Cultural & Genetic Influences in Brazil

Since the mid-1980s, Dr. William Dressler and colleagues have been examining the influence of culture on individual well-being through pioneering the cultural consonance approach. Cultural consonance measures how successful people are in achieving the broad goals that are collectively valued in their society, especially goals across the life-span (for example, creating a satisfying family life). Dr. Dressler recently completed research funded by the National Science Foundation aimed to replicate and extend research on gene-environment interactions and subjective well-being among persons of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds in an urban center in Brazil.

Research in the past decade has shown that individuals with different genetic profiles are variably influenced by stressful environmental events and circumstances in terms of their sense of subjective well-being, including feelings of depression. While intriguing results have been observed, the range of environmental events and circumstances that have been investigated has been relatively narrow. A major goal of Dr. Dressler’s recent research was to understand how different kinds of environmental experience may—or may not—be modified by genes.

The project focused on two genetic polymorphisms thought to influence well-being. One, brain-derived neurotrophic factor, affects the health and development of nerve cells. The other, a receptor for the neurotransmitter serotonin, is related to the transmission of nerve impulses in the brain. In addition to cultural consonance, three indicators of experience in the social environment were studied. Childhood adversity refers to stressful events in childhood, such as the death or serious illness of a parent or a history of maltreatment. Stressful life events refer to current events such as divorce, death of a spouse or child, and unemployment. Frustration tolerance is a psychological disposition in which small and large setbacks can be accepted.

Data were collected in a survey of over 400 adults from diverse socioeconomic groups. Genotypes were determined from samples of cells from the cheek. Other data were collected in face-to-face interviews. Subjective well-being was measured as the number of symptoms of depression, isolation, and hopelessness respondents had experienced in the two weeks prior to the interview.

Major results were as follows: Childhood adversity was moderated by genotype, especially by the serotonin receptor gene. Persons with a specific variant for the gene were at much higher risk of reporting high levels of depressive symptoms if they had experienced childhood adversity (Fig. 1). The moderation of genotype-by-childhood adversity in relation to depressive symptoms was especially strong among persons from a low socioeconomic background (Fig. 2). Persons with this serotonin receptor variant and who experienced childhood adversity also had lower frustration tolerance. Cultural consonance proved to be the strongest influence on subjective well-being—risk of high levels of depressive symptoms was strongest for people with low cultural consonance (Fig. 3).
The results of this research present a more nuanced view of the influence of genes, the environment, and the interaction of genes and environment on subjective well-being. Persons who experience high adversity in childhood are more likely to experience lower well-being as adults, especially if they have a particular genetic background. On the other hand, if those individuals are able to achieve the kinds of goals in life that are widely valued in their society, they are less likely to experience depression, isolation, and hopelessness as adults. Additionally, their genetic background does not alter the experience of cultural consonance.

Subjective well-being has been shown to have a powerful influence on physical health and social and economic productivity over the life-span. This well-being matters to individuals and to society. The influences on well-being are complex, ranging from the molecular biology of individual genetic differences to the collective goals and values called culture that help to hold a society together. Understanding and enhancing well-being for individuals and society depends on the analysis of these diverse influences, and this research contributes to that end.

Students & Meek Receive Honors

Dr. DeCaro presents Krause Award to Paul Eubanks.

We are pleased to report the continued success of our students and faculty in their efforts to pursue research funding and be recognized for their achievements. At the annual Department Holiday party on December 18, doctoral students Rachel Briggs and Paul Eubanks were presented with the Panamerican and Richard A. Krause Awards, respectively. Professor Emeritus Richard Krause is an archaeologist and cultural anthropologist who served the Department of Anthropology at UA for 31 years during a crucial period of development. Because of his commitment to graduate student training, the Krause Award was established to recognize students who display academic excellence at the graduate level based on the promise of the student’s proposed thesis or dissertation. The Panamerican Award for Scholarly Excellence in Archaeology is awarded to the graduate winner of a scholarly paper competition.

Paul Eubanks was also a finalist in the “Three-Minute Thesis” that was sponsored by the UA Graduate School in November.

