Psycho? Logical? Bulletin!
April 2008

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DEPARTMENT WILL HAVE A HAPPY HOUR. TODAY, 5:30 SHARP EDGE
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Lori Holt and Alessandro Rinaldo are having a baby girl. But since the baby isn’t here yet, there’s still time to suggest names. As of press time, the littlest Rinaldo (or the littlest Holt? Holt-Rinaldo? Rinaldholt?) doesn’t have an official first name. Finding names that sound good

That’s where you come in. As you know, names are important, and the department has done an excellent job steering new parents toward good ones (when she’s older, little Badger Koedinger is going to thank you). So let’s hear about your suggestions!

To get the ball rolling, the PLB has suggested a few below. If you like those, you can vote for them in this survey. If you have others you want to propose, don’t worry: that very same survey has a place for you to fill in your own suggestions.

### The Wisconsin Names

**Leinenkugel, Bucky, or (Brit) Favre**

**Rationale:** Leinenkugel is a good local beer, but a great name. Bucky is short for the U. of Wisconsin’s mascot, Buckingham U. Badger. Also, it’s a cool name for a girl - a little tomboy, but also a little cute. And Favre is self-explanatory. It’s appropriate for both boys and girls (although, if you want to go super feminine, you could make Brit the first name, and Favre the middle, as suggested by an anonymous PLB reader!).

### The Work Names

**Maximum Likelihood** or J.N.D.

**Rationale:** It’s a little-known, but obvious in retrospect, fact that jargon from the fields of psychology or statistics make great names (e.g., if my name were Maximum Likelihood Thiessen, I would probably be the world’s best blackjack or pool player).

### The Italian Names

**Elena and Leia**

**Rationale:** I don’t know that many Italian names. Additionally, all the good ones I know - Vinny, Mario, Luigi - are boy’s names. So there may be better ones out there.

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**Footnotes**

1. This is the PLB, people. We don’t publish anything unless we have hard evidence.

2. We were hoping to find something a bit more related to Ale’s work, but “Log-Linear Group Lasso Estimator” was a bit of a mouthful.

3. Just Noticeable Difference. Also, if J. David Creswell has an N anywhere in his name, look for this to get re-used as a nickname.

4. May not actually be an Italian name. But, dammit, I’m getting a little girl around here named Leia no matter what it takes!

5. The wife of the PLB could not be reached for comment.
Cognitive Psychologists Dying Young(ish)
Submitted by Sheldon Cohen

In our former graduate student Sarah Pressman’s dissertation, she predicted the longevity of famous psychologists (included in a series of volumes with autobiographies) based on a number of variables of interest. For example, those who used more varied social network terms (e.g., wife, friend, volunteer, neighbor, colleague) in their writing lived longer as did those who used more “activated” positive emotion terms such as enthusiastic, joyful.... In a recent analysis, she compared longevity based on area of expertise. Clinical, Social and Personality psychologist lived an average of 81.19 years (SD=9.9), while cognitive psychologists lived an average of 76.97 years (SD=7.7). Just thought you’d be interested.

Why do Cognitive psychologists have a lower life expectancy?

**The PLB’s Top 10 Hypotheses**

1) The journal *Cognition* continues to use traditional “Trial by Combat” method of settling disputes between authors and reviewers

2) Teenagers - who have high mortality rates - are much more likely to choose cognitive psychology, because it’s sexier

3) Rock and Roll lifestyle of hard-living cognitive psychologists. The PLB is looking right at YOU, Charles Kemp

4) Social psychologists routinely add 5 years to their birth certificates, so they can drink at younger age

5) Many cognitive psychology conferences held near active volcanos or other natural hazards

6) KFC’s infamous “All the fried chicken you can eat if you’re a cognitive psychologist” promotion in 1988 had disastrous effects on blood pressure of cognitive psychologists

7) Hotel pool for first SPSP conference? Actually the fountain of youth

8) Computational models release a mild toxin that builds up in the blood stream over time

9) Numbers skewed because world’s two oldest men are actually social psychologists

10) Social psychologists pressure really old psychologists to declare themselves social psychologists.

In case you missed it above:

Happy hour today! All are welcome!

Sharp Edge! Drinking! 5:30 PM! Exclamation points!

e-mail emilier@andrew for directions
This month’s PLB Shout-Out goes out to Mike Scheier. As many of you know, I’m headed to Qatar this summer. Originally, when I was arranging the details of the trip, CMU-Q said that they wouldn’t pay for my wife to come out with me. I went back and forth with them on this, but they wouldn’t budge. This may be due to the fact that the only two negotiating stances I know are “Agreeable Turtle” and “Surrendering Kitten.”

When I told Mike about this, he said, “Well, I’ll e-mail some people and see what’s up.” His initial round of e-mails got the same response mine did, and he let them know that he considered the policy somewhat nonsensical.

