

# *2023 Ph.D. Hooding Ceremony*

*Department of Psychology  
University of California, Los Angeles*



*The Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy) is the highest academic degree the University can confer. Candidates for this degree are required to take an extensive series of courses, seminars, and rigorous examinations that determine whether the student may proceed to dissertation research. Their research must constitute an original contribution to the state of knowledge in the selected subject and is designed in a doctoral dissertation read and approved by a doctoral committee of at least four faculty members. Finally, the dissertation is defended in an oral examination conducted by the doctoral committee. Only after a successful dissertation defense is the degree awarded.*

*Today's recipients of the Doctor of Philosophy degree have persevered, and in doing so, they have exhibited great dedication and commitment. Thank you for being here to celebrate their distinguished achievements and contributions to the field of Psychology.*

*Class of 2023*

# *Welcome*

*On behalf of the graduating class of 2023, the UCLA Department of Psychology would like to personally welcome parents, family, and friends to this very joyful event.*

*El Departamento de Psicología de UCLA, en nombre del grupo de titulados del 2023, desea darles la bienvenida personalmente a los padres, familiares, y amigos que nos honran con su presencia en este evento tan alegre.*

*The Department of Psychology at UCLA acknowledges our presence on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the Gabrielino/Tongva peoples.*

# *Program*

## *Call to Order*

Professor Annette L. Stanton  
Chair, Department of Psychology

## *Procession of Faculty and Graduates*

## *Welcome*

Professor Annette L. Stanton

## *Graduate Address*

Dr. Benjamin Rosenberg

## *Presentation of the Dena Chertoff Graduate Student Service Award*

Professor Theodore Robles  
Vice Chair, Graduate Studies

## *Tribute to Research and Teaching*

Professor Michelle Craske

## *Presentation of Joseph A. Gengerelli Dissertation Award*

Professor Lara Ray  
Chair, Graduate Student Awards Committee

## *Presentation and Hooding of Candidates*

Professor Theodore Robles

## *Concluding Remarks*

## *Recessional and Reception*

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# CLAUDIA GABRIELA AGUIRRE

*Neural and behavioral features of flexible learning under uncertainty*

## Dissertation Description:

We are surrounded by salient cues and actions in our everyday lives that predict reward in a constantly changing environment. Cognitive flexibility refers to our ability to re-evaluate these previously learned associations that predicted reward and adjust our current responses following changes in the environment. Conversely, the inability to respond flexibly when stimuli or actions in our environment are no longer rewarding, can lead to maladaptive behavior and impairments in decision-making, which is a common feature across many neuropsychiatric disorders. Thus, my research has focused on identifying the neural mechanisms underlying cognitive flexibility, by using techniques that allow us to manipulate neural activity, paired with behavioral paradigms that test for flexible learning and decision-making. My research could aid in establishing a causal link between brain and behavior associated with cognitive flexibility and better understanding both adaptive and maladaptive decision-making.

## Acknowledgements & Announcements:

I would like to thank my family for their unconditional love and support throughout my academic career, and a special thanks to both of my parents who have sacrificed so much along the way to get me to where I am today. I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Alicia Izquierdo, who has been an incredibly supportive and generous mentor for the past six years. I would also like to recognize my dissertation committee members Dr. Lara Ray, Dr. Igor Spigelman, and Dr. Kate Wassum for their guidance and encouragement.

## MEREDITH ROSE BOYD

*Application of Organizational Management Concepts to the Study of Clinical Supervision in Community Mental Health: The Influence of Clinical Supervision in the Therapy Room and Broader Organization*

### Dissertation Description:

In community mental health organizations, clinical supervisors are well-positioned to support ongoing development of therapists' clinical skills through one-on-one and group meetings. Further, they are positioned to positively impact therapists' experience of the organizations in which they work because they interface with upper-level management and front-line workers. Acknowledging these potential influences, this dissertation examined supervisor impact on therapist use of clinical skills during psychotherapy sessions and therapist experience of their work environment.

### Acknowledgements & Announcements:

My doctoral degree represents the support of a community of family, friends, and mentors. Thank you to my parents, Ken and Janet, for their unwavering confidence in me. Even from across the country during a global pandemic, I was never too far to feel their love. Thank you to my sister, Rachel, for being my serious supporter while helping me to not take things too seriously. Thank you to Gabe, my partner in all things, for making LA an adventure and a home. Thank you to Rich and Carolyn for welcoming me as family and driving 70+ hours to help us move. Thank you to my cohort mates for sharing in the graduate experience. The depth of intellect and passion of this group makes me hopeful for our field. Thank you to my sweet friends who helped me take breaks and find balance.

Thank you to my graduate mentor, Bruce Chorpita, for training me to take a big picture view of my research and maintain focus on the mission driving our work. Thank you to my lab mates for being dependable collaborators and friends, especially Alayna Park who tirelessly answered my questions at every stage of training. Thank you to Cara Lewis who consistently gave me opportunities to push myself and made the process fun. Thank you to my clinical supervisors, particularly Danielle Keenan-Miller, for modeling values-driven clinical work and fostering my growth as a therapist. Thank you to the internship training team at the Ann Arbor VA for concluding this degree on a high note. I am endlessly grateful to everyone who made my degree possible. I am excited for the next step in my career working as a postdoctoral scholar at CDIS at Northwestern University.

# MOUSLIM CHERKAOUI

*Unconscious associative learning with decoded neuroreinforcement*

## Dissertation Description:

Your brain is constantly active and spontaneously thinking about different things. Sometimes it processes information that you become aware of. But most of the time it processes information that you do not become aware of.

