 ssrwinrs@gmail.com @WinRS_SSR Women In Reproductive Sciences

Women in Reproductive Sciences Bulletin Vol. 7

Happy New Year WinRS! 2020 is already off to a wonderful start for women in reproductive sciences, with many accomplishments and awards to celebrate! We've just recently had both the day for International Women in STEM and International Women's Day – both days for us to reflect on what it means to be a woman in science and the all-encompassing fight for equality in STEM.

Congratulations to the SSR 2020 Awardees



Sue Hammoud, PhD
**SSR Virendra B. Mahesh
New Investigator Award**



Joy Pate, PhD
**SSR Trainee
Mentoring Award**



Jean-Ju L. Chung, PhD
**Janice Bahr Junior
Scientist Travel Award**



Founding member of WinRS, **Dr. Sally Perreault Darney** is retiring from her position as Editor in Chief of Environmental Health Perspectives (EHP), where she has served for the last 4.5 years. Dr. Perreault-Darney was the Treasurer (1997-1999, 2012-2014), President-Elect (2009), President (2010) and Past President (2011) of SSR.

Dr. Sarah Kimmins is part of a research team that has just been granted \$1.6 million grant from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) to expand research into the impact of phthalate exposure on male fertility. Professor Kimmins has also been selected to give the plenary lecture for the combined Endocrine Society of Australia/Society for Reproductive Biology (ESA/SRB) annual meeting in Christchurch, NZ in 2020.



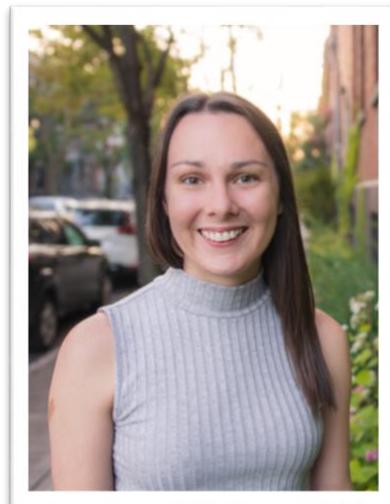
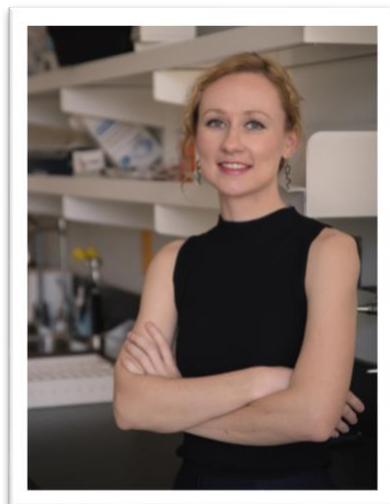
Potentially the first time that most of us experience the gender gap in science is at the trainee level. Women graduate students often don't get the chance for **stem**inist mentorship, and there are stark gaps in the representation of women in academia. Being a post doc can be a precarious time for many of us. It's a transitional stage where we are no longer a 'student' (despite being a 'trainee'), and we don't yet have permanent employment. Post docs in general face a host of issues based on this sort of career stage hybrid; *where will I go next, do I have health insurance at my institution, how much mentorship should I be doing, can I apply for my own grants, where can I go if I want to leave academia, how do I finally get my name at the end of the author list?*

In this bulletin, we wanted to draw attention to some of the amazing post docs in our community, so we reached out to the female trainees within SSR to be part of this bulletin! A common response from WinRS was that they didn't think they were deserving of being highlighted, and many felt uncomfortable promoting themselves. This only reinforces the need to promote and highlight women in reproductive science, and celebrate one another's accomplishments. In doing this, we also want to send the message that each of these women are more than just their research achievements, highlighting not only the work but the life part too. In her piece reflecting on the post-doctoral experience, **Dr. Lisa Vrooman** reminds us how important it is to *"separate your self-worth from your research"*. By getting to know the people behind the science in **"What's Your Story?"**, we hope that mentoring opportunities might expand. We know networking can be intimidating, and **Dr. Kathryn Grive** highlights for us the importance of making connections, and going out on a limb to introduce yourself.



Excited to discuss science and activism with you all soon!

Aimee Katen and Heather Fice
WinRS Co-Chairs 2020



Life as a Millennial Postdoc

By **Lisa A. Vrooman, PhD**

Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Pennsylvania



What is it like to be a postdoc in 2020? If you Google **'Postdoc problems'** you will quickly (4,430,000 results in 0.37 seconds to be exact), come across top articles focused on the negative aspects of being a postdoc. These articles highlight the lack of academic jobs, the poor mental health and general

exploitation of postdocs. Most have catchy titles: 'Why a Postdoc Might not Advance Your Career', 'Five Ways a Postdoc Will Ruin Your Career', 'So Many Research Scientists, so Few Openings as Professors', 'The Human Cost of the Pressures of Postdoctoral Research', 'The Price of Doing a Postdoc', and my personal favorite, 'The Postdoc: A Special Kind of Hell'. Notably, these are not personal blogs written by disgruntled former postdocs. These are articles from Nature Career News, Nature Jobs blog, Science Careers, The Guardian, and the New York Times. While we want to laugh at these articles, any postdoc with aspiration for a career in academia may also cry an invisible tear.

There are realities surrounding postdoc life which have probably been true since the invention of 'the postdoc'. These include: the pressure to publish and obtain fellowship funding, the relatively low pay, lack of typical fringe benefits, loneliness, lack of mental health resources, and personal issues, including if, and when to have kids. We faced many of these same issues as graduate students and most of us had exposure to postdocs during our graduate work. In short, most of us knew what we were getting ourselves into when we decided to do a postdoc. From a mentor's perspective, they too have personally experienced some, if not all of these issues during their training. In the ideal situation,

this helps the mentor guide their postdoctoral trainee with an informed and sympathetic perspective.

