

Social anxiety? Well, you may already be someone's best friend

In matters of friendship, people with social anxiety disorder face many problems. They often find it difficult to make friends. They also tend to assume that the friendships they do have are not of the highest quality.

This perception may not be shared by their friends, according to new research from Washington University in St. Louis.

Social anxiety disorder is not as simple as mere shyness. According to the study, "It is a recognised psychiatric condition in which those struggling with the affliction often live in fear of meeting new people, passing up social invitations or work opportunities for fear of being rejected, embarrassed or otherwise singled out as a failure.

By some estimates, 13 percent of people in Europe and the United States experience social anxiety disorder. The disorder ranges in severity, from less severe, yet impairing fears of a single situation (most often public speaking), to fears about interacting with people in general, the study adds.

The study was published this month in the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*.



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Is depression infectious?

Depression is seen by many as a temporary condition that will go away with time. In reality, it is not only a disease like diabetes, it may well be infectious. In a paper published in *Biology of Mood & Anxiety Disorders*, Dr Turhan Canli suggests that major depressive disorder (MDD) should be re-conceptualised as an infectious disease. Dr Canli is an associate Professor of Psychology and Radiology at Stony Brook University. In the paper, Dr Canli presents three arguments why reconceptualising MDD as an infectious disease may help improve treatment.

"First, he points out that patients with MDD exhibit illness behaviour such as loss of energy, and that inflammatory biomarkers in MDD also suggest an illness-related origin. Second, he describes evidence that parasites, bacteria and viruses that infect humans in a way that alters their emotional behavior. Thirdly, Dr Canli brings the notion of the human body as an ecosystem for microorganisms and the role of genetics."



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O Brother, Where Art Thou?

According to a study in the *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, "having a sibling is just as good for you as it is for your sister." That's contrary to previous reports that boys benefit less than girls from peer relationships. Brigham Young University professors Padilla-Walker and Jim Harper concluded that siblings uniquely promote the development of sympathy.

The message parents are advised to take from the study: "Helping their children have a positive relationship with each other will yield lasting rewards. Boys who have a hostile relationship with a sibling were significantly more likely to have behavioral problems later on."

TO KISS OR NOT TO KISS

"Kiss me and you will see how important I am," said Poet Sylvia Plath. What the poet did not perhaps know is that as many as 80 million bacteria are transferred during a 10 second kiss. That's according to research published in the open access journal *Microbiome*. The researchers from Micropia and TNO in the Netherlands also found that partners who kiss each other at least nine times a day share similar communities of oral bacteria. However, the study does not suggest that it's bad for you: "About 100 trillion microorganisms, called the microbiota, live in our bodies and



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are essential for the digestion of food, synthesising nutrients, and preventing disease. With the mouth playing host to more than 700 varieties of bacteria, the oral microbiota appears to be influenced by those closest to us."

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