

July 2, 2015

For important stuff we turn to a NY Times story on one of Louisville Slugger's bat makers.

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Luckett's 46-year tenure as the longest-serving bat maker for Louisville Slugger came to an end on Friday, when he retired. Few had as much direct impact on producing the tools of the game.

Luckett is believed to have made more than two million bats for Louisville Slugger, which was bought by Wilson Sporting Goods in March but will retain its name and continue to manufacture bats in Louisville, Ky. Luckett said he was retiring not because of the sale but because, with his 68th birthday approaching, it was time.

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The Washington Post Science section tells us how smart crows are. Pickerhead knew that, because crows are black, and not one of them was dumb enough to vote for Obama.
... the greatest intellectual rival to the brainy apes may be a noisy scavenger with a sharp beak, bright eyes and a brain about the size of a walnut: the crow and its corvid relatives.

Crows and ravens are clever problem-solvers, expert toolmakers and adept social movers, but scientists haven't reached a consensus about how corvid minds handle abstract thinking or how closely their mental processes resemble those of humans.

Researchers from the University of Iowa and Lomonosov Moscow State University in Russia reported early this year that crows can use analogies to match pairs of objects. To reach that conclusion, the scientists trained crows to recognize whether two objects were identical or different, which the birds indicated by pressing one button when shown pictures of objects that matched and a different button when the objects didn't match. Once all the birds were good at matching objects, researchers showed the crows images of pairs of objects. Some images depicted matched pairs, while others depicted two mismatched objects with different shapes or colors. In response, crows could press buttons to choose between a matched pair or a mismatched pair.

The researchers wanted to see if crows could figure out the relationship between pairs of objects and then choose a pair with the same relationship: matched or mismatched. For

instance, a crow looking at a mismatched pair would then select the mismatched pair from their response choices. Nearly 78 percent of the time, the birds succeeded. According to the researchers, the birds recognized that the relationship between the two pairs of objects was the same. In other words, they were making analogies. ...

... Corvids seem to understand that other birds have minds like theirs, and their decisions often take into account what others might know, want or intend, according to several studies of crows, ravens and jays. Psychologists call this a theory of mind, and it's a fairly sophisticated cognitive ability. Humans don't develop it until late in childhood. Crows and their fellow corvids are social animals, much like primates, so theory of mind probably offers significant evolutionary advantages.

For one thing, it may help prevent food theft. Crows and ravens often hide food in caches and retrieve it later. "You can actually see them watching both the other birds that they are with and the humans, and if they sense that they have been seen, they will take that food and they'll go and hide it somewhere else," Innes said of the Maryland Zoo's ravens. The birds appear to realize that watchers will know where they've hidden the food and might use that knowledge to steal it later.

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National Geographic says North Carolina is having a perfect storm of conditions that could lead to shark attacks.

An unusual combination of factors has led to an increase in bites.

There have been six shark attacks in North Carolina this year, all of them in June.

This is already more than last year, when the state saw four attacks. In the previous decade, there were only 25 shark attacks in North Carolina. And there have been just 55 documented shark attacks in the state between 1905 and 2014.

So what's going on this year?

"It's kind of a perfect storm," says George H. Burgess, the director of the International Shark Attack File at the Florida Museum of Natural History. Burgess says across the United States overall, shark attacks are on pace with an average year, and the chance of getting bit is still very low—an estimated one in 11.5 million for an ocean bather. But, he adds, "clearly, something is going on in North Carolina right now."

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"I don't care what anybody says, verbally," says Prentiss Smith, the general manager at a Toyota dealership in Brookhaven, Mississippi. "If they pull up on our lot, they might say they're not ready to buy, but that's not true." Salespeople watch for subtle signs to read your mind. "If it's a trade-in and I'm doing an appraisal, I see how much gas is in there," says Daniel Wheeler, an Oregon-based Hyundai salesman. "If it's a quarter of a tank or below, it's usually a fairly good sign [a customer is] ready to purchase." David Teves, a California-based salesman who writes the blog Confessions of a Car Man, says he can determine a customer's mood by the parking spot they choose. "There's a place at the end of our lot we call 'Laydown Lane' because the people who park there are too timid to park out front. They're either total 'laydowns'—which means they buy whatever you want for whatever price—or they have extremely bad credit."

