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### Important Dates

- ◆ Thanksgiving Break Begins: 11-23-2015
- ◆ Finals: 12-7-2015
- ◆ Spring Semester Begins on: 1-11-2016
- ◆ Drop Deadline: 1-16-2016
- ◆ MLK Day: 1-18-2016
- ◆ Spring Break: 3-7-2016
- ◆ Last Day for W: 3-24-2016
- ◆ April Fool's Day moved to 4-2-2016 due to leap year
- ◆ Easter Holiday: 3-25-2016
- ◆ Fall Registration: 4-12-16
- ◆ Last class-day: 4-25-2016



## Adolescent Mental Health

Jordan Neusch

Adolescence (between ages 12 and 18) is seen as a time for emotional, physical, and social growth. Generally considered to be one of the healthiest periods of life, some of the major problems facing adolescents are often overlooked.

Adolescents are healthy as a group, suffering from the lowest levels of debilitating injury and long-term illness. However, this view ignores mental illness and general psychological issues.

The peak vulnerability for mental health issues occurs between ages 16 and 24. There are several possible contributing factors for why an otherwise healthy age group may be so vulnerable to mental illness: the physical, emotional, and social changes

teenager of today's society and economy is overlooked. As students, adolescents attend approximately 7 to 8 hours of class 5 days a week and many also participate in some form of extracurricular activity, and/or hold part-time jobs. Then there is often the need to study and do homework. Students can put in more than 40 hours of school and work-related activities per week. Such a workload can be a significant stressor leading to anxiety issues or other psychological problems if students are unable to appropriately deal with the stress.

One reason for psychological issues affecting adolescents is the lack of education aimed at informing

*"...While those suffering from diseases such as cancer or AIDS are called heroes and survivors, those suffering from depression, anxiety, and other mental illness are seen as weak..."*

experienced in adolescence, high expectations, and a lack of education on the subject of mental illness and possible interventions.

Many changes occur during the transition from child to adult. Puberty brings about physical changes through hormonal release. These hormones can affect mood, behavior, and emotions throughout adolescence and can result in changes in personality, sometimes minor and other times drastic. These physical changes together with social pressures typical in middle and high schools could lead to feelings of inadequacy, loneliness, and anxiety.

While the period of adolescence and young adulthood may be called "*the prime of life*" the amount of work and commitment demanded of the typical

them about potential mental health issues, their causes, and how they can be treated or helped.

Western society appears to hold a non-progressive stance toward mental illness. While those suffering from diseases such as cancer or AIDS are called heroes and survivors, those suffering from depression, anxiety, and other mental illness are seen as weak and suffering from personal problems rather than a biological illness. This prejudicial stance permeating society creates a powerful stigma for teens, keeping them from actively seeking help for psychological issues due to fear of being perceived as "*crazy*" or one of many other common derogatory and degrading terms.

### Psi Chi FYI

*Founded in 1929 to encourage, stimulate, and maintain excellence in scholarship, and advance the science of psychology.*

## Contributions of Mary Ainsworth

In psychology textbooks it seems obligatory that there will be a chapter, a section, or at least a footnote mentioning some of the most famous names in the history of psychology. Some of these names include: Sigmund Freud, Alfred Adler, Alfred Binet and certainly others. However an important but often excluded name is that of Dr. Mary Ainsworth.

In Dr. Ainsworth's day (1960's to 1970's), Developmental Psychology was experiencing new and revitalizing interest. Ainsworth's research on infant attachment styles gave insight into how parent behavior during child rearing could potentially affect those children's relationships later in life.

Now, 40+ years later, Ainsworth's theory of attachment is the dominant theory and is widely used in the understanding of infant behavior and mental health.



Attachment Theory recognizes four distinct attachment styles: secure, anxious-ambivalent, anxious-avoidant, and disorganized. To classify a child's attachment style, Ainsworth developed

the Strange Situation Protocol. This method was designed for research and was never meant to serve as a diagnostic tool. Nonetheless, some clinicians have found success using the Strange Situation as a secondary method to confirm certain disorders.

While not as well known by name, Ainsworth's research and theories are found in both Social and Developmental Psychology texts testifying to the importance of her contribution to psychology.

Ainsworth, M., M. C. Blehar, E. Waters, & S. Wall. *Patterns of Attachment: A Psychological Study of the Strange Situation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1978.

