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What does your research focus on?

The goal of my research program is to understand the biological underpinnings of affect and emotion, with a particular focus on the mechanisms that generate individual differences. My core interest is to understand why there is such marked variety in people's affective experiences — why some people love the taste of coffee and others hate it; why some people laugh at a joke while others scowl; why the same event can result in one person developing affect-related psychopathology yet leave another person relatively unscathed. My experimental approach is both multi-method and interdisciplinary. I use methods that include behavioral observations, social-cognitive reaction time tasks, neuroimaging, and psychophysiology in humans and nonhuman primates. My goal is to capitalize on the unique strengths of each model system to facilitate an understanding of how and why organisms differ in their affective responses. In humans, I model extant individual differences and study self-reports of affective experience. In nonhuman primates, I actually create individual differences by manipulating the brain or an animal's social experiences.

What drew you to this line of research and why is it exciting to you?

My initial interest in affective science was cultivated through early research experiences as an undergraduate in the context of a broad liberal arts education. At the time, I was completing coursework

in biology, psychology, and philosophy. I was intrigued by the core questions in affective science: they represented overlap between these three fields and were being examined experimentally in the laboratory. Those experiences led me to pursue graduate training in affective science and social psychology, during which time I developed an interest in neurobiology. I pursued postdoctoral training in behavioral neuroscience because I was drawn by the potential power of animal models for answering the core questions that drive my research program.

Who were/are your mentors or scientific influences?

Lisa Feldman Barrett has been my mentor for the duration of my academic training. She taught me how to think scientifically and cultivated in me a deep appreciation for psychological science and a regard for the scientific method. Her intellect, creativity, and tenacity are inspiring. Jim Russell has been instrumental in shaping my thinking about emotion and the scientific process more generally. Jim instilled in me a passion for precise and thoughtful experimentation. My research program would be untenable without mentorship that I have received from David Amaral. He took a risk accepting a social psychologist for training in nonhuman primate neuroscience, and I am very grateful that he did. Most recently, I have benefited from the mentorship of Brenda McCowan, a behavioral biologist. Brenda has been invaluable in shaping my thinking about the evolution of social communication and the structure of social networks.

What's your future research agenda?

For the last few years, much of my research has focused on translating metrics of affective processing from the human literature for use with rhesus macaques so that the same phenomena can be examined in both species. I am now using such metrics to study the role of the amygdala and anterior cingulate cortex in affective processing. I plan to pursue an understanding of the function of specific brain regions, hopefully using new technology being developed by my colleagues that will allow us to temporarily turn on and turn off specific brain areas at will. In addition, I am developing a line of research involving experimental tests of whether social context shapes neuroanatomy or whether neuroanatomy influences who develops different types and numbers of social relationships. I also plan to re-cultivate my human research program aimed at studying how social context shapes affective experience.

What publication are you most proud of?

Bliss-Moreau, E., Bauman, M. D., & Amaral, D. G. (2011). Neonatal amygdala lesions result in globally blunted adult affect in adult rhesus macaques. *Behavioral Neuroscience*, 125, 848–858.

This is my first publication in nonhuman primate neuroscience that utilizes a metric translated from human studies of affect. It represents the first melding of my social psychological and my behavioral neuroscience training.