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There might also be other factors at play when sugared-up kids go nuts. Candy and cake, for example, are staples on Halloween and at birthday parties—events rife with kid drama. Or there might be other substances in the mix. Chocolate, for instance, is packed with stimulants, such as caffeine and theobromine.

Still, for many parents, sugar remains the go-to scapegoat, even if proof is lacking. "We're always looking to explain our behavior," Milch says. "We don't like to be in a vacuum where something happens and we don't know why."

NY Times - Extra Bases

[Louisville Slugger Craftsman Retires After 46 Years of Turning Out Hits](#)

by Tyler Kepner



Danny Lockett weighing a newly cut World Series bat for the Phillies' Pedro Feliz in 2009 at the Louisville Slugger factory. Nearing 68, he retired Friday.

Danny Lockett did some woodworking in high school. Other than that, his main qualification for a job that would help many major league hitters was simply saying yes to the man at the employment office.

“He said, ‘How do you feel about making baseball bats for a living?’ ” Lockett said last week. “I said, ‘Well, I need a job, so that sounds good to me.’ I’ve been here ever since.”

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He takes decades of highlights with him, including Oct. 11, 1972. With the best-of-five National League Championship Series between Pittsburgh and Cincinnati tied, two games apiece, Lockett went to work for the Reds’ star catcher.

“Johnny Bench hit a home run in the bottom of the ninth to tie the game with a bat I had turned that morning,” Lockett said. “Our representative took it to Cincinnati in the afternoon and he used it in the game.”

The Reds went on to win the pennant. Some two decades later, Lockett said, he watched as Joe Carter used his bat for the homer that won the 1993 World Series for the Toronto Blue Jays.

The Carter bat, though, was not turned by hand. By then, the art of using a lathe to turn a bat was all but obsolete. A process that once took 15 minutes can now be done in 45 seconds with a Computer Numerical Control lathe.

The technology is less romantic, to be sure, but it has greatly improved the craft. Because of imperfections in weight, the company once had to produce about 15 to 18 bats to get a dozen that fit a player's order.

"With the computers that we have, unless something happens to the machine, all the bats are identical, and that's what players want," Lockett said. "They want all the bats to be consistently the same size and the same weight."

Of all the clients he served, Lockett said, Tony Gwynn had perhaps the smallest bats, at 33 inches, 30 ½ ounces. Gwynn, a Hall of Famer, liked the light bats because he could whip them through the strike zone so quickly. The heaviest bats, he said, were for the Willie Stargell-Dave Parker Pirates teams of the late 1970s.

"They wanted 37-inch bats, and they wanted 35, 36 ounces," Lockett said. "They were called 'the Lumber Company' for good reason."

The most popular model ever, he said, was the C271, originally made for the former outfielder Jose Cardenal. It had a thin handle and a medium-size barrel, and players liked its balance and durability. Lockett said the challenge in later years, for players raised with aluminum bats, was to give them the thin handles they wanted while staying within Major League Baseball's specifications.

Lockett worked with clients like Hank Aaron and Cal Ripken Jr., and as recently as last winter he turned a bat by hand for the Miami Marlins' Christian Yelich, who visited the factory. The last hand-turned bat Lockett knows was used in a game was by Craig Biggio, during one of the final games of his Hall of Fame career in 2007.

Biggio collected 3,060 hits in his career, but by the end, when he was 41, the bat might have been a bit tougher to get around.

"He went to Cincinnati and used it one time and he said, 'The bat's too heavy,' " Lockett said. "But it was the same bat he used all along."

