

**GIFTED KIDS: WHAT RESEARCH SAYS ABOUT NURTURING GENIUS**

SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN  
**MIND**

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# THE EXERCISE CURE

Why it may be  
the best fix for  
depression

THE CHEMISTRY  
OF DESIRE

HOW TO LEARN A  
NEW LANGUAGE





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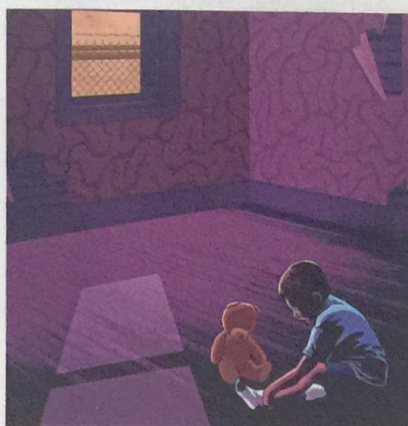
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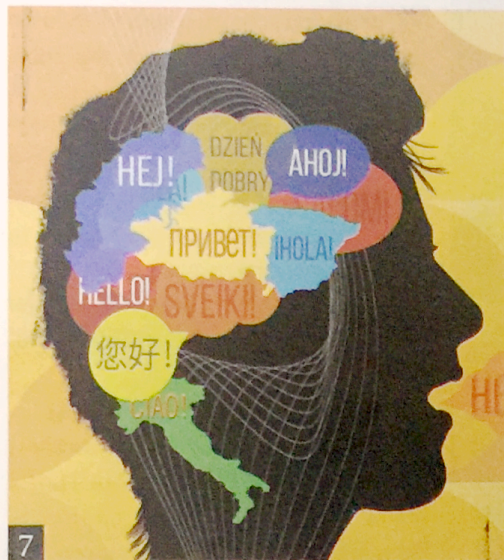
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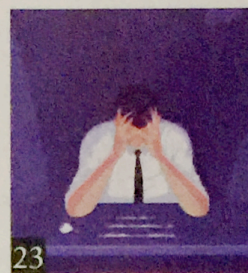
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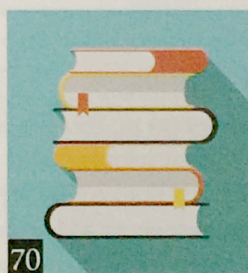
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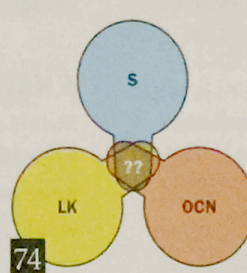
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#### A HAVEN AT HOME

Rachel Nuwer writes in “No Workplace Like Home” that people might work more productively in such a setting, but I would like to point out an additional benefit: if you experience environmental stressors such as sensitivity to fluorescent lighting, high-contrast patterns and background noises, you can control your environment at home and maximize concentration and focus and minimize visual and auditory sensory stress. And you can take breaks as needed and work according to your own time frame and circadian rhythm. Working remotely can also enable you to spend more time with family and engage in activities to unwind and de-stress, such as cooking healthy meals. If a person is diagnosed with a psychological or physical disability, working from home instead of an office may be an acceptable, reasonable accommodation to enable him or her to work at the job he or she is qualified to perform.

Thank you for bringing this option and its benefits to the attention of the public.

Shoshana Shamberg  
Baltimore

#### TAKE A BREAK TO MEDITATE

I read with interest the article “Give Me a Break,” by Ferris Jabr. I am a clinical psychologist with 30 years of experience

running a busy practice. I schedule two 20-minute meditation sessions every day, and as a result, I function better as a doctor and as a human being.

I have learned that researchers have proposed three major categories of meditation techniques, classified according to electroencephalographic measurements and the type of cognitive processing, or mental activity, involved: focused attention, open monitoring and automatic self-transcending.

Each technique has value, and I use all three in my clinical practice. I often recommend transcendental meditation to my patients, and I see good results in those who meditate regularly.

Mark S. Ellinger  
Delray Beach, Fla.

#### PARENTS SLEEP HALF-AWAKE

I was surprised that in his Consciousness Redux column “To Sleep with Half a Brain,” Christof Koch didn’t mention the light, fitful sleep anecdotally reported by some parents, especially moms, with newborns. As a veterinarian, I often use this phenomenon as an analogy when describing a similar response I have observed in dogs that are protective of their owners. Although I suspect most moms with young children eventually reach a point when they don’t sleep half-awake every night, there are still times, for example, when the kids are sick, when this mechanism kicks in again. I imagine grandparents may also go into this alert sleep mode when babysitting their grandchildren and get more restful sleep as soon as the parents return.

Myrna Milani  
Animal behavior consultant,  
TippingPoint  
Charlestown, N.H.