My research tested whether we can make people make decisions and develop preferences based on information they've only processed unconsciously. To do this, I read people's brain activity and noticed for example every time the brain spontaneously started thinking about some objects or animals (i.e. cats, dogs, chairs, hammers). Then I took advantage of the fact that the brain likes to repeat doing things that have been rewarded, so every time my participants' brains spontaneously start thinking about cats, I reward them, to make it more likely that their brains think about cats. Importantly, when my participants receive a reward, they do not know that it is because their brain is thinking about cats unconsciously. Then the final test is to see whether this lead to people developing an unconscious preference for cats over other animals and objects.

## Acknowledgements & Announcements:

First and foremost, I'd like to thank my mother. My mother is the most generous, loving, and caring person I know. To her I am eternally grateful. I live to make her happy and proud. I thank my father for giving me the life that he dreamt for me. I want to thank my wife. Being her husband is the greatest honor I'll ever have.

I also want to thank my chair, Jesse Rissman, it was a pleasure being part of his lab and getting to learn from his exceptionally analytical mind. I want to thank my committee. I want to thank Hakwan Lau for his mentorship and generosity.

I thank all my lab mates, both in the Rissman lab and in the Lau lab. My classmates. And all the staff at UCLA and Japan that I met along the way.

## LUCY CUI

*Number representations: Improper Fractions, Squares, Square Roots*

### Dissertation Description:

Many years of K-12 math education are dedicated to the learning of numbers (e.g., counting, different number forms: whole numbers, decimals, fractions). A common challenge is the integration of learned number forms (e.g., whole numbers) with new number forms (e.g., decimals). In my dissertation, I ask the question of whether adults also rely on more familiar/known number forms when processing these more complex number forms: improper fractions (e.g., magnitudes more than 1,  $5/3$ ), squares and square roots. My dissertation fills in major gaps in the numerical cognition literature and has implications for algebra and calculus readiness in students.

### Acknowledgements & Announcements:

I am incredibly grateful for my PhD advisor: Zili Liu, for his unwavering support and guidance throughout my doctoral journey. His constant encouragement helped me get through difficult challenges, especially early on in my program. His mentorship helped me grow into an independent scholar.

I sincerely appreciate the rest of my dissertation committee: Hongjing Lu, Jim Stigler, and Keith Holyoak for their time, expertise, and feedback on my dissertation. I would also like to thank Janet Tomiyama and Alicia Izquierdo for leading an invaluable seminar on professional issues in psychology.

I am grateful to the faculty and staff of the Psychology Department for providing a stimulating academic environment for my undergraduate and graduate study. Special thanks to Lisa for her support throughout my PhD requirements and Diego Garcia for finding TA appointments that match my interests. I would also like to thank my many undergraduate research assistants for their help in my research.

I am thankful for my peers for the shared experiences and for sharing similar struggles. They have made the journey much more worthwhile. Last but not least, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to my family for supporting my decision to pursue a PhD and for believing in me.

Thank you all for being a part of my journey and for contributing to my academic and personal growth.

## CAROLINE KEMPER DIEHL

### *Neural Mechanisms of Change in Schizophrenia following Cognitive Training*

#### Dissertation Description:

Cognitive impairment is a key barrier to recovery from schizophrenia. Computerized cognitive training interventions have shown promise and may work in part by changing the connectivity of functional brain networks. My dissertation introduces a novel framework for examining such changes by differentiating between normalization (a reduction in pre-existing network disturbances) and compensation (relying on alternative networks or network features to support cognition). Using this framework in conjunction with graph-theory principles, I examine intrinsic neural network organization in participants with first-episode schizophrenia before and after cognitive training.

#### Acknowledgements & Announcements:

My journey through graduate school would not have been possible without the boundless support of my family, friends, peers, and mentors. I am especially grateful to Emily Sung and Hazel; my parents, Jean Heilprin Diehl and Jackson Diehl; Sandy Diehl and Emily Sorensen; Chrissy Sandman, Meredith Boyd, Jordan Thomas, and my entire cohort; Anika Guha and other graduate and undergraduate members of the Laboratory for Clinical and Affective Psychophysiology; Greg Miller, Cindy Yee-Bradbury, Danielle Keenan-Miller, and all of the clinical supervisors from whom I have been privileged to learn. Starting this fall, I will be an Advanced Fellow in Mental Illness Research and Treatment at the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System, where I will research health and social services for unhoused individuals with schizophrenia and other mental health needs. I look forward to continuing to pursue research and clinical work focused on promoting recovery, empowerment, and community for people with psychiatric disabilities.



## BRITTANY LEIGH DRAKE

*Understanding Contributors to Effects of Emotional Reflection and Expression: The Roles of Psychological Distancing, Universality, and Generativity*

### Dissertation Description:

My dissertation examines how reflecting on and expressing emotions related to significant stressors, such as metastatic cancer and the loss of a loved one, affects psychological health and well-being. Specifically, I explore how the social context and language used in expressing emotions can help individuals distance themselves from their experiences, recognize shared experiences with others, and use their experiences to support and empower others. Additionally, I examine how these processes may help individuals gain new perspectives, derive meaning from their experiences, and contribute to enhanced psychological health and well-being.

