Living with Face Blindness

Tuesday, December 13, 2016
5 p.m.
Caspary Auditorium
The goals of this town hall are:

- to share information and raise awareness about the experience and challenges of face blindness
- to update the community on the latest research into the biology of face blindness
- to brainstorm with clinicians, researchers, advocacy groups, and other interested stakeholders about underdiagnosis and support for face blindness
- to promote the creation of a diverse community of people interested in face blindness to inform future research

Program

5:00 p.m.  Registration Opens, Light Snacks and Networking
5:30 p.m.  Welcoming Remarks and Introductions
           Christina Pressl, M.D.
           Instructor of Clinical Investigation
           The Rockefeller University
5:40 p.m.  How Our Brains Recognize/See a Face
           Winrich Freiwald, Ph.D.
           Associate Professor and Head, Laboratory of Neural Systems
           The Rockefeller University
5:55 p.m.  The Neural Basis of Developmental Prosopagnosia
           Brad Duchaine, Ph.D.
           Professor, Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences
           Dartmouth College
6:20 p.m.  Approaches to Improving Face Processing in Prosopagnosia
           Joe DeGutis, Ph.D.
           Assistant Professor, Department of Psychiatry
           Harvard Medical School
6:35 p.m.  You Don't Look Like Anyone I Know: Life with Face Blindness
           Heather Sellers, Ph.D.
           Living with face blindness
           Author, You Don't Look Like Anyone I Know: A True Story of Family, Face Blindness, and Forgiveness
           Professor, Department of English
           University of South Florida
7:15 p.m.  Open Discussion with Panelists
8:15 p.m.  Concluding Remarks, Followed by Networking

Speakers

Christina Pressl
M.D.

Winrich Freiwald
Ph.D.

Winrich Freiwald is associate professor and head of the Laboratory of Neural Systems at The Rockefeller University. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Tübingen in 1998 and did postdoctoral work at MIT and Harvard. Before joining Rockefeller as assistant professor in 2009, he led a research group at the Centers for Advanced Imaging and Cognitive Science at Bremen University. He is the recipient of numerous honors, most recently Columbia University's 2016 W. Alden Spencer Award, which recognizes outstanding research contributions in neuroscience.

Dr. Freiwald studies one of the most basic aspects of social interaction—how the brain processes faces. His work focuses on understanding how a specialized system in the brain responds to the sight of a face and contributes to an individual's ability to interact with others. He also uses face processing as a model to investigate how the brain couples visual perception to memory, attention, emotion, and communication. Work in Dr. Freiwald's lab has uncovered how the face-processing system integrates facial forms and motion, and identified several brain areas in charge of facial movements crucial to emotional expression.

Christina Pressl joined Rockefeller University's Laboratory of Neural Systems as an instructor in clinical investigation in July 2014. After receiving her M.D. from the Medical University of Graz in Austria in 2009, she trained in radiology for three years at the Allgemeines Krankenhaus in Vienna (Vienna General Hospital). As a clinical scholar in Dr. Freiwald's laboratory, she is investigating the mechanisms of face perception. Her current projects reflect part of the laboratory's efforts to uncover the neuronal mechanisms of face perception and their role in cognitive and social behaviors like person knowledge, social production, and attention. Together with collaborators at New York University and Dartmouth College, Dr. Pressl investigates the neural mechanisms of acquired prosopagnosia and related disorders. Utilizing face perception as a model system, she aims to understand the consequences of temporolobectomy in patients suffering from pharmaco-resistant temporal lobe epilepsy (TLE). The researchers' ultimate goals are to develop new methods to enhance the current understanding of malfunctioning neuronal circuits, to predict resulting psychosocial consequences, and to subsequently accelerate the improvement of curative and rehabilitative strategies. Discoveries derived from investigations of system-specific impairments after temporolobectomy are expected to be translated into the field of prosopagnosia as well as into a wider variety of other brain systems, their functioning and malfunctioning, resulting cognitive impairments, and ultimately treatment strategies.
Joe DeGutis is an assistant professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and codirects the Boston Attention and Learning Laboratory with Michael Esterman, Ph.D., at the VA Boston Healthcare System. He earned his Ph.D. in experimental psychology from the University of California, Berkeley, in 2006. His current research interests are in cognitive training and rehabilitation of attention in individuals with acquired brain injury and age-related cognitive decline. He is also very much interested in understanding the causes and consequences of prosopagnosia and exploring rehabilitation possibilities for this disorder. His fascination with prosopagnosia and its potential for rehabilitation began in graduate school while performing dozens of experiments over two years with a developmental prosopagnosic. In particular, he discovered that with training, she improved at some aspects of face processing and that training was also accompanied by a more "normal" neural response to faces. His current project of training developmental prosopagnosics, funded by the National Institutes of Health, builds on this work and seeks to understand who training works best for and what cognitive and neural changes accompany improvements in face processing.

Heather Sellers is a professor in the department of English at the University of South Florida. Her award-winning memoir, You Don’t Look Like Anyone I Know, describes her discovery, at midlife, that she suffers from severe prosopagnosia. Her story has been featured on The Today Show, Dateline, Good Morning America, The New York Times, NPR, The Rachel Ray Show, and in many newspapers and magazines. She is the author of a children’s book, a series of books on the craft of writing, three volumes of poetry, and a short story collection. Her recent essays appear in The Sun, Reader’s Digest, Good Housekeeping, Real Simple, Parade, and The New York Times. She has received a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts for her fiction. Her textbook, The Practice of Creative Writing (Bedford/St. Martins), is just out in its third edition. She is at work on a novel for young readers and a new collection of poetry.