

REFLECTIONS ABOUT THE "OLD" VERSUS "NEW" INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR HUMAN ETHOLOGY

Until a few months ago, The International Society for Human Ethology's Human Ethology Bulletin was a way to keep current on news of the society, purview lists of recent literature, read book reviews, and reflect on opinion pieces. The Bulletin undertook substantial changes, and is now transforming into a peer-reviewed journal, which will ideally become a leader in the field and promote ethological research.

During the last month of a recent sabbatical, I decided to reflect not only upon my own research programs and career goals, but also about the fields I consider myself a member of, namely evolutionary psychology, sexuality and gender studies, and human ethology. In a round about way, this reflection led me to stay up one night and download every old copy of the Bulletin (and Newsletter) that Karl Grammer (with the help of others) has incredibly managed to put online.

Over the following days, while basking in the rare sunshine that hit Halifax, I read many of these old issues. I was immediately struck by similarities that the ISHE of 'now' has with the ISHE of 'then.' I share these observations with the hope that they will provide inspiration, and give us courage that human ethology will survive as a unique field of study. I also hope that this optimism will encourage researchers to contribute their manuscripts to the Bulletin, as a way to sustain and promote our field.

The Bulletin changed dramatically over time – from having open forums for discussing controversial topics, to being a journal that included non-refereed articles. At one point, there were interviews with well-known ethologists. The staple, though, across time was consistently the book reviews and lists of current literature. As the Bulletin now changes into an online peer-reviewed journal, it is not transforming entirely into a new identity, but in many ways, returning to how it used to be. Mind you, whereas the new Bulletin will have a peer-review process, the old Bulletin's (at least starting around 1989, volume 5, issue 12) publication policy was "*No material in the Newsletter is selected by critical peer review and thus material is printed only to foster free and creative exchange of (even outrageous) ideas between researchers. The fact that material appears in the Newsletter never implies the truth of those ideas, ISHE's support of them, nor any support for any policy implications that one might be able to draw from them.*"

The Bulletin is in some ways an accurate reflection of the diverse topics that are covered at the ISHE conferences and summer institutes. Simply scanning the list of keynote and plenary speakers from the Vienna 2012 conference shows the array of topics that interest the membership: embodiment (Rolf Pfeifer, Louise Barrett), female sexuality (Randy Thornhill), socio-cognitive niches (Andrew Whiten), and language

(Tecumseh Fitch). Past Bulletins reflect this diversity as well, particularly in the types of books that have been reviewed.

What was most interesting to me, however, were the issues that arose for the Society. I was particularly intrigued to see the “Message from the Editor” (who at that time was Glenn Weisfeld), in the June 1992 issue (volume 7, issue 2). I summarize some of the points here with my reflections upon them.

The Society at that time had about 340 paid members, and Weisfeld outlines the need to recruit new members in order to prevent the raising of dues. He asks members to advertise ISHE, and notes that students can join for half price. Today, our membership stands at approximately 295 members, and students can join for free. I particularly found one statement optimistic: *“The fact that our membership is stable is not necessarily a sign of declining interest in human ethology. Several other societies have emerged in recent years, suggesting that our approach is gaining adherents.”* Today, we still advertise our Society through word of mouth and encourage students to become members.

We now live in an academic world of increased fragmentation, and with several societies that serve scholars who incorporate an evolutionary perspective. The fact that our membership is made up of approximately 295 people should be viewed positively in light of this reality, especially because now, like then, *“Many ISHE members belong to one or more of these other groups.”*

Another reason to be positive is even more apparent now than in 1992 – behavioral work that incorporates an evolutionary perspective is being published in an increasing number of scientific journals. Weisfeld said, *“... our approach to the study of behavior is steadily progressing. New journals devoted to it have appeared, such as Human Nature. Numerous other journals have begun publishing articles with an evolutionary perspective... Ethology and Sociobiology... has expanded to six issues per year. Books on ethology and related disciplines are appearing so fast that they cannot all be listed in the newsletter, let alone reviewed... Things may still be tough for our discipline, but the ideological snow was even deeper in the past. The first issue of the newsletter, published in 1974, stated that the only journal that regularly accepted articles on human ethology was Social Science Information.”* Today, *Ethology and Sociobiology* is *Evolution and Human Behavior*, *Human Nature* continues to thrive, and new journals have become established, including *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology*, *Evolutionary Psychology*, *Journal of Social, Evolution, and Cultural Psychology*, and *EVOS: The Journal of the Evolutionary Studies Consortium*. There are many additional journals that will now consider evolutionary-based work, and of course, there are a large number of books, published by a number of high quality publication houses.