Washington Post

Who ya callin' bird brain?

By Kiona Smith-Strickland

Are crows the smartest animals of all?

Many scientists think that corvids — the family of birds that includes crows, ravens, rooks and jays — may be among the most intelligent animals on Earth, based on their ability to solve

problems, make tools and apparently consider both possible future events and other individuals' states of mind.

“There’s a lot of research that has been done with both ravens and crows because they are such intelligent species,” said Margaret Innes, an assistant curator at the Maryland Zoo in Baltimore.

Even in humans, defining and measuring intelligence is difficult, and it’s more complicated in other species, which have very different body shapes and have evolved for their niche in the environment. However, scientists who study cognition have defined a few measures of intelligence: recognizing oneself in a mirror, solving complex problems, making tools, using analogies and symbols, and reasoning about what others are thinking.

For a long time, biologists expected most of these mental feats to be unique to primates. The great apes — chimpanzees, orangutans and gorillas — succeed at nearly all of these tasks, from making and using tools to learning large vocabularies of symbols, as well as recognizing themselves in mirrors.

A select few other mammals also meet most of the accepted criteria for intelligence. Dogs and dolphins, for instance, are very good at tasks involving social intelligence, such as communication, conflict resolution and reasoning about what others are thinking. Dolphins are also capable of basic tool use — for instance, carrying sea sponges in their mouths to shield their noses from scrapes and bumps as they forage on the ocean floor.

However, the greatest intellectual rival to the brainy apes may be a noisy scavenger with a sharp beak, bright eyes and a brain about the size of a walnut: the crow and its corvid relatives.

Clever problem-solvers

Crows and ravens are clever problem-solvers, expert toolmakers and adept social movers, but scientists haven’t reached a consensus about how corvid minds handle abstract thinking or how closely their mental processes resemble those of humans.

Researchers from the University of Iowa and Lomonosov Moscow State University in Russia [reported](#) early this year that crows can use analogies to match pairs of objects. To reach that conclusion, the scientists trained crows to recognize whether two objects were identical or different, which the birds indicated by pressing one button when shown pictures of objects that matched and a different button when the objects didn’t match. Once all the birds were good at matching objects, researchers showed the crows images of pairs of objects. Some images depicted matched pairs, while others depicted two mismatched objects with different shapes or colors. In response, crows could press buttons to choose between a matched pair or a mismatched pair.

The researchers wanted to see if crows could figure out the relationship between pairs of objects and then choose a pair with the same relationship: matched or mismatched. For instance, a crow looking at a mismatched pair would then select the mismatched pair from their response choices. Nearly 78 percent of the time, the birds succeeded. According to the researchers, the birds recognized that the relationship between the two pairs of objects was the same. In other words, they were making analogies.

Other scientists contend that a type of reasoning less sophisticated than analogies could have produced the same results. For instance, the crows in the analogy test could have simply chosen images with similar characteristics, such as objects of the same color, instead of reasoning about the relationship between the objects, to get the correct answer.

Some behaviors, like those employed in the analogy test, could have more than one explanation, and until recently, scientists could only see what the birds did, then make inferences about the mental processes behind the behavior.

Now, researcher John Marzluff and his colleagues at the University of Washington are using positron emission tomography, or PET, scans to study which parts of a crow's brain are active when it performs such tasks as recognizing friendly and unfriendly birds. And he says that another team of researchers, at the University of California at Davis, is preparing to use the same technique to study the brain activity of New Caledonian crows, a species that makes sophisticated tools. The team hopes to actually see the crows' brains at work while they're crafting tools.

Birds' minds

Corvids seem to understand that other birds have minds like theirs, and their decisions often take into account what others might know, want or intend, according to several studies of [crows](#), [ravens](#) and jays. Psychologists call this a theory of mind, and it's a fairly sophisticated cognitive ability. Humans don't develop it until late in childhood. Crows and their fellow corvids are social animals, much like primates, so theory of mind probably offers significant evolutionary advantages.