### Acknowledgements & Announcements:

I owe immense gratitude to my dissertation chair, Dr. Annette Stanton, and my committee members, Drs. Idan Blank, Matthew Lieberman, and Rena Repetti, without whose guidance and support, this work would not have been possible. My lab mates and cohort have been a constant source of inspiration, collaboration, and encouragement, and I consider myself profoundly fortunate to have forged friendships and academic partnerships with such talented individuals. My family and friends have been my unwavering supporters, providing me with love and encouragement. To my father Gary Drake, my stepmother, Patti Drake, and my mother-in-law, Angela Cesario, your belief in me has kept me motivated and inspired me to pursue my dreams. To my husband Michael, who has been my pillar of strength, an informal mentor, and my greatest source of emotional support and humor to lighten the weight of challenging moments: I could not have done this without you. I would also like to dedicate a special portion of my acknowledgments to my mother, Lisa Drake. Her unparalleled perseverance and strength in the face of chronic illness motivated my research, and her dedication to family taught me how to balance this academic journey without losing sight of myself and my loved ones. Finally, I appreciate the support provided by the UCLA Bedari Kindness Institute to carry out this research.

## LAURA CAROL FRIES

*Practicing Connections: Exploring the Impact of a Core-Concept Intervention on Student Learning in Introductory Statistics*

### Dissertation Description:

My dissertation explored how we develop transferable understanding in complex domains, such as statistics, where learning for many students is hard and slow. In two undergraduate classes, I tested an intervention designed to emphasize the connections between content and the conceptual structure of the domain, delivered as a series of videos embedded in students' interactive, online textbooks. While the intervention improved learning, not all students opted to watch the intervention videos regularly.

### Acknowledgements & Announcements:

Jim Stigler, Karen Givvin, Ji Son, and everyone at the Teaching and Learning Lab: thank you for all you have taught me. You have broadened my horizons, challenged me, and reminded me to keep a sense of humor. I admire you each so much.

Stacy and Mary, my amazing labmates, you made even the tough times fun. I miss you!

Thank you to Patrice, Ellie, Grace, Courtney, Sam, and all who have worked at IDP, for caring for my three children born during graduate school. You have created a magical place and I feel incredibly lucky to have started my parenting journey with you.

Lisa Lee, the most incredible student advisor, thank you for your encouragement and optimism. It meant more than you know!

A humongous thank you to both my Pittman and Fries families, and especially thank you, Mom and Dad, for believing I can do anything.

And Nick, I never would have taken the first step toward this goal if it weren't for you. I owe you everything.

## SASKIA GIEBL

*How to Make the Internet a More Effective Learning Tool: The Role of Thinking-Before-Googling*

### Dissertation Description:

The Internet makes it possible to look up needed information whenever and wherever we need that information. One potential cost, given the evidence that people often “google” information before even trying to come up with an answer on their own, is robbing oneself of the benefits of retrieval practice—that is, making the retrieved or generated information more recallable from our own memories in the future. My dissertation work looks at ways to enhance the effectiveness of the Internet as a tool for learning.

### Acknowledgements & Announcements:

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my family, friends, colleagues at work, research mentors and collaborators, and most importantly, Drs. Elizabeth and Robert Bjork, for their unwavering support throughout my graduate studies.

## LAUREN TIONGCO HOFSCHEIDER

*The Role of Perceived Stress in Food Insecurity and Eating Behaviors*

### Dissertation Description:

Dr. Hofschneider's work explores the relationship between stress and eating within the context of food insecurity. More specifically, she examined how psychological stress negatively impacts self-reported diet quality and eating behaviors.

### Acknowledgements & Announcements:

I would first like to thank my family. I've been immensely lucky to have parents who were passionate about education. Because of you two, I associate the pleasure of reading with trips to the bookstore as a reward for As on my report card. At times, preparing a lecture will remind me of my first slideshow, which I used to convince you two why getting a hamster as a pet was a good idea (it never was). I also wanted to thank my brilliant sister, Kelly, for always keeping me on my toes and helping me find humor throughout my five years of grad school. Hamster aside, I am truly grateful for the support you all showed towards my ambitions.

Janet, thank you for all your encouragement and patience. Your commitment to my success gave me the confidence to pursue my career as a full-time teaching professor. I hope to continue modeling your attention to detail, empathy, and mentorship with my own students.

Finally, to my students at UCLA and LACC, thank you for entrusting me with your education.

Dr. Hofschneider is a tenure-track Assistant Professor in the Psychology Department at Los Angeles City College and an adjunct in the Psychology Department at UCLA.

# CHRISTINA MAE HOUGH

*Neural and Inflammatory Mechanisms of Response to Electroconvulsive Therapy in Treatment-Resistant Major Depression*

## Dissertation Description:

Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) is a highly effective treatment for individuals with depression who do not respond to traditional antidepressants, however, little is known about how ECT improves symptoms of depression. In three studies, this dissertation examined how ECT affects the size of specific brain regions and inflammation in the body, how these changes relate to symptom improvement, and how these neural and inflammatory processes interact to influence clinical treatment outcomes. Such research may improve our ability to treat this highly prevalent, debilitating and intractable disease.

## Acknowledgements & Announcements:

I have been fortunate to receive immense support from many incredible people throughout my life and the past several years of graduate school. Thank you to my advisor and Chair, Dr. Craske, and my other committee members, Drs. Narr, Bower and Karlsgodt. Additional thanks to Drs. Wolkowitz, Mellon and Mathews for their mentorship at UCSF prior to graduate school. I have truly stood on the shoulders of giants.

Thank you to my family – both biological and chosen. I am immensely grateful for your support and sacrifices.

Mark Shrayber and Pooja Patel, thank you for your incredible and enduring friendship. To the Bartels and Mallillins, thank you for welcoming me into your family and making LA home. To my niece Maelyn, thank you for making me want to be the best version of myself. Wes and Tina, thank you for always being there, even from thousands of miles away. To my mom, Judy Hough, thank you for your unconditional love and endless support, pride and confidence in me. Your resilience, work ethic and selflessness inspire me. To my late father, James Hough, thank you for teaching me what it means to be tough – to persevere in the face of challenge, never be limited by others and always give my all. Hooah.

