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### Important Dates

- ◆ 15 Wk Session: 5-5-2018
- ◆ Graduation: 5-6-2018
- ◆ 1<sup>st</sup> 5 Wk Session: 5-7-2018
- ◆ 2<sup>nd</sup> 5 Wk Session: 6-18-2018
- ◆ Fall Semester: 8-27-2018
- ◆ Add/Drop ends: 9-1-2018
- ◆ Labor Day: 9-3-2018
- ◆ Last Day for W: 11-2-2018
- ◆ Fall Break:  
11-19-2018 -to- 11-23-2018
- ◆ Last Class Day: 12-8-2018



## A Heroic Friday

Robert Morris University's Psi Chi Chapter is known for having members that are incredibly bright and talented in and out of the classroom.

What most people may not know is that some Psi Chi members actually have super powers. These "super" members, such as Anni Varjonen, Taylor Bable, Amanda Carson, and Ashlee Groover, embarked on a mission with me to Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh's Radiology and Oncology Unit to host a "Fun Friday."

The goal of this mission (and every "Fun Friday" at Children's) is to allow patients to forget about their situation so they can just be kids. This party's theme was superheroes.



Each Psi Chi member wore a superhero t-shirt and mask to conceal their true identity. All heroes decorated the unit with heroic decorations and engaged the kids in arts and crafts from catapults to friendship bracelets.

Two heroic games included "Pin-the-Spider-on-the-Web" (Megan Racioppo) and "Hulk Smash" (Ashlee Groover). Psi Chi also brought snacks for patients and hospital staff such as Amanda Carson's delicious cupcakes each with Thor's Hammer on top.

This event has been in the works since early last summer, and it was great to see it through. The entire Psi Chi staff that attended relished the opportunity to host the event.

Treasurer Taylor Bable said, "It was extremely rewarding to see the smiles on all of the patients' and their families' faces. After the event was

Tyler Axelson



*over we were able to see the radiation equipment and it was incredibly moving. This is a day that I will never forget."*

Soon after the event, Psi Chi was asked to come back to host another "Fun Friday" next semester, making us feel quite heroic. However, I must say that we were not the real

*"It was extremely rewarding to see the smiles on all of the patients' and their families' faces. After the event was over we were able to see the radiation equipment and it was incredibly moving. This is a day that I will never forget."*

heroes. We simply did a good deed for a group that truly deserved it.

The real heroes are the brave kids at Children's Hospital. Their resiliency and positive spirit through the toughest of circumstances is a true testament of heroism. Even though these heroes don't wear capes or masks, nor fly, or fight crime, they have as much (if not more) strength and bravery as the ones that do.

## The Troxler Effect!

Those who have completed Sensation & Perception should remember that our visual system (your retinal cells in particular) especially likes two things: (1) Edges, and (2) Variation.

So, if you take a look at the image below, you will see that it has no clear edges (with the exception of the little star in the middle). Nope; your visual system HATES that!

And worse, although you can see changing patterns of color as you dart your eyes around the image, in actuality