There are some problems, however, that may be influenced by current political and economic trends and also by generational differences. Millennials, defined by the Pew Research Center as the cohort turning ages 24 to 39 in 2020, make up the majority of the current postdoctoral workforce. According to The United States National Postdoc Survey results from 2016, ~95% of postdocs are ages 25-39. It is very likely that your current postdoc is a millennial. Here, I present a few additional problems that might, literally, be keeping your millennial postdoc up at night:

#1. There are 'too many' postdocs and not enough academic jobs. In the US, only 12-20% of postdocs will obtain an academic position (Larson et al. 2014). This statistic leads to an ultra-competitive environment and anxiety that after 5+ years of dedicated research training, there will not be an academic job on the other side, simply based on probability.

#2. Pressure to obtain a K99 or other 'Pathway to Independence' type funding. The NIH introduced K99s in 2006. Since then, it has become obvious to postdocs seeking academic positions that a K99 is critical to obtaining a tenure-track job. Although having a K99 is not a guarantee one will be hired, it is akin to a golden ticket to Willy Wonka's chocolate factory-- it ensures your job application is looked at closely, increasing your chances that you will be invited to interview. This is especially true at institutions with a preference to hire someone who has already obtained research funds.

#3. Financial debt and instability. There is a student loan crisis in this country. Having the ability to delay repayment during graduate school, many of us are still paying off that debt as postdocs. Additionally, as diversity in STEM increases, with it come postdocs from different backgrounds and different starting financial

situations. Money problems can create an immense sense of stress. Although as a PI you know how much your postdoc earns, it's best not to make assumptions about their financial situation. Whatever you can do to limit your postdoc's work-related personal spending, the better the work environment. This will boost your postdoc's happiness and productivity.

#4 Distractions from technology. We have entered a new era of technology with the invention of the smartphone. While smartphones can make us more effective and productive with information at our fingertips, it can also be distracting. Forget social media and goofing off, even work-related communications can ultimately be distracting. Among postdocs at Penn, it is commonplace to be messaged by your labmates, undergraduates, or even PI. This constant access to texts, email, and management tools like Slack can create never ending communication tasks to complete throughout the day. Having nonstop access to news or personal messages can create an unfocused and stressed mind. For instance, when my grandmother was hospitalized, I was included on a family group text. In less than one hour, I had received over 60 text messages. While I appreciated being looped in, I found the play-by-play stressful.

#5 Millennials have greater physical and mental health decline than any previous generation. This staggering statement came from a recent 2019 report conducted by Blue Cross Blue Shield (<https://www.bcbs.com/sites/default/files/file-attachments/health-of-america-report/HOA-Moodys-Millennial-10-30.pdf>.) The report states that without interventions, it is predicted that millennials could face a 40% increase in mortality rates compared to Gen-X individuals at the same age. While there are many more articles written about the etiology of this phenomenon, it's something to consider when mentoring current postdocs.

There a number of things that can be done at the institutional, departmental, individual lab, and individual postdoc level to combat issues related to postdoc training. I share what is being done at Penn, not just to bolster Penn, but to provide some ideas for what other institutions/departments can implement. At the university level, there is an office dedicated to career development training for postdocs. Having access to organized workshops and seminars taught by faculty, as well as outside experts, has been extremely helpful.

Additionally, there is a separate postdoc-run association, The Biomedical Postdoctoral Council. The Council also organizes career development activities, but also social events, as well as a yearly research symposium. The University also grants current postdocs access to the University's Career Services office, which offers career advice, proofs CVs/resumes, provides access to job market resources and tools, and conducts mock interviews for both academia and industry.

In the Department of Cell and Developmental Biology, our Chair, Dr. Nancy Speck, has taken a personal interest in providing a sense of community for postdocs. She has set up a secondary mentor program, where postdocs can be formally matched with another faculty within the department. The department also sponsors 'Take a PI to Coffee', where postdocs can pick up a Starbucks gift card to invite another PI other than their advisor, to have coffee with them. The department also allows postdocs to sit in on Chalk Talks of faculty candidates and provides a faculty-led discussion following the Chalk Talk. Lastly, the department holds an overnight retreat every other year where postdocs are given the opportunity to plan the programming and activities alongside administrative staff. As for a PI, remember that you ultimately set the lab culture. Having your postdoc on a formal Individual Development Plan is a good place to start the conversation about expectations of the mentor and the personal goals of the trainee. Encourage your postdoc's independent ideas, but balance it constructive feedback—this is crucial for our growth. For me, personally, having a PI who has shown excitement when I'm excited and has given me ample opportunity to present our research has been extremely rewarding.

Lisa's small but mighty tips. I don't claim to have all the answers and the following advice is just a short list of things I have found helpful during my own postdoc experience.

Science: Build in 'fail safes'.

This is one of the biggest tips I learned from my mentors that really shapes the way I design experiments. Find ways to design your experiments so that no matter what the outcome is, they are interesting and publishable. If you are going after a high risk experiment, have a side project that, while it may be more 'boring', it guarantees you data that you can use in the case that your high risk experiment doesn't work out.

Career Development: Take advantage of free career development opportunities. If your institute doesn't have this support, do some research. Ask your PI if you can attend training events at a regional meeting or at SSR. Don't wait for them to suggest it, make career development opportunities an active part of your postdoctoral training.

Job Market: Read *The Chicago Guide to Landing a Job in Academic Biology* by C. Ray Chandler. In addition to advice from my PI and mentoring group, this tiny book, was incredibly helpful. I bought this book in graduate school and I think it was helpful to have read it this early. A lot of the advice was applicable to applying for a postdoc. You can read it in one sitting, and even though a lot of it seems like common sense, it's a good reminder of all the things to consider when going on any job hunt.

