



College of Liberal Arts Newsletter

Fall 2011

Discussing Social Psychology: An Interview with Michael R. Ransom

Dr. Michael R. Ransom received his B.A. in psychology from Elon University and his M.S. and Ph.D. in Experimental Social Psychology from Ohio University. As a social psychologist, his principal scholarly interest is the self in relation to social judgment, or how people's preferences, desires, and self-views influence the evaluations they make about those around them. His first line of work examines various forms of hypocrisy and focuses on how people evaluate others who engage in the same negative behaviors as themselves. The following interview was conducted with Dr. Ransom in his office on December 6, 2011.

SH: Good morning, Michael. The first question I have is, when did you know you were interested in the field of psychology?

MR: I was really a physics major, but the discipline was a little more difficult than I anticipated. By that time, I had taken a couple of psychology classes and enjoyed them. So I thought, what the heck, I'll try psychology, and I loved it. I guess going into my field of social psychology, I wasn't sure of that until later on in my undergraduate career. As far as majoring in psychology, I had decided by my sophomore year. People have the conception that psychology is all Freud, Dr. Phil, and whatnot, but really it's more diverse than that,



Dr. Michael R. Ransom

SH: You mentioned there is clinical psychology and social psychology. How many branches are there?

MR: I can show you a pie chart if you want. A lot of fields are already developed. This is a pie chart I show my intro classes so they can realize psychology has many diverse fields. Clinical is a big section of psychology, but you have counseling, developmental, cognitive, industrial/organizational where you apply psychology to business type settings, school psychology, social psychology, health psychology, experimental, educational, neuroscience, quantitative, all different types of psychology.

SH: How would you describe your field of social psychology?

MR: A lot of it is how groups impact the self and how the self impacts groups, kind of a two way street that way. Social psychology is the scientific study of how people think, feel, and behave in a social context. It's a little more micro than sociology; sociology has a lot more to do with the group

level, whereas social psychology is on a more individual level. It's distinct from sociology, though they are brethren, they are kin.

SH: Recently, I had a student doing research who wanted to quote Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Is the hierarchy a useful model for discussing the individual?

MR: I don't know if I can speak to that since I'm not a developmental psychologist. Certainly the hierarchy wouldn't be around if it didn't help people, if it wasn't useful in that regard. One thing that I tell my intro classes is that the answer in psychology is often: it depends. The way we do our studies, the way we analyze our data, is always based on probabilities, so we can't say with certainty that something is proven. We can say the data supports a hypothesis, but not that it proves a hypothesis. You never say "proves" in psychology. We find support that the evidence is convincing in a regard. Any science, even the physical sciences, that use any type of inferential statistics, you can't say prove, you say you find support, or convincing evidence.

SH: So you can't, say, prove that someone is psychotic.

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WEST VIRGINIA SECRETARY OF STATE NATALIE TENNANT VISITS OSIX

West Virginia Secretary of State Natalie Tennant and members of her staff visited Fairmont State University on Tuesday, December 6, to tour the Open Source Intelligence Exchange (OSIX), which is the laboratory and applied research component of the University's National Security and Intelligence program. FSU is the first university in the state to offer a program of this kind.

"The goal of OSIX is to give students hands-on experience producing intelligence assessments for real customers in the national security and law enforcement communities. OSIX intelligence products have been provided to the CIA, FBI, Department of Defense and Department of State, as well as to state and local law enforcement agencies in West Virginia," said OSIX program director and faculty mentor David Abruzzino.



Program Director David Abruzzino, Dr. Deanna Shields and Secretary of State Natalie Tennant

CRIMINAL JUSTICE STUDENTS ATTEND CONFERENCE

Faculty and students from FSU attended the annual conference of the West Virginia Criminal Justice Educators' Association on November 3 and 4 at Wheeling Jesuit University. Graduate student Michael Kittle presented his paper, entitled "Cyberbullying and Social Media," for which he placed first in the graduate paper competition.

