
F O C U S

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Nice Guys Finish... Second?

Being altruistic—but not too altruistic—may boost men's appeal.

Generosity can pay off when searching for a mate—up to a point. Overly giving men may actually be seen as less desirable by potential romantic partners, new research published in the journal *Personality and Individual Differences* suggests. Researchers recruited 262 heterosexual adults to watch a video in which a person of opposite gender received about \$120 and was given the chance to donate some of it. Individuals in the video gave away either majority or half amount, half of it, or nothing; participants then rated the person's attractiveness. Moderately altruistic actors—those donating half—were seen as more attractive than both highly altruistic and non-altruistic individuals. This was especially true of women rating men. Excessive altruism could be perceived as norm defying, the researchers hypothesize. Those who give away about as much as they keep, however, may get high marks for fairness—a desirable mate quality in itself.

Source: Mark Travers, Ph.D., Psychology Today, July/Aug 2020

A Reason to Reach Out

Having intimate conversations with strangers may be far more enjoyable than we think

Engaging in meaningful conversations with others strengthens social bonds and boosts well-being far more than does small talk. Yet many people dread or even actively avoid intimate conversations, especially with those they don't know well. Why are we so reluctant to engage in an activity that could benefit us so acutely? According to new research, it may be due to mis-calibrated expectations, and changing them could foster deeper connection. In a series of studies published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, participants either engaged in “shallow” conversations (speaking, for example, about their sleep schedule or how often they get haircuts) or “deep” discussions (covering embarrassing moments, what they're grateful for, or when they last cried). Before chatting, they predicted how awkward and uncomfortable the conversation would be, how close they would feel to their conversation partner afterward, and how much they would enjoy the interaction. Participants consistently overestimated the awkwardness of the conversation; this miscalculation was especially significant for the “deep” discussions. They also greatly underestimated how much they'd enjoy the more intimate conversations, as well as how close they'd feel to their partner. Participants who had both shallow and deep discussions enjoyed the latter more and felt more connected afterward. The disparity between participants' expectations and their actual experience seemed rooted in the assumption that conversation partners wouldn't care about the details of their lives. “We underestimate, essentially, how social others are,” explains study author Nicholas Epley, a psychologist at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business. “As a result, we underestimate how positive it will be when we reach out and try to connect.” Such an assumption could be a barrier to forming deeper connections with others, Epley speculates. Yet participants appeared able to course-correct. When they were told ahead of time that it's common to underestimate how much strangers care about each other, they voluntarily steered the talks into deeper directions, potentially reaping the benefits of doing so. A single reminder likely isn't enough to permanently change mis-calibrated assumptions, Epley warns. But making the effort to engage in just a few positive interactions could help someone mentally reset. “After having a meaningful conversation, people usually want to have another one,” he says—in other words, they learn the benefits that intimacy can bring. “But you can learn only from experiences that you have,” he adds. “If you think it will be unpleasant to talk to someone and therefore never try, you'll never find out that you were wrong.”

Source: Devon Frye, Psychology Today, Jan/Feb 2022

Yoga for Anxiety and Depression

Since the 1970's, meditation and other stress-reduction techniques have been studied as possible treatments for depression and anxiety. One such practice, yoga, has received less attention in the medical literature, though it has become increasingly popular in recent decades. One national survey estimated, for example, that about 7.5% of U.S. adults had tried yoga at least once, and that nearly 4% practiced yoga in the previous year. Yoga classes can vary from gently and accommodating to strenuous and challenging; the choice of style tends to be based on physical ability and personal preference. Hatha yoga, the most common type of yoga practiced in the United States, combines three elements: physical poses, called *asanas*; controlled breathing practiced in conjunction with asanas; and a short period of deep relaxation or meditation. Available reviews of a wide range of yoga practices suggest they can reduce the impact of exaggerated stress responses and may be helpful for both anxiety and depression. In this respect, yoga functions like other self-soothing techniques, such as meditation, relaxation, exercise, or even socializing with friends. By reducing perceived stress and anxiety, yoga appears to modulate stress response systems. This, in turn, decreases physiological arousal—for example, reducing the heart rate, lowering blood pressure, and easing respiration. There is also evidence that yoga practices help increase heart rate variability, an indicator of the body's ability to respond to stress more flexibly. A small but intriguing study done at the University of Utah provided some insight into the effect of yoga on the stress response by looking at the participants' responses to pain. The researchers noted that people who have a poorly regulated response to stress are also more sensitive to pain. Their subjects were 12 experienced yoga practitioners, 14 people with fibromyalgia (a condition many researchers consider a stress-related illness that is characterized by hypersensitivity to pain), and 16 healthy volunteers. When the three groups were subjected to more or less painful thumbnail pressure, the participants with fibromyalgia—as expected—perceived pain at lower pressure levels compared with the other subjects. Functional MRIs showed they also had the greatest activity in areas of the brain associated with the pain response. In contrast, the yoga practitioners had the highest pain tolerance and lowest pain-related brain activity during the MRI. The study underscores the value of the techniques, such as yoga, that can help people regulate their stress and, therefore, their pain response. Although many forms of yoga practice are

safe, some are strenuous and may not be appropriate for everyone. In particular, elderly patients or those with mobility problems may want to check first with a clinician before choosing yoga as a treatment option. But for many patients dealing with depression, anxiety, or stress, yoga may be a very appealing way to better manage symptoms. Indeed, the scientific study of yoga demonstrates that mental and physical health are not just closely allied, but are essentially equivalent. The evidence is growing that yoga practice is a relatively low-risk, high-yield approach to improving overall health. **Source: Harvard Mental Health Letter (2009) updated 2018. Cambridge, MA Harvard Medical School.**

Weekend Catch-Up Can't Counter Chronic Sleep Deprivation.

