



PsychNews

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Alumni Column: Sports Psychology

I took my first step toward becoming a sport psychologist during my junior year at UW. It was in Dr. Morgan's sport psych course that I first knew sport psychology was for me. My experiences as a UW student athlete also deepened my interest in the field.

Following my time at UW, I earned my doctorate in clinical psychology and obtained licensure as a psychologist in the state of Wisconsin. While this was not the most direct route to becoming a sport psychologist, I believe it has better prepared me to address the areas of both health and human performance.

After licensure, I pursued specialized training and supervision in the field of sport psychology. By going through an extensive evaluation process, I earned the distinction of 'Certified Consultant' with the Association of Applied Sport Psychology. This allowed me to finally use the title of "Sport Psychologist". I was also listed in the United States Olympic Committee Sport Psychology and Mental Training Registry. This is a directory of qualified sport psychology and mental training specialists.

Continued on page 3

"Heroes are those who can somehow resist the power of the situation and act out of noble motives, or behave in ways that do not demean others when they easily can." - Philip Zimbardo

Inside this Issue
Are They Into You?, 2
Mental Illness in Hollywood, 2
I have a Degree in Psychology Now What, 3
Vaccines and Autism, 3
History Corner: Maslow, 5
Spring Fever, 5
Primate Experiments at UW, 5
Crossword Puzzle, 6
Ask Psi Chi, 6

Depression as an Evolutionary Adaption: Arguments Debunked By Sapir Sasson

In a recent paper, authors Paul W. Andrews and J. Anderson Thomson, Jr. attempted to argue that depression is evolutionarily beneficial and has therefore been maintained through natural selection. First, let me begin by making a very clear statement: I don't buy any of it. I read the entire 43-page paper in *Psychological Review* and I am simply not convinced. I will address the authors' main arguments and offer an empirically-supported counterargument for each. I am not in any way devaluing evolutionary psychology; I am merely trying to use common sense and logic to express my views on the matter. First, the authors cited that 30-50% of people meet psychiatric diagnostic criteria for major depressive disorder at some point in their lives. They argued that because prevalence rates are so high, depression is better classified as normal psychological functioning (rather than a disorder or a malfunction). So, anything that is common (occurs in over 30% of the population) should be classified as normal functioning? If this logic is used, then heart disease, which affects 37% of the population (American Heart Association, 2010), should be considered normal cardiovascular functioning.

Continued on Page 4

Are They Into You? There's No Need to Guess

By Kelly Pertzborn

As college students, most of us would be quick to admit the existence of a sexually charged atmosphere for undergrads. Our adolescent hormones are raging and with the ever-present social scene (parties, socials, even in class), meeting someone is never a difficult task. The next step is where most of us falter: how can we tell if the other person is interested? New findings coming from an Indiana University study suggest that, in fact, we may be better able to detect other's interest than we think.

Place et al. (2009) conducted a study using 54 Indiana University undergraduates and measured their ability to read the romantic interest of couples taking part in a speed dating trial. Accounting for the fact that hearing the couples' conversation may easily give away their romantic intentions, videos of speed dates that were held in Germany were used, granting no participant the advantage of understanding the dialogue. The participants were asked if the male was interested in the female and vice versa; their answers were then compared to the answers given by the speed daters.

Both males and females were able to quite accurately rate the interest of the couple. However, participants did have a more difficult time estimating the females' interest in the male. This may suggest that females are better at hiding their intentions or even that they enjoy using the so-called game of "Hard-to-Get." Place and his colleagues suggest that it is to the female's adaptive advantage to mask her early intentions. Evolution has prepared women to pick the mate with the most resources; in acting rather ambiguous with her initial advances, she has more time to judge the resources of the male.

This study highlights a few key points that may help us all in our dating endeavors. We are remarkably good at judging the romantic interest of others, even when we are not involved in the situation! This study does not delve into the physical predictors of romantic interest; perhaps it is the person's body language or facial expression. Either way, we should rely on our initial impressions when judging another's intentions. Chances are we will know if they are interested; evolution has prepared us for it!

Mental Illness in Hollywood

By Hannah Solomon

It is no secret that American society is fascinated with the lives of the rich and famous. We are drawn to their lives because they are seemingly far different than the mundane lives of the rest of us humans. Though fame and fortune can buy many things, they cannot buy immunity to the development of mental illness. One startling afflicted with such an illness is supermodel Mary Forsberg Weiland, who was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Mary started her modeling career at age 14 and quickly skyrocketed to fame. Her modeling career took her all over the globe shooting for companies such as Estee Lauder, Max Factor, Cosmopolitan magazine, and Vogue. Mary's fame grew further in 2000 when she married the lead singer of Stone Temple Pilots, Scott Weiland.