To Daniel Bartels, my best friend and partner in life. Thank you for always being my biggest fan and strongest supporter, waking up at 5 am and making breakfast before I went to work, paying our bills when I worried about money, taking care of the house when I worked 14-hr days, and keeping me grounded through it all. Words can never express how grateful I am for you and everything you do. I could never have done this without you.

# NICHOLAS ICHIEN

## *Relations in Human Cognition*

### Dissertation Description:

We often learn something new by finding similarities between things that are nonetheless fairly dissimilar: High-schoolers reading Hamlet might benefit from comparing the play to The Lion King, and cognitive scientists frequently rely on comparisons between the mind and a computer. Useful comparisons tend to require selective attention to relations between things: The solar system is like an atom because they both involve sets of objects (planets or electrons) that revolve around a more massive object (the sun or a nucleus). My dissertation tests the ubiquity of relations in human thinking.

### Acknowledgements & Announcements:

Grad school would have been unbearable without friends and family. Thank you to my close friends Pete, Lauren, Emily, Jamie, Lee, Amalia, Raihyung, Hunter, Mason, Shuhao, Andrew, Kendra, Ian, Jen; to my Kickolas Cage teammates Alex, Allie, Ben, Emily, Gavin; to my immediate family, my mom Helen, my siblings Jessica, Stephanie, and Tim; my nephew Hank, my niece Emiko; and to my LA family, Haruko, Joanne, Jael, Lawrence, Jimmy, Debbie, Torey, Derek, and Bella.

Grad school would have been impossible without my mentors. Thank you to Hongjing and Keith for teaching me all I know about research; to Patricia and Idan for humoring my naivety; and to Silvia for her guidance from afar.

# MAIRA FATIMA KARAN

## *Empathy and Associated Neural Processing in Adolescence*

### Dissertation Description:

In recent years, there has been a notable shift from framing adolescence as a period of “storm and stress” to re-characterizing this developmental phase as a time of opportune malleability when positive behaviors mature in concert with characteristics that enable adolescents to adequately explore their rapidly changing social world. My dissertation aimed to contribute to the growing literature of developmental cognitive neuroscience by investigating how empathy -- the ability to feel and understand another person's emotional and mental state -- develops during adolescence, and examined what regions of the developing adolescent brain are involved in empathy.

### Acknowledgements & Announcements:

This momentous milestone would not be possible without the love and support of my family, friends, and colleagues at UCLA and beyond. Thank you to my parents, Sara and Saveed, for making that move across the globe all those years ago so that I could be where I am today, manifesting my dreams. Thank you to my brother, Abraar, for being a model scientist and the loudest cheerleader in all that I do. Tila, soy muy afortunada de tenerte como mi otra Mamá - gracias por todo. Thank you to my partner in life, Saeb, for your endless love, companionship, and caffeine refills. Thank you to my tribe, Dr. Baker, Dr. Tashjian, Dr. Rastogi, Dr. Sahi, Dr. Schorn, and many others, for walking this journey of grad school by my side. I am incredibly grateful to my lab, the Adolescent Development Lab, and its members (past and present) who have helped shape who I am as a scientist. This July, I am excited to begin a postdoctoral research position with the Zeitzer Circadian Sleep Lab at Stanford University!

## LEE LAZAR

### *The Neural Correlates of Empathy that Predict Prosocial Behavior in Adolescence*

#### Dissertation Description:

Empathy is the ability to share, understand, and care about the thoughts and feelings of others. While empathizing with someone else's pain might motivate you to help them, it can also cause emotional distress, leading you to turn away from the situation. My dissertation aims to examine neural activity during an empathic experience and understand how it may predict whether someone goes on to help the person they are empathizing with. I specifically studied this within adolescence, a period when neural regions underlying empathy are developing at different rates.

#### Acknowledgements & Announcements:

My PhD is not an individual accomplishment - it took a village. To my advisor Naomi - I hit the jackpot having you as an advisor. I came into graduate school relatively clueless, and was blessed with the most brilliant, understanding, and thoughtful mentor. You have shaped my thinking in invaluable ways, and I can only hope to mentor others the way you have me. To my parents, who are an endless source of support, love, and wisdom. Abba - even after a long week, coming home to your infectious smile and big hugs melted all my worries away. Thank you for modeling what it looks like to both work hard and revel in all that life has to offer. Ima - sharing a love of research with my best friend is so special. I know you couldn't get your PhD because you were selflessly taking care of us, so it feels like kismet that you raised a daughter who would complete it for you. You are my rock. Aviv and Bar - thank you for paving the way for me in every phase of life. Being able to see you go through different obstacles, handle them with grace, and then advise me is the greatest privilege. Gil - while 9 years younger, I look up to you in many ways, and seeing you always makes my day better. Thank you to my friends, who have supported, celebrated, cried, and laughed with me. To my love, Lipi, who is steadfast, sharp, and quietly caring - thank you for both loving and challenging me. Hard times are manageable with you by my side, and life with you is simply sweet. And finally, I dedicate my dissertation to my grandparents - Giora, Tamar, Chaim, and Chana. To have a part of your resilience and love woven into my DNA gives me great pride.



## ADRIANA SOFIA MENDEZ LEAL

### *Neurodevelopmental Influences of the Early Caregiving Environment on Sensory Processing: Implications for Mental Health*

#### Dissertation Description:

Most people have at least one major stressful experience during childhood, and research suggests these experiences can increase the risk for mental health challenges. My dissertation shows that early stressful experiences may make teenagers and adults more sensitive to sensory cues (sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches) in their daily lives, and that this increased sensitivity is linked to more symptoms of anxiety and other mental health conditions. To try to understand how sensory symptoms develop after stress, I asked people about how different sensory cues make them feel, and looked at how their brains responded to uncomfortable sounds. Together, my research suggests that understanding these sensory symptoms may help us learn how to better support mental health after childhood stress.