A good night's sleep is vital for your health. Sleep helps your brain work properly. A lack of adequate sleep over time can also lead to disruptions in metabolism. These disruptions increase the risk for obesity and diabetes. Experts recommend that adults get at least 7 hours of sleep every night. But studies have found that about a third of adults regularly get less than 7 hours of sleep. Some people try to make up for these deficits by sleeping more on their days off work. Whether this strategy can make up for the damage done by work-week sleep deprivation wasn't known. To study the effects of make-up sleep on metabolism, researchers led by Dr. Kenneth Wright, Jr. from the University of Colorado brought 36 healthy men and women into their sleep lab for two weeks. After allowing three nights of normal sleep, the researchers split the participants into three groups. The first group was allowed to continue sleeping up to 9 hours a night. The second was allowed a maximum of 5 hours sleep a night for the length of the study. The third modeled "weekend recovery sleep." They slept a maximum of 5 hours a night for 5 days, were allowed to sleep in for 2 days, then returned to sleep deprivation for another 2 days. The researchers measured eating patterns, weight gain, and changes in insulin sensitivity (the body's ability to use insulin properly and control blood glucose levels). The study was funded by NIH's National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), and others. Results were published February 28, 2019, in *Current Biology*. Consistent sleep deprivation quickly distorted metabolism. Compared to people who slept normally, those who only slept 5 hours a night snacked more after

dinner and gained an average of about 3 pounds during the study. Their bodies' sensitivity to insulin decreased by 13% over the two-week period. Recovery sleep didn't provide any benefit over continuous sleep deprivation. Though they were allowed to sleep as much as they wanted over a weekend, participants in the recovery sleep group only managed to get an average of 3 hours extra sleep over 2 nights. The extra sleep on the weekend actually disrupted the participants' body rhythms when they returned to sleep deprivation. Following the recovery sleep period, they were more likely to wake up when their natural body rhythm was still promoting sleep. Participants in the recovery sleep group were less likely to snack at night during the recovery period. However, they reverted to late-night eating as soon as sleep deprivation began again. They also gained an average of about 3 pounds during the study and experienced a 27% decrease in insulin sensitivity. Notably, liver and muscle insulin sensitivity were reduced only in the weekend recovery sleep group. "The key take-home message from this study is that... weekend recovery or catch-up sleep does not appear to be an effective countermeasure strategy to reverse sleep loss induced disruptions of metabolism," Wright says. **Source: National Institute of Health. (2019). Weekend catch-up can't counter chronic sleep deprivation. Retrieved from <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/nih-research-matters/weekend-catch-cant-counter-chronic-sleep-deprivation>**

Help the Competitive Child Win More Than the Game

I know I'm not alone in worrying about the width and length of my child's competitive streak. It's hardly unusual for a child to be competitive. Nor is it bad. But there is a healthy competition and a unhealthy competition, says Jim Thompson, found of *Positive Coaching Alliance*. "Remember that comparison is inevitable and a normal human instinct," says Hilary Levey Friedman, author of *Playing to Win: Raising Children in a Competitive Culture*. "It is a skill to admire qualities in others, but also to be able to pinpoint an area in which one excels." That's all very well and good, but what am I supposed to do to better manage my child's competitive nature? Luckily, she and some other experts shared these five ideas. **Look in the mirror** - Examine your own competitive nature. Maybe you aren't into chess, soccer, Minecraft, or whatever your child's passion is. But consider the the subtle ways you might be influencing that competitive streak. I picked this one up from sports psychologist Joel Fish's book *101 Ways to be a Terrific Sport Parent*,

