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A Standard Deviation Above the Mean

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Implicit Attitudes and a Career in Psychology

Katherine “Kate” Ranganath, (2003) B.S. in Psychology

As I sit down to write this I'm surrounded by piles of job application materials and I suddenly realize that it's been exactly six years since I sat in my apartment in Nashville surrounded by grad school application materials. Many things are the same this time around - the research statement, the letters of recommendation, the nerves, my deep gratitude for the mentors helping me along the way. But one thing is different – after being a student for 23 straight years, I finally feel ready for a new role.

I graduated from Belmont in 2003, having worked with Dr. Yandell as my research mentor, and immediately began a doctoral program in social psychology at The University of Virginia (UVA). While doing research during my sophomore year at Belmont I came across a website with a test claiming to reveal unconscious biases. Like a good psych student I was skeptical, but interested, so I turned to PsychInfo. It soon became apparent that our minds are more than just the conscious parts and that “implicit attitudes” – attitudes that we're not necessarily aware of – can have a real impact on our behavior. For example, most people say that they harbor no racial prejudices, but data from the Project Implicit website shows that about 80% of white participants show at least some degree of unconscious preference for white people relative to black people. Further, and scarier, research shows that these unconscious preferences matter; implicit racial bias has

been shown to influence real-life discrepancies in medical treatment, legal decisions, instances of police shootings, and employment opportunities for black people relative to white people. What people say their racial attitudes are doesn't predict these discrepancies nearly as well as their more unconscious attitudes. This work was really interesting to me so I began using the Implicit Association Test (IAT) in my undergraduate research studies and reading more about how other people had used it in theirs.

The decision to go to graduate school at Virginia was an easy one. Once I knew the area of research that I was interested in, I investigated who was doing that kind of work. The website where I had originally taken the IAT was created by Brian Nosek, then a graduate student at Yale. That year, Brian became a professor at UVA and I applied to work with him. When I visited for their graduate recruiting weekend, I knew immediately that UVA was the place for me. Brian was doing exactly the kind of research that I wanted to do and I also really admired his commitment to making his research available to people outside of academia through the Project Implicit website. Lucky for me, the admissions committee agreed that I would be a good fit for the program and off I went to Charlottesville.

The term “graduate student” does not quite capture the multitude of roles that one has during the course of graduate school at a

research university. Sure, there are classes, at least in the beginning. But there is also teaching. And supervising undergraduate research assistants. And attending lab meetings. And presenting at conferences. And hosting visiting faculty. But all of these things are secondary to the main goal – do research and publish it.

Different advisors have different ways of getting their graduate students involved in research. Some have first-year students take on small parts of big projects that the lab is already working on. My advisor took a different approach; he basically said, “read a lot, figure out what you’re interested in knowing, and design studies to test it.” The freedom to study whatever I wanted was exciting and completely terrifying, but I took his advice and started to do some serious thinking about what I wanted to know.

Since college I’ve worked with several social justice organizations and have been consistently amazed at the hatred and violence perpetuated worldwide because of racial and ethnic differences. And I’ve always wondered how it is that people develop such strong attitudes toward others, sometimes others they’ve never even met! While that question seemed a bit big for a first-year research project (or even a lifetime of research), I started several different lines of research looking at smaller questions of how it is that people develop the attitudes and beliefs that they hold, particularly about other people and groups of people.

One of my favorite research projects that I’ve done (and published) is about people’s tendency to use “guilt-by-association” thinking. Most people say that it’s wrong to judge one person on the basis of the actions of another person who belongs to the same group; however, my research shows that people might not have the cognitive abilities to keep information that we learn about one person from leaking into our evaluations of another person from

the same group. In these studies we give our participants information about people who belong to two different groups – one of them is positive and one of them is negative. We then tell our participants about two new, unrelated people who happen belong to those same groups – groups that are large and diverse. What we find is that, in the short-term, people resist using information about the original people in judging the new people; however, a week later after forgetting occurs, people treat the original and new group members as if they’re interchangeable. It’s a simple idea, but I think it has important implications for how it is that we learn to have the prejudices that we often do.

After research, teaching has played the largest part of my graduate school career. Coming from Belmont I am very aware of how important professors can be in the lives of their students and what an incredible difference having good mentors makes. In addition to teaching countless lab sections of undergraduate statistics, I received a Distinguished Teaching Fellowship last semester that allowed me to create and teach my own seminar on Implicit Social Cognition. It was by far the highlight of graduate school for me. I always knew that I enjoyed teaching, but it wasn’t until I had the chance to teach a class completely on my own that I realized how rewarding it is. Or how much work.

So even as I wade through the piles of job application materials, I feel very fortunate that I have found a career that I love so much. Trying to get a job in academia is pretty scary; there are not a lot of jobs and there are a lot of people looking for them, but it’s an exciting transition to make and I know that my mentors at Belmont and UVA have prepared me well.

Note: If you would like to try an Implicit Association Test (IAT) you can do so at <http://implicit.harvard.edu>.

