

THE GPPA Report

SPRING 2018 THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE GREATER PITTSBURGH PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

A Letter from the President

VICTOR BARBETTI, PhD, LICENSED PSYCHOLOGIST

Dear GPPA Members,

THOPE YOU ARE well and that you're enjoying these warmer, sunnier days of late spring. Since I moved from the South to Pittsburgh some 20 plus years ago, I have always enjoyed the distinct changes we experience here from season to season. The transitions are quite noticeable and bring with them anticipation and excitement for the new. Change is good, I believe. It keeps us on our toes, and prevents us from settling too deep into our routines.

I'm excited to announce to the Membership that GPPA has recently been granted Continuing Education status from the American Psychological Association. During the last cycle (Fall 2016 - Spring 2017) the Board evaluated the feasibility of re-applying for CE granting privileges and, under the leadership of Dr. Teal Fitzpatrick, the CE Application committee has been very busy over the past year working to re-submit our application to APA. The Board would like to thank the hard work and diligence of the CE committee: Chair, Dr. Teal Fitzpatrick, and committee members Drs. Mary Beth Mannarino, Ed Zuckerman, Marjorie Weinstock, and Will Hasek. Because of their efforts, GPPA will now once again be able to offer to its members high quality, low-cost education opportunities here in the Southwest PA region.

We recently held Board member elections and I'm pleased to announce GPPA's newest Board members for the 2018-2019 cycle: Drs. Sean Moundas, Allie Jedinak, and Marjorie Weinstock. They will be joining existing Board members Drs. Teal Fitzpatrick (reelected), Nick Flowers, George Herrity, and William Hasek. Please join me in welcoming our newest Board members.

As my time as Board President winds down, I find myself reflecting fondly over the past five years and the work we've accomplished together. Whether it's honoring a colleague through the Legacy



Award program, or making new connections at a Networking Fair, GPPA continues to facilitate opportunities for both new and seasoned psychologists in the region. None of this would be possible without the hard work of its members and the countless volunteer hours many of you have contributed. I've truly been honored to be a part of GPPA, and I look forward to seeing you at our upcoming educational and networking programs.

Warm wishes,

Victor Barbetti, PhD GPPA President

GPPA Approved to provide Continuing Education as an APA-Sponsor

TEAL FITZPATRICK, PH.D.

TAM THRILLED TO announce to the GPPA membership that we have been approved as an APA Continuing Education Sponsor. As many of you know, we have partnered with Chatham University over the past few years in order to provide educational programming for our membership. That collaboration has been very appreciated, and I extend thanks to their CE Committee. Now, with independent sponsor status, GPPA will be able to offer more frequent and more diverse programming and the board has decided to prioritize continuing education moving into the next several years. As the Committee Chair for the Continuing Education subcommittee of GPPA, I would like to specifically thank Drs. Mary Beth Mannarino, Marjorie Weinstock, William Hasek, and Ed Zuckerman for their participation in the committee work to date.

We invite our membership to contact us directly to share your ideas and hopes for Continuing Education programs and events. We anticipate providing local trainings and workshops that satisfy board requirements for licensure, along with more specialized educational options. Our goal in obtaining this status is in the service of best meeting the needs of our members, so we welcome all questions, ideas, and proposals. We also welcome those who may chose to work on the Continuing Education Committee moving forward. Please feel free to email me at dr.tealfitzpatrick@gmail.com.

I look forward to seeing you at our upcoming Continuing Education events!

PAVEL SOMOV, PHD

The Possessive Syntax of How We Talk About "Our Brains" (i.e. Ourselves)

In the beginning, before the first animal, before the first emotion, there was a nerve cell, which in turn developed directly from bacteria. The kernel of our brain's neurons, the millions of mitochondria, are almost the same as these primordial bacteria. We carry this ancient system in each of our cells ... The uniformity of cortex is striking; almost any small piece of the cortex looks like any other piece. And the human brain looks like almost any animal's brain. From mouse to woman, the cortex is made up of the same cells and the same circuits.

- Robert Ornstein, author of Evolution of Consciousness

TE DON'T HAVE BRAINS, we are brains. We don't have neurons, we are neurons.