Finances: Ask if your PI or department can pay upfront for conference/work-related expenses. Your PI may be able to pay for some of the big expenses, including flights and registration so that you don't need to wait for reimbursement or incur fees/interest associated with placing it on your personal credit card.

Technology: Go 'airplane' mode. When you need to focus, turn off your cellular data or wifi, put your devices in another room, or turn them off. Dedicating a chunk of undisturbed time can exponentially improve productivity. This has come in particularly useful for me when writing a paper, a fellowship application, or prepping a presentation.

Self-care: Separate your self-worth from your research. I repeat-- Separate your self-worth from your research. I

have seen many postdocs take failure personally, whether it is failure at the bench, rejected manuscripts, or not getting that fellowship after working tirelessly on an application. The reality is these situations are common for an academic researcher and you cannot let them break you. This is a mindset that takes practice.

Emergencies: Talk to a counselor. Counseling and cognitive therapy are not just for people with diagnosed mental health issues. Bad stuff beyond your control can happen during your postdoc: the death of a loved one, a miscarriage, a bad breakup or divorce, a physical illness, needing to be a caretaker, chronic work stress, etc. As much as we would like to rely on our family, partners, and friends, professional help can offer an objective and educated take on what may be going on, give you a framework for coping, and help you find solutions. Ask your health insurance company if there is coverage and often, you can see someone outside of the university's providers. If you or someone you know is struggling with depression or has had thoughts of harming themselves, don't hesitate to call [The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline \(1-800-273-8255\)](https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/suicidal-thoughts-and-actions/index.shtml). It provides 24/7 free, confidential support for people in distress, as well as the best practices for professionals and resources to aid in prevention and crisis situations.

Support: Identify mentors and scientific peers outside of your PI and current lab. These can be people you have stayed in touch with from graduate school, have met at meetings, or people in other labs/departments at your current institution. Not only is it important to establish a network for career development, it is good to have access to objective advice from people who care about you.

Making the Most of Your Postdoctoral Fellowship, and Beyond

By Kathryn Grive, PhD



Just a few short months ago, I started a research faculty position at Women and Infants Hospital of Rhode Island and the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University,

returning to the city and institution where I completed my graduate work. In my experience, and as you might agree, despite how long my training history has felt in the moment (it was a full decade long), it also seems to have flown by. And in reflecting on this time, I am confident that I wouldn't have changed a single thing. But I do often wonder: **Where would I be if I had chosen differently? Why did I make the choices I made? And which decisions made me most successful at my job?**

Writing this piece really made me think about the answers to these questions, and distilled down, the three suggestions I would make to rising or current postdocs are to trust your gut, find your voice, and make meaningful connections.

Find Your Right Fit, and If In Doubt, Trust Your Gut

There is no one right way to choose a lab or an institution - many people choose to follow the projects that excite them the most; other people, myself included, make a short list of labs whose research speaks to them, and then choose based on environment and fit. I cannot advocate for one over the other, but what I can tell you is that for each and every career transition: **trust your gut**. In your quest for intellectual and professional advancement, there is a place for true reflection upon, and careful

consideration of, the circumstances in which you feel most comfortable and most able to fully invest yourself in your work. I have seen first-hand from my own time as a trainee, as well as from the students I've mentored, that by fostering an environment of true support, you will always perform better than when you resent the work you do or the environment you're in.

I first came to this conclusion as a new doctoral student at Brown University. Like many new graduate students, I had broad scientific interests (cancer biology! aging! genomics!). I had never before considered reproductive biology as one of my many research interests, but I ultimately chose Dr. Richard Freiman's laboratory for my graduate work because I was drawn to his very human approach to his mentees, and to his passion for his work. Rich's enthusiasm about reproductive development, and his unconditionally welcoming attitude, made me never want to leave. Meanwhile, I watched several of my close friends choose labs whose work really excited them, but whose investigators were imperfect fits. It became clear to me then that a mentorship mismatch can make you lose enthusiasm for a project you otherwise love, but the right environment will always help you build any project into one of which you're proud.

In looking for my postdoctoral position, I had my eye on "the right fit". In graduate school, you may very well have a rotation of a few weeks to months which will allow you to "try on" a lab, but this is likely not to be the case for choosing a postdoctoral position. In many cases, postdocs visit for a day at most, and sometimes only interview remotely if they are

located at a great distance. It can be hard to truly assess the lab environment in that time, which is why I want to emphasize trusting your instincts. If you find yourself feeling particularly at ease despite the brevity of the interaction, **don't ignore that!** That is a great sign! If, on the other hand, you find yourself having doubts or concerns despite such a short interaction, **definitely do not ignore that!** That is a clear sign that you either need more information or that the environment may not be the right fit. This is not in any way a reflection on how well you would perform in that lab setting, but it may reflect how happily you will perform your job, which in turn may affect your performance itself. After my search, I chose Dr. Paula Cohen's laboratory at Cornell University for my postdoctoral fellowship. Paula's approach to her lab members is to encourage each individual to live their fullest life as a scientist and as a person (her lab website even features a lab pets tab!), and, critically, for her postdocs to pursue true independence both in their research projects and in their management and mentorship of more junior trainees.

Both of these formative experiences have convinced me that there are key ingredients to a happy, productive, and independent scientific placement, regardless of your career stage (this includes faculty positions!). In short, look for labs (or institutions) that: allow you to be a human and recognize that one size does not fit all for mentorship, understand that you are more than your work and undoubtedly have more demands on your time than just the lab, allow you to develop projects that you really care about, encourage you to submit grants and attend conferences, help build and foster your network, and genuinely and deliberately work to make the lab a place you **want** to be. All of this information can be difficult to glean from a few interview-based conversations, but make sure to ask these questions of the faculty and the lab members. And when transitioning to an independent faculty position,

attempt to remember how far these measures went in helping **you do your** best work.