Mary's life, however, is not as glamorous as it might appear. In 2007, Mary was diagnosed with bipolar disorder after torching her husband's \$10,000 wardrobe and destroying a Burbank hotel room during a manic episode. She recently published a memoir titled *Fall to Pieces*, which chronicles her struggle with the illness as well as her former drug addiction. She describes her tumultuous childhood and early adulthood, which was filled with her parents' divorce, physical abuse, suicide ideation, frequent moves, experimenting with drugs, and the stress of a high profile life. Once she was able to control her disorder, she was also able to tackle her drug addictions, and is now a recovering addict. Her memoir is a poignant narrative that reminds us that even celebrities fall prey to mental illness.

I Have A Degree In Psychology, Now What??

By Elizabeth Farley

Since you are reading this article, you are probably a psychology major. Therefore, I have two questions for you: why did you become a psychology major and what do you want to do with this after you graduate? I ask the first question because a lot of students chose to pursue psychology due to their interest in helping others. While some students will choose to pursue graduate school after receiving their baccalaureate, many students will instead take a gap year for various reasons. During this gap year, many may become involved in some sort of service opportunity.

Service opportunities allow students not only to help others, but also to gain real world experience before applying to graduate school or for a job. Some organizations that offer service opportunities are fairly well-known nationwide such as the Peace Corps, Americorps, and Teach for America. However, what about opportunities within our own community of Madison? There are a multitude of service opportunities for students to pursue both nationwide and within their own community. So please take some time to consider whether a service opportunity might be the next step for you.

Alumni Column -

continued from page 1

10 challenging years after my undergrad experience at UW, I began my practice as a Clinical & Sport Psychologist by founding IGNITE YOUR LIFE.ORG. I now provide athletes with the mental strategies necessary to gain the competitive edge. With an expertise in "The Psychology of Excellence," I help athletes discipline their minds as well as their bodies. I help coaches develop superior leadership skills necessary for a more positive influence and a greater impact on their players. I also assist parents in providing their children with an environment in which they can thrive. As a sport psychologist, I am interested in working with anyone who wants to use exercise and physical fitness to improve their lives.

My experiences range from working with professional level and elite athletes, to those with recreational interests. I have found regardless of sport, sex, or level of competition, the most common issue encountered is fear: fear of failure, fear of success, fear of pain, etc. By helping athletes develop a "Philosophy on Sport and Competition" they are able to face these fears as a challenge and something to overcome, as opposed to as a threat and something to be avoided. Sport psychology can have a great impact not only on the athlete, but the person as a whole.

Thank You,
Dr. Peder N. Piering, CC-AASP
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Vaccines and Autism

By Michael Kruepke

In the United States of America (U.S.), April has been designated as Autism Awareness Month in an effort to promote awareness and support for autism spectrum disorders (ASDs). ASDs include not only the Autistic Disorder (i.e. "classic autism") but also Asperger's Syndrome and Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD). While those with "classic autism" may show significant language delays, social and communication challenges, and unusual behavior and interests, those with Asperger's and PDD usually show milder symptoms. In this regard, individuals with Asperger's may have issues with social interaction and unusual behavior/interests, but they typically lack problems in language or intellectual development. In a similar manner, PDD may cause only social and communication challenges for the individual. In combination, the disorder is four to seven times more likely to occur in males than females and is reported to occur in one out of every 110 children in the US. This number is a dramatic increase from the 2009 prevalence rate of one out of 150 children. While this increase is sadly large, it is not shocking. ASDs are the fastest-growing developmental disability in the US, with an annual growth rate of 10-17%. This extreme increase has played a major role in the desire to pinpoint a causal factor for autism. Over the years, several hypothesis have been produced; recently, the controversial theory that that vaccines containing thimerosal (a mercury containing compound) given to children cause autism, has seemingly been laid to rest, at least in court.