Some of the potential problems faced by ISHE of old are the same as now. For example, Weisfeld discusses the fact that although joining or renewing membership has become easier, there is a need to increase this ease; this remains an issue today. Students who want to be members often do not send in the required proof of their student status,

members do not renew on time, and so on. The administrative nuisances continue, and will probably continue for the foreseeable future.

Of greater importance, though, is getting the word out about human ethology. Recently, I co-authored an article on how researchers can use the media to educate the public about evolution with ISHE members Daniel Kruger and Justin Garcia (2011). I did not realize that Weisfeld had proposed the same idea, albeit differently, when he said (based on a discussion with a friend who worked with the Associated Press), "*Write a story in journalistic style on your research results as soon as they appear in print. Label it a press release. Aim for the weekend, when copy is scarce. Include quotations of yourself, the author. Keep it simple, catchy, and of general interest. Play up any local angle to the story. Send it to the nearest Associated Press office. Include a copy of the journal article. If the local office likes the story, it will be sent to all subscribing newspapers and electronic media in the state, which then decide whether or not to run it. Even so, it is wise to send the story to the major local newspapers. If it appears in 'print, the wire services may pick it up belatedly. Major universities have media relations offices to do this for us; you might leave it up to them.*" This advice would presumably work just as well now as it did in 1992. Wouldn't it be wonderful to read the morning paper tomorrow and see a short article devoted to human ethological work by a member of ISHE, or a mention of work covered in The Bulletin?

Those who attended President Wulf Schiefenhövel's address to the General Assembly in Madison, Wisconsin hopefully recall his statement that human ethology needs to retain its distinctiveness from evolutionary psychology. I quote here from the official minutes from that meeting: "*His main address concerned the identity of ISHE and pointed out that we are a small group, connected with, but distinct from, Evolutionary Psychology. He stated that whilst ISHE embraces laboratory, survey, or theoretical approaches, our distinct identity lies in the pursuit of direct observation in natural environments and that approach, so essential to good science, must be particularly encouraged.*"

I am certain many of us agree, and I propose that we are at a critical junction – we need to remember our history in order to help guide our future. The face of ISHE is changing and new students are being introduced to our field, partly thanks to the very generosity of the Owen Aldis Award and the Linda Mealey Award, and presumably because of gentle nudges from their supervisors or mentors. These new members in particular might gain some valuable insights from exploring the history of human ethology in order to see where the field has gone, and potentially, where it might go in the future. Reviewing the old copies of the Bulletin are a good place to start but perhaps more is needed. We certainly should support the new format of the Bulletin by submitting manuscripts, as well as engaging in reviewing activities. We should attempt to encourage students at all levels to become involved, potentially working as reviewers with guidance of mentors, or as contributors. We can also think more widely; should we create a repository of articles and books that represent us? Maybe a book series? Perhaps universities that offer human ethology could band together, and become a program, similar to that for the EVOS program in the United States.

I cannot better the words of Weisfeld, so I close with them: *As we continue our sometimes lonely work, let us remember that we are the intellectual heirs of Darwin, Tinbergen, von Frisch and Lorenz. What other branch of behavioral science can boast a Darwin or three Nobel laureates? What other branch has as solid a scientific theory on which to base its efforts? ... We are making an impact. Let's keep up the good work.*"

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REFERENCES

- Fisher, M., Kruger, D. & Garcia, J. (2011). Understanding and enhancing the role of the mass media in evolutionary psychology education. Special issue of Evolution: Education and Outreach, 4(1), 75-82.