Achsa Dorsey (MA 2014) received the College of Arts and Sciences Outstanding Research by a Masters Student award for her biocultural work in Tanzania on maternal and child health. Achsah recently began PhD studies at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

An outstanding group of Graduate School Research and Travel Award applications were received in the fall. The Anthropology Department can only nominate a limited number because of a requirement to provide matching funds. Nine applications were received, and five were nominated. The graduate school awarded funding as follows:

- **Erik Porth**, $300 from the Graduate School, $100 from the Department
- **Lynn Funkhouser**, $300 from the Graduate School, $100 from the Department
- **Jessica Kowalski**, $300 from the Graduate School, $100 from the Department
- **Greg Batchelder**, $100 from the Graduate School, $100 from the Department
- **Ashley Stewart**, $100 from the Graduate School, $100 from the Department

Greg Batchelder was also the recipient of a $200 Research and Travel Grant from the UA College of Arts and Sciences toward traveling to Washington, DC to present his poster “Batchunder’s Travels: Balanced and Proportioned Engagement in World of Warcraft and Effects on Stress” at the American Anthropological Association annual meeting.

Lastly, Dr. David Meek was awarded a $700 SECU Faculty travel grant from the Office of Academic Affairs to travel to the University of Mississippi and collaborate with scholars at the Southern Foodways Alliance.

Read-Wahidi & Davis Receive PhDs

Bill Dressler, Becky Read-Wahidi, Jason DeCaro, Michael Murphy, Kathy Oths (l-r), and Mariana Gabarro (via Skype).

Rebecca Read-Wahidi and Jera R. Davis received the PhD in Anthropology in December. Read-Wahidi defended her dissertation, “A Model Guadalupan: Devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe and Psychosocial Stress Among Mexican Immigrants to the South.” Her dissertation committee included Jason DeCaro (chair), Bill Dressler, Michael Murphy, Kathy Oths, and Mariana Gabarro.
Davis defended her dissertation on October 17. The title of her dissertation is "On Common Ground: Social Memory and the Plaza at Early Moundville." Her dissertation committee members were John Blitz (chair), Jim Knight, Lisa LeCount, Kathy Oths, and Kent Reilly. An article on her dissertation research appeared in *American Antiquity*.

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**Anthro Club Hosts Guest Lectures**

The Department’s Friday Anthropology Brown Bag Lunch talks (FABBLs) commenced September 12 with PhD candidate Erik Porth’s presentation, “Some Preliminary Results from the 2012 Fall Field School Mound P Excavations.” Erik presented an overview of excavations at Mound P from the Moundville III phase, 1400-1520 AD. Some of Erik’s preliminary results include identification of several different ceramics found at the west flank trench and an analysis of the bucket auger assemblages.

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Thanks to the Anthropology club and Dr. Oths, we were able to welcome Dr. Eileen Anderson-Fye on September 18 to discuss some of her research with the faculty and students. Dr. Anderson-Fye gave an informal talk titled “Education, Well-being and Rapid Socio-cultural Change: A Longitudinal Mixed-Methods Investigation of Girls’ Secondary Education in Belize” to students in the department, which gave them the opportunity to discuss issues around ethnographic research. Later in the day, Dr. Anderson-Fye gave a talk titled, “How Fat is Too Fat?: Obesity Stigma, Upward Mobility, and Symbolic Body Capital in Four Countries.” She discussed how, through cross-cultural research in Jamaica, Belize, Nepal, and Korea, she has found that obesity stigma can alter a person’s view on body image and cause harm.

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Our Fall FABBL series continued September 26 with PhD student Greg Batchelder’s presentation “Estibrawpa: Ecotourism in the Bribri Village of Yorkin. Celebrating Tradition and Improving Health.” Greg’s presentation focused on his summer 2014 research in Costa Rica, where he learned about Estibrawpa, an ecotourism program created by the women of Yorkin, a village of about 200-250 people. Greg traveled to Yorkin by canoe and stayed for a week in the home of the Morales family. Greg was able to observe many of the benefits from the creation of Estibrawpa, including the resurgence in the community of an interest in traditions from the younger generations. He plans to return and to continue to collaborate with the community in Yorkin and study their ecotourism project.

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On November 7, PhD candidate Paul Eubanks presented “Saline on the Bayou: An Exploration of Caddo Salt Making at Drake’s Salt Works.” Paul has found that salt production in Northwestern Louisiana during the protohistoric and early historic periods developed largely in response to increased salt demand following European contact. Several salt licks were available to the Caddo natives of the area, but the proximity to Europeans, as well as availability of liquid brine, resistance to flooding, and fuel availability influenced the preference for production at Drake’s Salt Works.