Thimerosal has been used in vaccines since the 1930's as a preservative to prevent deadly bacteria growth in multi-dose vaccine bottles. However, starting in the 1990's, a powerful group of individuals, including Robert F. Kennedy Jr., began claiming that thimerosal in vaccines was the cause of autism, and that the government was covering up the harm it was doing to promote its national vaccination program. This claim was tested in several scientific studies, each of which showed that the removal of thimerosal from vaccines actually increased the prevalence of autism. Still, the claim persisted. This March, however, a case, which started in 2007, sought to put this issue to rest. The case, which was held in a special court, involved three families seeking compensation from the Vaccine Injury Compensation Program on behalf of their autistic children. The basic claim was that vaccines containing thimerosal directly caused their children's autistic disorder. However, after three years, Special Master Denise Vowell ruled that these claims were implausible and had no grounding in science. In this regard, one of the parent's key points was based on the notion of their children having "regressive autism". However, as Vowell said in his ruling, "World-class experts in the field testified that the distinctions drawn between the different forms of ASD were artificial and that they had never heard of the "clearly regressive" form of autism about which the petitioners' epidemiologist testified". Vowell also noted, through the testimony of ASD experts, that "the causal mechanism (thimerosal) would not produce ASD, but rather neuronal death, and eventually patient death as well". However, these decisive words were not blindly believed by those who claim thimerosal is casually linked to ASDs. Almost immediately after the verdict was announced websites were ablaze with claims of a government cover-up, protection of drug companies and their special interests, and denials of science in favor of governmental vaccine programs objectives. Despite these protests however, the ruling has been given and a call has been made to look past what appears to be a non-causal reason for autism and instead to begin investigating other possible sources of ASDs.

Depression as an Evolutionary Adaption: *continued from page 1*

Next, the authors discuss the 5HT1A receptor, which is known to promote depressive symptoms in rats (removing the structure reduces depressive symptoms). Even if depression in rodents is similar to depression in humans (evidence which the authors failed to provide), the mere presence of a structure whose absence alleviates depression does not mean the structure's purpose is to promote the condition, nor does it merit the conclusion that depression is an adaptation. Jerry Coyne (2009) made a perfect analogy to illustrate this point: removing the appendix eliminates the possibility of appendicitis, but this does not mean that the appendix evolved to promote appendicitis or that appendicitis is an adaptation.

The authors further justify depression as an adaptation by claiming that it is highly unlikely that clustering of depressive symptoms is a coincidental by-product of biological processes or is attributable to chance; rather, the coordination of symptoms must have been constructed by natural selection. I don't even know if I would consider this an argument. *Any* disease or disorder is characterized by a group of coordinated symptoms, but calling depression an adaptation on the basis of this logic is just as unreasonable as claiming that autism and social phobia are adaptations.

The authors also argued that depressive ruminations are useful because they are persistent, analytical, and prevent us from getting distracted or thinking about other issues. They force us to dwell on complex problems long enough for us to break them down into smaller components and consider them individually. First, I think there is a good reason why most modern psychotherapies discourage rumination: it is a thought mechanism in which individuals are so engrossed in their problems that they are not able to function normally or think about other important issues. "Dwelling on complex problems long enough for us to break them down into smaller components" sounds more like problem-solving than rumination to me.

The authors then cited their own research in which they found that people who get more depressed when working on complex problems on an intelligence test tend to score higher on the test. I have nothing to say about this argument except that I would like to see the published, peer-reviewed article that cites these authors' methodology.

The next argument is one I found particularly far-fetched and ludicrous. The authors cited several symptoms of depression, among them the desire for social isolation, a reduced sex drive, and loss of appetite, as evolutionary adaptations. The reasoning behind their claim is that these symptoms help individuals avoid distracting situations, and analysis of complex problems is much better uninterrupted anyway. The obvious solution, then, is to isolate ourselves in quarantine and starve for days until we manage to solve our problems (note my sarcasm here).

Another point the authors bring up is the fact that writing thoughts and feelings in a journal, something the authors consider to be a manifestation of depressive rumination, has been found to promote quicker resolution to depression. They say this is most likely because depressed individuals gain insight into their problems. Therefore, they conclude that rumination must be helpful and consequently interventions should encourage depressive rumination rather than try to stop it. Luckily, I am familiar with the research they are referring to: Dr. James Pennebaker wrote a book called *Writing to Heal*, in which he encourages people to use expressive writing about emotional upheavals as a route to healing. Pennebaker was not equating the writing process with depressive rumination, but rather as a form of catharsis: using short-term focused writing as a means to prevent rumination in the long run.

A relatively minor detail that I would like to point out is that the authors implicated high levels of serotonin in allowing the brain to ruminate and analyze problems. However, depression is thought to result from serotonin *deficit* rather than excess (hence, psychiatrists prescribe selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors to *increase* serotonin levels in the synapses).

It is important to note that nowhere in the article did the authors mention the evolutionary cost of suicide, which is committed by 10% of clinical depressives (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2009). I do not see the slightest evolutionary benefit to this aspect of depression.

Finally, I would like to point out that the authors' hypothesis is unfalsifiable because it is not testable. It is impossible to compare modern environments with evolutionary environments when we cannot obtain data that supports or contradicts the hypothesis that depressive rumination is evolutionarily beneficial.