McLeod, S. A. (2014). Mary Ainsworth. [www.simplypsychology.org/mary-ainsworth.html](http://www.simplypsychology.org/mary-ainsworth.html)

## The Science of Fear

On November 9<sup>th</sup>, the Psychology Club hosted its annual PsychoSocial featuring guest speaker, part-time RMU faculty member, and author, Dr. Margret Kerr.

Dr. Kerr is a sociologist who studies fear from the social, psychological, and physiological perspectives. Her work has taken her across the globe to see how different societies perceive fear, as well as consume commercialized fear.

According to Dr. Kerr, most of her work was driven by how fear influences the media. She recognized that fear is a powerful force that is used to sell things such as news programming, political agendas, as well as retail and consumer products using certain trigger words.

This use of fear in the media alters the perceptions of the consuming population into thinking the world is more dangerous than it typically is. The confirmation bias, group polarization, and familiarity play large parts in this process.

Dr. Kerr has also used her knowledge in her work at the *ScareHouse* in Etna, PA since 2008 (advertised as Pittsburgh's scariest haunted house amusement). There she collects data from *ScareHouse* participants to help



build and perfect scary and thrilling experiences.

Haunted Houses and scary movies have been an outlet for people to experience a variety of benefits because they can experience fear in a safe environment. Her research has found that fear can be healthy. On a biological level, fear produces the fight-or-flight response which increases endorphins, adrenaline, dopamine, and oxytocin in the brain. This makes people feel strong, fast focused, and euphoric.

Psychological benefits include greater confidence, feeling accomplished, successful, competent, resilient, and capable. There are also social benefits to experiencing fear. It often brings people together as a bonding process

and it can help create memories.

Dr. Kerr briefly spoke about her first published book, *SCREAM: Chilling Adventures in the Science of Fear*, which covers the physical effects of feeling fear, as well as her own personal experiences traveling to places such as Japan, Canada and Bogota, Colombia. A goal of these travels was to explore the scariest places and view how societies perceive and consume fear. Through all of her experiences, Dr. Kerr has been able to show how people can be afraid and it can be a healthy experience, as it changes those who conquer it into more confident people.

By Jordan Neusch

By Diane Gorog



## Trip to the Zoo!

On Thursday, October 22, Dr. Paul's Psychology of Learning class traveled to the Pittsburgh Zoo for a behind-the-scenes look at the training and care of the animals. The class had been studying operant conditioning, how animals and people can be conditioned using rewards and punishments. This trip was a way to see first-hand how operant conditioning is applied when working with dangerous animals.

The group of about 20 students and faculty met at the zoo's educational center. The first animal that we saw was a barn owl named Luna.



The class learned that at the Pittsburgh Zoo, conditioning is not used to train the animal to perform tricks like at circuses or amusement parks. It is used to make the lives of both the zookeepers and the animals easier and safer. For example, Luna was being trained on how to get into her crate when her trainer told her to do so. This made it easier for the trainers to take her to classes and transport her for medical checkups.

The only training done at the zoo is positive reinforcement; where the animals are given rewards for desired behaviors. For example, when Luna went into her cage when asked, she received a piece of food, which was a big reinforcer for her.

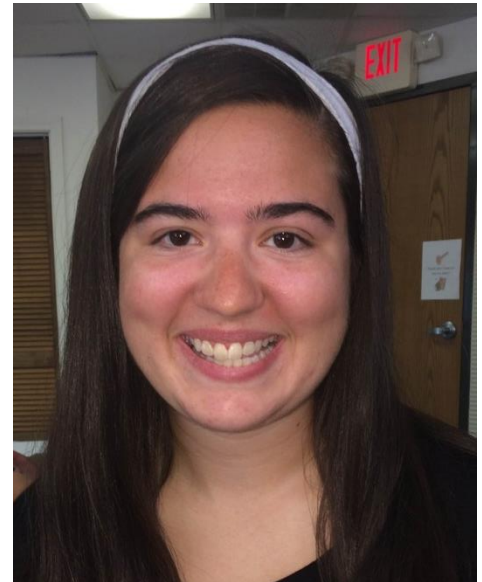
The next animal was a boa constrictor that had been dropped off in the area several years ago. The boa was young when the zoo first got him and had been cared for by people before, so there had never been any danger working with him. During the session, he was calm while wrapped around the trainer's waist, and only

## Andrea Bracken →

lifted his head when he noticed an alligator in a nearby tank.

The final animal was a South American porcupine named Rianna who was trained to sit on the arm of the trainer while she walked around the classroom with her. The trainer kept Rianna entertained with banana chips, her favorite. When Rianna wanted more, she stood on her back feet with front paws up and made a squeaking noise!