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On November 21, Dr. David Dye from the Department of Earth Science at the University of Memphis visited and
Missy Sartain joined the department on March 22, 2010 as an Office Associate II (we prefer Demi-Goddess) and is the beautiful face at the front desk in the Anthropology Department Office. Before joining us, Missy spent 6 years as a legal secretary, the last 2 years in domestic law. As the proud mother of three boys, she found all the domestic law conflicts around children unpleasant. She finds life in the Anthropology Department much calmer. Since we all regularly stop to chat with Missy, you might think you know a lot about her, but we recently asked her to share 10 things you may not know:

1. “I was born in Anchorage, Alaska.
2. I’ve lived in Germany.
3. I’m about to celebrate my 50th birthday.
4. I want to visit San Diego before I die.
5. I am a huge NASCAR (Go, Dale, Jr.!) and Alabama softball and football fan (well, you probably know that).
6. I like to fish and sit out in the sun.
7. I once won a Valentine’s Day poetry contest on the radio, which won me a prime rib dinner for me and my fella.
8. At one point, I wanted to be a teacher when I grew up.
9. I like to grill out and eat BBQ and Mexican.
10. I am excited to be going to see Def Leppard’s reunion show (I was a headbanger in the 80s).”

New Department Members

This past fall, we welcomed three new faculty members. Drs. Lesley Jo Weaver and Cameron Lacquement joined our faculty as Assistant Professors. In addition, Dr. David Meek, spouse of Dr. Weaver, joined as an Adjunct Faculty member in our department and taught a course for us in the fall 2014.

Jo Weaver received her PhD and MPH from Emory University. She does research around the topics of chronic diseases, mental health, and nutrition in Brazil and India. Her doctoral work focused on social and family roles among women with type 2 diabetes in urban North India. She found that although women’s family roles in this cultural context can be extremely demanding and may detract from women’s ability to take care of their diabetes, these roles provide a source of social cohesion that appears to protect them from the mental ill health that often accompanies diabetes. Dr. Weaver is currently developing a new project on food insecurity and mental health in rural Brazil. As a response to public health and development initiatives that tend to examine only the nutritional aspects of food insecurity, this project is designed to test the relative contribution of both nutritional and social pathways in the established link between food insecurity and mental ill health. This is one arm of a larger global comparative study she is conducting with colleagues who work in Ethiopia, Haiti, and Malawi. Pilot work she conducted in 2013 suggested that in this community, social aspects of food insecurity, such as eating foods that carry the stigma of being “poor people’s foods,” may be just as damaging to mental health as the nutritional insufficiency that is sometimes also associated with food insecurity.

Cameron Lacquement received his undergraduate degree from Western Carolina University in anthropology focusing on forensics and criminal justice in 2002. He received his masters from UA under the supervision of Dr. Jim Knight in 2004 by examining domestic architecture in the Black Warrior and Tombigbee river valleys. The project required examining the archaeological evidence in the area but also had an experimental component, which involved the building and burning of a full-sized early Mississippian flexed pole house. During this time, he started branching out to other disciplines to support his research including wood science technology and structural engineering. His master’s research is included in an edited book by him entitled Architectural Variability in the Southeast and in an article in the Journal Of Primitive Technology. In 2009, Dr. Lacquement received his...
David Meek (PhD University of Georgia, 2014) is an environmental anthropologist, critical geographer, and education scholar with an area specialization in Brazil. Dr. Meek theoretically grounds his research in a synthesis of political ecology, critical pedagogy, and place-based education. His interests include sustainable agriculture, social movements, and environmental education. Dr. Meek’s has conducted his work using a combination of traditional anthropological and cartographic methods, such as GIS, remote sensing, and historic aerial photography. He has carried out research on sustainable agriculture education within Brazil’s Landless Workers’ Movement. This research explored how people learn about sustainable agriculture through political participation and the potential impact this learning has on agricultural practices and landscape changes. Dr. Meek’s past research focused on the relationships between public policies, economic incentives, and educational processes within an agrarian reform settlement in the Brazilian Amazon. Dr. Meek is currently collaborating on a research project with UA’s Dr. Caroline Boxmeyer looking at the relationship between K-5 students’ participation in the Druid City Garden project and academic performance, environmental knowledge, and nutritional choices.

In addition to faculty, eight new graduate students joined the Department in the fall, and three of our previous MA students were accepted to continue working with us as doctoral students. Clay Nelson is an archaeologist who received his BA and MA from UA and is continuing at the doctoral level focusing on Southeastern U.S. archaeology and Mississippian societies. Ashley Stewart received her BA from Auburn in 2010 and a master’s degree from our department in May 2014 and is continuing her focus in bioarchaeology here at the doctoral level. Mirjam Holleman joins us as a doctoral student in the Biocultural Medical program. She completed her BA and MA in the Netherlands and is focusing on disabilities research in Poland.