The authors claimed that depression brings both costs and benefits to humans and should be classified as an adaptation with evolutionary advantages rather than a clinical disorder. However, I did not notice any particularly powerful arguments that would convince me that depression is an adaptation passed on by natural selection. Stronger arguments with much greater empirical support would be necessary for me to have more confidence in the construct validity of their research. Adaptation or not, depression affects millions of individuals, oftentimes in a way that interferes with normal human functioning. We cannot disregard its adverse effects or allow them to persist simply because depression *may* also yield minor problem-solving benefits.

History Corner: Abraham Maslow

By Hilary Miller

A fellow alumni as well as one of the founders of the humanistic perspective, Abraham Maslow received his B.A, M.A, and PhD all from the University of Wisconsin. Born in 1908 in Brooklyn, New York, Maslow was the son of uneducated Jewish parents who had emigrated from Russia. His father encouraged him to be very ambitious from a young age and to work hard. During his childhood he had no friends and spent long hours studying. Through some of his readings as a child, he became very interested in the famous psychologists of his time, which included Freud, Jung, and Pavlov. Although interested in psychology, his father pressured Maslow into studying law. While initially following his father's wishes, Maslow enrolled in the City University of New York with the intention of becoming a lawyer. However, quickly realizing that being a lawyer reflected his father's wishes rather than his own personal desires, Maslow finally got the courage and rebelled against his father and moved to Wisconsin to study psychology.

Through his studies in psychology, Maslow became very interested in primate research and soon became mentored by Harry Harlow. Although in graduate school he researched primate motivations with the encouragement of Harlow, he later realized that he was more interested in human motivation and knowledge. In 1937, he moved back to his hometown and became a professor at Brooklyn College, where he published some of his most influential work. While psychodynamic theory and behaviorism shaped his education, he took a new perspective and focused on human potential, believing that, in contrast to the assumptions made in the earlier theories, humans are conscious of their behavior and have intrinsic motivation. He felt that rather than studying only the mentally ill, as was emphasized by Freud, that researchers should study the healthiest people in society. One of his most famous theories is the hierarchy of needs, in which he theorized that people have to fulfill their lower needs which include physiological and survival needs before being able to fulfill higher needs of self-esteem and self-actualization. His work remains important in psychology today and his theories have not only been influential in the humanistic perspective but have also been influential in the new positive psychology movement.

Spring Fever

by Sydney Erickson

We've all heard of Spring Fever, but does it actually have any merit? A recent study by Denissen et al. (2008) gives mixed results. In their analyses, temperature, wind, and sunlight were not significantly correlated with positive mood. However, sunlight did significantly correlate with tiredness; less sunlight led to increased feelings of tiredness. According to these results, the commonly held belief that weather plays a large part in our moods may be incorrect. However, the researchers mentioned that there was a lot of individual variance, so the weather affects some people's moods more than it affects others'. Moreover, most people feel more energetic with the increasing sunlight. The moral of this story is that if you are feeling more energetic and think it's because of the new warmer weather, then you should embrace it, and don't let the recent rain get you down.