Fairmont's chapter of Alpha Phi Sigma entered two teams in the crime scene competition. A total of ten teams from colleges and universities throughout the state participated. We are proud to announce that our teams placed first and third in the competition. The winning team members were Ashley Bourbeau, Logan Markley and Heather Weldon. The third place team members were Nicole Allison, Josh Brooks, Tyler Hawkins, and Brittany Shumate.



Alpha Phi Sigma Winning Team Members

NEWS FROM THE STUDENT PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Michael White, president of the Student Psychological Association at FSU, reports that approximately twenty-five students are currently active in SPA. Activities last fall included participation in the Hope Vigil to promote awareness of domestic violence and to advocate for policy change. Members also organized a toy and food drive for victims of domestic violence. Future plans for SPA members include hospice training at Ruby Hospital.

White is also a member of the civil rights group Fairness West Virginia, and was an advocate for the recently passed anti-bullying policy, legislated for West Virginia schools, that acknowledges that sexual orientation and gender identity are common reasons for harassment. The policy enumerates twelve reasons a child could be bullied. They include race, color, religion, gender, ancestry, national origin, socioeconomic status, academic status, physical appearance, sexual orientation, and mental, physical or developmental disability. To hear White's own story about being bullied, check out "Michael's Story WV" on Youtube.

**SPOTLIGHT: FULBRIGHT SCHOLAR
LAURA GIL AND
WORLD LANGUAGE IMMERSION DAY**

Laura Gil from Argentina accepted an offer from Fairmont State to begin in fall 2011 as a Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant in Spanish. Gil describes her teaching style as “the eclectic approach combined with the presentation, practice and production model (PPP),” which focuses on receptive and/or productive skills. These approaches help students achieve “real-life” communication skills by sounding more “native-like.”

During World Language Immersion Day at Fairmont State, held on October 11, Laura made a cultural presentation about Argentina. Laura believes that language instruction involves more than teaching learners how to manipulate lexicon and syntax, so she aimed at deepening participants’ knowledge by sensitizing them to the culture being studied. To highlight the linguistic differences between the Spanish that Argentinians speak, as opposed to those that people from other Hispanic countries speak, students worked with pronunciation through activities where they practiced various sounds. Then they created with the language, writing their own tongue twisters and presenting them in groups. Laura was amazed by the willingness of students to participate, and said it was really nice to hear



Fulbright Scholar Laura Gil

student produce sentences like, “Raúl rió ruidosamente en el río.”

Laura says her FLTA experience has been of great benefit so far, and has allowed her to broaden her horizons, to communicate life experience and to adapt to new situations. She has not only learned about North American civilization but has also shared her own customs and values. Above all, she is learning to appreciate the apparent slight but great differences between the U.S. and Argentina, from the food, the system of education, and even the way people live. She is trying to record every detail and would recommend the FLTA program to everyone.

**TWO FAIRMONT STATE STUDENTS
ATTEND ACADEMIC SEMINAR**

Two Fairmont State University students attended an academic seminar hosted by The Washington Center for Internships and Academic Seminars, a non-profit organization that provides students with internships and seminars in and around Washington, D.C. Students in the College of Liberal Arts, Logan Thorne is a political science major and Nicole Allison is majoring in criminal justice. The “Top Secret: Challenges to National Security in a Global Society” seminar held May 15-21 provided students a guided experience of the national security landscape. Both students are members of the Honors Program.

“My experience at the Top Secret seminar has certainly expanded my knowledge of national security and the cooperation between government agencies required to keep our country safe,” said Allison. “It will surely be an advantage during my continuing studies at Fairmont State University, and I am excited for the upcoming semesters during which

I can hopefully use what I learned in our nation’s capital here in West Virginia.”

The Washington Center provides several academic seminars each year relating to politics and government. In addition, the organization aids students in finding internships that reflect their interests at various offices and departments in D.C. The programs are competitive, with an application required. Housing is provided at townhouses owned by the Washington Center.