For one thing, it may help prevent food theft. Crows and ravens often hide food in caches and retrieve it later. "You can actually see them watching both the other birds that they are with and the humans, and if they sense that they have been seen, they will take that food and they'll go and hide it somewhere else," Innes said of the Maryland Zoo's ravens. The birds appear to realize that watchers will know where they've hidden the food and might use that knowledge to steal it later.

[Studies](#) of several corvid species have documented this re-caching, as it is called. Skeptics of the birds' advanced intelligence say simpler mental processes might prompt re-caching, such as making an association between being seen and later having a cache stolen.

Innes, however, is convinced that the re-caching is a sign that ravens have a theory of mind, based on her observation of re-caching behavior in ravens at the Maryland Zoo. "Definitely," she said. "I think it definitely indicates that."

[Other test results are harder to dismiss](#) as simple association. When researchers in Austria hid food behind a partition, ravens found it, apparently by noticing where the humans were looking and following their gazes to the hidden food. "You're using the person's gaze to infer information about something you can't see," Marzluff said.

Brain imaging studies could settle the question, Marzluff said, because advanced cognition in all animals uses different areas of the brain than simpler associative learning.

Feathered craftsmen

Corvids' toolmaking is much more clearly the product of sophisticated cognition, according to biologists who study them.

Several animals use found objects to get food, such as otters and sea gulls that use rocks to crack shellfish, and apes that use sticks to fish termites out of nests. But deliberately crafting tools is a much more sophisticated skill. Only four species are known to actually make tools: humans, chimpanzees, orangutans — and New Caledonian crows. Although other corvid species have learned to make and use tools in labs, only the crows found on the Pacific island of New Caledonia have been found to actually make tools in the wild.

With their beaks, the crows sharpen forked twigs into hooks for scooping larvae and worms out of holes in wood. The crows often spend more than a minute finding the right stick and then [sculpting it into the right shape](#). Even chimpanzees don't craft their tools so meticulously, and some researchers say that the crows' work is on par with very early human tools such as spears and sharpened digging sticks.

New Caledonian crows even take steps to avoid losing their carefully crafted tools. Biologists [recently discovered](#) that the birds sometimes stash their hooks in holes, or simply stand on them, when they aren't in use. The crows are especially careful when the risk of losing their tools is greatest, such as when the birds forage in high branches.

The aptitude for toolmaking is probably an instinct for most corvids, as it is for humans. Corvids use found objects as tools — ravens and crows, for example, drop nuts onto flat rocks to crack the shells — and nearly all corvids seem to have a knack for solving physical problems. In [one set of experiments](#), captive crows figured out how to bend wires into hooks to retrieve food from a tube. And captive rooks, close relatives of crows and ravens, [have done the same thing](#).

It's unsurprising that chimpanzees and orangutans share so many abilities with humans, because they are very closely related to us, but it's striking that corvids share so many skills once believed to set humans apart. After all, birds and mammals have spent the last 300 million years evolving on different paths, which produced very different brain structures and bodies.

Parts of the brain that evolved earlier than 300 million years ago, such as the primitive structures in the brainstem that control basic bodily functions, look the same in most animals, including primates and corvids. But structures that developed more recently, like those involved in cognition, are organized very differently in birds than they are in mammals.

Mammalian brains have evolved with what is called a laminar structure, in which brain cells are organized in six layers that make up the cerebral cortex, or forebrain. The cerebral cortex handles cognitive tasks, and it's especially well developed in humans and our fellow apes, as well as other intelligent animals such as dolphins and dogs. In the bird brain, a structure called the nidopallium caudolaterale handles cognitive tasks, and it's especially well developed in corvids.

"All three of those animals have very large forebrains relative to the rest of their brains, for their particular group," Marzluff said. "Certainly the forebrain of a bird and a mammal differ, but they have the same sorts of functions — that is, you know, higher-level thought and processing of sensory information."