Primate Experimentation at UW-Madison

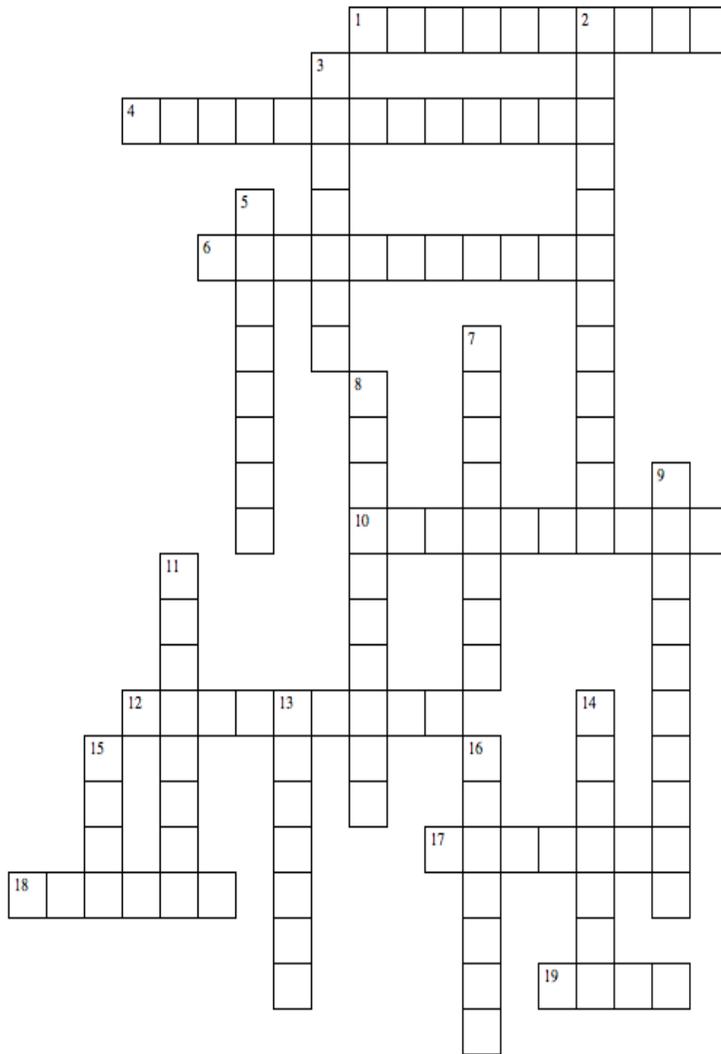
By Sarah Friedman

News regarding primate research at UW-Madison is nothing new. The Wisconsin National Primate Research Center, founded by the famous Wisconsin alum Harry Harlow, has been in operation since 1930. This Primate Center is one of eight federally supported Primate Research Centers, and the only one in the Midwest.

For the first 60 years of operation, there was little opposition to the experimentation practices of the Primate Center. However, in the whirlwind that was the 1990's, many animal rights activists spoke up against its practices, some violently. These violent protestations went from voicemail threats all the way to mailing razor blades to the researchers' homes. In order to prevent violence in the recent resurgence of protests, measures were taken to facilitate a peaceful dispute. On March 14th, 2010, a public debate was held on campus so that both sides of the issue could be heard.

The controversy surrounding the Primate Center highlights the delicate issue of ethics in all psychological research. To reach the goal of research and acquire findings that can help the greater good, the community must first define this greater good, and weigh this gain against the deficits created by the actual experiment. To learn about these issues in greater detail, consider taking the course the Psychology of Primates or Experimental Psychology, a prerequisite for the major.

Test your psych knowledge



Ask Psi Chi: If you could have any job related to psychology, what would your dream job be? And why would this job be your dream?

"I am working towards my dream job as a forensic psychologist. I have always been interested in criminal justice. My love for psychology developed recently after taking a high school course. Forensic psychology is the perfect way to combine my two passions"- Shannon Wojciechowski

"I would be a sports psychologist. I would love to work with professional athletes before and after competition and help them mentally prepare themselves and succeed to the best of their abilities"- Mollie Puchner

"My dream job would be to do violence risk assessments with prisoners. This would be my dream job because it represents a bridge between psychology and law. When I came to college I originally wanted to pursue legal studies and eventually shifted to psychology. It would be to find a job that would connect these interests"- Anonymous

"I would love to be a counselor in the military, soldiers deserve and need mental health care"- Sarah Friedman

"I would love to be a clinical psychologist working with college students because we need all the help we can get"- Kristen Merkitch

ACROSS

- 1 Emotional relationship between a child and a caregiver.
- 4 Stimuli offered following a given behavior that increases the probability that the behavior will be repeated.
- 6 The process by which people use information to make inferences about the causes of behavior or events.
- 10 The basic defense mechanism by which painful or guilt-producing thoughts, feelings, or memories are excluded from conscious awareness.
- 12 A research technique that provides false information to persons participating in a study.
- 17 _____ conditioning: a behavior training technique in which reinforcements or punishments are used to influence behavior.
- 18 A subset of a population selected as participants in an experiment.
- 19 _____ exposure effect: The tendency to develop more positive feelings toward objects and individuals the more we are exposed to them.

Crossword made by
Sarah Halls

DOWN

- 2 A statistical technique to combine information from many empirical studies on a topic to estimate the reliability and overall size of the effect.
- 3 _____ group: experimental participants who are not exposed to the independent variable.
- 5 A positive or negative evaluation of an object.
- 7 Freud's id, ego, and _____
- 8 A procedure at the conclusion of a research session in which participants are given full information about the nature and hypotheses of the study.
- 9 A yielding to perceived group pressure.
- 11 _____ attribution: an attribution that locates the cause of an event to factors of the person, such as personality traits, moods, attitudes, abilities, or effort.
- 13 _____ effect: a change in behavior in the absence of an experimental manipulation.
- 14 The gap between one neuron and another.
- 15 An expected standard of behavior and belief established and enforced by a group.
- 16 _____ disorder: a mood disorder characterized by alternating periods of depression and mania.