About a week later, I met with the Dean of CMU-Q, Chuck Thorpe, and he said, “Well, someone brought it to my attention that this policy was silly, so we changed it, and now we’ll pay for your wife to come along.”

I’m sure that Mike’s advocating on my behalf made getting that changed a lot more likely than my vague protestations alone would have. So thanks for the effort, Mike!

Remember: Smart People comes out on April 11th! Who knows who could have made it as an extra?
April’s Graduate Student of the Month is Sarah Schipul. Sarah explained a bit about what it’s like to go to an all-girls school, how to cure a hangover, being a human lie detector, and several other topics. If you’re interested in finding out more, read on!

PLB: Tell us a little about where you’re from and where you went to school.
SS: I grew up in Watertown, Connecticut, a small town that is not a suburb of New York City. My parents were both high school teachers, and I grew up with an older brother – who now lives in San Diego and just had a baby. I went to an all-girls high school, which was wonderful. Then I came here, back in 2000, to do my undergrad. I majored in cognitive science. Then after I graduated, I was an RA for Marcel, for three years, and I liked it so much I stuck around for grad school.

PLB: Did your parents teach at the girls school?
SS: No, they taught in a different town. Ironically, my parents were public school teachers, but they sent me to private school. A lot of my friends were going to private school. They’re on every corner in Connecticut. I thought it was a great experience.

PLB: Why did you choose CMU again as a grad student?
SS: I knew if I stayed here I had already worked a lot on the studies we had done, and I didn’t want to abandon that. And I knew if I stayed here I could get started right away. And there were other good things. I love Pittsburgh. And my boyfriend Sam is here, at Tepper. So we stayed, and bought a house in Greenfield, with a view of the river and a yard, and now a dog. So this was really my best option.

PLB: What are you working on now?
SS: I’ve started a study – that has not been run on a subject yet, but maybe this Saturday! – with an autism population. One of the areas of deficits in autism is social perception, so in this study we’re trying to see how they can judge trustworthiness, so we show them a picture of a face, and ask them to judge it as trustworthy or not. A behavioral study showed that they judged everyone as trustworthy. And then we’re like, what if we present them with some context, a little story, and then ask them to decide again. So we want to see how people with autism perform, and also how their brain activates differently than neurotypical people. If it’s a matter of underconnectivity, where it’s just they can’t put all the information together, or if there may be, for example, amygdala differences where it’s not as active.
PLB: Why trustworthiness?
SS: Trustworthiness affects how you should interact with a person. There are anecdotal stories of people with autism being very gullible, not being able to perceive when someone’s lying to them. We had a previous study where we had participants watch a little video, and have to tell if someone is lying to them, or telling the truth. We did a little training, as well, and that seemed to help.

PLB: How can you tell if someone is telling the truth?
SS: Your pupils dilate, and you talk faster, and you pause more. And you keep your head really still. It’s kind of like being nervous.

PLB: Has this turned you into a human lie detector? When you’re watching Law and Order, can you always tell which character is lying?
SS: No one can get a lie past me now. But it’s sort of hard to tell sometimes. You have to be really close to someone to see if their pupils are dilating!

PLB: Other than being a human lie detector, what do you do for fun?
SS: I play with my dog, Ruby. That’s fun. She may be the cutest dog in the world, though we don’t have all the results in yet. Also, I do a lot of cooking, though I do it less now that I’m in grad school. I go hiking and camping in the summer. We walk to school every morning, which is about two and a half miles.

PLB: You’re pretty outdoorsy. Do you do anything really strenuous?
SS: We did the MS 150 a few years ago, which is a 150 mile bike ride to Lake Erie. We biked 80 miles one day, and 70 the next day. It’s a bit tough, you don’t think you can do it at first, but then you’re surrounded by thousands of people, and everyone’s biking and talking; it’s a really good sense of community. And there are people who do it every year, and they get to the finish line and then they have their coolers and beer ready. I found, during the training for the MS 150, that biking is the perfect hangover cure. Yeah, you wake up and feel horrible, but you already have a plan to get up and go. And by 10 miles in, I felt fantastic. It was flat biking, which I think is the key. Just running stuff through your body, very low impact, it works hangovers out super quickly. In emergency situations, that’s the way to go.

PLB: Now, before we’re done, we need to do the Three Tough Questions. You may have guessed the first: What, for you, is the big question you want answer with your career?
SS: For me, it is, what are the neural mechanisms for judging social situations, and why is that process different in some people than others, especially people with autism?

PLB: If you weren’t a grad student, what would you be doing with your life?
SS: I think either I’d be a professional dog walker, or a cook. Not a chef, not the recipe-designer, but the cook. Because I can stand and cook all day.

PLB: What kind of restaurant? And no, that’s not the third tough question!
SS: Not fancy. But not Big Jim’s In the Run. Somewhere in between. And preferably not a chain.