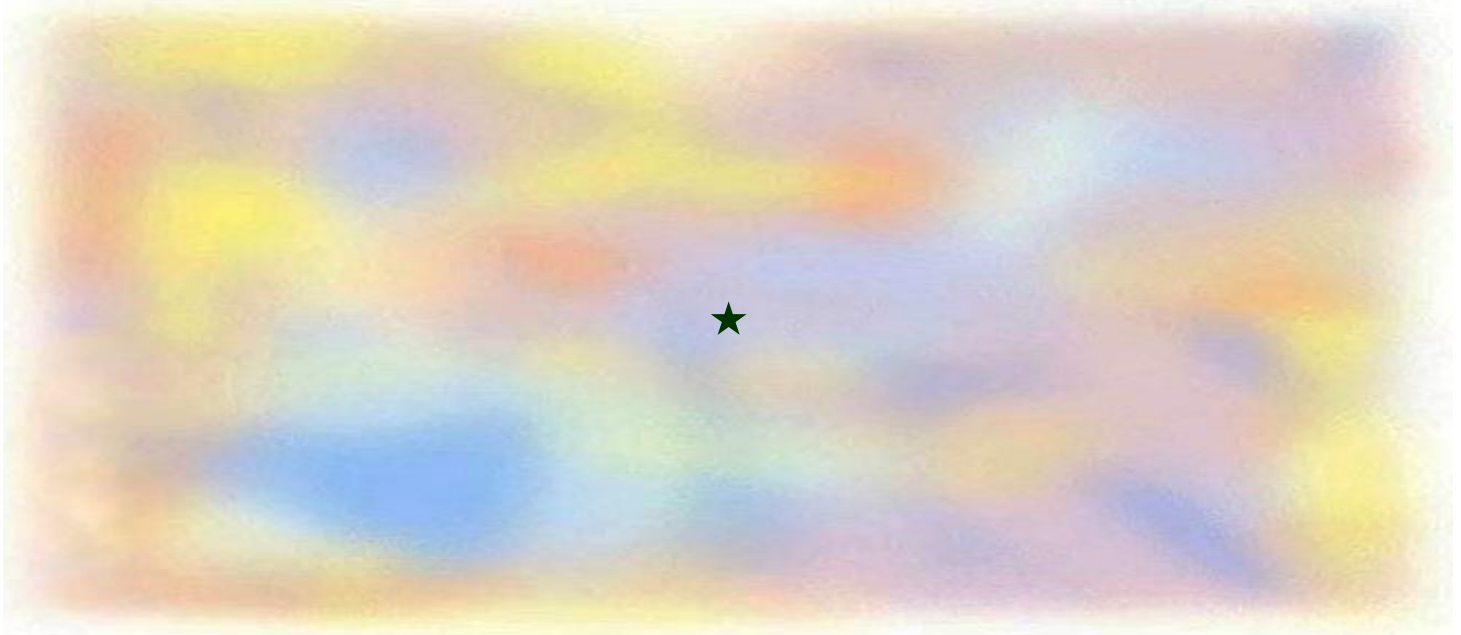
these changes are rather subtle to the visual system. Moving your eyes over the image actually enhances what would otherwise be considered rather minimal variation to the visual system.

The consequences of an image that has no edges and very little change is that your visual system stops processing it. See for yourself.

Stare at the star in the middle and don't move your eyes or blink. Within a very short amount of time (for me it takes less than 10 seconds) all the color

will disappear and it will seem as though you are staring at a green star in a blank field of white.

This is called retinal fading (more formally introduced to the world by Swiss physician Ignaz Paul Vital Troxler in the early 1800's). There are many other examples of the Troxler Effect on the web (in particular, you should check out [illusionsindex.org](http://illusionsindex.org)), but this is one of my favorites because it is so colorful!



## The Black Sheep Effect: An Education Minor's Perspective

*By Taylor Bable*

As many psychology majors at RMU do, I have a minor in education. There are great reasons to have this minor while majoring in psychology: (1) Many classes overlap, (2) it reflects positively when applying for graduate school, and (3) it provides a good foundation if you plan to work in a school setting.

But what happens when you are the only psych major in a class of education majors? From personal experience I can tell you that it can feel you are the black sheep of class. Many teachers don't know what to do with you when putting together groups, assigning grades for field experiences, or asking about career plans.

I attended the education conference at Yorktown in mid-March and sat on one of the panels. In a room full of teachers with two classmates beside me, we were asked at the end what our



majors were. My two fellow classmates responded with their education majors and their focus in a specific grade level or subject and were met with smiles and praise. When I expressed that I was a psychology major with a minor in education, there was silence and I felt an awkward tension in the room.

Many of us are pursuing the education

minor to someday work in a school setting. We want to know we will be welcomed to help the students outside the classroom as much as the teachers are helping them inside the classroom.