#### Acknowledgements & Announcements:

Thank you to my one-in-a-million doctoral advisor, Dr. Jennifer Silvers, for generously sharing an endless bounty of scientific and strategic wisdom, empathetic and steadfast advocacy, and expertise on where to find the best hot chocolate and vegan donuts.

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## POOJA KIRIT PATEL

*Identifying decision-making and reinforcement learning deficits in psychosis: Clinical, neural, and transdiagnostic implications*

### Dissertation Description:

My dissertation focused on negative symptoms of psychotic illness (e.g., reduced motivation, decreased pleasure during rewarding activities). I investigated whether reward guided decision-making and reinforcement learning deficits contribute to negative symptoms, and examined how cognition and brain structure are related to these deficits. I also explored how deficits manifest across stages of illness, across and between diagnostic boundaries, and across the spectrum of severity. Ultimately, my goal is for these findings to inform the development of targeted interventions in the future.

### Acknowledgements & Announcements:

This work would not have been possible without the guidance of my dissertation chair, Dr. Karlsgodt, and Drs. Bearden, Green and Sharpe who served on my committee. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Stephanie Groman at the University of Minnesota, without whom the innovative analyses in my dissertation would not be possible.

I am grateful for the friendship and guidance from all those in the Clinical and Cognitive Neuroscience Lab. I have been lucky enough to find lifelong friends in graduate school, including Christina Hough, Brittany Drake, Julia Schorn, Kelsey Stiles, Sophie Arkin, and Dr. Joao Guassi Moreira.

I am grateful to my family for their support— Sonali, Rupali, Suriya and my parents, Kirit and Yasmin. Navigating the challenges of graduate school would not have been possible without my chosen family— my twin soul and champion Angela Sardo, those who have been by me since childhood (Ava Calvano, Maria LaVerghetta, Emily Cheung-Hynson), those who have helped me weather seasons of chaos (Dee Lowe, Abby Wilson), and those who have helped Los Angeles feel like home (Sophie Kelly, Erin Kaufmann, Sarah Beth Tyrey).

I would also like to thank the research participants who participated in these studies, many of whom were navigating serious mental health challenges while participating in research protocols.

After graduation, I look forward to continuing my scholarly work and clinical practice as a postdoc in the Advanced Fellowship Program in Mental Illness Research and Treatment at the West LA VA.

## ARIELLE RADIN

*Breast Cancer-Related Cognitive Impairment Across the Cancer Continuum: Elucidating Clinical Drivers, Biological Mechanisms, and Trajectories*

### Dissertation Description:

The aim of this dissertation was to study clinical drivers, biological mechanisms, and trajectories of cognitive problems during breast cancer survivorship. Study 1 examined the associations between different surgery types and cognitive problems over time; Study 2 tested associations between inflammation and cognitive problems longitudinally; and Study 3 identified data-driven trajectories of cognitive problems over time and identified clinical, psychological, and biological risk factors for trajectory group membership.

### Acknowledgements & Announcements:

I would like to take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Julie Bower, for her invaluable guidance, support, and encouragement throughout my doctoral journey. Her deep expertise, wisdom, and patience have been instrumental in shaping my research and helping me navigate the challenges of graduate school. I feel incredibly fortunate to have had such a dedicated and inspiring mentor. I'd also like to thank Drs. Annette Stanton and Patricia Ganz for their support and expertise over the years.

I also want to extend my heartfelt thanks to my parents, who have always been there for me, cheering me on and believing in me, even when I doubted myself. As a physician, my dad inspired my interest in healthcare and science, and as a breast cancer survivor, my mom inspired my goal to conduct research that will improve the quality of life for survivors like her. Their unwavering love and support have sustained me through the ups and downs of this long and challenging journey. I owe them more than words can express.

Last but not least, I want to acknowledge my husband, Joe Pulverman, for his support and encouragement, his boundless patience and understanding, and his unwavering belief in me. He has been my rock and my best friend throughout the majority of this journey, and I couldn't have done it without him (and our three fur babies). I am deeply grateful for his love and his presence in my life.

## GIOVANNI RAMOS

*App-Based Mindfulness Meditation for People of Color Who Experience Race-Related Stress: A Randomized Controlled Trial*

### Dissertation Description:

This study examined whether a mindfulness meditation app could be a feasible and effective intervention for people of color who experience frequent instances of discrimination in their everyday lives. Results showed that participants across the United States used the app consistently, reporting high acceptability and treatment satisfaction in this 4-week program. More importantly, this low-intensity intervention led to clinically significant reductions in stress, anxiety, and depression in this at-risk population.

### Acknowledgements & Announcements:

Gio would like to thank his family, friends, and mentors for their unconditional support and encouragement during this journey. He loves you all and would not be here without you. He is also grateful to his patients and students who motivate him to continue working toward achieving a more just society where anyone can access high-quality mental health services and pursue a higher education irrespective of race, financial situation, native language, or immigration status.

This year, Gio will continue his academic career as both a Ford Foundation Fellow and the UC Chancellor's Postdoctoral Fellow in Psychological Science at UC Irvine. These prestigious awards, administered by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine and the Office of the President at the University of California, respectively, are made to outstanding scholars whose research, teaching, and service will contribute to increasing diversity and equal opportunity in academia.

