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Week in Ideas: Christopher Shea

By CHRISTOPHER SHEA

Addiction

Drying Out With LSD

A fresh analysis of six old experiments on LSD as a treatment for alcoholism found that the treatment worked—at least for a while.

Collectively the experiments showed one LSD dose to be roughly as effective against alcoholism as daily doses of three medications often prescribed today: naltrexone, acamprosate and disulfiram.



Oliver Munday

A fresh analysis of six old experiments on LSD as a treatment for alcoholism found that the treatment worked—at least for a while.

The six studies, between 1966 and 1970, involved more than 500 patients, of whom 325 received a single substantial dose of the psychedelic drug. The control groups either got no drug or very low LSD doses.

Overall, 59% of the patients who'd taken LSD showed improvement at the first follow-up after treatment, compared with 38% for the control group. The improvement was also statistically significant at two to three months, and at six months—though not at the one-year mark.

"Lysergic Acid Diethylamide (LSD) for Alcoholism: Meta-Analysis of Randomized Controlled Trials," Teri S. Krebs and Pål Ørjan Johansen, Journal of Psychopharmacology (forthcoming)

Psychology

Blogging as Therapy

Many therapists recommend that their patients keep diaries, but blogging might be even better for mental health, a study suggests.

Researchers in Israel recruited 160 nonblogging teenagers who had scored low on a test of social and emotional well-being. Participants were asked to blog about their problems for 10 weeks (under a pseudonym); to blog about anything they wished; or to keep a diary in an unshared computer file. There was also a control group.

Before and after the experiment, the teens took tests measuring their self-esteem and satisfaction with interactions with peers; and their writing was also analyzed for clues about their mental health.

By the end of the experiment, the teenagers who had blogged about their problems showed more

improvement than the other groups—including those who'd kept a private diary. But given the risks of disclosure, the authors said this kind of frank blogging should occur only as part of a supervised treatment program.

"The Therapeutic Value of Adolescents' Blogging About Social-Emotional Difficulties," Meyran Boniel-Nissim and Azy Barak, Psychological Services (forthcoming)

Employment

The Beauty Premium

When a photo accompanies a job application (as is common in Argentina), attractive job seekers of both sexes get called back 36% more often than unattractive ones, a study finds.



Getty Images

Of the attractive fictional candidates, 10.3% were called, compared with 7.6% of the unattractive ones.

Three economists in Buenos Aires used what they described as objective measures of beauty: facial proportions that other studies have suggested are universally fetching. The researchers created composite photos of people in their 20s, then adjusted the ratios to make them more attractive or less.

During two months in 2010, the researchers sent out 2,500 applications, with the résumés of the job candidates carefully made similar. Of the attractive fictional candidates, 10.3% were called, compared with 7.6% of the unattractive ones.

"The Labor-Market Return to an Attractive Face: Evidence From a Field Experiment," Florencia López Bóo, Martín A. Rossi, and Sergio Urzúa, Institute for the Study of Labor Discussion Paper (February)



General Electric

Morpho butterflies' wings are sensitive.

When a Sensor Flaps...

The key to building remarkably fine-tuned heat sensors, at low cost, according to scientists at General Electric's Global Research Center? Butterflies.

The wings of the Morpho butterfly are covered with complex nanoscale structures—shaped vaguely like Christmas trees—that interfere with and diffuse light, producing shimmering colors. These structures also react to heat. By implanting carbon tubes in the "trees," the GE researchers improved their sensitivity, creating sensors that can identify changes in temperatures as small as 0.018 degrees Celsius,

and express them through color changes.

Existing sensors with that degree of sensitivity can be prohibitively expensive and too mechanically complex for everyday use. Potential uses for the bionic-butterfly heat sensors include identifying inflammation in human tissue and detecting friction in machinery before it leads to irreversible damage.

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