

FACULTY RESEARCH AREAS

Dr. Andrew Ainsworth

My research interests center around the development and application of advanced statistical methods to improve the measurement and testing of psychological phenomenon. Studying quantitative psychology has afforded me the ability to work in many subfields of psychology and this is one of the reasons I am pursuing a degree in quantitative psychology. I plan on continuing my research and actively pursuing outside support to fund future research, which will involve both undergraduate and graduate student assistants.

Dr. Alyssa Arentoft

My research explores neuropsychological functioning (i.e., brain-behavior relationships) in disease states using a biopsychosociocultural framework. We investigate health disparities and health-related outcomes among underrepresented and disenfranchised populations. Most of my current work is focused on individuals with HIV/AIDS. My lab is currently focusing on:

- (1) a recently completed, NIMH-funded pilot project examining how healthcare quality predicts the types of HIV medications that patients are prescribed, and how these medications affect neuropsychological functioning in areas such as learning, memory, attention, and motor functioning. We are continuing to analyze this data.
- (2) an ongoing NIMH-funded SC2 grant examining how neuropsychological functioning (particularly in areas of attention and executive functioning) predicts engagement in health risk behaviors in HIV+ and HIV- individuals. We are exploring a wide variety of health risk behaviors, including dietary, exercise, drug-related, and sexual risk behaviors. We are currently collecting data for this project.

Dr. Meeta Banerjee

My research employs both integrative and ecological frameworks to understand the influence of contextual factors on early and late adolescent developmental trajectories in ethnic minority families. I am especially interested in exploring the interaction between ecological contexts (e.g., schools, families, neighborhoods, racial discrimination, and communities) and racial socialization practices and processes. Moreover, I investigate how these factors are both directly and indirectly related to mental health and educational outcomes in ethnic minority youth.

Dr. Sara Berzenski

My research investigates emotional development in the context of adversity, from a developmental psychopathology perspective. I am interested in the ways that emotional development is altered in the context of child maltreatment, as well as the ways in which emotion competence skills may mitigate the negative impact of adversity on adaptation. In addition, I am interested in approaching these questions using diverse quantitative analytic techniques and measurement approaches, as well as applying a developmental perspective to quantitative issues. My current research projects include studying multi-domain adversity experiences in children, emotion and behavior regulation across development, and masked emotional expressions in the context of hostile parenting.

Dr. Thomas Chan

As a Developmental and Health Psychologist, I examine the lifestyle, social, and technological interventions that promote positive health and development. My attention is on building resilience and motivating scalable prevention in community settings—such as the role mentorships, community programs, and technologies (e.g., Wearables, Augmented Reality) play in improving health and developmental outcomes in at-risk aging adults and their families.

To do this work, I have received funding from The National Institute of Health/National Institute on Aging to sponsor a Postdoctoral Fellowship in Epidemiology, Biostatistics, and Mental Health of Aging at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health (NIA-T32AG000247) and a Johns Hopkins School of Nursing Center for Innovative Care in Aging pilot grant. I have also worked with The City of Claremont and communities in DC and Baltimore to improve the enriching services provided to their residents.

I am currently funded by NIH BUILD PODER to investigate the biopsychosocial protective factors that combat health disparities

Dr. Gabriela Chavira

All of my research projects focus on successful transitions to adulthood for immigrant and ethnic minority youth. The Developing College Awareness and a College-Going Identity in Latina/o Youth is a new research project is currently being developed with the help of my two graduate researchers. For this project, we developed a six-workshop series for Latina/o parents and their adolescent youth (early adolescence through late adolescence) with the aim to a) increase their college knowledge, b) provide instrumental support and guidance navigating the college application process, and c) increase the number of Latina/o youth who apply for and enroll in four-year colleges and universities. We also have two ongoing studies, the Mentoring Matters Research Study and the Psychological Functioning and Cultural Discontinuity Project.

