



Science *Spotlight*

Research, news, and opportunities in psychological science

MARCH 19, 2026

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In This Issue

Team-based science is becoming essential to solving complex problems, and researchers must be able to collaborate across disciplines, methods, and cultures. Join next Tuesday's **[Essential Science Conversation](#)** (March 24, free of charge) to build those skills and strengthen your capacity for resilient, high-performing scientific teamwork. The momentum continues with back-to-back **[Science Training Sessions](#)** on sources of validity evidence, April 16 and April 28. Check *Need to Know* for these and more opportunities for psychological scientists.

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New Research

This week's research highlights how self-pacing can improve performance, how narrative shapes public opinion, how outlooks influence long-term health, and how personality patterns help explain counterproductive behavior.



Self-paced work improves performance

Runhan Yang and Aaron S. Benjamin, *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*

Research has indicated that letting people set their own pace in attention-demanding tasks can enhance performance. In two experiments where participants identified targets among different numbers of distractors, self-pacing increased target strength (i.e., improved target discriminability) and reduced noise (i.e., decreased target variability). These benefits appear to reflect, in part, participants recognizing that more distractors made the task more difficult and adjusting their timing accordingly. The findings suggest giving people more control over pacing—for example allowing them to modulate workflow and breaks—might improve their performance.

[**Read more.**](#)

Why eponymous legislation wins public support

Krystia Reed, et al., *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*

How do victim stories affect public support for legislation? Measuring sympathy, emotional reactions, and reasoning across three experiments, researchers found that participants consistently favored bills that included a victim's name and narrative over otherwise identical versions. The story,

not merely the name, appeared to boost approval. The findings raise concerns that emotionally driven support can elevate ineffective or even harmful policy proposals, underscoring the need for legislators to prioritize evidence-based policy over persuasive narratives. [Read more.](#)

Health and energy outlook predict health outcomes

Morgan K. Taylor and Margie E. Lachman, *Psychology and Aging*

Research has shown that older adults who rate their health and energy more positively have better long-term outcomes, but why? Drawing on 20-year data from the Midlife in the United States study, researchers found that optimistic outlooks predicted slower progression of health limitations, with especially strong benefits for adults with lower education. Health-promoting behaviors partly explained these links. Although outlook didn't predict changes in chronic conditions, a positive energy outlook modestly reduced mortality risk. Results suggest that strengthening health and energy beliefs earlier in life may support healthier aging. [Read more.](#)

Personality profiles in counterproductive behavior

Michael P. Wilmot et al., *Journal of Applied Psychology*

Why do some people engage in counterproductive behavior across work and life? Researchers synthesized over 1,200 studies with more than 850,000 participants and linked such behaviors to patterns of Big Five traits that reflect "personality malfunction," or problematic configurations rather than single traits. Cluster analyses revealed recurring profiles that may represent forms of counterproductive behavior, aligning closely with the externalizing spectrum of psychopathology and pointing toward a broader taxonomy and new avenues for research and practice. [Read more.](#)

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Need to Know

Register for free trainings and events

- **March 24:** Strengthening Team Science in a Changing Research Landscape (APA Essential Science Conversation)
- **March 24:** Adaptability (third seminar in Psychology of Resilience series cohosted by World Wildlife Fund and APA)
- **April 16:** Psychological Instruments: A Primer on Sources of Validity Evidence (APA Science Training Session)
- **April 22:** A First Introduction to Cognitive Modeling (APA Science Training Session)
- **April 23:** Virtual Q&A session with Psi Chi for students considering graduate study in psychology (Psi Chi and APA)
- **April 28:** Motivating Community Stewardship (fourth seminar in Psychology of Resilience series)
- **April 28:** What Scale Is Best? Understanding Sources of Validity Evidence for Depression Management (APA Science Training Session)

Apply or nominate for opportunities and awards

- **March 31:** Raymond D. Fowler Award for Outstanding Contributions to APA
- **April 1:** 100 Psychologists Rising (APA presidential initiative)
- **April 3:** Eric and Wendy Schmidt Awards for Excellence in Science Communications

- **April 15:** American Psychological Foundation professional development awards for high school psychology teachers
- **June 1:** APA Awards for Distinguished Scientific Early Career Contributions to Psychology.

Provide feedback

- **April 8:** The National Institutes of Health seeks community feedback on the next Agency-Wide Strategic Plan. Input from researchers, stakeholders, and the public is essential to ensure transparency and advance the principles of gold standard science. Weigh in during a webinar on April 8 (2:30–3:30 pm ET).

Career



Step into leadership in psychological science

Help identify and inspire tomorrow's research leaders by judging psychological science projects at the 2026 Regeneron International Science and Engineering Fair, the world's largest high school science competition. Virtual judges are needed to review 35-40 projects online in early May. If you're a PhD/MD (or equivalent), an advanced grad student (4+ years research experience or within one year of dissertation defense), or a professional with 6+ years of relevant experience, email Science@apa.org by March 26 to participate. Looking for other ways to lead? Explore APA's full catalog of [student leadership positions](#) for opportunities to advance the field, build your network, and strengthen psychological science from the inside out.

Deep Dive



New frontiers in learning and brain health across the aging lifespan

Older adults can achieve memory and attention performance on par with young adults—a finding helping to rewrite assumptions about cognitive decline. New research shows that multi-skill learning in supportive settings doesn't just slow aging's effects on the brain; it can reverse them. The most effective interventions target real-world skills like using tablets for online banking and medication management, or navigating Uber and Google Maps to access community resources. A Finnish study of people at higher risk of dementia found significant gains in psychomotor control, executive function, and complex memory after targeted training. Interventions now span in-person classes, digital coaching, and virtual-reality experiences, with strong engagement and early evidence for reduced loneliness and better everyday functioning. Emerging directions: scalable digital tools, equity-focused programs for underserved older adults, and AI-enabled personalization to help individuals maintain lifestyle changes and protect brain health.

[Read the full story.](#) / [Listen to a podcast with featured researcher Rachel Wu.](#)

Word for Word

“ If you really want to understand human cognition, you have to look at the whole gamut of processes from the most basic to the most complex. And among the very top, I would place the arts, including music.”

[Robert Zatorre, PhD, in “Music and the mind,” March 2026 *Monitor on Psychology*](#)

And Finally

Psychologists including 185 APA members and staff representing 46 states and territories recently advocated on Capitol Hill to strengthen funding for the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation, among other key legislative priorities. **See photos from the third annual Council Hill Day event.**

How satisfied are you with *Science Spotlight*?

Extremely dissatisfied

Somewhat dissatisfied

Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied

Somewhat satisfied

Extremely satisfied

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[Science Directorate](#)
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Washington, DC 20002

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