In birds' brains, cells form clusters called nuclei instead of layers. For years, biologists held that the layered cerebral cortex gave mammals some cognitive advantages, but research on corvids has cast doubt on that assumption.

Bird brains

That such distantly related animals with such different brains could evolve such similar abilities is surprising, but when two different species face similar evolutionary pressures, natural selection can lead to similar traits. Biologists call this convergent evolution, and it's the same process by which birds and bats both evolved wings. At some point, biologists say, the ancestor of today's corvids must have found itself in an ecological niche where intelligence boosted the odds of survival, so corvid brains evolved with cognitive abilities similar to those of primates.

Convergent evolution may have led to similar wiring despite the differences in physical structure between bird and mammalian brains. The network of connections between areas of the brain looks very similar in corvids and primates, and one recently published paper compared bird and primate brains to Apple and PC computers. "At one level of analysis, they do the same things in a similar way, but viewed from another perspective, their operating systems are indeed different," wrote the author, Cambridge University psychologist Nicola Clayton.

In the coming years, the differences and similarities between corvids' mental operating systems and those of mammals will be analyzed with brain imaging. At that point, said Marzluff, we may have "some of those answers" to the question of how smart crows really are.

National Geographic

North Carolina's "Perfect Storm" for Shark Attacks

by Brian Howard

An unusual combination of factors has led to an increase in bites.

There have been [six shark attacks](#) in North Carolina this year, all of them in June.

This is already more than last year, when the state saw four attacks. In the previous decade, [there were only 25 shark attacks in North Carolina](#). And there have been just 55 documented shark attacks in the state between 1905 and 2014.

So what's [going on this year](#)?

"It's kind of a perfect storm," says [George H. Burgess](#), the director of the International Shark Attack File at the Florida Museum of Natural History. Burgess says across the United States overall, shark attacks are on pace with an average year, and the chance of getting bit is still very low—an estimated one in 11.5 million for an ocean bather. But, he adds, "clearly, something is going on in North Carolina right now."

Here's why:

1. Warmer weather

Most shark attacks in North Carolina happen when the water reaches about 80 degrees Fahrenheit (27 Celsius), something that happened early this year, in April. Most sharks prefer warmer water, and the higher temperatures have drawn them in from farther south.

The warmer weather has also brought more people to the state's beaches and entices them to take a dip to cool off. That makes more chances to run into sharks.

2. Higher salinity

North Carolina has had a drought this year, which means less rainwater has been flowing off the land into the sea. That has made the waters right off the coast less diluted, and therefore more salty, than usual. Most sharks prefer saltier water, says Burgess.

3. A bloom of bait fish

North Carolina has had an especially plentiful run of menhaden along its coast this summer. The small "bait fish" are a favorite prey item of sharks, who often follow them long distances.

"There's been a combination of more sharks, more people, and lots of bait fish, and that's a formula for more shark bites," says Burgess.

He adds that based on the location and characteristics of the bites, bull or tiger sharks are most likely to blame for this weekend's accidents.

4. Fishing near swimmers

"There is no doubt that fishing is an attractant to sharks," says Burgess.

Sharks can smell bait and blood from a long ways away. Fishing can also injure or confuse sharks, making them more likely to bite.

Communities may want to take more care in establishing designated fishing and swimming areas, says Burgess.

5. Global warming

Although [Frank J. Schwartz](#), a shark biologist with the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, says there's too much natural variability in weather cycles to blame the recent shark attacks on global warming, Burgess says the link is plausible.

"Clearly global climate change is a reality and it has resulted in warmer temperatures in certain places at certain times," says Burgess.

As warming is expected to increase, it will likely bring more sharks farther north and entice more people to get into the water, which will lead to more bites.