Dr. Stefanie Drew

My research spans across several different areas involving visual perception and neuroscience. These topics currently focus on:

- (1) Virtual Reality (VR): with the recent emergence of new immersive virtual reality systems on the market, little is known about the impact of these machines on the ocular system. We are currently exploring potential impacts these systems have on the accommodative and vergence oculomotor systems as well as whether people are able to transfer motor skills learned in the virtual world to the real world.
- (2) Asthenopia: asthenopia, or visual discomfort, is a common condition that is characterized by symptoms that can include sore eyes, blurred vision, headaches, re-reading when performing near-work tasks such as reading or looking at a computer screen. Currently we are utilizing a combination of techniques including surveys, psychophysics and eye-tracking to examine the relationship between this condition and accommodation.
- (3) Synesthesia: synesthesia is a fascinating condition in which individuals experience additional sensory perceptions when viewing a stimulus. Currently, we are investigating the effects of attention on synesthetic perceptions in grapheme-color synesthetes, individuals that experience colors when viewing black and white letters and numbers.
- (4) Electroencephalography (EEG): Currently, we are designing experiments to include comparative examination of commercially available EEG machines on the market.
- (5) Visual Attention: we are currently examining how visual attention, as measured by eye-tracking, is affected by particular objects, such as a weapon.

Dr. Elise Fenn

My lab examines the application of cognitive psychology (memory, judgment/judgment bias, and decision making processes) to improving society. Current work focuses on two main areas:

- (1) Understanding the cognitive processes involved in lying, and how those processes differ from telling the truth. Understanding these cognitive processes will help improve forensic interviewing techniques used by the police. One particular ongoing project examines the potential discrimination that occurs when minorities are accused of a crime.
- (2) Understanding judgment biases for fake news sources. Graduate students could work on a project that investigates how photos bias attention to, and belief in, fake and true news presented via social media. As a graduate student in the lab, I require at least 10 hours per week of work on your thesis.

Dr. Que-Lam Huynh

The primary focus of my current research is on prejudice and discrimination, specifically the relationship between such experiences and minority identity and well-being. In particular, I am most interested in understanding the effects of contemporary, subtle forms of prejudice, such as microaggressions. Thus, my primary focus is on the target's perspective (the person experiencing the microaggression) rather than the perpetrator (the person committing the microaggression).

Currently, this interest translates to various projects in my research group to (a) identify and quantitatively measure microaggressions directed at various marginalized groups (e.g., racial and ethnic minorities, LGB individuals, deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals, farm workers); (b) elucidate the affective, motivational, and cognitive mechanisms underlying the experience and interpretation of a microaggression; and (c) quantify the effect of microaggressions on the target's psychological and physiological well-being.

A secondary interest is in the sociocognitive foundations of microaggressions in an interpersonal context. Specifically, I focus on how attitudes and beliefs that operate outside of conscious control serve as the basis for expressing and interpreting microaggressions in everyday life.

Students working in my research group get exposure and training in a variety of research methods, depending on the research project and what is most appropriate for the questions being investigated. These methods include survey research, interviews and focus group research, archival research, and experimental research.

Dr. Sun-Mee Kang

Two projects are currently undergoing in my research lab.

- (1) I investigate how individuals with alexithymia, schizophrenia, or autism spectrum disorder process emotion information using the Electroencephalography (EEG).
- (2) I explore the priming effect of racial discrimination on the bicultural identity of Asian Americans. Using implicit and explicit priming tasks, we are currently testing whether priming the past experiences of racial discrimination would lead them to make stronger ties with their American or Asian identity

Dr. Justin Kantner

My work examines both basic/theoretical and applied questions in human memory and cognition, particularly at the intersection of memory and decision making. So many of the decisions we make are based on some form of supporting evidence from memory, yet memory is notoriously faulty. I am interested in the ways that evidence from memory is evaluated and translated into a decision, and the biases that enter into this process when memory evidence is incomplete or ambiguous. Three general goals guide this work: first, to identify biases that unify recognition memory and other decision-making processes, with an emphasis on individual differences; second, to determine the neural mechanisms of individual differences in the expression of these biases; third, to determine how these biases manifest behaviorally in applied settings.

Dr. Luciana Lagana

I conduct experimental research on the anti-bias effects of my original social impact documentaries; I also conduct clinical assessment research on the psychosocial factors affecting quality of life in older adults.