Scientific American published an article titled "Know Your Neurons." The title, I believe, is misleading. To know our neurons is really to know ourselves or, to be more precise, to know our selves.

When we talk about ourselves and our selves the way we usually do, when we say "my brain" or "my neurons," we demonstrate a profound misunderstanding of who we are. We turn the "who" into "what." We objectify our own subjectivity with possessive syntax.

Ask yourself: "Who is this who is trying to understand this sentence?" The answer can't be "my brain." The answer has to be "I, the brain" or "We, the neurons." There is no Meta-You separate from your brain: you are your brain. There is no Meta-You separate from your neurons to know your neurons: you are your neurons. (Notice my purposeful use of possessive syntax, I underlined it.)

There are things that we possess and there are entities that possess us. For example, a car in your driveway is your car in your driveway. You possess both of these objects/properties—the car and the house with the driveway where the car is parked. But the brain that you consider to be "yours" is not an object or a property for you to possess. It possesses you. You don't have your brain—on the contrary, *it has you*.

To appreciate this fundamental difference is to understand who you are and to stop confusing yourself with some kind of neural "what" that is presumably under the possession of some abstract Meta-You. To understand this is to be no longer possessed by the reductionistic way we talk about ourselves and our selves. The goal is to change how we talk about our neural selves so as to re-possess ourselves phenomenologically.

CASE IN POINT

"A neuron fires a spike after *deciding* that the number of inputs urging it to switch on outweighs the number telling it to turn off," wrote Terry Sejnowski and Tobi Delbruck in a Scientific American article, "The Language of the Brain" (my italics). What would happen if we asked the authors of this article if neurons *really* decide? What would happen if we asked the authors of this sentence to account for this turn of phrase? My guess is that they'd dismiss it as just language, as nothing more than creative phrasing. Perhaps they'd say something along the following lines: "Neurons don't *really* decide, they fire. Brains decide. Neurons themselves are not really that sophisticated; not con-

scious enough to decide in the way that we-the brains-decide."

That's what I'd expect from a typical neuroscientist. And if Sejnowski and Delbruck are traditional neuroscientists, then they probably fear anthropomorphizing neurons. Why? Because anthropomorphizing is a reductionistic sin.

But perhaps I am wrong; they might say, "Sure, when we say 'neurons decide' we are not being figurative, we mean it literally—after all, the brain is neurons, if the brain's decision-making is an artifact of collective decision-making of any given neuron, then neurons do decide." If I heard something like that, I'd like it very much. I'd instantly know that I am no longer dealing with traditionally reductionistic neuroscientists anymore. I'd know that I am dealing with neurons conscious of their consciousness. I'd know I am dealing with neural buddhas who are awake themselves and are therefore in a position to awaken others.

MICROSCOPES AND INTRASCOPES

There are two ways for us to study ourselves and our selves—through microscopes and through introspection. When you look meditatively inside, your head becomes an intrascope. When you ask yourself "Who is this who is asking?" you begin to magnify the seemingly insignificant and you begin to see the seemingly invisible.

Traditional neuroscientists, however, tend to study themselves through microscopes. And curiously, in the course of their self-study, they end up objectifying themselves and reducing their own phenomenological complexity to metaphors. I am pretty sure that Terry and Tobi don't believe that neurons actually decide. Doctrinal and orthodox neuroscientists don't believe that neurons actually decide—no, they just fire, in a strictly deterministic sense, in response to chemo-electric stimuli. The paradox here is that any given neuroscientist who feels that he or she freely chose to look into a microscope at a given moment in time does not, in fact, believe in his or her own neurons' freedom to make such a decision. Reductionism isn't wrong. It's just a point of view; and not a very helpful one at that.