which reminded me to look inward. I'm not a team sports person, but I am notoriously competitive in my career and in the kitchen (lobster bisque, anyone?). How I model my own disappointments will directly influence him; next time my story is rejected or the pork roast is overdone, I'll incorporate "win some, lose some" talk into dinner conversation. **Cross train** - Find other areas to channel that competitive urge into places where your child can pursue victory. If she likes an individual activity such as chess, expose her to team sports as well. And vice versa. That's the advice I got from Friedman. "That might make him or her more understanding of others," she told me. "Or provide an outlet for that energy without the negative (and albeit sometimes positive) impact of being on a team." For the team experience, nudge your nonathletic child toward theater camp instead of a soccer clinic. **Say no; it's okay** - Don't forget the competition between parents, that is, the peer pressure to compete. Are you signing up for a stressful show choir programs because your friend Heather signed her son up for it? Or two soccer teams in the fall because your brother's kids are doing that? Or because your kid wants to do both? "I should have been smarter about realizing that less is more, and that it is not a good idea to accept every invitation," said Mark Hyman, author of *Until it Hurts: America's Obsession with Youth Sports*, a book inspired by his son's injuries from playing too much baseball. Don't be afraid to take a season off; if your child has a chance at playing for the San Francisco Giants, his chances are not going to be ruined by missing one season of Little League. **Make the grade** - If grades are more important to you than the outcome of her tennis match or whether all that singing practice lands him a solo, then create guidelines to emphasize what needs to be a priority. Less than an 80 on that math test? Skip Little League practice and have them review the material they were supposed to have learned before the test. "Many high schools have rules like this," Hyman reminded me. "You can't play on an interscholastic team unless you have a certain grade point average." **Big picture** - Never lose sight of the big picture. If you are frustrated by how your child's competitive streak is manifesting right now, try to look back and forward. Remember when your high diving champion was 3 and refused to go in the swimming pool? And you fretted over this issue for weeks? Big picture: Childhood is ever-evolving; kids are ever-changing. **Source: Mary Pols, Great! Schools.org (2022). Retrieved from <https://www.greatschools.org/gk/articles/help-the-competitive-child-win-more-than-the-game/>**



Gratitude: The Cure for Entitlement and Materialism

How do you raise kids that don't just say thank you but mean it too? How do you fight the factors leading to entitlement and moralistic children? Great Schools queried three scholars who shared their informed opinions on combatting materialism, oxytocin parenting and deepening gratitude in our children. Armed with those 10 tips, you can upgrade the "attitude of gratitude" in your household. Tim Kasser, Ph.D, is the author of *The High Price of Materialism* and co-editor of *Psychology and Consumer Culture: The Struggle for a Good Life in a Materialistic World*. He's an activist seeking to provide children with lives of "inward richness" instead of shallow consumerism and sits on the steering committee of the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood. He provided four tips you can't put a price on to combat materialism in children: **1. Think about the values that you are modeling as a parent.** Research shows that when parents hold materialist values to be important, their children take on those values. If you spend your time working long hours, shopping a lot, watching television, talking about and making money, etc., you are modeling to your child that materialistic aims in life are important. The child will then imitate those values. **2. Reduce the extent to which your child is exposed to other materialistic models.** Consider following the guidelines of the American Academy of Pediatrics: No screen time at all for children younger than 2, and less than 2 hours per day of screen usage for older children. **3. When your children do encounter advertisements, critique them.** One study showed that when children see advertisements and adults make factual comments (such as "Those commercials are intended to sell.") or evaluative comments ("That commercial is wrong; it doesn't look like that."), children's desire for the products declines. A game kids are likely to enjoy is to hit mute when a commercial comes on and make up your own funny dialogue for the advertisement message. **4. Encourage healthier values in your children.** Research on the human value system show that intrinsic values for personal growth (such as following your own interests and curiosity), affiliation (having good relationships) and community feeling (trying to make the world a better place) stand in conflict with materialistic values. By encouraging intrinsic values, materialistic

values will decline. Susan Kuchinkas is the author of *Oxytocin Parenting and The Chemistry of Connection: How the Oxytocin Response Can Help You Find Trust, Intimacy, and Love*. She provided the following practical guidance on fostering gratitude in your home. **1. Teach your child to be grateful by modeling it in an emotionally genuine way.** You can feel and express gratitude for both big and little things in daily life ("The clerk at the supermarket was so nice. She made me smile.") If you model gratitude for your child, you are helping create an emotional habit — biochemically and neurologically — that will shape your child's responses in a positive way. **2. Thankfulness at mealtimes and bedtime.** When you eat dinner with your child, and when you put them to bed at night, think back on the day together and discuss what you are grateful for. It could be in line with a religious belief, such as saying grace, or it could be secular. **3. Journaling about positive events in your life.** Expressing gratefulness can initiate oxytocin release. The oxytocin response is provoked not only in face-to-face interaction but also in phone conversations, Internet communications, or just thinking about things you are grateful for and people you are grateful to. Dacher Keltner is an author, psychology professor, and co-director of the Greater Good Science Center at University of California, Berkeley. Greater Good recently launched a three-year, \$5.6 million project, called Expanding the Science and Practice of Gratitude, with funding from the John Templeton Foundation. (GreatSchools is also contributing to this project.) He recommends: **1. Make sure your children grapple with the suffering that is in the world.** Climate change, hungry children, decline of species — understanding suffering and need is the basis for developing appreciation for life. **2. Have your children experience awe and deep beauty on a regular basis.** Nature and museums for example help open children's eyes and minds to the vastness of life. For out of awe comes the reverence at the heart of gratitude. **3. Make sure your children practice gratitude in daily conversation.** Saying "thank you," expressing appreciation, and affirming what others say all matter a lot in helping develop kids appreciation for what they have. **Source: Hank Pellisier, Great!Schools.org, (2023). Retrieved from <https://www.greatschools.org/gk/articles/gratitude-the-cure-for-entitlement-and-materialism/>**

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