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# ON THE BORDER

*Info & insights from the interface between energy healing & science*

## November 2017

Welcome to the November 2017 edition of 'On the Border'.

For those of you new to 'On the Border', this is Jayne's monthly Ezine newsletter about the latest information and insights into energy fields, healing and science. Each month I share with you some of the latest research and how it applies to healing, energy work & (daily) life. There is also a 'Freebie' section where you get something for nothing, gratis.

## Does Living in Crowded Places Drive People Crazy?

You may be thinking: Yes, living under crowded conditions surely drives people crazy. And the reason may be traced back to some unfortunate rats.

In the mid-20th century ethologist John Calhoun wanted to see how overcrowding would influence social behaviour in rats. He placed rats in a confined space and allowed them to multiply with relatively little control. The results looked like scenes out of a horror movie: cannibalism, dead infants and complete social withdrawal, to name a few.

Calhoun's rats captured public imagination and inspired a surge of research on the psychological effects of density in our own species. Some studies found that people living in crowded environments indeed showed a variety of social pathologies, just like Calhoun's rats. But other studies did not. Reviews of the early research concluded that popular fears about overcrowding may be unfounded.

Now half a century has passed, and the world population has doubled. On the other hand, research on the psychological effects of density has all but disappeared. However recently a group of scientists headed by Douglas Kenrick at

Arizona State University revisited this topic with a new tool called life history theory. It is about how all animals allocate their limited time and energy across life's tasks, such as growing, mating and parenting. Aspects of the environment shape these allocation choices.

What does this have to do with density? One of life history theory's earliest ideas was that environments of low density — where there are few individuals around— would favour organisms that adopt a "fast" life history strategy. This strategy focuses on quick reproduction and having many offspring but with little investment in each. Put simply, it is focused on the present and prioritises 'quantity over quality.'

A low-density environment favours a fast strategy because it is presumed to have abundant resources with little social competition. Here fast reproduction would allow for full exploitation of the environment's resources. Animals living in low-density environments also would not need to invest much in offspring, because it would be easy for those offspring to survive independently in such an environment.

But things get different when the environment gets crowded and strong social competition for resources and territory exists. To successfully compete, individuals now need to spend more time and energy building their own abilities. This often leads to a delay in reproduction. In a dense environment, one's offspring also face greater social competition. Hence, it be more adaptive to focus time and energy on just a few offspring (to increase *their* abilities and competitiveness) instead of spreading resources over many offspring.

This approach is referred to as a "slow" life history strategy, and it prioritises 'quality over quantity'. A slow life history also involves a psychology that plans for the future, given the need to build one's abilities over time. The researchers had one simple question: Would higher densities also lead *people* to adopt a slower life history?

The team examined this idea in a variety of ways. First, we gathered data on country-level population densities and on a variety of psychological traits and behaviours related to life history. They did the same thing for the 50 U.S. states, where equivalent data were available.

Indeed, they found that across countries and across U.S. states, individuals in regions with denser populations showed traits that corresponded to the psychological profile of a slower life history. They were more likely to plan for the future, preferred long-term, committed romantic relationships, married later, had fewer children, and were more likely to invest in both their own and their children's education. These relationships held when taking into account alternative factors, such as economic development and urbanisation.

To see if there might be similar effects in short-term situations, the team conducted experiments in which they had both undergraduates and slightly older adults read an article that talked about increasing population growth in the

U.S. After reading the article, participants reported both their romantic relationship and family-size preferences. It was found that the undergraduates who read the density article preferred having a few committed romantic relationships (instead of many casual ones). The older adults who read the same article preferred to have fewer children and to invest more in each child (instead of investing less in many children).

Thus, in experiments, individuals led to think about increasing population densities also seemed to shift toward a slower life history, characterised by quality over quantity.

Many of us have intuitions about the effects of crowdedness. It is therefore useful to anticipate some questions. For instance, will higher densities always lead to a slow life history? No. In fact, when high densities are paired with unpredictable death or disease, life history theory predicts that a faster life history will emerge. A second critical point to consider is the nature of social competition. The assumption is that humans typically compete for resources by building skills and abilities (for example, through education). But this might not always be the case. In environments where competition is carried out by forms of lethal violence, we would once again expect higher densities to lead to a faster life history.

These are just some of the many unanswered questions about density. That said, perhaps a crowded life does drive people a little crazy—but not in the frightening ways expected from Calhoun's rats. Instead it may make people obsessed about planning for the future, getting a good education, waiting for that perfect romantic partner and putting everything they have into that one child who is going to make them proud.

**REFERENCES**

■ Sng, O., Neuberg, S. L., Varnum, M. E. W., & Kenrick, D. T. (2017). The crowded life is a slow life: Population density and life history strategy. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 112*(5), 736-754.

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## November Freebie

In this section you get the chance to get something for nothing. Helemaal gratis. Always a pleasure!

If you've done any personal development work then you will probably have heard of Louise Hay. Louise was one of the forerunners of the self-help movement and became known as 'The Queen of Affirmations.' You may even have her most famous book 'Heal Your Life' sitting on your bookshelf. She also was the founder of the Hay House publishing company which has given us some of our best-loved authors such as Wayne Dwyer, Christiane Northrup, Kris Carr, Lynne McTaggart, Gabrielle Bernstein and Gregg Braden. What you maybe didn't know it that Louise didn't start Hay House up until she was 60 years old!

At the end of August this year, Louise passed away, in her sleep, at the grand old age of 90. I never got to meet or experience this fascinating and inspiring *grande dame* but via Hay House's Online Learning Community there is a fabulous lecture with Louise in action together with Cheryl Richardson ('Creating an Exceptional Life'). It will have you in fits of laughter – my favourite section was when we, the viewer, get to see what Louise kept in her bra….yes honestly!

To access this Freebie, go to http://www.hayhouseu.com.
At the bottom right hand corner of your screen you will see 'A complimentary online course is waiting for you'. Click on that icon and when the pop-up appears fill in your details. (You can always unsubscribe later).

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