The Office of the Provost and the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts provided funds to support Thorne’s and Allison’s participation in the seminar. The Honors Program has sent students to seminars hosted by The Washington Center for last five years.

ALUMNI NEWS

Since graduating from Fairmont State University in December of 2008, Drew Schiefelbein has discovered that earning a degree in English can be dynamic in the working world. After completing his bachelor's degree program in English education, he returned to his native Barbour County and was a Reading Interventionist at the middle school level for two years.

After having a successful tenure there, which included his election as faculty senate vice-president, he accepted an offer from Westfield Insurance to serve as a Field Representative in the Property Claims division. The biggest lesson he's learned since leaving Fairmont State is an appreciation for the universal value of strong verbal and written communication skills, skills that he attributes to the English Department of the University.

STUDENT NEWS

English majors Michelle Yost and Shasta Gibson were two of ten finalists in the 2011 West Virginia Fiction Competition. Michelle ultimately won third place in the competition. Michelle is currently serving as editor of *Whetstone*, Fairmont State University's undergraduate literary journal. She formerly held the title of literary editor. Shasta is in the process of revising her first novel, currently titled "White Cottage." She intends for it to be the start of a trilogy of young adult novels.

FACULTY NEWS

Congratulations to Dr. Judy P. Byers, Director of the Frank and Jane Gabor West Virginia Folklife Center, and Noel W. Tenney, Cultural Specialist for receiving a \$4,000 grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission for the 2011 Appalachian Teaching Project. The ARC also designated

Byers and Tenney as ARC Appalachian Teaching Fellows for the 2011-2012 academic year.

Dr. Suzanne Heagy has a story, "Tripping the Princess," forthcoming in *Pleiades: A Journal of New Writing*. In October 2011, she attended the Small and Regional Press Festival held in Frostburg, Maryland, along with *Kestrel* editors Donna J. Long and Elizabeth Savage.

Dr. Sue Kelley has been named Marion County's Labor Person of the Year for 2011-2012. She continues as a member at large of the AFT-Executive Board. Students in her Women's Literature class visited a Marcellus Shale drilling pad and welcomed guest speakers from the gas companies to Fairmont State this fall.

Dr. Adam Podlaskowski has a paper, "Phenomenal Concepts and Full Understanding," forthcoming in *Southwest Philosophy Review*. Podlaskowski also gave four talks during the fall semester, including a presentation titled, "Semantic Diversity and A Pluralist Approach to Meaning," at Wheeling Jesuit University and a presentation on "Dividing Up Semantic Territory: A Problem For Semantic Pluralism," to the Alabama Philosophical Society in Pensacola, Florida.

Dr. Elizabeth Savage's *Jane & Paige or Sister Goose, Twenty-Four Women & Girls* was published in September, 2011, by Furniture Press in Baltimore. Savage's poetry chapbook traces relationships among friends, sisters, mothers, daughters, rivals, sweethearts, role models, mentors and apprentices. Savage and Debbie Benedetti read from their work at an event at the Shaw House hosted by President Maria Rose in December. Savage also gave a reading with Elizabeth Willis in Pittsburgh in November, and at the Small and Regional Press Festival in Frostburg,

Maryland in October.

Dr. Julie Sellers had two articles published in October, "X Marks the Spot: Geocaching and Waymarking in the Language Classroom and Beyond" in *The Language Educator* and "Selecting and Working with Language Interpreters" in *The Wyoming Lawyer*. The latter is available online at <http://digital.ipcprintservices.com/publication/?i=84421>.

Betsy Shaw spoke at the WVU College of Law in October on "Alternatives to Practicing Law." The panel presentation discussed with students other options to being part of a firm or opening up shop for themselves. She also took a part-time position as a prosecuting attorney in Marion County focusing on domestic violence. Her position is funded by a grant administered through Hope, Inc.