Of course, I share some of the responsibility for feeling this way. The classroom experience isn't supposed to be one-way. But it can be intimidating when you are the only Psych major in a room full of Ed majors.

I feel that Education professors, sharing a school with the social sciences, should consider working a little harder at integrating psychology majors when they are students in their classes. As I learned in SPED3010, even the college classroom could be made more inclusive.

## Psychology in a Box - 2018

Keli Rojtas

On March 23rd, Psi Chi held its 6th annual Psychology in a Box event. During this event, about 60 students from local high schools came to RMU, where RMU psychology majors led demonstrations on six fields of psychology: Cognitive, Sport, Social, Industrial, Anomalistic, and Sensation & Perception.

As the day began, students were greeted by Dr. Paul and instructed on the schedule for the morning. The very first event was called the "MP3 Experiment." Students were given MP3 players with pre-recorded instructions on them. Although the messages were mostly the same, when they diverged half of the MP3 players had one set of directions, while the other half contained a slightly different set of instructions. This helped to make things interesting to watch as two groups suddenly formed based only on these slightly different instructions.

During the MP3 activity students were instructed to dance, yell "I AM SPARTACUS," "mummify" (wrap) their partner in toilet paper, and so on. This was a fun way to get students moving and ready for the day.

Next, the students moved into their assigned rooms (one of the six areas of psychology they were going to be introduced to). This meant dividing participants into six groups of between 10 and 12 students. After spending about 30 minutes exploring one area of psychology, they shifted to a new room.



Some of these demonstrations included a taste-altering activity in the Sensation & Perception room, an escape activity in the Cognitive Psychology room, and having their minds read by the RMU students in the Anomalistic Psychology room. The high school students were also encouraged to ask questions about the activities, psychology, or college as a whole.

After experiencing all six fields of psychology represented this year, the students came back together for lunch and a few raffles. At this time, Dr. Paul revealed that there had been a twist added to the event this year. In each group there was a "plant" student who was thought to be from a local high school, but in reality, these students were actually RMU students pretending to be in high school.

This was a necessary ploy to help

out with one of the Social Psychology activities. Specifically, students were told to participate in an activity that was designed to be undesirable, such as trading shoes with classmates. In previous years, it was found that obedience was 100%, meaning that all students participated whether they wanted to or not. This is where the plants came in. All plants were instructed to disobey in order to see if the high school students would model this disobedience. However, this only seemed to increase obedience. Better luck next year?

Finally, Dr. Semich gave some closing remarks while everyone enjoyed the taco bar. He offered information about RMU and the psychology program. Overall, the event was very successful; a great way for students to learn outside the typical classroom setting.

### Irrational?

**Happy Spending.** Dunn, Aknin, and Norton (2008) gave some money to participants to spend. The researchers asked the subjects which would make them happier, spending the money on themselves or on other people. What was the answer?

**Free Chocolate!** Ferrero Rocher's chocolate is more delicious than Hershey's Kisses. Shampianier, Mazar, and Ariely (2007) gave participants a choice between the chocolates where Kisses cost 1 cent and the Ferrero Rocher chocolate cost 26 cents. Only 40% preferred the Kisses. What

### From Dan Ariely's *Irrational* (irrationalgame.com)

happened when the Ferrero Rocher chocolates cost 25 cents and the Kisses were free?

#### References

Dunn, E., W., Aknin, L. B., & Norton, M. I. (2008). Spending money on others promotes happiness. *Science*, 319(5870), 1687-1688.  
 Shampianier, K., Mazar, N., & Ariely, D. (2007). Zero as a special price: The true value of free products. *Marketing Science*, 26(6), 742-757.



Participants said that spending money on themselves would make them happier, but actually they were happier when spending money on others. So, money really can buy happiness! (As long as we spend the money on others!)

Free Chocolate:

Preference for the Hershey's kisses jumped from 40% up to 90% even though it was only a 1-cent change in BOTH prices! But apparently "free chocolate" is different from chocolate that only costs 1-cent! When things are free, we get overly excited about it and end up making decisions (and acting on them) that we probably would not otherwise make.