Mental Floss

10 Confessions of Car Salesmen

by Jessica Hullinger

It may look like a world of balloons and bad tweed. But making a living on the lot is anything but a Sunday drive.

1. They read you like a book.

“I don’t care what anybody says, verbally,” says Prentiss Smith, the general manager at a Toyota dealership in Brookhaven, Mississippi. “If they pull up on our lot, they might say they’re not ready to buy, but that’s not true.” Salespeople watch for subtle signs to read your mind. “If it’s a trade-in and I’m doing an appraisal, I see how much gas is in there,” says Daniel Wheeler, an Oregon-based Hyundai salesman. “If it’s a quarter of a tank or below, it’s usually a fairly good sign [a customer is] ready to purchase.” David Teves, a California-based salesman who writes the blog *Confessions of a Car Man*, says he can determine a customer’s mood by the parking spot they choose. “There’s a place at the end of our lot we call ‘Laydown Lane’ because the people who park there are too timid to park out front. They’re either total ‘laydowns’—which means they buy whatever you want for whatever price—or they have extremely bad credit.”

2. They are speaking in code to each other. (Yes, about you.)

A potential customer is an “up,” a new salesperson is an inexperienced “green-pea,” and a buyer with no credit history is a “ghost.” Taking up too much of a salesman’s time without actually buying? You’re a “stroke.” If you’re lugging paperwork around—like newspaper ads or car reports—you’re a “professor.” And “one-legged shoppers” are customers without their spouses, which is a regular excuse for why they can’t buy right now—gotta ask the old ball and chain!

3. They believe there is no difference between a new car and a new puppy.

The best lingo appears when a customer is on the fence about buying a car: That’s when, sometimes, dealerships will insist they take the car home for the night. This is called “puppy-dogging.” Mark McDonald, a career car salesman and author of the “Car Salesman Confidential” column at *MotorTrend.com*, explains: “When customers show it to their friends and neighbors, they will make such a fuss over it—just as they would a new puppy—that they’ll have no choice but to buy it.”

4. Their co-workers are cutthroat.

Forget about the high failure rates, pressures to sell, and potential debts to their employers. Car salespeople also have to endure brutal tactics used by fellow salespeople. For example: It’s your day off? Opportunistic coworkers might tell your loyal customers that you’ve been fired, sell the car themselves, and keep the commission. “Some people would step over their own mothers to get that car sale,” McDonald says. They also risk life and limb whenever buyers take them out on a test drive. “I once went for a ride with a drug dealer in Oakland who took me on a test drive to collect drug money,” Teves recalls. “Any test drive when you come back alive is a successful test drive.”

5. They keep their eyes on the prize.

“Sometimes, a piece of inventory just won’t sell, so the general manager will keep lowering the price,” Wheeler explains. The dealership loses money on these cars, but the salesperson still gets commission. If a car is proving particularly hard to sell, some dealerships hand out cash prizes, called “spiffs,” to whoever finally sells it. As a salesperson, “you could make \$5000 to \$10,000 a year on spiffs alone,” McDonald says. In fact, the first car a salesperson usually shows you is a spiff. Instead of promising a specific cash amount, some dealerships have their own “wheel of fortune” with various spiff prizes on it. Salespeople could get \$100, or they could get nothing, depending on where the wheel lands.

6. Despite the fun and games, they’re not rolling in dough.

The average car salesperson’s salary in 2012 was just under \$45,000. And it doesn’t come easy. Many salespeople work purely on commission, meaning they only make money if they sell a car. “We’re not paid anything for standing there 12 hours a day and not selling,” says McDonald. “And if I work a whole week and don’t sell a car that week, I make nothing. When I do finally sell a car, I might make a minimum commission, which at my dealership is \$125. When you divide that by 60 to 90 hours a week, it’s nothing.” Smith agrees, citing an average success rate of about 20 percent. “We lose in this industry a whole lot more than we win.”