Find Your Voice and Demonstrate Your Expertise

Once you've accepted a postdoctoral position, it can be challenging to find your place and your independence, particularly if the lab has a set repertoire of projects, or if funding is tight. These barriers need not stand in the way of your own path, however, and I encourage you to not only consider the development of your own project a benefit that postdocs are afforded, but also as an essential part of your job description. You are in this role to continue to develop your skills, and to carve out your intellectual niche in the field. It is important to remember that you have been hired for a reason - to bring new skills or perspectives to the lab's projects - and that you will be making discoveries that are new to your PI and to the field. Confidently asserting your conclusions and expertise will go a long way to establishing your unique role within your specific research community.

Even if you find yourself locked into a particular research project, there are deliberate ways to find your voice as a researcher and to establish your area of expertise. First, involve collaborators! Even if not strictly necessary for your project, other sets of eyes can bring great new perspectives to your work, and those perspectives can help you hone the project into one that's uniquely yours. During my postdoctoral fellowship, I had the fantastic opportunity of collaborating with Dr. Jen Grenier, Director of Cornell's Transcriptional Regulation and Gene Expression (TReX) Facility, on a project to explore transcriptional dynamics during spermatogenesis by single-cell-sequencing. We both brought very different skill sets and backgrounds to the project, but as a result, the work that grew from that collaboration established the project as both truly unique to the lab and to my portfolio of research. Second, consciously contribute your expertise to your institution by

volunteering to give guest lectures for classes whose topics are related to your work. This builds your teaching portfolio and demonstrates your commitment to the subject matter. Finally, you need not wait for your data to roll in to make your mark on the field; in your “downtime” (I know, is there really such a thing?), consider writing a literature review that suits your area of interest. While some journals only accept invited reviews, many editors are open to discussing review articles if you contact them with your ideas (and occasionally an outline) and why you think the journal is an appropriate home for that review.

Most importantly - and in any position - advocate for what you believe. This is hard for everyone, and feels impossible for some. What I’m suggesting, however, is not confrontation or conflict - it is simply asserting your conclusions about an area of your subject matter expertise. Differences of opinion are par for the course in science, but by expressing and supporting yours, the ensuing discussion will inevitably lead to better, more sound science.

Make Meaningful Connections and Keep Them

Much will be said about the importance of networking, and how these connections will pave your way for future opportunities, projects, etc. And it’s true - building these relationships is essential, but admittedly overwhelming. This emphasis on networking has been one of the biggest hurdles to overcome during each and every one of my career stages, made especially difficult by being particularly introverted. But I don’t think that this is a unique stressor to only those who are especially introverted; I think a lot of scientists are familiar with the anxiety of approaching someone whose

work you know and respect, and going out on a limb to introduce yourself.

For this reason, I have chosen not to ubiquitously network, but to meaningfully network, and to set achievable networking goals. At each conference I attend, I make an effort to introduce myself to one person I’ve been wanting to meet, and to really **meet** them. A passing introduction may not make an impression, especially in an environment with so many other people. But this introduction is now your jumping off point - follow up with that person, perhaps invite them to give a seminar, or offer to video-conference into their lab meetings to share your work with their lab. Like with all relationships, continuing to foster it will allow it to grow into a lasting one upon which you can draw for your career. For example, I am tremendously grateful to Dr. Melissa Pepling, who I first met at an SSR meeting, and who later served as my outside reader for my thesis defense when I was a graduate student. When I was a postdoc, she regularly invited me to present at her lab meetings, and I now excitedly reunite with her at conferences to catch up and share our science. It is true that my network may not be particularly wide, but it is deep, and I am confident that I can always turn to these individuals for their feedback and insight.

All of this brings me back to my original question: which decisions have made me most successful at my job? I think the ultimate conclusion is that there have been many, but their common denominator is being honest with myself about my personality and my goals. You need not sleep in the lab or work every weekend to move forward in your career; a little self-reflection and deliberate, strategic choices are all you need for your success.

'What's Your Story?'

WinRS Trainee Feature



Taylor Pini (she) @TaylorPini

Post doc/Katz-Jaffe lab/Colorado Center for Reproductive Medicine

What's your story? I'm an Australian currently working in the US. I started off in animal science, and completed my PhD working with sheep and specializing in sperm biology. I'm now working in a clinical environment with patients and investigating both fundamental reproductive biology and translational medicine focused around human infertility.

What are you passionate about? Science in general and women in STEM in particular.

What in your life currently makes you feel the most fulfilled? Having a challenging job – it's not always easy, but I know that I am constantly being tested, learning and improving.

How would you describe yourself? Down to earth and passionate, like most Aussies!

How do you relax outside of science? A good book and a cup of tea.

What is the best piece of advice you've received? "Science is all about peaks and troughs" – there are moments when I feel on top of the world, and others when I question if I'm a total failure. It's good to keep in mind that both can be fleeting, and that the rough patches will eventually smooth over.

What is the biggest hurdle you think postdocs face? Finding permanent employment after completing a postdoc – being trapped in a cycle of temporary contracts, with poor benefits and no job security makes so many people leave science!

What is your dream job? An academic position that involves both research and teaching.

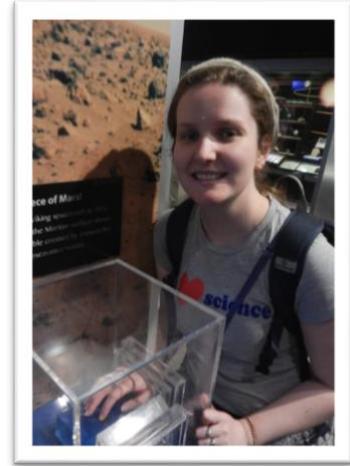
What absolutely excites you right now? The next stage of my career – finding something permanent!