The classroom session concluded, and next we went behind-the-scenes



## RMU Psychology Club Update

Megan Miller

During the Fall 2015 semester, the Psychology Club has been actively participating in various activities. Members have continued to volunteer at *Hope Grows* and *Hike for Hope* in September and October with the head coordinator Lisa Story.

In addition, to help give students an idea about internships, the club held a practicum workshop.

For the Psychosocial (11/9/2015), they coordinated having a guest speaker, Margee Kerr, author of "*Scream: Chilling Adventures in the Science of Fear*" talk to attendees. The Psychology Club also had various games and raffles throughout the Psychosocial event.

Next semester the Psychology Club will continue to build an environment for like-minded people with a focus on mental health.

*You do NOT have to be a psychology major to join!* If interested, please contact Dr. Monda (monda@rmu.edu)!

## Psi Chi FYI

*Psi Chi awards more than \$400,000 each year to Psi Chi members and chapters in the form of awards and grants!*

## Parasomnia [2015 “Creepy Conference” 1<sup>st</sup> place presentation]

Taylor McCoy



The Creepy Conference was started by the English department in 2008. It offers a yearly venue for RMU students and faculty to share fact and fiction related to the macabre in time for Halloween!

My presentation was based on sleep related phenomena covered in the *Psychology of Paranormal*

*Beliefs* course: Hypnagogic and hypnopompic hallucinations.

The presentation began with a closed-eyes scenario describing an alien abduction. This led to a discussion about some possible explanations for abduction stories. I explained that everyone has nightmares but posed an interesting question: “*What if waking up was what was causing the real nightmare?*”

I covered symptoms, distinctions, and some history behind varied parasomnias, focusing on hypnopompic hallucinations. These occur during the in-between state of sleeping and waking. At this stage, people can feel paralyzed, which can occur with strong feelings of panic and paranoia and even vivid auditory and visual hallucinations.

To illustrate the timelessness of the phenomenon, I presented a variety of images from art that included John

Henry Fuseli’s “*The Nightmare*,” a disturbing painting from 1781. The scene depicts a sleeping woman with a demon crouched on her chest. Other historical paintings and statues presented had similar depictions and creepy undertones.

The demons in the paintings represented the feeling of sleep paralysis along with the intense auditory and visual hallucinations experienced by the artists.

I ended my presentation with a 45 second video that allowed the audience to witness the horror of hypnopompic hallucinations. The video is a snippet from the “*Sleep Paralysis Project*” and gave a nice visual representation of the horrible things people have perceived during these episodes while actual victims narrated the scenarios.

## Myths in Psychology

Taylor Miller

There is an over-abundance of well-known claims related to psychology. Unfortunately, even when they have been proven wrong, they continue to enjoy popular belief.

For example, regarding romantic relationships, we hear tons of dating myths and cliché advice; but how much is myth versus truth?

Two popular myths have been proven false: (1) Differences in how women and men communicate and (2) Opposites attract.

The debate that men are from Mars and women are from Venus has been running the show for decades. But really, how true is it that (a) women talk more than men (b) women self-disclose more than men (c) men interrupt others more than women and (d) women are more perceptive of nonverbal cues than men?

It turns out, according to Lilienfeld, Lynn, Ruscio, and Beyerstein (2010) that studies examining such issues fail to find any significant differences! Well, except for the last question. There does seem to be a small difference between the sexes.



Women are actually more perceptive of nonverbal cues than men.

The other popular psychological myth I wanted to mention is that opposites attract. To be true, this would mean that people prefer dating others who are different from themselves in personality and other traits.

In actuality, research shows that this view is false. In fact, it turns out that opposites often *repel* each other. Even though a relationship between you and your opposite may make for an exciting relationship at first, the relationship may be short lived.

Generally, we are more compatible with people who share our beliefs and personality traits. According to

Lilienfeld, et al. (2010) “we’re about twice as likely to be attracted to someone with whom we agree on 6 of 10 issues as someone with whom we agree on 3 of 10 issues.” People find dissimilarity unattractive more than they see similarity as attractive.

These are just two of many beliefs related to psychology. As one can see, it is important to closely examine psychological beliefs to properly determine whether or not they may actually just be unfounded myths.

Lilienfeld, S., Lynn, S., Ruscio, J., & Beyerstein, B. (2010). *50 great myths of popular psychology: Shattering widespread misconceptions about human behavior*. Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell.

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