Dean’s List – Fall 2008

The following Psychology and Neuroscience Majors and Minors made the Dean’s List for Spring 2008

Sara Bentley	Alyssa Henning	Benjamin McGlothlin
David Burns	Jessica Howard	Laura Muck
Heather Cairl	Jaclyn Hunter	Laura Musten
Zachary Caro	Sarah Jaworski	Catherine Oman
Jessica Chapman	Jill Johnson	Kaitlin Overton
Haley Corenswet	Martha Johnson	Sarah Plotkin*
Whitney David	Emily Kerr	Taylor Shade
Danielle Goodboo	Luke Lancaster	Kathryn Shelton
James Goodlad	Caitlin Lecksell	Kevin Stone*
Rachael Haney	Whitney Marvel	Drue Williamson
Laura Hart	Jennifer Mashburn	Brittany Wood

*President’s List – 4.0

May 2008 Graduates: John DePriest, James “Gunner” Goodlad, Shandus Valentine, Tequelia “Sharde” Carney, Afton Cole, Mary Motsinger, Sarah Smith, Irena Tepavcevic, Rosemary Harris.

Psychology Club/Psi Chi Events in Fall 2008 –

By Luke Lancaster, Vice President

- September 12 – Member Meeting – PDB 108
- September 19 – Convocation on Grad School Preparation w/ Dr. Giordano (Curriculum Vita, Purpose Statement, etc.) – PDB 108
- October 10 – Member Meeting – PDB 108
- Convocation on Depression w/Dr. Loftin (screening of “Reign Over Me” and discussion) – Leu Center for Visual Arts
- October 30 – Movie Night – PDB 108
- November 7 – Member Meeting PDB 108
- December 8 – End of Semester Party – PDB 108
- Polygraph Convocation – TBA



Luke carved a pumpkin to decorate for Movie Night

2008 Means Award Winner: Eileen Marks (see alumni section below) was chosen for the Marie Hackel Means Award for 2008. Eileen was a pioneer in our department and was interested in thinking and problem solving correlates of brain electrophysiological activity as measured EEG. She developed a small program of research and showed remarkable initiative, street smarts, and persistence in pursuing her research questions. In doing so, she obtained a competitive grant through Psi Chi to purchase some EEG equipment for her studies. She presented her research at a number of meetings including the Eastern Psychological Association, the National Conference for Undergraduate Research, and the Society for Neuroscience. In addition, in the summer of 2006 Eileen was one of about 20 students selected from around the nation for the American Psychological Association's Advanced Statistical Training in Psychology held at George Washington University.

Our Alumni:

Afton Cole (2008) – is in the master's degree program in counseling at the Chicago Professional School of Psychology

Radha Dunham (2005) – Two big things have happened this month (May): I got engaged to Stephen Carlson (Biology '05) and I also got my M.S. (and am continuing on to get my PhD, still at University of Miami). My research specializes in developing and evaluating culturally-informed family therapies for schizophrenia.

Sarah Lashley (2007) – is attending the University of South Carolina in a master's program in Biostatistics.

Eileen Marks (2008) – Is in the PhD program in Neuroscience at the University of Wyoming.

Amy (Powell) Phelan (1998) – After working in various social service-type positions around Nashville, I decided to become a nurse. I returned to Belmont to study nursing, and earned my BSN from Belmont in 2005. I am currently working at Vanderbilt Psychiatric Hospital as an RN, and split my time between the Adult and Adolescent programs. I hope to return to

school in a year or two to earn my masters degree in psychiatric nursing and become a psychiatric nurse practitioner. In the meantime, my husband of nine years and I are expecting our first child, a little girl, this month (May)!

Clayton Rothwell (2007) – is attending Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville in pursuit of an MA in Theology. He plans to graduate in May, 2009. In the fall he hops to begin a PhD program in Psychology. He has continued with his musical interests by playing drums for his church. He and his wife, Jessica, have also been serving in an administrative role with a Christian college students' house, that focuses on discipleship, evangelism, and intentional community.

Natalie Simpson (2004) – Is working as a legislative assistant to Representative Ray Sansom in the Florida House of Representatives.

Shandus Valentine (2008) – is enrolled in the Student Affairs master's degree program at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. She will marry Ryan Parish on November 22.

A View from the Chair: As always, there is a lot of activity around the psychology department – student research, practicum experiences, guest speakers on campus, collaborative research across science departments, service projects, the development of a study abroad experience in psychology (more on that at a later time!), and so on. However, the MOST EXCITING NEWS is that in May of 2010 (only a year and a half away), we will be moving into the 4th floor of the new Pharmacy building that is under construction. We are very excited to more than triple our current lab space, so that we will have greatly expanded room for teaching labs and for student-faculty research collaboration. If you are an alumni reader, we would love to have you visit and check things out.

Let Us Hear From You!

If you are an alum reader, please take a moment to fill out the form below and drop us a line. Just mail to the address on the back of the newsletter, or contact us by e-mail at godwinm@mail.belmont.edu. We would love to hear from you and to include your update in the next edition of *enPSYCHlopedia*. If you are ever in the Nashville area, please stop by our office to meet the new faculty and see the exciting things going on here in the Psychology Department. Check out our web pages at <http://www.belmont.edu/psychology>.

<i>Alumni Update</i>		Date _____
Name _____	Graduation Year _____	
Address _____		
City _____	State _____	ZIP _____ Phone _____
Spouse's name _____	Belmont grad? _____	Year _____
Employment _____	Title _____	
Recent promotion, honor, award, etc.? _____		
What else is going on with you (that you'd like to share): _____		

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