What absolutely scares you right now? Ending up in a job that isn't stimulating, or doesn't offer opportunities for advancement.

Do you have a philosophy for your career/life? Never feel guilty for taking time off to enjoy life, because in the end you'll mostly remember all the fun stuff, not your time at work.

Nicole (Nikki) Camlin (she/her/hers) @DrNicoleCamlin
Postdoctoral Fellow, Dr. Janice Evans Lab, Purdue University.

What's your story? I grew up in rural Australia, and got my bachelors degree at my home town university (Charles Sturt University) in Medical Science majoring in Pathology. It wasn't until I started uni that I realized getting a PhD and doing science research was a career option. After my undergrad I moved to the University of Newcastle, Australia to do an Honours research year and my PhD. It was here that I first started working with oocytes and I never looked back. After finishing my PhD I joined Janice Evans' lab, originally at Johns Hopkins, now at Purdue. Here I am investigating the molecular mechanisms controlling oocyte meiosis, and I love it!



What are you passionate about? I get really excited and passionate about learning new things. Even when I'm not doing science I spend a good part of my time watching documentaries or reading about how things work (have you ever looked up how a tube TV works, its incredible!).

How do you relax outside of science? I read romance and fantasy novels, normally 1-4 a week.

What is the best piece of advice you've received? It wasn't really advice, but about a year into my postdoc Janice asked me what research I wanted to do independent of what anyone else's research was. What was I passionate about, and what excited me. It was the first time I had ever been asked that or thought about what I wanted my own research vision to be. It was both scary and exciting, and I think it has really helped to shape me into a better scientist. So it's not really a piece of advice I received, but more advice I now give other trainee's- think about what your science passion/voice is external of your mentor.

What are three things about you that are interesting, that people might not know?

1. I make skirts
2. I did community theater in high school
3. Science made me addicted to caffeine. I started drinking coffee in the last 6 months of my PhD to combat jet-lag from international conferences and interviews that I was attending while also writing my thesis.

What are three uninteresting things about you that people might not know?

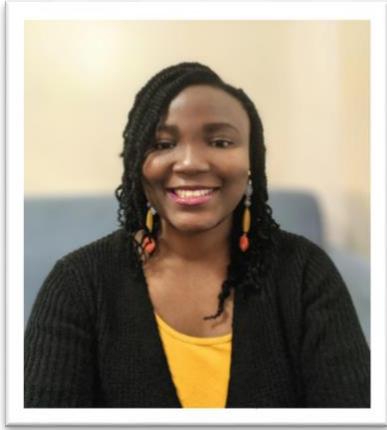
- I never spell fluorescence correctly.
- I rarely sit in the lab when I am doing science.
- I don't like arugula.

What is your dream job? Academic at a research-intensive institution

What absolutely scares you right now? That I will not be able to find an academic job and if I will not be able to think of interesting, fundable and or important science questions and will fail.

Do you have a philosophy for your career/life?

"And nobody in the world is gonna be as good as you at being you. Nobody in the history of mankind — past, present or future — will be as good as you at being you! You got a calling that's been placed on your life and you gotta get out there and do it!" — Cory Wong from Companion Pass



Oluwatosin Adesina @drsweettee

PhD student /Reproductive Biology/ University of Nottingham

What's your story: During my days as an undergraduate student in veterinary medicine (In Nigeria), I realized that I developed interest in and performed excellently in the reproduction related courses. This sparked my interest in the reproductive system of various animals, and I also wanted to know how reproductive efficiency could be improved. My quest down this path led me to do a masters at the University of Edinburgh in 2015, where my MSc afforded me the opportunity to better understand reproductive sciences. It was at this point I also started developing molecular laboratory skills necessary for work in reproductive biology. After my masters, I

knew I wanted to remain in the lab, as this will afford me the opportunity to understand the molecular control of reproduction, all in a bid to improving reproduction in the nearest future. I enrolled to do a PhD in reproduction at the University of Nottingham, where I am currently working on microRNAs that regulate ovarian function. I believe that findings from my project will help to provide further insight on how microRNAs can be used as biomarkers for reproductive efficiency.

What are you passionate about? I am passionate about carrying out scientific research that will generate information that can be useful to farmers to help them improve reproduction in their animals.

What in your life currently makes you feel the most fulfilled? My scientific career is going as planned and a very beautiful family support system (husband and daughter)

How would you describe yourself? I would like to describe myself as organized and confident. I am goal-oriented and follow things through till the end once I have my mind on them. I am a good team player, very positive and would always like to believe the best of everyone.

What is something you are very proud of, and why? I am proud of the fact that I am moving at a good pace in every aspect of my life. I do not consider myself disadvantaged or slowed down at all, these I am very grateful for.

What are the goals you are still looking towards? I look forward to having publications in high impact journals. I also look forward to being successful at grant applications to enable me carry out my own research.

How do you relax outside of science? I love to do a lot of cooking and baking.

What is the best piece of advice you've received? "Hard work has never killed a man. Be diligent and hardworking and you will get to the top".

What are three things about you that are interesting, that people might not know? I enjoy teaching, love shopping, I can eat rice all week long, I don't like pizza.

What are three uninteresting things about you that people might not know? I do not like evening hang outs, I dislike living in the countryside, when not shopping I am indoor person.

What is the biggest hurdle you think postdocs face? Having to make all their experiments work to enable them to provide positive results for publications; writing grant applications to get more funding for their research.

What is your dream job? A research job in a high-profile academic institution. I really enjoy doing scientific research in the field of reproductive biology.

What absolutely excites you right now? Whenever my experiments go well/as planned.

What absolutely scares you right now? I honestly can't say anything really scares me. I always believe that things will always work out in the end even if they take time initially. There is no point being anxious over what one has no control over.