PLB: All right. This, then, is the third tough question: what is your favorite, and your least favorite, part of being a grad student?
SS: As compared to my previous life as a research assistant, I’m in charge of myself. I’m not really my own boss, but I make my own hours and I do the work that I see as important. And that’s the best part, and also the worst part, because I need to motivate myself to come in and get the work done and everything else!
Super Bonus Graduate Student of the Month Question!

PLB: Sarah, is there anything else you’d like to say?
SS: Why yes, yes there is. I just wanted to remind everyone about Spring Carnival. It’s a huge thing for undergrads here but I don’t think the grad students know that much about it. I just would like to add something like:

CMU’s Spring Carnival is April 17-19! http://www.andrew.cmu.edu/org/carnival/ There are booths (made by the different school organizations) and rides in the Morewood parking lot from Thur afternoon to Sat night. And the buggy races (which are super fun!) are from 8am to noon on Friday (prelims) and Saturday (finals). The buggy course goes up Tech St, down Schenley Dr and around Flagstaff Hill, and back up Frew St. It’s all right outside Baker Hall so come out and watch for a bit!

First Annual Psi-Chi Kickball Picnic

Friday April 25th 4:30 PM

In just a little over three weeks, the CMU chapter of Psi Chi (the national psychology honor society) will be throwing a picnic.

The picnic is going to feature both food and an epic kickball match (kickball is like baseball, but with more kicking).

It will be a throwdown of legendary proportions. Or possibly a kickdown. The PLB is not really certain which is correct in this context, because it has never come up before.

But in any case: look out for pictures of this titanic struggle in the next issue of the PLB, and if you’re in the neighborhood, be sure to come by and cheer on the contestants!
Elections

If you haven’t already, you’ll be seeing me soon as I deliver you a pamphlet calling for nominations for the upcoming SC election. The pamphlet describes what SC is and what we do, and mentions changes taking place in the elections procedure this year. Nominate yourself and/or others, detach the form, campus-mail it, and you’re done! Once nominees are identified, voting will take place by paper ballot (We learned at our March meeting that IT didn’t have enough time to computerize SC voting this year). The elections changes are a bit confusing. If you have any questions that aren’t addressed in the pamphlet, email me or catch me in the hallway and I’ll try to help you out. (No promises that I know the answers, either!)

Campuswide Emergency Planning presentation

CMU is overhauling and re-thinking its campuswide emergency, disaster, and safety preparedness planning and procedures in response to recent college campus violence, terrorism, etc. At our March meeting, we heard a presentation about the thinking behind the revisions and were asked to offer our input, particularly about how best to broadcast word about an impending emergency. I asked questions about 3 topics: Drills, tornadoes, and derailments.

I asked if there were plans to have a campuswide drill or simulated campus evacuation. We were told that drills had been tried in the past but the problem was that some individuals (particularly faculty) refused to vacate their offices and ignored the directives.

Re: Tornadoes...I asked if there were plans to install signs identifying safe areas of buildings (e.g., basements) to evacuate to in case of a tornado warning. I went to school in Michigan, and we had both signs and a drill once a year or so. It’s my perception, having lived in Pgh. for about 10 years, that the threat of tornadoes is not taken seriously enough in this area, perhaps because people assume that tornadoes don’t occur in hilly areas. I also asked about tornadoes don’t occur in hilly areas. I also asked about CMU plans in case of train car derailment, since trains routinely transport quite nasty chemicals.

Amendment to Constitution

The amendment I mentioned in a recent PLB column about procedures to dismiss SC members in case of dereliction of duty had its wording revised by the Constitution Committee. The re-worded amendment was voted on, passed, and will be inserted into the SC Constitution.

Kennywood

Kennywood tickets will still be $5 this year. More on Kennywood as we get closer to the event...

Have I mentioned that there is a Happy Hour today, at the Sharp Edge, 302 S. St. Clair Street?

In case I haven’t mentioned it yet, I am mentioning it now.
Sheldon Cohen: Media Superstar
Submitted by Lori Holt

Sheldon Cohen, fresh off of an appearance in the USA Today (story), is going to appear on the Today Show tomorrow - Wednesday - morning. I don’t know if this means he’s close personal friends with Matt Lauer, but I expect so.

Additionally, he is starring in a series called “Un-natural Causes” on WQED (about the series). Hanging out with Sheldon increases your odds of being on TV, as Theresa Kurutz and Erin Donahoe found - they’re featured in the series!

The PLB is selling Cohen-autographed t-shirts and other souvenirs, starting at the low, low price of 35 dollars!

PLB Publication Schedule

This is the school year’s penultimate issue of the PLB. Which I mention mostly because I enjoy saying ‘penultimate.’ But also so that you know that, if you have any news or announcements you want in the PLB, be sure to submit them to me before Friday, April 30th.

The last PLB of the school year will come out on Monday, May 2nd (mark your calendar now!). Then the PLB will be taking a long summer break, and return tanned, rested and ready.

Hey, even PLB editors need breaks sometimes. All these news items don’t fabricate themselves!