Dr. Debbie Ma

My research focuses on social psychological phenomena related to stereotyping and prejudice. Members of my research lab and I examine the ways in which race shapes thoughts, influences judgments, and impacts behavior. Currently, we are investigating how physical features that signal racial category membership influence downstream social cognitive processes like stereotyping and prejudice. We are also investigating different aspects of how individuals process human faces.

Dr. Bradley McAuliff

My research uses basic social and cognitive psychological theories to understand human behavior in applied settings. I have used multiple methods to examine a variety of empirical questions relating to people's involvement in the legal system. For example, how do jurors and legal professionals evaluate scientific evidence? Do law enforcement personnel who know the suspect's identity administer lineups fairly? What factors influence the accuracy of children's reports? Are jurors sensitive to these factors or could expert testimony increase their understanding?

Dr. Mark Otten

My research and teaching focuses on sport performance, sport and exercise psychology and statistics. I run the "CSUN Sport Psychology Lab" alongside Drs. Ashley Samson and Jacob Jensen from the CSUN department of kinesiology. Our lab welcomes students with an interest in sport, and/or the pursuit of sport and exercise studies in graduate school.

Dr. Scott Plunkett

Investigating individual, family, peer, school, and neighborhood qualities in relation to adolescent and emerging adult mental health and academics. Evaluating university and community programs that promote the health and well-being of children and adults.

Dr. Jill Quilici

My research interests lie in the area of cognitive processes, decision making, problem solving, expertise, knowledge representation, and analogical reasoning. My current primary research interest is in the area of decision making. In particular, I am interested in the issue of how people make decisions about their nutritional intake. At a theoretical level, I am interested in the decision-making process and what factors influence our decisions to stick with or abandon healthy eating goals in our daily lives. At a practical level, I am interested in studying potential environmental or educational interventions designed to promote healthier eating decisions with the goal of reducing obesity.

More generally, I am interested in how we can use our knowledge of human cognition to design interventions in practical settings. What can we do to promote effective decision-making that will be consistent our goals in health settings? In educational settings? How can we help people to learn from past experiences and use them effectively to make decisions or solve problems in new situations?

Research assistants in my lab will get experience assisting with literature review, data collection, data scoring, data entry, and data analysis for a variety of data types. In addition, students who are motivated to be more active participants in the lab can be involved in designing research studies (including thesis projects), designing stimulus materials for experiments, preparing and presenting research findings at conferences, and preparing research findings for publication.

Dr. Abraham Rutchick

I am eagerly seeking at least one graduate student for next year. I am particularly excited to work with a student focused on psychology and technology, and I am hoping to also welcome a student primarily interested in consumer behavior and marketing research. (To be clear, these could be two different people!) Prospective students with interests related to any of our lab's work are encouraged to apply.

Much of our current research examines emerging technology – both as a tool to study cognition and behavior (e.g., with smartphones and other recording devices) and as a topic in its own right (e.g., questions of morality, agency, and trust in a changing technological landscape; people's perceptions of and relationships with machines). However, we have several other topics of inquiry, often driven by students' own interests.

Currently we have several ongoing projects in the lab.

- (1) Personalization of Machines: We have recently completed our first lab study examining the connections people feel toward machines (here, small robotic toys) with different features (names, gender pronouns, etc). We have several follow-up studies planned in this vein – broadly, the question of endowing machines with lifelike qualities is of great interest.
- (2) Smartphones: Thoughts and Behavior: We have two ongoing projects involving smartphones. The first considers the "folk theories" people use to think about their phones - the metaphors through which they understand the devices' function and meaning. We've shown interesting differences in the way people think, with a range of behavioral consequences. The second examines interventions that can be implemented to reduce smartphone dependence and improve the quality of time people spend on their phones.
- (3) Consumer Psychology: We have ongoing research focusing on leveraging psychological theory to improve understanding of consumer cognition and behavior. Specifically, we are leveraging self-expansion theory to capture the incorporation of brands into the self-concept, and using principles from the judgment and decision making literature to develop new ways to conduct concept testing.