Several new master’s students also joined us. Shannon Edsall (BA, Auburn) and Allyson Harrison (BA, University of Michigan-Dearborn) is studying bioarchaeology, while Katie Lazzara (BS/BA, University of Iowa), Cassie Medeiros (BA, William & Mary), and Gracie Riehm (BA, University of Georgia) are archaeology students. Katie is here to study Andean archaeology, Cassie joined us to study the archaeology of alcohol, and Gracie is interested in Southeastern archaeology and the Late Mississippian and Contact periods. Nikki Henderson (BS, Emory) and Edward Quinn (BA, University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse) are biocultural medical students. Nikki is studying mental health and addiction, while Edward is focusing on social rank and chronic stress.

Alumni News & Faculty IN the News

Ross Owens, who received his MA from the UA Department of Anthropology in 2014, landed a job in the fall as a Survey Specialist II at RTI International in Raleigh, NC. RTI International is a global research institute dedicated to improving the human condition. Ross now works in the data collection division on various social and public health research projects.

Peruvian bonesetter Don Felipe Llaro with Dr. Kathy Oths

On October 10, the University of West Alabama at Livingston hosted an “Afternoon of Anthropology” with Dr. Kathy Oths, who gave two talks on her work for our department. She gave a talk about her study of Tuscaloosa farmers markets entitled “Farmers Markets and Foodies: Conflict, Change, and Resolution” and another regarding her project in Peru called “Medical Tradition in the Peruvian Highlands: What Time and Climate Change Have Wrought.”

Just in time for the holidays, Dr. Chris Lynn published initial results of his study of fireside relaxation in the open access journal Evolutionary Psychology, which has received attention from Huffington Post, Discover Magazine, Men’s Health, Fox 4/WBRC in Birmingham, Mail Online, Paleo (in Spanish), and UA A&S Desktop News. In the experimental study, Lynn found that even watching a fire simulation (e.g., a Yule log DVD) for as little as 15 minutes can reduce blood pressure when it simulates some of the naturalistic conditions of a real fire, such as the crackling sounds. He speculates that this capacity may have played an important role in human cognitive evolution, given the long history humans have with controlled fire.
Several students have been involved in Dr. Lynn’s fireside relaxation study over the past few years, and last year undergraduate Meghan Steel gave a presentation about it at the American Anthropological Association annual meeting that was blogged about by Sydney Yeager for the Anthropology of Consciousness. Meghan introduced a prosociality measure to the third iteration of the project, and Lynn found that participants who scored higher on the prosociality scale achieved greater relaxation benefits.

The Fall 2014 issue of the College of Arts and Sciences Collegian (Vol. 23, No. 1) features three articles on research in our department. Dr. Marysia Galbraith was recognized for the receipt of a third Fulbright Grant to extend her study of Polish identity. Along with collaborators in the Department of Psychology, Dr. Jason DeCaro was recognized as a recipient of a $2.2 million grant to assess the efficacy of local Head Start programs. The Collegian also detailed doctoral candidate Paul Eubanks’ NSF-supported study of Caddo Indian salt production in what is today Northwest Louisiana.

Eubanks was also a finalist for the “Three-Minute Thesis” competition hosted by the UA Graduate School, as highlighted in the UA News.

From Mound Ritual to Iconography

In the spring of 2014, UA Anthropology professor Jim Knight retired after 25 years of service. To celebrate his career, achievements, and contributions to Southeastern and Caribbean archaeology, some of Jim’s students honored his legacy by participating in a session at the 71st annual Southeastern Archaeology Conference, held November 12-15 in Greenville, SC.

In the spirit of his career, former students presented on an array of topics covering the Woodland through historic periods. They focused on Native foodways, Mississippian iconography, mid-Atlantic social complexity, and even Caribbean chiefdoms. In addition, many participants shared some of the various "Jim Knight Rules of Archaeology and Writing" they acquired under his tenure (such as, "Never use the world 'unique' because nothing ever is" or "If it is obvious, you should not have to state it"). Symposium participants included Amanda Regnier (PhD 2006), Cameron Lacquement (PhD 2009), Scott Hammerstedt (MA 2000), Karen Smith (MA 1999), Matthew Gage (MA 2000), Rachel Briggs (PhD, anticipated 2016), Erin Phillips (PhD 2012), Julie Markin (BA 1994), Brooke Persons (PhD 2013), Jon Marcoux (MA 2000), and Robin Beck, Jr. (MA 1998). John O’Hear served as discussant, treating a packed room to numerous anecdotes from their long (and entertaining) history together.

