LSEL: Both groups of children show similar syntactic understanding and word-learning strategies, including within-group variability associated with other aspects of each child's behavior. In both groups, early linguistic knowledge and social abilities influence later talk and understanding. These findings suggest that language development might have both social and linguistic foundations.

[Taking Skills Seriously: Toward an Integrative Model and Agenda for Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Skills](#)

Christopher J. Soto, Christopher M. Napolitano, and Brent W. Roberts

Social, emotional, and behavioral (SEB) skills—a person's ability to maintain social relationships,

regulate emotions, and manage behaviors—are as important for achieving success as cognitive skills and opportunity, Soto and colleagues say. They define SEB skills as capacities rather than personality traits and identify five skill domains: social engagement, cooperation, self-management, emotional resilience, and innovation. Soto and colleagues propose clearly distinguishing between SEB skills and personality traits in order to improve how researchers and practitioners measure SEB skills and traits, and how they design interventions to improve these skills.

[Primate Vocal Communication and the Evolution of Speech](#)

Julia Fischer

Studies of nonhuman primate communication may support our understanding of how speech evolved. Fischer describes the similarities and differences between nonhuman primate communication and human speech (e.g., they have similar abilities to rapidly attach meaning to new sounds but differences in vocal production). The author explains that changes in neural control during vocal production, rather than comprehension, might be key to understanding the evolution of speech. She discusses questions of meaning and syntax and examines the role of social cognition, namely the motivation to communicate about the world, in human and nonhuman primate communication.

[The Physical Context of Child Development](#)

Gary W. Evans

Evans provides a taxonomy of the physical-setting characteristics that can influence child development. These characteristics include environmental stressors such as noise, crowding (i.e., interior density, such as people per room), and chaos (i.e., levels of stimulation including predictability and routines), as well as the physical quality of housing, day care, and schools. Suboptimal physical contexts during childhood may result in chronic physiological stress and cognitive and socioemotional negative outcomes. Evans highlights the need for more experimental studies to foster a better understanding of how the physical characteristics of where and how children live can affect their development.

[Robots as Mirrors of the Human Mind](#)

Agnieszka Wykowska

Robots can increase our knowledge about human cognition and serve as tools for research in psychological science. Wykowska gives examples in which robots have been used to study mechanisms of social cognition that require reciprocal interaction between two people (e.g., joint attention, when one person directs their attention to a location and their partner attends there in response). The author also discusses whether and when robots are perceived as possessing human characteristics and how robots have been used to implement computational models of human cognition.