The paradox is that while we-as a culture-marvel at "our brains," we do not marvel at neurons (notice the possessive syntax). While we accord the miracle of consciousness to the Whole of what we are, we are hesitant to acknowledge the consciousness of the Parts that make up that Whole. We are afraid of what that means. We are afraid to acknowledge the consciousness of the lowly neurons that we literally are. And it's exactly for this reason that the language of how we talk about the brain is a

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Fears and Motivators for Women Re-entering the Workforce

KAREN LITZINGER, MA, LPC

While children are still at home often experience significant ambivalence. On one hand, they may desire their own income and sense of accomplishment beyond the home, yet on the other hand they may not want to give up schedule freedom or may feel guilt at "giving up" a primary parental responsibility, feelings that are sometimes exacerbated by comments or concerns from the children or spouse. Women who have a financial need to be in the workforce following a divorce may have a clearer decision about moving forward, yet have other emotional issues to process, such as resentment or fear that could impact forward progress. Of course, whereas I focus on women here, stay-at-home-dads might recognize themselves in some of the concerns and conflicts raised here.

Shining a light on fears can lessen their power, whether the fear is real or imagined. Examining motivations can help women gain energy for a decision and forward movement or recognize that she wants to spend energy on paths other than work. Two excellent books that that address some of the emotions of re-entering the workforce and inform some of this article are *Back on the Career Track* by Carol Fishman Cohen and Vivian Steir Rabin, and *Moms for Hire* by Kathleen Kennedy.

Fears and obstacles to explore related to re-entering the workforce:

- Worry and fear about impact on the children and household, even though studies show virtually no difference between children of working or at-home mothers.
- Letting go of control, though what may be gained by the children are learning practical skills, responsibility and a sense of independence. Missing special moments like conversations right after school is another potential emotional struggle.
- Giving up schedule freedom, which may trump the desire for a paycheck or career contribution.

Possessive Syntax... continued from page 2

mixture of reductionistic facts and intuitive metaphors (that we self-consciously take back as soon as someone points out our anthropomorphizing).

I don't know Terry or Tobi. I made them out to be a kind of two-headed straw man that I can rail against. Perhaps they and I are on the same page. That'd be nice. My point is that modern neuroscience—generally—does suffer from this linguistic ambivalence. It is time we say a Neural Namaste to our neural selves. It's time we—the neurons—decide to go ahead and unconditionally anthropomorphize the very neural humanity that we ourselves literally—not figuratively—are.

[excerpt from "Neural We: Single Neurons, Multiple Personalities, and Redefining the Species," Somov, 2012]

- Self-Doubt can occur even in women with past high powered careers, resulting in low self-esteem or depression.
- Guilt can be a factor with either decision. If not re-entering, a woman may feel guilty in not contributing to household income or about no longer feeling passionate about motherhood. For those returning, they can sometimes feel selfish or guilty about naturally not being able to do as much and requiring others to do more.
- External and internal pressures can play a role in either decision. Whether it is a well-meaning friend giving unsolicited advice about what to do, or a spouse impacting the decision, it can cause the client to lose sight of inner guidance. Sometimes a woman may have her own internal "shoulds," such as "I should use my degree or earn money," or "I should stay home for the good of the family."

Grounded motivations for re-entering the workforce:

- Money is shown as the number one motivation for women re-entering the workforce, according to the Center for Work-Life Policy at Harvard University. This may be out of financial necessity or having money to call one's own.
- Validation may be related to combating self-esteem questions that emerged from being out of the workforce, or wanting to not be defined solely by motherhood. Some women feel that accomplishments in the workplace give more validation than even highly respected volunteer contributions.
- Intellectual stimulation in the workplace may be desired as a change from being with children, talking about children with other parents, or having conversations in social organizations that may not feel "substantial."
- Preparing for the empty nest time by working can ease the adjustment since the longer a person waits to re-enter the workforce, the harder it is.
- Ambition or contribution may be a need beyond the mother or volunteer role, whether it is to achieve a certain amount of income or be in a position to contribute to a product or service and be financially rewarded for doing so.
- Serving as a role model to younger children can help them see parental roles beyond gender stereotypes and see that a person can remake themselves at any point.

Even if a woman isn't completely sure about whether she wants to return to the workforce, career counseling in tandem with therapy can be helpful to gain self-knowledge and explore career options. Although acting on career guidance may not be immediate, having tools and resources can help a woman feel empowered and reduce fear and anxiety. Career counseling may also bring to light ambivalent motivations which can also be helpful in the decision-making process.