## RITIKA SONAL RASTOGI

*The Social Worlds of Immigrant-Origin Youth: Peer Status and Friendships Across Adolescence*

### Dissertation Description:

Youth in immigrant families often face multiple challenges to fit in, such as exclusionary immigration policies, cultural conflict, and bullying. To navigate these challenges, they need close, supportive alliances at school. Inspired by her experiences as a second-generation Indian American, Ritika examined the school-based relationships of over 3000 immigrant youth. Despite being neglected by peers at school, immigrant youth had strong and positive friendships with each other, showing the power of shared lived experiences in bringing together youth of diverse racial and cultural backgrounds.

### Acknowledgements & Announcements:

The list of people I would like to thank is long. To my mother, for showing me what strength and tenacity in womanhood look like, and my father, for your kindness and endless patience. To you both for your fierce love and for the countless hours you have sacrificed for my education and success; I can only hope to give as much to you as you have given me, one day. To my brother, for doing life with me. You are a fighter and a truth-teller; every day I am in awe of you. Gratitude to my aunt, uncle, and little cousins who have always been my home, even thousands of miles away from my motherland. The biggest, warmest, and squeezey-est hug to my friends near and far, who have kept me alive, fighting, laughing, and dreaming. You let me be my fullest self. I am grateful you have shown me what acceptance and love can look like. To my friend and roommate, Taylor Morissette Brown, who took her life on December 12, 2019 while enrolled in UCLA's Graduate Programs in Biosciences. I am so grateful to feel you watching over me every day; I will never give up because of you. May you rest in paradise always. Thank you to my committee for your support, flexibility, and integrity. You have made me a better and more critical scientist. And, to my advisor Jaana Juvonen, thank you for seeing something in me and choosing to work with me all those years ago. Thank you for your wisdom, mentorship, and encouragement, for pushing me to take a leap of faith even when I am afraid. I am almost one year into my postdoc at Brigham and Women's Hospital and I am so excited for what comes next. None of this would be possible without you all—my village!

## **BENJAMIN ROSENBERG**

*Neural, Physiological, and Behavioral Correlates of Anhedonia – Associations with Pavlovian Learning and Exposure Therapy*

### Dissertation Description

Predominant models of exposure therapy, the gold-standard treatment for anxiety disorders, are built upon principles of Pavlovian fear learning. Anxiety and depression commonly co-occur. Anhedonia, or a loss of interest or pleasure in activities, is a symptom dimension that is often considered unique to depressive disorders and that has rarely been considered in the context of fear learning paradigms. This dissertation considers if anhedonia is associated with 1) unique patterns of brain activity during Pavlovian fear learning, 2) overgeneralization of learned fears, and 3) differences in learning processes during exposure therapy. The studies support potential links between anhedonia and core mechanisms of fear learning and exposure therapy, supporting theories of how anxiety and depression symptoms interact with one another.

### Acknowledgements & Announcements:

My dissertation is dedicated to my zeyde, Nathan Rosenberg, who was the first member of his family to attend college and became my very first academic role model. I wish that he could read it.

There are so many people who have helped make this work possible. To my parents, Nancy Small and Gordon Rosenberg, who have always supported and encouraged me – this work is as much yours as it is mine. To my brother, Zachary Rosenberg, who has always shown me the way – you have no need for any more dissertations in your life. Please disregard this one. To all of my academic mentors throughout the years, Drs. Andy Reed, Laura Carstensen, Katharina Kircanski, Ian Gotlib, Amit Etkin, Desmond Oathes, Roselinde Kaiser, Hakwan Lau, Michelle Craske, and many others – you have inspired me, advocated for me, and fostered my growth as a scientist, thinker, and mentor to others. I simply would not be here without you. I would like to especially acknowledge Dr. Michelle Craske, who welcomed me into her lab and has taught me so many things I cannot list them all here. It is perhaps the most fortunate accident of my career that I ended up working with such a brilliant, generous, kind, and inspiring mentor during my doctoral training. Thank you for being you. Finally, I would like to thank my committee members, Drs. Jennifer Silvers, Jesse Rissman, and Katherine Karlsgodt, for advising and supporting me throughout the completion of my dissertation.

My graduate studies were generously supported by the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship Program and the UCLA Dissertation Year Fellowship Award.

## RAZIA SUKAINA SAHI

*Social facilitation of emotion regulation: Uncovering the mechanisms and outcomes of social regulatory support*

### Dissertation Description:

Decades of research have demonstrated the importance of regulating our emotional states for health and well-being. However, most of this research focuses on how we regulate our own emotions. In everyday life, we often receive help from others with managing emotions, and, in the absence of supportive relationships, physical and mental health tend to suffer. My dissertation examined the intersection between social support and emotion regulation research, illuminating the mechanisms and outcomes of social emotion regulation processes.

### Acknowledgements & Announcements:

I am deeply grateful to the many mentors, colleagues, mentees, and lab mates that I've learned from and with throughout graduate school, with special gratitude towards my advisors Dr. Naomi Eisenberger and Dr. Jennifer Silvers for supporting my growth as a researcher through these challenging and formative years. I also must highlight that I would not have reached this milestone without the unwavering support of my family and friends. Thank you mom for being my inspiration and my strength. Thank you Hunter for being my partner through life's peaks and valleys. I will take all my learning and the deep connections forged on this path into the next chapter of my life as a postdoctoral researcher at Princeton University.

# CHRISTINA SANDMAN

## *Upregulating Positive Affect Through Imaginal Recounting in Anhedonia*

### Dissertation Description:

Depression can be viewed as having two “volume knobs”: negative emotion is turned up while positive emotion is turned down. The majority of therapeutic interventions are designed to decrease negative affect but are largely ineffective for increasing positive affect. My dissertation examined new treatments for anhedonia (loss of interest and pleasure), including Positive Affect Treatment and Virtual-Reality Reward training. I found that the skill of “imaginal recounting”, or savoring specific pleasant sensations, thoughts, and feelings can enhance positive affect for individuals with anhedonia.