Do you have a philosophy for your career/life? Believe in honesty, believe in God and be at your best always. Also always remember to be good to everyone as much as it is within your power to.

Ale Elder Ontiveros (She/Her) @ale_elder

Grad student at Baylor College of Medicine, doing my thesis work at MD Anderson Cancer Center.



What's your story? Went to medical school in Monterrey, Mexico (my hometown) and decided I wanted to pursue my career in the US. After several different jobs in research and clinical settings I decided I wanted to continue my studies in reproductive biology and got into grad school. I am currently trying to understand how the uterus is formed using genetics and the mouse as a model.

What are you passionate about? Science! Reading, traveling, wine

How do you relax outside of science? Yoga (I am a yoga instructor too!), running



Farners Amargant i Riera (She/Her/Hers) @FarnersRiera

Postdoctoral Researcher, Duncan Lab, Northwestern University.

What's your story? I was born and raised in a little town close to Girona (Spain). At the age of 18 I moved to Barcelona to study biochemistry. After earning my college degree, I moved to Madrid where I studied a masters in biomedicine; there I worked on characterizing new anti-Malarial drugs. After this experience, I moved back to Barcelona to pursue a translational PhD in reproductive medicine. As a PhD student, I worked on the interface between basic and clinical research, focusing on the sperm contribution to the early steps of embryo development.

Along my PhD I had the chance to meet many couples that were facing infertility problems due to advanced maternal age. This is what brought me to Dr. Duncan's lab at Northwestern University in Chicago, where I'm studying the age associated decrease infertility.

What are you passionate about? I'm passionate about science, female health and outreach activities.

What in your life currently makes you feel the most fulfilled? Being able to see how my current work will help patients to overcome their reproductive problems in the future.

How would you describe yourself? Passionate, cheerful, curious and thorough.

What is something you are very proud of, and why? I'm the first college student in my family and I am very proud of the tremendous efforts that my parents did to make this possible.

How do you relax outside of science? I love going to the sea/lake and sailing. I enjoy spending quality time with my family and friends and try out new restaurants.

What is the best piece of advice you've received? Science that is not communicated, doesn't exist.

What are three things about you that are interesting, that people might not know?

- My parents named me after my hometown, which is a very usual girl's name there.

- I'm a habitual reader and I love Russian literature.
- I've been awarded Person of the year at my village.

What are three uninteresting things about you that people might not know?

- I don't like sci-fi films.
- I love flowers and gardening.
- I am the administrative coordinator of the Chicago Women in STEM initiative, a Chicago-based initiative that supports gender equity, diversity and the success of local women in STEM.

What is the biggest hurdle you think postdocs face? As an international postdoc in US, I think that the instability of our job and visa issues are our main obstacles.

What is your dream job? I'd love to lead my own projects, that will have a clear translational potential, alongside passionate scientists. And even more important, I'd love to combine this job with my current commitment to promote women in science.

What absolutely excites you right now? Being part of the next generation of reproductive biologists.

What absolutely scares you right now? I'm afraid of the low public investment in science, especially in my home-country (Spain).



Mancy Tong (she, her, hers)

Postdoctoral associate in the Abrahams lab at Yale School of Medicine

What's your story? During the last year of my PhD in the University of Auckland, New Zealand, I met my current mentor, Dr Vikki Abrahams at an international meeting. Luck would have it that just as I was on the job market, she got some funding that enabled me to come to Yale for my postdoctoral training. Having grown up in NZ, I never thought I would live so far away from our "little corner of the world" but this has been an amazing opportunity for both personal and scientific growth and I'm so grateful for all the people and experiences I've had along the way!

What are you passionate about? Maternal-fetal crosstalk... And good food.

How do you relax outside of science? Sweating in the gym

What is the biggest hurdle you think postdocs face? Achieving work-life balance

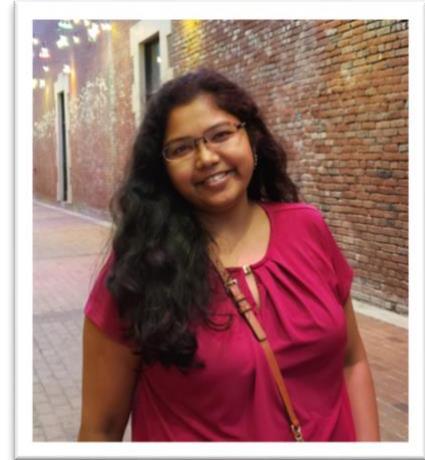
What is your dream job? To be a successful mentor and role-model for the next generation of scientists.

Do you have a philosophy for your career/life? Try to enjoy the "now" as much as possible, it only gets harder from here! 😊

Arpita Shridhar Bhurke (she/her)

Graduate research/teaching Assistant, Bagchi Lab Group, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

What's your story? My story is about a dreamy girl from a middle class, traditional Indian family who wanted to travel the world, read books and dance. I grew up in Thane city in Maharashtra, India. High school was an emotional roller-coaster. After highschool I left Thane and enrolled into an undergraduate Biotechnology program at Pune University in Maharashtra, India. My undergraduate life wasn't as exciting, mainly because I realized I wasn't doing what I am really interested in. Finally, I decided to listen to the little voice in my heart, that keep whispering 'reproductive biology'. I knew switching career paths from biotechnology to reproductive biology wasn't going to be easy, with my limited research experience and no animal handling experience. But I was determined to give my best for the career I always wanted. Looking back at life, I am glad I did what I did to get to where I am today. Life as a graduate (both as masters and PhD) student has been very exciting and satisfying. In the past few years, I have learnt more about life than ever before. PhD changes you. You become more patient and learnt to appreciate little things in life. It feels like the rat race is finally over. Now you compete only with yourself.