7. In fact, they might owe their boss money.

If a salesperson has a dry spell, some dealerships will let them draw against their commissions until they can pay it back. In car sales lingo, this is called being “in the bucket.” McDonald says, “Once you get in the bucket, it can be very hard to get out. You could owe \$4,000 or \$5,000 after two or three months. When that happens, the only thing you can do is quit.”

8. Lots of movement on the lot? Must be a slow day.

One strategy for luring customers is to rotate the vehicles around the lot to convey a busy, vibrant environment. “I tell my guys all the time to go out there and move the whole front line of cars,” Smith says. “Play musical chairs with the cars and customers start moving in. Action creates reaction.” And while there’s no concrete evidence to support it, an unspoken rule is that balloons somehow sell cars. On slow days, salespeople go nuts with them. “I worked at a dealership where you had to put 150 balloons out every day,” Teves says. “By the time you were done, you were exhausted. You didn’t have any energy left to sell a car.”

9. The job is going the way of the dodo.

In 2015, more than a million Americans work at car dealerships. But that could change. Thanks to the Internet, people now walk into dealerships with their minds already made up. They don’t need—or want—a salesperson’s pitch. It makes sense that some dealerships are trading in their inflatable gorillas for online ads, as the Internet is by far their top referral source. In 2013, brand activity on Twitter alone drove \$716 million in car sales, according to marketing analytics firm MarketShare. In other words, for better or worse, selling cars is becoming less of an art that involves human interaction, and more of a science that doesn’t.

10. Bad reputations sting more than you’d think.

In a recent Gallup poll, car salespeople were ranked as some of the least honest, least ethical professionals in America, just above members of Congress (who came in last) and below bankers, lawyers, and ad professionals. This stigma has genuinely negative effects: According to a 2007 study published in the *Journal of Selling*, awareness of this stereotype hurts job

performance. When they feel they're being judged, salespeople don't try as hard; they think they've already lost the sale. Customers then see the salesperson as detached and uncaring, and aren't as likely to buy—and the cycle perpetuates! Managers can help, the study suggests, by training and providing support and empathy for salespeople. Customers can try to keep an open mind. And the salespeople themselves? They can build relationships, follow up after a sale, and remember honesty is the best policy. After all, as Smith says, "It is our responsibility to help change their opinions." Of course, that, like puppy-dogging and [these things](#), could just be another hard sell.

Popular Science

[Does Sugar Make Kids Hyper?](#)

Short answer: Only if you believe it does

by Daniel Engber

The image of a kid on a sugar high bouncing off the walls gained credence in the 1970s and '80s, when several studies linked sugar intake to behavioral problems such as hyperactivity.

But in 1995, Vanderbilt University pediatrician Mark Wolraich reviewed 23 studies involving more than 400 children and found no evidence for the belief that sugar impacts a kid's behavior or cognition. "We came as close to proving the null hypothesis as you can," says Wolraich, who is now Chief of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics at Oklahoma University.

In the early 1990s, psychologists Richard Milich and Daniel Hoover took a different approach to answering the question: They studied 31 boys ages 5 to 7 whose parents identified them as "sugar sensitive." The researchers gave the boys aspartame-sweetened Kool-Aid and then videotaped them interacting with their moms. Beforehand, the researchers told half the moms their kids had consumed sugar and told the other half the truth. Parents who thought their kids were on a sugar high rated them as being more hyperactive and criticized them more severely. Milich and Hoover concluded that the link between sugar and behavior might be based on parents' expectations, not on the sweetener itself.

There might also be other factors at play when sugared-up kids go nuts. Candy and cake, for example, are staples on Halloween and at birthday parties—events rife with kid drama. Or there might be other substances in the mix. Chocolate, for instance, is packed with stimulants, such as caffeine and theobromine.

Still, for many parents, sugar remains the go-to scapegoat, even if proof is lacking. "We're always looking to explain our behavior," Milich says. "We don't like to be in a vacuum where something happens and we don't know why."



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