Karen Litzinger, MA, LPC helps people from high school through retirees with education and career decision-making. For more information: www.KarensCareerCoaching, Karen@KarensCareerCoaching.com

FurScience: Conducting Psychological Research with the Furry Fandom

ELIZABETH FEIN, PhD, KATHY GERBASI, PhD, COURTNEY PLANTE, PhD, SHARON ROBERTS, PhD, AND STEPHEN REYSEN, PhD

 \mathbf{I}^{F} YOU'VE EVER been to downtown Pittsburgh during the summer, you may have been treated to an extraordinary sight. For one weekend each year, the streets are full of folks hanging out, eating pizza, playing games, and reconnecting with old friends-while dressed head to toe in brightly colored, faux-fur anthropomorphic animal costumes, looking rather like sports mascots. Maybe you looked a little closer and saw other folks who were dressed in typical street clothes, but had a pair of cat, dog, wolf or fox ears on their head, or possibly a tail clipped to the back of their jeans. You might have noticed others who weren't wearing anything unusual, but sported lanyards around their necks full of colorful badges depicting various creatures, in a variety of poses and situations drawn by different artists. What's going on here, you may ask yourself? You've just run into Anthrocon, one of the world's largest conventions of furries. Furries are participants in a creative, artistic subculture/fandom organized around appreciation for anthropomorphic animals. Their costumes—known in the fandom as fursuits—represent their fursona, a version—or in some cases an idealized representation—of themselves as an animal or combination of animals. FurScience, which is also known as the International Anthropomorphic Research Project (IARP), is an interdisciplinary and international team of social scientists, which has spent about a decade studying the furry fandom. We've examined the demographic makeup of the community, run studies on group distinctiveness, identity development, and stigma management among furries, and conducted in-depth interviews and focus groups on topics such as gender, creativity, and ecopsychology. In addition to publishing in peerreviewed journals, we make all our findings available on our website (furscience.com), and often give interviews to popular press outlets like Vice and Psychology Today. We also produce our own video media, such as the Just Like You* *But with Fur anti-stigma campaign video series.

One of the goals of the FurScience team is to challenge popular misconceptions about furries. For example, many people erroneously assume that being a furry is, first and foremost, a fetish or sexual interest. Data from our studies suggest otherwise. While erotic content is present in the furry fandom—as it is in fandoms ranging from anime to science fiction to video games—many furries report that their participation in the fandom is motivated more by the entertainment, creative opportunities, and sense of community it provides. According to social psychologist Courtney Plante, "It makes about as much sense to describe the furries as having a 'furry fetish' as it does to describe video game fans as people with a 'video game fetish." In addition to being the team's lead quantitative analyst who aggregates

the survey responses gathered each year at Anthrocon and other conferences, Courtney's also a longtime furry whose fursona is a neon-blue, scientifically-minded cat named *Nuka*. Courtney Plante and Stephen Reysen—another co-founder of FurScience/ IARP—are the driving force behind publishing the team's dozens of publications on furries and anime.

One thing that our data suggests about furry sexuality, however, is that the community is very inclusive of LGBTQ folks. Furries are seven times more likely than the general population to identify as predominantly or exclusively homosexual, and fifteen percent of furries describe their sexual orientation as "other." Ten percent identify as trans, non-binary or otherwise genderqueer. Sociologist and FurScience team member Dr. Sharon Roberts recently received a grant worth over \$250,000 from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council in Canada to study intersections of identity within the furry fandom. The projects include developing a furry database (the FurScience Universal Recruitment Project—or FurP) of future participants, focusing on how participation in the fandom may benefit trans youth, and documenting international participation in the furry fandom, including comparisons with other fandoms such as anime and soccer fans.