#### THE SPOTLESS MIND

Regarding “Trying to Forget May Cause Amnesia,” by Dinsa Sachan [Head Lines], I would add a different, but perhaps lesser, dimension to amnesia. Having grown up during the Japanese occupation of the Dutch East Indies in the Second World War, in which people of



## THE SOCIAL MEDIA GENERATION

**"Generation Z: Online and at Risk?,"** an excerpt from Nicholas Kardaras's book *Glow Kids*, expounds on the perils of social media for today's teens—from having fewer "real" friends to developing a technology addiction. A number of high school students wrote in via e-mail to express their opinions about the story's claims. We have grouped some of their comments by topic.

—The Editors

### How Many "Friends" Do You Really Have?

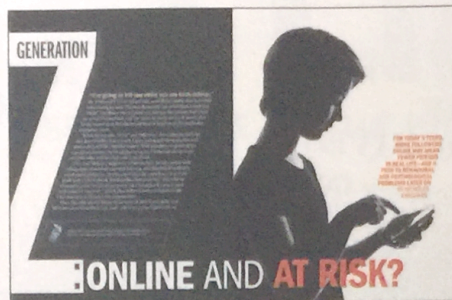
Brooke Harris writes that "most people now have over 300 friends on Facebook but don't even talk to half of them."

■ Kyle Anderson agrees: "On social media, I have a real conversation with only a few of my friends on Facebook every day; I talk to others but not very often." ■ Dalton Hermes adds, "Friends on social media, to teenagers, do not mean much. We really only are true friends with a small group of people." ■ Jake Mennen, on the other hand, notes that "having multiple friends on Facebook helps me connect with people I never thought I would be able to."

### Social Media Addiction

George Jeff writes, "I do not use social media myself, but I have seen some of my friends and family become addicted to it and use it constantly, to the point where they barely make any social contact outside of it, as they use it more and more."

■ Katelyn Byerley adds, "As a teenager,



I understand how social media and texting are an addiction. People have withdrawal when they don't have this luxury."

### Pulling the Plug on Phone Use

Sharon Heather writes, "I agree with the idea that parents should encourage their kids to not be on their phones all the time" but notes that "for that to work, parents need to get off their phones as well."

■ Robert H. Youngren asserts that instead of limiting their children's social media use, "parents should say little and instead encourage doing sports, going out with friends, or pursuing any hobby the kid likes."

### Does Social Media Magnify Peer Pressure?

Tessa Burger disagrees: "If somebody is going to be influenced, they are going to be influenced no matter what. I think what we should focus on more is teaching teens to resist peer pressure rather than blaming social media."

to select out the effects of more violent methods of child control or abuse, it neglects to raise the context that situates such a complex phenomenon. Namely, who spans? If that question were to be examined, taking into account cultural and familial context, it would give us a much truer picture of the sources of "negative outcomes" from spanking. Then there is that even more enticing question: Who doesn't spank? Who are they? And what disciplinary methods fare best in terms of outcomes on children's mental health and well-being?

Philip E. Wolfson  
San Anselmo, Calif.

## PSYCHOPATHIC PRESIDENTS

**Kevin Dutton's story** "Would You Vote for a Psychopath?" ranks U.S. presidents based on assessments of psychopathic traits. All presidents are listed except Barack Obama. Why? Is it because he is a sitting president? If so, then why are the 2016 candidates who ran for president ranked? And more curiously, why are obvious psychopaths such as Joseph Stalin and Mao Zedong not included?

Harold R. Barbera  
Tamarac, Fla.

European descent were put in internment camps, my suppression of bad memories has become a constant exercise. I even shut out some of what I hear. Couple that with dysfunction in my immediate family, and suppressing things has become a habit in my daily life. It becomes a "zone" I am in without realizing it, and even learning is done from this in-between state. This realization has come to me recently, but I made the connection, in particular, after reading this article. Thank you.

Joy von Ende-Reddy  
Toronto

## EXERCISE AND COGNITION

**The answer to** "How Does Exercise Benefit Cognition?" by David R. Jacobs and Na Zhu [Ask the Brains], was interest-

ing. But the authors did not discuss the reverse possibility: Might it be the case that people with better cognitive capabilities are also the ones who are better able to control and stimulate their physical capabilities? In other words, are they simply more disciplined and more motivated to achieve goals? Cause and effect might be reversed.

Antoon Kuijpers  
Vlaardingen, the Netherlands

## TEASING APART THE EFFECTS OF SPANKING

**Reducing complex** social and behavioral contexts to a single variable tends to lead to erroneous results. Although "What Science Really Says about Spanking," by Melinda Wenner Moyer [Head Lines], indicates that researchers made an effort

**THE EDITORS REPLY:** Dutton created the table of past presidents based on a 2012 study co-authored by psychologist and Scientific American Mind advisory board member Scott O. Lilienfeld, who explains, "Obama was left out because the data were collected several years before he became president." Dutton researched psychopathy among historical world leaders, and he notes, "This is an ongoing study, and the biographers for Stalin and Mao haven't gotten back to me yet."

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