IN MEMORY:

ALEENA LIPSCOMB

Aleena Lipscomb, a senior English major at Fairmont State, passed away after an extended illness in October, 2011. Dr. Suzanne Heagy notes, "Aleena was a joy in class, always present and engaged in discussing literature and the human experience."

Aleena was a 2002 graduate of Elkins High School where she was a member of the National Honor Society and the Vo-Tech Honor Society. She was a graduate of the Clarksburg School of Massage Therapy and held state and national licenses for massage therapy. Aleena was an avid reader, loved to fish and never met an animal that she didn't want to take home. She will be awarded a posthumous degree in May, 2012.

**WV HUMANITIES COUNCIL
AWARDS GRANT TO KESTREL**

The West Virginia Humanities Council, a state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities, has awarded a \$5,000 grant to *Kestrel*, Fairmont State University's literary and art journal, toward a project entitled "*Kestrel* Journal & Celebrations: Cultivating Creative and Critical Community."

This West Virginia Humanities Council major grant will support *Kestrel* in a year-long promotion designed to help the Journal grow in size and scope as a venue for writers, artists, and scholars. Currently, *Kestrel* is the only journal of its kind supported by an institution of higher learning in West Virginia. The grant will further *Kestrel's* mission to explore the human condition and to share a vision of the human experience with readers in West Virginia,

Appalachia, the United States, and abroad, and to bring together contributors and audiences for celebrations that foster appreciation for and inquiry into the humanities. A recent contributor, Sally Rosen Kindred, wrote, "The work [in the issue] is first-rate. The art and layout of the journal are elegant, and the editing is great—the organic flow from one piece to another really allowed the pieces to 'talk amongst themselves'."



Kestrel's next celebration is scheduled for March 30-31, 2012, and will include a reading at the Frank and Jane Gabor West Virginia Folklife Center.

(Ransom, continued from page 1)

MR: You would be more likely looking at criteria that someone has a type of disorder. And really it's the judgment of the psychologist to make that call based upon the criteria, and the past history of the person as well. And again, that's more clinical psychology and not my area of expertise, but the DSM4 is a manual that psychologists use in order to diagnose and treat various disorders.

SH: You said that social psychology has to do with the individual and groups, so, for example, what would be a case study in the field?

MR: We talk about group norms and group standards. Actually some of my graduate work was based on differential standards and hypocrisy, how we have different standards of judgment when we judge ourselves and when we judge others. Social psychology has been in the popular press a lot lately and gotten a lot of exposure in that regard.

SH: Just yesterday I read a news article about people who steal things from hotels, and the reasons people give for

doing it. One, they paid a lot of money for the room and are justified in, say, taking a towel. But other people say no, that's still theft and morally wrong, so people are making these judgments about taking things from a hotel room.

MR: I have an article about hotels and people that I'm giving my students next spring that's about Cialdini type norms, or descriptive norms that inform by way of example. It's about encouraging hotel patrons to reuse their towels because it's environmentally friendly.

SH: It seems like hotels would have an easier time convincing patrons to reuse towels since we're in an era where it's cool to be green. Of course, there are probably people who say no, I paid good money for this room and I want a fresh towel.

MR: That's related to the theory of reactance we use in social psychology; people want to defy in an experimental setting because they don't want to be controlled by the experimenter.

SH: So being in an experiment influences the person's personality?

MR: It can be artificial. That's one of the drawbacks we talk about with research methods, the limitations of laboratory study, the artificiality of it. It's hard to apply that sometimes to a real world setting for external validity.

SH: There was a study about why the average German citizen participated in Nazi war crimes.

MR: The Milgram study? Yes, that's one of the classic studies we talk about in social psychology. It's been replicated in many countries, different populations, different age groups; it's one of the more robust type studies. We talk about research ethics as well.

SH: In the Milgram study, what's the average number of people who resist the authority or being obedient based on their own integrity?