The founding member of the IARP is Kathy Gerbasi, an anthrozoologist and social psychologist who became interested in the furry fandom while moderating an anthrozoology discussion group for Society and Animals several years ago. At the time, very little scholarly research had been done with the furry community, and most of the widely-available information came through derogatory or sensationalist portrayals in the media. Working with clinical and cultural psychologist Elizabeth Fein, Dr. Gerbasi is now focusing her work on other groups whose members often attend Anthrocon: therians and otherkin. These attendees do more than roleplay a fursona; they genuinely believe that they are, on some level, an animal or other nonhuman entity. Therian is a term for people who experience themselves as a "real" animal, like a wolf or a platypus, which exists-or once existed—on earth. The term otherkin describes people who identify as a fictional or mythological creature, like a griffin or a phoenix. Compared to furries, many of whom consider their interest in anthropomorphism to be a fun hobby, therians and otherkin believe that their other-than-human identifications are essential, deeply-held aspects of their identity, often originating in early childhood. For some therians and otherkin, these identifications have a spiritual dimension; some believe their identity was created through reincarnation. While only some therians and otherkin identify as furries, events like Anthrocon provide a place where they can feel a little freer to be themselves.

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Research Briefs

(or, a roundup of unabashedly skimpy summaries from recent research studies)

- Football players who start the sport before age 12 show an increased risk—up to two times as much—for mood and behavior disorders later, according to a study in *Translational Psychiatry*.
- Researchers for the journal *Emotion* suggests that encouraging a "culture of happiness" may promote depression instead in that it prompts people to dwell on their failures. In a world filled with "happiness paraphernalia" such as motivational posters and self help books, we seem more likely to ruminate on our shortcomings than not.
- Preschool age Children who alternate living arrangements with both parents post divorce, fare better, on the average, than those living primarily with one parent, according to a study in *Acta Psychiatrica*.
- The Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied published findings that suggest people may take higher doses of medicine when the drug is easy to pronounce. Additionally, when subjects were told the drug was "herbal," they ingested even more (up to 13% more) of the dosage across the two conditions of easy or difficult to pronounce names.
- Mothers who breastfeed their babies longer are more sensitive to those children's emotional cues, even several years later, and after breastfeeding stopped, according to a study in *Developmental Psychology*.
- The American Psychologist reports that the majority of clinical training programs in the United States do not offer specific addiction training. Despite the escalating drug crisis in the US, training programs offering addiction training have not changed at all for the period between 1999 and 2013
- Using data from 51,000 participants, a study in the *Journal of Sexual Medicine* found that people who use marijuana more frequently also have more sex.

- A study in the journal *Health Psychology* blows the whistle on 26 chain restaurants, analyzing their menus to discover that "healthy menus" don't use enticing words to persuade diners to try such healthy options, as opposed to meat based descriptions. Whereas words like "fun, artisanal, tasty, or exciting" are commonplace in high calorie and/or unhealthy high fat items, words like "macronutrient, simple, nutritious, fresh, depriving" are more common for "healthy items."
- The *Journal of the American Medical Association* published a study that found the popular antidepressant Zoloft (Sertraline) ineffective for people with chronic kidney disease.
- "Activist investors" (shareholders who try to acquire enough stock to transform a company outside of the control or direction of the CEO) are more likely to target public companies with women CEO's than companies where men are at the helm, according to a study in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*.
- Researchers publishing in *NeuroImage* suggests that as we age, exercise may help to preserve memory by slowing deterioration of the left hippocampus, crucial to memory processing.
- An increased number of girls and young women are ending up in emergency rooms for self inflicted injuries and suicide attempts, with the steepest rise for girls aged 10-14 (19% increase) according to a study published in *JAMA*, on data spanning the period 2009-2015.
- The journal *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts* report that people tend to prefer curved objects over straightedged ones—a finding that seems to hold across several cultures.

FurScience... continued from page 4

FurScience has found that (contrary to popular stereotypes) furries do not differ significantly from non-furry control groups in terms of overall physical and emotional wellness, life satisfaction, and self-esteem (see http://furscience.com/researchfindings). However, some furries do differ from the norm in ways that make their lives harder. The furry subculture may have something special to offer one group of vulnerable youth in particular: youth on the autism spectrum. The FurP demographic data, collected from over a thousand furries from all over the world, suggests that as many as fifteen percent of furries identify as being somewhere on the autism spectrum. Elizabeth Fein's next project will explore what draws youth on the autism

spectrum to participate in the furry fandom, and what they get out of it.