In addition to these topics, my lab works on other applications of social psychological theory: social identity and acculturation, political psychology, and health psychology. New students will work on one or more of these projects, in addition to developing research in areas of mutual interest.

Dr. Omar Ruvalcaba

My research focuses on understanding first-generation students' sense of belonging, participation, and help-seeking in school and work settings. Although some of my studies focus on technology and the tech industry, I also have numerous studies focusing on the experiences of first-generation immigrant students. For example, in one study, I focus on studying how Latina/o students participate in class and seek help during office hours. In a second study, I examine how first-generation students navigate institutional, family, cultural, and gender expectations (and how this relates to mental health).

Dr. Holli Tonyan

My research interests examine children's development as part of social and cultural contexts. My interests are quite broad, but my research has focused on infancy through early childhood (before starting school) and social and emotional aspects of development. I have particular expertise in attachment theory, socio-cultural historical activity theory (SCHAT, following Vygotsky's legacy), ethology (drawing on evolutionary biology), mixed-methods, observational methods, and exploratory/graphic data analysis. Recent projects focus on in-home non-parental child care, specifically licensed family child care, commonly referred to as "home day care".

I am beginning a new line of work into associations between friendships, peer interactions and children's physiological stress responses (salivary cortisol and alpha amylase) in family child care. Several mixed-method projects are available for student involvement, but most current efforts focus on family child care providers' descriptions of their daily routine activities (in-depth qualitative interviews). Other recent projects have examined parents' responses to an internet survey of daily transitions between home and child day care settings (e.g., drop-off and pick-up times), a survey of child care providers to better understand the ecology of child day care settings in the San Fernando Valley, and mother-infant interaction among low-income Latino families (archival video or observational analysis).

Dr. Yolanda Vasquez-Salgado

My research focuses on Latina/o, first-generation college, and low-income student populations during the transition to college. I utilize various research methodologies (qualitative, survey, experimental) and designs (cross-sectional, longitudinal) to investigate factors that contribute to the health and academic achievement of these populations, with the goal of designing interventions to help promote their resilience. I am particularly interested in a sense of cultural value conflict or mismatch that students raised in more collectivistic home environments (e.g., first-generation college students) experience with the individualism of the university culture.

Dr. Erica Wohldmann

My research is concerned with factors that influence attention, learning, memory and decision-making.

- (1) **Attention and Learning**: Situations that tax our attentional capacity can impact learning, memory, and performance of tasks in a variety of ways. My research in this area examines how cognition changes as a function of secondary task demands (divided attention), as well as how different environments (e.g., natural versus urban) change our ability to focus and learn. In the past, we have found learning to be highly specific to the task requirements, and future research will explore conditions under which learning is more flexible. In addition, we've shown that being in a natural environment improves attention and learning relative to being in an urban setting. This research helps to inform how learning and memory are altered by conditions of stress, and how to restore attention.
- (2) **Cognitive Factors that Influence Food, Health, and Pro-Environmental Decisions**: What we choose to eat has huge impacts on social and environmental issues. For example, diet-related diseases such as cancer, heart disease, and diabetes are the leading causes of death in the U.S. Agricultural pesticides are polluting our rivers and streams, drinking water that is necessary for maintaining life. Similarly, what we choose to purchase—from clothes to cars—has impacts on the environment, social wellbeing, and the economy. I design experiments to examine factors that influence consumption, generally speaking, with the goal of better understanding how to create a more environmentally and socially conscious world.
- (3) **Learning versus Doing**: What is the role of education in decision making? How knowledgeable do we need to be to make "the right" or "best" or "most rational" choice? This is an area of research that fascinates me. I've designed a number of studies to examine how education and expertise impact decisions in a variety of realms, including food choices, environmental responsibility and social justice.

Research assistants who work in my lab will gain valuable experience conducting psychological research, which will make them highly competitive applicants for graduate programs. They are trained to help me collect data by testing human subjects, do library research and literature reviews, and to help me analyze data. My research assistants present our findings at professional conferences both on and off campus.