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Up Close: Lisa Cantrell podcasts a wide net

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UP CLOSE

Lisa Cantrell podcasts a wide net

Too many “super-cool” research stories go untold or get too little attention, says psychology alumna **Lisa Cantrell ’07**. So she started a podcast. What began as a low-tech endeavor in 2014, “An InExact Science” has seen its audience grow to 2,000 subscribers and nearly 20,000 listeners on live radio broadcasts.

Since the start of the series, Cantrell has produced programs about supernatural beliefs, falling in love and Alzheimer’s disease. More recently, she has delved into aphantasia, a brain condition that prevents a person from visualizing objects, faces or scenes in their mind’s eye. Her latest work, “Social Pain

and the OPRM1 Gene,” looks at why some people feel more emotional and physical pain than others, because they have fewer opioid receptors.

Cantrell, who grew up in the Upstate, got the idea for the podcast series during lunch with a friend. She described to her friend what she thought was a well-known study about how babies learn language. “It’s research that everyone in my field knows about,” says Cantrell. “But he had never heard of it. That stuck with me.”

Cantrell believes scientists are good at sharing research with each other in scholarly journals, where for the most part that research remains. “There’s still a lot of

super-cool information the general population doesn’t even know about,” she says.

Her sense of responsibility to tell those stories is perhaps only eclipsed by the enthusiasm with which she brings the information to the world. “I like explaining things. When you find someone who has never heard about a crazy-interesting psych concept before, and you’re the person who can tell them about it, that’s amazing to me,” says Cantrell.

She says the impetus for the series may have had its beginnings at Furman, where even basic psychological findings were mind-blowing to her. Later, when she was immersed in research for her

Ph.D. at Indiana University, she nearly forgot about the thrill of scientific discovery. She explains that the series is her way of reigniting those scientific passions by ferreting out the most interesting findings in human psychology, then delivering them in a riveting way.

Cantrell gives Furman credit for her unfettered approach to new ideas. The “top-notch faculty” at the university gave her the freedom to venture outside the lines, she says. Like many smaller liberal arts and sciences universities, Furman gives students room to be more creative, tackle problems in multiple ways and take risks – qualities, Cantrell says, that have carried into her Ph.D. and post-doctoral work, the classroom and eventually “An InExact Science.”

In August 2017, she was named assistant professor of child development at California State University, Sacramento. With support from the American Psychological Society Fund for Teaching and Public Understanding of Psychological Science, Cantrell will continue to tell her stories through the podcast, which was featured in the Sacramento Bee and Science magazine and was dubbed one of the best indie podcasts of 2016 by The Audit.

Asked about her favorite role, podcast producer or professor, she says, “I love it all. The same thing I love about being in the classroom is what I love about doing the podcasts and storytelling.” ●

For episodes of An InExact Science, visit aninexactscience.com.

– Tina Underwood