Duh! 12 obvious science findings of 2012

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December 26, 2012

For scientists, an answer to a question, or solution to a problem, is not true until proven so. And sometimes that means revealing what mere mortals already knew, like, say the fact that getting to the hospital quicker can save heart-attack victims, or, the seemingly far-fetched idea that exercise is good for you. Here are a few of the most obvious findings of 2012.

1. Good partners make good parents
Perhaps not the most shocking news in the world: Marry a good, secure partner, and you can expect them to become a good, secure parent.

The same skills that make people good in romantic relationships make them good at building relationships with their kids, researchers reported Dec. 6 in the journal Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin. Among the key traits are cooperation and communication.

While this may seem self-evident, researchers say that empirically linking the same skills to the two types of relationships may translate to better self-help and therapy. Fix one relationship, and you may fix them both.

2. We all want to date a hottie
Sure, you may say you look for a good sense of humor and a sweet disposition, but deep down, you have to admit a pretty face wouldn’t go amiss.

Both men and women unconsciously desire a sexually attractive partner, a study released in January found.

Using a high-speed word association test, the researchers found that people responded faster to words linked to sexiness, no matter how low they claimed to prioritize the physical. The mismatch between what we say we want and what we want may be why online dating meet-ups sometimes go astray, the researchers said.
3. **Pre-gamers drink more**

Do the math: If you drink before you go out and then drink while you go out, you end up drinking more than if you hadn't had anything to drink before you went out. In other words, those who "pre-game" get drunker than those who just belly up to the bar, according to research published online in the journal Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research.

"Pre-drinking is a pernicious drinking pattern that is likely to lead people to cumulate two normal drinking occasions — one off-premise followed by one on-premise — and generally results in excessive alcohol consumption," study researcher Florian Labhart of Addiction Switzerland, where the study was conducted, said in a statement. "Excessive consumption and adverse consequences are not simply related to the type of people who pre-drink, but rather to the practice of pre-drinking itself."

4. **People with more experience make better decisions**

Okay, so pre-drinking is a bad decision — and thus, a choice the more experienced would automatically avoid, according to a study released in December in the journal Organizational Decision Making and Human Decision Processes. People with more experience in a field (in this case, basketball or designer goods), were better at making intuitive judgments about that field than newbies, the study found. But the experienced were no better at making decisions than amateurs when told to reason out their choices analytically. In other words, it’s okay to go with your gut — but only if you know what you're talking about.

5. **Keeping guns out of the hands of troubled individuals saves lives**

In a report that would tragically prove very timely this year, the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health found that keeping guns away from high-risk individuals prevents gun violence. These individuals include criminals, those with a history of domestic violence, the mentally ill, people under age 21 and substance abusers.

The report also found that the availability of high-capacity magazines increased deaths in mass shootings.

"Mass shootings bring public attention to the exceptionally high rate of gun violence in the U.S., but policy discussions rarely focus on preventing the daily gun violence that results in an average of 30 lives lost every day," said study author Daniel Webster, the director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research. "Addressing weaknesses in existing gun laws by expanding prohibitions for criminals, perpetrators of domestic violence, youth, and drug abusers, and closing the loopholes that allow prohibited persons to obtain guns can be effective strategies to reduce gun violence. It is important to note that making these changes to our gun laws would not disarm law-abiding adults."

6. **Exercise is good for you**

If you haven't heard by now that getting moving is good for you, you might want to get with the times. Perhaps also not new news to those who enjoy a good endorphin buzz: Exercise improves
mental health as well as physical.

A study published in the journal Clinical Psychological Science in September found that both the improved body image that came with exercise and the social interaction inherent in organized sports made teens less likely to suffer from mental problems such as depression, anxiety or substance abuse. The study controlled for factors such as socioeconomic background, age and gender.

7. **Calling an ambulance improves heart attack survival**
Think you're having a heart attack? Dial 911. Believe it or not, paramedics really do save lives.

Research presented at the Acute Care Cardiac Congress in October found that only 29 percent of Turkish patients having heart attacks went to the hospital by ambulance, despite the fact that this service is free in Turkey. Taking a cab or driving one's own car was slower than an ambulance ride and delayed crucial treatment, the study found.

8. **Guys are more into their girl friends than vice versa**
Apparently some stereotypes about guys and sex are true. It turns out that college-age guys report more sexual interest in their platonic female friends than vice versa, though these crushes are usually described as more of a burden than a boon.

In post-college-age adults, about half of the participants in the study, which was released in May, spontaneously mentioned attraction as a burden to their cross-sex friendships. Nevertheless, study researchers said, male-female friendships can be successful.

9. **Smoking a lot of pot can make your mind fuzzy**
Yes, science has done it again: Heavy marijuana use can mess with a teen's brain. The study, detailed in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, found that of the 1,000 New Zealanders followed, those who started using pot as teenagers and used it for years afterward lost some of their smarts; more specifically, they had an average decline in IQ of 8 points, between age 13 and age 38.

"The simple message is that substance use is not healthy for kids," study researcher Avshalom Caspi, a psychologist at Duke University and the Institute of Psychiatry at King's College London, said in a statement. "That's true for tobacco, alcohol, and apparently for cannabis."

10. **Driving when drunk is unsafe**
Drinking and driving really is dangerous. A study out this year showed that as a person's blood-alcohol level increased so did their risk of being killed or involved in a fatal crash, regardless of their age. For instance, compared with sober drivers of the same age, individuals who were ages 16 to 20 with a blood alcohol between 0.02 and 0.05 were nearly three times as likely to be involved in a fatal crash. The study, detailed in May in the Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs, also found that more underage females who have been drinking alcohol are at risk for
being in a fatal car crash compared with 2007. The researchers aren't sure what's behind the increase, but speculate girls are taking more risks nowadays.

11. High heels are bad for your feet
Cramming your feet into tight-fitting shoes with inches-long heels on the bottom can hurt your feet. The new finding out this year? High heel-wearing is linked to ingrown toenails. So who would've guessed that wearing tight-fitting shoes with a steep slope down is one of the most common causes a foot problem in which the toes get compressed so much that the big toenail grows into the skin? But seriously, while often an ingrown nail is just an annoyance, it can get infected and even require surgical removal of the entire nail.

To avoid the pesky podiatry problem, Rodney Stuck, a professor of podiatry at the Loyola University Health System, recommended buying less-tight-fitting heels (yes), and ditching the fashion statements on days when you plan to do a lot of walking and standing.

12. Screaming at your child is harmful to your child
Psychological child abuse, such as belittling, terrorizing, exploiting and neglecting emotionally, can damage a kid's health.

"We are talking about extremes and the likelihood of harm, or risk of harm, resulting from the kinds of behavior that make a child feel worthless, unloved or unwanted," Dr. Harriet MacMillan of McMaster University said in a statement. MacMillan added that examples would include a mother leaving her infant alone in a crib all day or a father pulling his teen into his own drug habit. Such abuse can be as harmful to children as physical harm, the researchers reported in August in the journal *Pediatrics.*