What are you passionate about? Dance, home interiors, Teaching, crafts

What in your life currently makes you feel the most fulfilled? Teaching/mentoring students is the most gratifying and humbling experience.

How would you describe yourself? Creative, organized, eager to help, optimist and foodie

What is something you are very proud of, and why? I am proud of how far I have come today. About 10years back when I was in high school in India, I got interested in studying female reproductive biology. However, I never thought I would become a researcher/scientist in reproductive sciences. Little did I know; I would be living my dream all the way in USA.

What are the goals you are still looking towards?

- Completing my PhD.
- Submitting a grant proposal.
- Getting a Job.
- Writing manuscripts.
- Finding a boyfriend

What is the best piece of advice you've received? Dad: Work sincerely and success will follow

What are three things about you that are interesting, that people might not know? I like to travel. I will never turn down an invitation for good food. Dark red roses, stuffed animals and snow make me happy.

What are three uninteresting things about you that people might not know? I hate exercise/work out sessions. I am uncomfortable in an untidy/messy environment. I do not like cosmetics and make-up.

What is the biggest hurdle you think postdocs face? There are not as many fellowships and grant proposals that international students can apply for as a post-doc.

What is your dream job? Graduate student coordinator and Teaching professor

What absolutely excites you right now? Writing my Thesis and defending my PhD thesis

What absolutely scares you right now? My paper not getting published!

Do you have a philosophy for your career/life?

- Spend only that which you can pay for.
- Become a reason for someone else's happiness.
- What you sow, you shall reap



Jordana Bloom (she/her/hers) @BloomJordana
PhD candidate/Schimenti Lab/Cornell University

What's your story? I grew up in a small town Northern New Jersey and got my undergraduate degree at Haverford College in Pennsylvania. Haverford is a small liberal arts college and it was there that I learned about the value of model organisms in scientific research. It was at Haverford that I also got my first experience performing independent research in a lab. While at school, I played on the college's tennis team...which was both fun and exhausting! After college, I chose to go to Cornell for graduate school to pursue my PhD from the Department of Molecular Biology and Genetics. I joined Dr. John Schimenti's lab in the Spring of 2015 and have been performing research there ever since!

What is the best piece of advice you've received? Some of the best advice I received was from my undergraduate thesis advisor. He advised me to work hard and stay curious. Curiosity has led me to pursue multiple different, but related, research questions and doing so has benefited me in many ways. It has allowed me to learn many different experimental techniques and to stay optimistic when something in one project does not go as originally planned.

What absolutely excites you right now? During my time in graduate school I have witnessed the growth and development of both the genome editing and single-cell sequencing technology revolutions. I feel that it's an incredibly exciting time to be a scientist. It's amazing to see the rapid implementation of these technologies and to learn about the novel insights gained using these approaches in many scientific fields!

What is your dream job? My dream job is one in which I am able to share my excitement about science with others and to participate in the training of future scientists.

Shaihl Khan (she, her) @KhanShaihl
Post-doctoral Research Associate

What's your story? It's a 34-year long story! But in a nutshell, I am a reproductive scientist. I am currently a post-doc with Dr. Krisher at Colorado Center for Reproductive Medicine. I have completed my PhD in reproductive endocrinology at the University of Wyoming. I love my job and I love being a part of this field!

What are you passionate about? A lot of things! But mostly eating great food and learning new things.

What in your life currently makes you feel the most fulfilled?

My family, friends and peers

How would you describe yourself? I am a big surprise wrapped in a small package

What is something you are very proud of, and why? I am proud of leaving my comfort zone and moving to different countries to follow my career. I am also proud of having a family that encouraged me to do that.



What are the goals you are still looking towards? My goals are to do more science, publish more papers, and pay forward all the help I have gotten over the years.

How do you relax outside of science? I watch a lot of Star Trek and I love to paint. My new hobby is origami but often I end up making a sad boat instead of a swan.

What is the best piece of advice you've received? Don't talk yourself out of a room you worked so hard to be in.

What are three things about you that are interesting, that people might not know? I can read and write three languages, I still have my lab and class notes from 2008 (I am not a hoarder), I say a little western blot prayer before I see my results.

What are three uninteresting things about you that people might not know? All the interesting things I have listed above.

What absolutely excites you right now? Organs on chip

What absolutely scares you right now? Growing disbelief in basic scientific facts. We as scientists need to do a better job at communicating science to different populations.

Do you have a philosophy for your career/life? Ask the right questions.



Megan Gura (she, her, hers)

Ph.D. Candidate, Richard Freiman Laboratory, Brown University

What's your story? I'm a Northeasterner. I grew up in one of the New Haven suburbs in Connecticut, went to SUNY Albany in New York, and am now a 5th year Ph.D candidate at Brown University in Rhode Island. I work in Dr. Richard Freiman's laboratory and my thesis project studies a basal transcription machinery subunit called TAF4b in the context of female embryonic germ cells in mice. I do both computational and experimental work in the lab. I would like to have many pets someday, but I currently have 7 plants and

their names are Spike, Rapunzel, Jade, Pinky, Waffle, Hector, and Pickle.

What are you passionate about? I'm passionate about learning and exploring. I think that is the best part about being a scientist, new technologies enable new discoveries!

I'm also passionate about social justice and the environment. I was a coordinator of my university's Graduate Women in Science and Engineering (GWISE) and am a proud member of my union. I am working to reduce my carbon footprint and would like to participate in more environmental advocacy in the future.

What in your life currently makes you feel the most fulfilled? I think it might be my recent publication in PLoS Genetics. I am very happy to see that my curiosity in publicly available datasets could be synthesized into an interesting story. I also really enjoyed working with my collaborators!