MR: About twenty-five percent of people resist or didn't go very far in causing pain to others, while roughly sixty-five percent tend to comply with authority. It's been replicated and the results have been shown consistent across different cultures, different age groups, and all that.

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SH: A lot of students that I meet are psychology majors. What advice do you give students who come to you and ask, should I be a psychology major?

MR: One question that I ask them would be what area do you want to look into, what gave you the motivation to be a psychology major. Well, if they say an episode on TV or a class in high school, I guide them or suggest to them what classes might be of interest to them.

SH: What kind of classes are you teaching right now?

MR: This semester I'm teaching two intros, a stats class, and an experimental psychology course.

SH: Do you actually experiment on your students?

MR: I do not experiment on them; we do class exercises though. Students actually go out and collect data, we come back and aggregate it and analyze it. We did two projects this semester, one on arousal and attraction. There's a classic study in social psychology on the misattribution of arousal. Some people, after watching a scary movie or working out, see people as more attractive due to increasing their heart rate, increasing their pulse, their palms are sweaty, and they see those physiological responses as being attracted to somebody else. There's a misattribution of their physiological symptoms; they misinterpret them into thinking they're actually attracted to people.

SH: What was the other project?

MR: The other was how likely people are to help somebody. We found that a main effect of care level is linked to how much care that person has been

shown in the past, compared to a low care level in the past.

SH: Interesting. I often see in the news how people will observe a mugging or an assault and no one attempts to help the victim. If one person helps, is it more likely a second person will?

MR: There's a classic study based upon the Kitty Genovese case, which was done by John Darley and his research partner, Bibb Latane, of Princeton University. She was a girl who was killed in New York in the early 1960s. In that case, Kitty screamed for help and all her neighbors heard her, and nobody called the police. Her attacker left and came back to finish the job. And still nobody intervened. They actually named it the "bystander effect." If people are in a large group, they're less likely to help somebody compared to if the person is alone. It's counterintuitive thinking in psychology. You think if you're in a large group, the person would be more likely to be helped than if it's a one-on-one situation. The research has shown that you're actually more likely to help someone if it's a one-on-one setting or a small group setting rather than a large group.

SH: Is there an antithetical theory? Like a hero theory?

MR: I'm not so sure about that. I do know that people are more likely to assist if you single them out, if you say directly, "Will you help me?" instead of just appealing to the masses. Also if one person helps, others are more likely to follow suit. There are other situational factors. If someone sees someone on the ground and there's a wheelchair by them, they'll be more likely to help than if they see someone on the ground with an empty beer bottle or liquor bottle near them. One of the things that social psychology does is consider the situational factors that influence people. The power of

the situation is a big question in social psychology, how that impacts people's judgments, behaviors, and their decision making.

SH: Do you have a dream class that you think about developing here at Fairmont State?

MR: I'm excited to say that we're adding a new stat class, but another one I'd really like to do, someday, is the psychology of humor. Why people find things funny and that sort of thing.

SH: There's the idea that technology is making us less funny. If we only interact on the screen, then we lose the ability to time things, deliver the punch line at the right moment, and actually connect with people face-to-face. So the internet is changing humor, though eight-year-old boy humor will never go away. Farts will always be funny to someone. There's also the British sense of humor that relies on word play, punning.

MR: There are cultural differences in humor. Different types of humor, sarcasm, irony, that type of thing.

SH: Sounds like a great class. I'd like to audit it, just for laughs. Is there anything you'd like us to know about you before we end the interview?

MR: Dovetailing on the humor thing, I actually wrote a Simpsons' script during grad school. For a stress reliever.

SH: I'm sure the students will love to know that. Thank you very much for your time today.

Thanks to everyone who contributed content to the newsletter. COLA faculty, staff and students are invited to forward news of events/accomplishments or ideas for feature articles to hheagy@fairmontstate.edu. Some contributions were edited due to space. Any errors are mine. HSH