### Acknowledgements & Announcements:

I would like to express gratitude to the many people who supported my journey throughout graduate school. To my parents Dan and Bonnie Sandman – thank you for nurturing my curiosity since childhood and supporting my love of learning. To my family – Erica, Tim, Lindsey, and Leah—for bringing joy to my life. To my partner Grant Carey – thank you for moving to California with me, for sharing a life together, and for everything I cannot even begin to express. To my cohort & friends – Caroline Diehl, Meredith Boyd, Ben Rosenberg, Meghan Hoch, Arielle Pulverman, Mason McClay, Jordan Thomas, and Rose Howell – it is inspiring to know you. To my advisor Dr. Michelle Craske – thank you for the incredible research and clinical opportunities you have provided me, which have fostered my love of both. To my dissertation committee – Drs. Julie Bower, Jennifer Sumner, and David Clewett – thank you for your valuable input and support. To my fantastic research assistants – this work would not have been possible (or as fun!) without you. To all participants and clients – thank you for sharing with me. I hope that in doing so you found some peace and happiness. To all of my clinical supervisors and especially Dr. Danielle Keenan-Miller – thank you for helping me find my passion and shape me into the therapist I am today.

After graduation I will serve as a postdoctoral associate with Dr. Nikki Rubin, specializing in third-wave cognitive behavioral therapies, while continuing research collaborations as an affiliate of the UCLA Anxiety & Depression Research Center.



## MIRIAM ELYNN SCHWYCK

*Tracking relationships: Uncovering how people acquire, represent, use, and predict social network information*

### Dissertation Description:

Every interaction is embedded in the complex social systems surrounding each person. Using social network analysis to quantify this social context provides a unique opportunity to understand how the social network surrounding a perceiver, as well as the one surrounding the target of perception, shapes social thought and behavior. Given the immense size and complexity of social networks, humans have developed the necessary shortcuts to efficiently track and navigate their relationships. In my dissertation, I sought to uncover the neural and cognitive mechanisms through which people are able to track their social networks and how this social context then shapes their perceptions, thoughts, and decisions.

### Acknowledgements & Announcements:

Thank you to my own social network for all the support and encouragement you have shown me throughout graduate school. Special thanks go to my advisor, Carolyn Parkinson, for her patient guidance and encouraging me to follow my own ideas; to my partner, Anne Schwyck, for her unending belief in me and her loving openness to sharing this experience; to my family for encouraging and modeling thoughtful, conscientious choices throughout my career; and to my friends who took this journey with me, one step at a time.

## LUCY SHEN

### *Investigating the Neural Correlates of Empathy in Couples' Communication*

#### Dissertation Description:

Despite the importance of communication for relationship functioning and maintenance, even partners who love each other often struggle to communicate effectively. Although conflict is inevitable in close relationships, couples vary significantly in their capacity to resolve disagreements, and partners also often struggle to communicate support and comfort to one another in sensitive ways during stressful times. This dissertation examined the neuroscience of empathy in couples' communication throughout social support and conflict interactions by measuring brain activity in regions associated with empathic processing in real-time.

#### Acknowledgements & Announcements:

I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Benjamin Karney, Dr. Thomas Bradbury, Dr. Matthew Lieberman, and Dr. Theodore Roles, for their insight and support on this work throughout my experiences as a graduate researcher at UCLA. I would also like to thank my collaborators, Ashley Binnquist, Raquael Joiner, Shannon Burns, and Macrina Dieffenbach, for offering their invaluable insight and assistance on these projects. I also thank my honors student, Jacki Huerta, and my dedicated team of research assistants for their incredibly hard work on the video coding tasks for this project. Extending beyond this research, I am incredibly grateful to my lab-mates in the Marriage and Close Relationships Lab for their friendship, emotional support, and encouragement throughout my time at UCLA. I am forever thankful to my parents for their unconditional love and support. I am grateful to my partner for being my confidante, best friend, source of joy, and shoulder to lean on. I would also like to thank Dr. Brooke Feeney, my undergraduate research advisor at Carnegie Mellon, for training me, always believing in me, and becoming one of my dearest friends and role models to this day. I'd additionally like to thank my friends and colleagues at Carnegie Mellon University, Brian Chin and Yuxi Xie, for their friendship, encouragement, and fun, insightful research chats. Lastly, I'd like to thank my sweet and adorable cats, Prince and Sir Elton, for always cuddling, napping, and purring by my side throughout the many late hours of writing my dissertation.

## KELSEY STILES

### *Social, Emotional, and Psychophysiological Risk Factors for Aggression in Pre-Adolescent Girls*

#### Dissertation Description:

The goals of my dissertation were to evaluate individual differences in emotion, social cognition, and psychophysiology that accompany aggressive behavior in pre-adolescent girls. By assessing several risk processes and multiple forms of aggressive behavior, particularly those that are most relevant for girls (e.g., relational aggression), my dissertation is informative for understanding developmental processes in this understudied group, which can inform the development of targeted, mechanism-based interventions for behavioral problems in girls.

#### Acknowledgements & Announcements:

I would like to give special acknowledgements to several people who supported my success throughout my graduate studies. First, to my advisor, Dr. Steve S. Lee, for his mentorship and unwavering support. Thank you for valuing my growth and development not just as a researcher, clinician, and educator, but as a whole person. Second, to my family and friends, for their emotional support through both the highs and the lows, and for their belief that I could succeed even when I didn't know it myself. Thank you for your patience and trust through my years of prioritizing my education and professional development. Third, to my colleagues in my graduate school cohort and in the Lee Lab, who I am fortunate to consider lifelong friends and the best people I could've imagined celebrating this accomplishment alongside. Finally, to the youth and families who lent their time and energy to participate in my research and clinical training. Their stories of resilience continually reorient us to the purpose and the impact of our work, and without their trust and openness, this work would not be possible.