How would you describe yourself? I am an endlessly curious person. I always have a personal project that I'm working on and currently I'm trying to learn German in preparation for an upcoming trip. I'm also very skeptical and cautious because there are so many scams out there of all varieties. Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.

What is something you are very proud of, and why? I've done several things that I'm very proud of, including being awarded an F31 on the first try, teaching myself to analyze RNA-seq datasets, and running a small conference at Brown.

What are the goals you are still looking towards? I'm looking forward to doing some more experiments and writing a paper about my RNA-seq data. The data is very perplexing. I want to find the thread that connects and explains the results we have. I'm also looking forward to adopting a couple of dogs someday.

How do you relax outside of science? Outside of since I like to play videogames, dance, read books, and watch YouTube.

What is the best piece of advice you've received? If a new experiment works the first time, worry.

What are three things about you that are interesting, that people might not know? I have my motorcycle license, I love eating spicy food, and I would like to run for a public office someday.

What are three uninteresting things about you that people might not know? I think I've tried every single mock-meat I can find in the grocery store! I do not like cheddar cheese and dark chocolate is a major part of my diet.

What is your dream job? I do not have a dream job, there are too many things I find interesting and exciting in life to pick just one!

What absolutely excites you right now? I'm excited to be nearing the end of my PhD and starting the next adventure in my career!

What absolutely scares you right now? Climate change. No personal fears of mine can compare to that.

Do you have a philosophy for your career/life? I try to be kind and pragmatic while taking life one day at a time.



Katie Chiang; she/her

Postdoctoral Trainee at the US EPA in the Center for Public Health and Environmental Assessment

Social Media Handle: Instagram: @katie.the.chiang (I pretty much only post about my art 😊)

What's your story? For most of my life I had wanted to be a veterinarian. To spruce up my resume, I started doing research in labs on my campus. I found my way into Dr. Jodi A. Flaws's lab with, admittedly, little other goal other than to get some research training under my belt for veterinary school applications. I was in the middle of plating an ELISA when I realized, "wait, I love what I'm doing." I sheepishly approached

Dr. Flaws and said something to the effect of "I know that I'm currently half way through my non-research-based master's that I started because I didn't think I'd like research, but it turns out I love research and can I be a PhD student here?!" I was welcomed into the Flaws laboratory as a PhD student the semester after completing my non-research-based master's program. My research focused on reproductive toxicology, and through that I found a passion for public health and safety which led me to pursue postdoctoral training with the EPA. I will be starting in mid-February where I will work with a team performing systematic review of chemicals of interest and help give regulatory impact to the research performed by my fellow toxicologists.

What are you passionate about? I'm incredibly passionate about how our research can help benefit humankind and facilitate a healthier human population with a higher quality of life. Feeling like I'm making a difference fuels me every day. I'm also incredibly passionate about my art!

What in your life currently makes you feel the most fulfilled? I feel like I should say something like "when my manuscripts get published" or "when I'm doing my research", but if I'm honest, I find that I'm most at peace when working on my art. Some of my most satisfied-feeling moments in life have been when I'm drawing or carving in clay.

How would you describe yourself? I would describe myself as goofy and driven. When a task is at hand, I can rally significant focus. And when there isn't a task at hand, I'll probably talk to you about my favorite bad movies.

What is something you are very proud of, and why? I'm proud of my ability to be objective. In a world that is so polarized lately, I'm proud I can still see multiple points of view, a trait that I think is dwindling.

What are the goals you are still looking towards? A big goal of mine is to pursue permanent employment with the EPA! The postdoctoral position is unfortunately temporary, but is a great place to start to accomplish that goal.

How do you relax outside of science? When I'm outside of the lab, you can usually find me drawing, doing ceramics, or riding my motorcycle with buddies. A day that ends with pencil on paper, clay on my hands, and/or wind in my face is always a good one.

What is the best piece of advice you've received? It wasn't advice per se, but I was speaking to a postdoc in my laboratory who I respect very, very much and hold in high esteem. She is hard-working, sharp as a tack, and highly successful as a scientist. One day, she told me, "I don't come in on the weekends if I don't have to." In grad school, I've felt like it was almost fetishized how hard one had to work in order to truly earn your PhD. No PhD is attained without tremendous sacrifice and suffering, and the less sacrifice and suffering, the less valuable or deserved your PhD is. At least, that's how I used to feel before this postdoc helped me realize that it's important to take care of yourself and that not going to lab every day doesn't make you less of a scientist.

What are three things about you that are interesting, that people might not know?

I have 15 tattoos from 5 different countries

I drag raced on my motorcycle (legally [and poorly])

I love demolition derbies

What are three uninteresting things about you that people might not know?

I constantly suffer from imposter syndrome, don't we all!

I'm *really nervous* to start a postdoc

I hate rom-coms

What is the biggest hurdle you think postdocs face?

I'm still new to this whole postdoc thing, but I imagine the greatest hurdle will be finding employment after the postdoc is up! My postdoc position with the EPA has a very clear and non-extendable end date, and I anticipate one of the greatest challenges will be finding permanent employment in a place I'd like to be employed before that end date arrives.

What is your dream job? My dream job would be somewhere in the public health sector where I feel like I'm helping impart positive changes to regulations on chemicals to which the public are exposed. Additionally, I would like this job to give me enough time to do my art in my free time. Essentially, I want to be a public health and safety champion by day and artist by night!

What absolutely excites you right now? I'm very excited to move to a new place (Research Triangle Park!) and start a new job.

What absolutely scares you right now? I am *very scared* about moving to a new place and starting a new job.

Do you have a philosophy for your career/life? It's cliché, but life is short! If I die sooner rather than later, I want to be remembered for something other than how many qPCR plates or ELISAs I could run in a single weekend. I want to work hard, but I don't want to work so hard that every other part of me doesn't get to shine. Life is short, remember to live it.