Other Fall 2014 Conferences & Presentations:


Galbraith, Marysia H. Being and Becoming European in Poland: European Integration and Self-Identity. Presented at the conference Political Culture: European Norms and Polish Reality. Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan, Poland, December 17.


Knight, Vernon James. The Archaeology of Moundville’s Sociogram. Invited lecture for the Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, September 29.


Weaver, Lesley Jo. “My mind is a little different”: Suffering and Resilience among Women with Type 2 Diabetes in North India. Presented at the 113th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Washington, DC, December 3-7.

**Opportunities for Giving**

We humbly welcome tax-free donations to the following:

**The Allen R. Maxwell Endowed Anthropology Scholarship** is awarded to support graduate student research in the areas of ethnography or linguistic anthropology. Established through a bequest from Dr. Maxwell’s estate, it is our first award specifically dedicated to ethnographic or linguistic field research.

**The Anthropology Field School Gift Fund** goes to support our undergraduate field schools in archaeology. Our field schools receive no budget from the University and depend heavily on these gifts for supplies and operating expenses. Our annual field schools for undergraduates date back to 1956, and, traditionally, they are among the most memorable experiences of our alumni.

**The Anthropology Lectureship Fund** goes to support distinguished guest speakers from outside the University. We try to have at least four guest speakers per year. These speakers greatly enrich our undergraduate and graduate programs by exposing our students to prominent ideas by the leading lights in our discipline.

**The David and Elizabeth DeJarnette Endowed Scholarship in Anthropology** is awarded to support graduate student research on Moundville or Mesoamerica-related topics. Each spring, the award is made during the popular DeJarnette BBQ, held at Moundville Archaeological Park on the Saturday of...
Honors Week. Since it was founded in 1993 by Sarah and James Caldwell, the endowment has steadily grown. In recent years, our DeJarnette Scholars have received awards of as much as $6,000.

The Hughes Prize recognizes students who have captured the imagination of the faculty by potential, intransigence, inventiveness, perseverance, insight, or a combination of those traits.

The Richard A. Krause Award is given for academic excellence at the graduate level in anthropology. The recipient of this annual award is chosen by the Graduate Studies Committee of the Department based on classroom performance and the promise of the student’s proposed thesis or dissertation research project.

The C. Earle Smith Award is given for academic excellence at the undergraduate level in anthropology. The annual award goes to the graduate senior in anthropology having the highest overall grade point average. Names of former “Smitty” Award winners are prominently displayed on a plaque in the Department.

The Panamerican Consultants, Inc. Award (formerly The Bob Work Award) is a graduate student paper competition with a monetary prize. Archaeology graduate students submit papers for review by a faculty, and the winner receives recognition at our annual Holiday party.

The Anthropology Club Fund supports the activities of the Anthropology Club, which includes camping trips, workshops, and guest speakers each semester. The opportunity to participate in Club activities is critical in fostering the ethic of collegiality and professionalism so important to our Department.

Checks directed to any of these initiatives should be made out to the UA College of Arts and Sciences and mailed to the Department at the address below. If you would like to discuss a contribution, please contact Department Chair Ian Brown (ibrown@ua.edu) or College of Arts & Sciences Director of Development Kathy Yarbrough (kathy.yarbrough@ua.edu).

Sad Note

Former colleague and lifelong friend of the Department Noel Read Stowe, Sr. passed on March 1, 2015. Read was often described as a larger than life character who never met a stranger. He received his BA in Anthropology from Nathaniel Hawthorne College in 1967 and MA degree with an emphasis in Archaeology from the University of Alabama in 1970. He taught anthropology and conducted archaeological research at the University of South Alabama for many years. Read’s wife, Becky Lumpkin, has asked for people to donate to the David and Elizabeth DeJarnette Scholarship, The Archaeological Conservancy, or favorite local animal rescue in Read’s honor.

Frozen Moments from the Fall

Fall Potlatch: Amelia Dodd, Dick Diehl, Lisa LeCount, Elizabeth Pratt, Paul Eubanks, and Erin Phillips. Jo Weaver and David Meek and family joined us for their first event.

Homecoming: Ashley Stewart, Angelica Callery, and Lynn Funkhouser working the Anthropology table.

The whole wonderful family at our annual Holiday party!

Stay in Touch!

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