ANSWERS

## No Words For Feeling

A personality trait known as *alexithymia* is an inability to recognize, express, or identify one's own emotions. Individuals with alexithymia are not deliberately ignoring their emotions, but rather are unable to access their emotions because they do not know how.

According to Chen, Xu, Jing, and Chan (2011) there are five dominant features of alexithymia: (1) difficulty in identifying one's emotion, (2) difficulty in describing self-feelings verbally, (3) reduction or incapability to experience emotions, (4) absence of tendencies to imagine someone else's emotions, or an externally oriented cognitive style, and (5) poor capacity for fantasy or symbolic thought.

Alexithymia restricts individuals to have the ability to recognize certain feelings. In addition, it is difficult for people with alexithymia to

understand emotions and identify facial cues, which creates a sense of detachment, consequently, limiting the ability to connect with others.

An individual who has alexithymia can recognize troubling emotions may be present in a situation but are unable to identify the emotion; whether it be anger, disappointment or anxiety. Being unable to identify what you're feeling or not being able to express your emotions can lead to extreme build-up of psychological stress. Research by Chen et al. (2011) suggests that individuals on various levels of alexithymia adopt different ways to express and regulate their emotions.

Additionally, alexithymia often co-exists with another disorder. According to Colino (2018), because someone who is suffering from alexithymia is unable to recognize or regulate their emotions, they may turn to alcohol or food to manage their distress. If you are living

with alexithymia, the goal is to develop emotional awareness to better understand your own thoughts and feelings.

Several ways to improve these skills involve journaling and reading novels or a more formal approach of becoming involved with the creative and expressive arts. Being able to have a strong sense of personal insight can provide a greater understanding of your emotions and feelings, in turn, building stronger interpersonal relationships and a life of fulfillment.

### References

- Chen, J., Xu, T., Jing, J., & Chan, R. C. K. (2011). Alexithymia and emotional regulation: A cluster analytical approach. *BMC Psychiatry, 11*, 33.
- Colino, S. (2018). *When You Can't Put Your Feelings Into Words - Literally*. Retrieved from <https://health.usnews.com/wellness/mind/articles/2018-03-28/when-you-cant-put-your-feelings-into-words-the-emotional-ignorance-of-alexithymia>

Jessica Gazzola (#18)

## RMU Psychology Club Update

The focus of the spring semester for the Psychology Club was planning for the third annual Psychology Mocktail Event. The club was honored to have eight passionate panel members this year, including two RMU alumni, representing a variety of fields. There was representation from Industrial-Organizational Psychology, Sport Psychology, Counseling, Social Work, and Behavioral Therapy.

The panel discussion allowed students to learn about different career options and what it entails to be part of each profession. Following the panel discussion, students had the opportunity to interact one-on-one with the professionals to ask specific questions, receive resume feedback, and build their professional network.

### Psi Chi FYI

*The RMU chapter of Psi Chi currently boasts 138 members and in April 2018 will hold its 11<sup>th</sup> Induction Ceremony*

The club also offered a unique experience for students interested in Sport Psychology and graduate school with a guest speaker via Skype. The guest speaker was 2017 RMU Grad, Emily Philip. She is currently a first year student studying Sport and Exercise Psychology at Georgia Southern University. She discussed what it is like to study sport psychology at the graduate level, what to expect in graduate school, gave advice, and answered specific student questions.

Prior to scheduling for Fall 2018, the club held a group discussion about the

undergraduate thesis.

Two officers of the Psychology Club will be graduating this year, and the club hopes that their replacements will continue to grow the club and the interest of psychology not only within the major, but the university as a whole. Congratulations to all of the graduating 2018 psychology majors and minors.

Have a suggestion for a club meeting or event? The Psychology Club is always looking for student feedback and suggestions. Please forward your ideas to [rmupsychclub@gmail.com](mailto:rmupsychclub@gmail.com).

Megan Racioppo



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