As I move forward to the next stage of my career as a child and adolescent clinical psychologist, I look forward to advancing the study and practice of clinical services for youth and families. I am excited to start my postdoctoral fellowship at the UCLA Semel Institute working with Dr. Tara Peris and Dr. Sandra Loo, where I will be testing and supporting interventions targeting pediatric anxiety disorders and ADHD.

## SOPHIE MAKO TANAKA

*WHO, WHAT, HOW: A Roadmap for Predicting Men's Support for Gender Equality Efforts Led*

### Dissertation Description:

My dissertation outlines a roadmap for predicting men's support for gender equality programs as a function of WHO is leading them, WHAT type of threat the program poses to the gender hierarchy, and HOW they are implementing it. This research draws on various organizational and psychological literature to clarify the conditions under which some leaders of gender equality will receive more support than others.

### Acknowledgements & Announcements:

First and foremost, I thank my advisor and dissertation chair, Dr. Yuen Huo, for the opportunities, mentorship, and resources provided to me throughout my doctoral research. Your guidance has been instrumental in shaping not only my research skills but also my understanding of leadership for institutional change and betterment. Your support has been invaluable, and I am deeply grateful for the trust you place in me and the belief you have in my abilities.

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To my exceptional research assistants, thank you for generously volunteering your time and sharing your knowledge. Each of you enriches the quality and impact of our work.

To my parents, you have consistently provided me with a sense of security and stability. Thank you for instilling in me the values of perseverance and balance. I feel empowered to pursue my goals while prioritizing my well-being and joy! Your unwavering support and sacrifices are at the heart of all my achievements.

## MARY CONYERS TUCKER

### *Prediction vs. Production for Teaching Computer Programming*

#### Dissertation Description:

Computer programming is often viewed as challenging by undergraduate students in the early stages of learning. In this dissertation I developed a prediction-based approach to teaching introductory programming concepts with the goal of increasing learning and motivation among students with limited background knowledge and prior exposure to computer programming. In a randomized experiment, I found that participants assigned to predict the outcome of pre-provided code showed more positive emotional trajectories, increased motivation, and greater learning compared to students randomly assigned to a more traditional instructional condition in which they were asked to write their own code.

#### Acknowledgements & Announcements:

Many helped me along this journey. First, I would like to thank the UCLA undergraduate students who inspired this work and who participated in this research. Second, I am ever grateful for my graduate advisors – Jim Stigler and Ji Son – both brilliant researchers and dedicated teachers and mentors. Their kindness, support, and guidance enabled me to cross the finish line on this dissertation and prepared me for the next stage in my career as an applied researcher. I could not have asked for better advisors. I would also like to thank Karen Givvin, Stacy Shaw, Laura Fries, Claudia Sutter, Adam Blake, and the entire Teaching and Learning Lab for their support, Xinran Wang, whose work as a Research Assistant helped get this project off the ground, as well as Jennifer Silvers and Keith Holyoak for their valuable feedback on this dissertation, and Lisa Lee, who offered excellent support and guidance throughout my time in the psychology graduate program at UCLA. Finally, I'd like to thank my partner, Zach, my parents, and my brother, Don, for their unwavering support and encouragement. I could not have done this without them.

# ALEXANDRA SUSANA VENEGAS

*Alcohol and cannabis co-use: Clinical correlates, mechanisms, and sex differences*

## Dissertation Description:

Cannabis is the most widely used illicit substance across the globe and the most commonly used substance in conjunction with alcohol. Those who co-use alcohol and cannabis tend to display more problematic drinking, a heightened risk for other co-occurring mental health problems, and have poorer prognosis for treatment. The overarching goal of my dissertation was to better understand the nature of co-use to inform treatment options and reduce the burden of disease associated with co-use. Specifically, it revealed important demographic and clinical characteristics of those who co-use alcohol and cannabis, examined sex dependent effects, and probed craving as a mechanism which may serve to promote and maintain co-use.

## Acknowledgements & Announcements:

This dissertation is wholeheartedly dedicated to my family.

I want to especially thank my mom and dad, who instilled in me at a young age the value of hard, honest work and the fulfillment that comes from being of service to others. You are my safe space, my home. I don't know where to begin to thank you. To Stevie, my ultimate confidante and cheerleader. My very best friend and forever partner in life. Thank you for never leaving my side. To Cruz and Luna, my babies, for always being sure to remind me to take a break, have a nap, play outside, chase a ball...thank you for grounding me and bringing me so much light and happiness. My life is infinitely better because of the two of you. Most importantly, thank you to my family for loving me and supporting me unconditionally throughout the challenges of graduate school and life. I love you beyond measure.

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Lastly, to Mama, Papa, Grandma, and Pop. I am honored to carry on your legacy. I hope I have made you proud. I am who I am today because of all of you. From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

# EMILY FRANCES WONG

## *Internet Memes in Political Reasoning*

### Dissertation Description:

The studies presented in this dissertation explore several covert processes that underlie political attitude formation and development: relational reasoning and emotions evoked by internet memes. The work demonstrated that some memes on the internet may constitute a form of metaphor and can serve as conceptual frames that shape judgments of objective data. Lastly, this work showed that liberal and conservative memes on climate change elicited differential emotions. Subsequent structural topic modeling demonstrated corresponding differences in the content of these memes.

### Acknowledgements & Announcements:

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*Class of 2023*

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