So, the next time you see furries downtown, don't be too quick to judge—and don't ruffle their fur (those fursuits are expensive!). Give them a wave, or a high-five, and know that they are helping to create a social space where folks of all stripes can explore and expand their sense of who they are.

For more information, see http://furscience.com/publications. The site also includes a free-to-download summary of the past five years of research findings: Plante, C.N., Reysen, S, Roberts, S.E. & Gerbasi, K.C. (2016). Fur Science! A summary of five years of research from the International Anthropomorphic Research Project. FurScience. Waterloo, Ontario.

GPPA Community Partnership Committee and Award

THE GPPA IS PLEASED to announce the formation of the Community Partnership Committee. The committee's primary goal is to encourage reciprocal engagement between psychologists and local service organizations. In doing so, it is hoped that psychologists will become more aware of social justice issues affecting the region and more engaged with their local communities. The committee also aims to provide mentorship and support for graduate students and early career psychologists. One goal of these services is to assist individuals from traditionally marginalized backgrounds in entering the field of psychology. This January, the committee organized a group of GPPA members to attend the annual Summit Against Racism. In the future, the committee will notify membership of other community events and organize groups to attend.

The committee also formed the Community Partnership Award, which honors graduate students who are using their knowledge of psychological science to help the local community. This year, the award was presented to Sean Leadem and Sadie Mohler, who are actively working with local community leaders and activists in the South Hilltop neighborhood of Pittsburgh on issues of trauma and violence. Sadie and Sean are both doctoral students at Duquesne's clinical psychology department and members of PlaceLab, an actionoriented, community-based research lab that conducts qualitative research projects at the intersection of psychology and community development. Sean and Sadie currently work on two PlaceLab projects: Community Trauma and Resilience Care (CTRC) and an evaluative partnership with the South Hilltop Men's Group (SHMG). Both projects engage existing community programming in the South Hilltop neighborhoods of Pittsburgh. These PlaceLab projects aim to support the resilience and community-based healing taking place in these communities and aim to use academic research in the service of social justice.

Since Fall 2017, Sean and Sadie have been on the CTRC team, an interdisciplinary group of researchers, education consultants, clinicians and community members collaborating to develop a trauma-informed training program and 'playbook' for caregivers employed in community after school and summer programs in the South Hilltop neighborhoods. The CTRC will provide staff training about the effects of trauma in children, how to recognize and understand trauma responses and provide a set of tools and exercises that support and supplement the excellent work program educators and staff are already doing. Training modules combine contemporary research on trauma and trauma-informed training with experiential learning methods and a written 'playbook' of activities.

In future editions of the newsletter, the committee will highlight psychologists and local organizations who are contributing to the betterment of the Pittsburgh region.



GPPA Community Awardees.

GREATER PITTSBURGH PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION



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Dr. Robert Noll receives 2018 GPPA Legacy Award



GPPA Board members Drs. Fitzpatrick, Hasek, and Barbetti with this year's 2018 Legacy Award recipient, Dr. Robert Noll.

THIS YEAR'S RECIPIENT of the GPPA Legacy Award is Robert Noll, Ph.D. Dr. Noll has conducted superlative research on the impact of childhood medical illnesses on mental health and family functioning. His research examined a variety of illnesses, including sickle cell anemia, hemophilia, and chronic migraines, though the majority of his research focused on pediatric cancer. He published 125 peer-reviewed papers, over 40 of which focused on pediatric cancer. His recent research centered on creating classroom interventions to increase acceptance and inclusion of children who survived pediatric cancer. Dr. Noll's research has been funded through a variety of prestigious grants provided by the National Institute of Health and the American Cancer Society.

Dr. Noll currently works as a pediatric psychologist at Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh. He is the chair of the Behavioral Science Committee in the Children's Oncology Group, and he is a faculty member of the LEND (Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities and Related Disorders) center. Dr. Noll provides mentorship, supervision, and education to graduate students in the health professions, including not only psychologists, but also physicians, audiologists, physical therapists, and speech therapists. Based on his lasting contribution to his patients and students, the GPPA board was delighted to honor Dr. Noll with the 2018 Legacy Award.

GPPA Summer Social at Springhill Brewery

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