

Berkeley Psychology INSIGHT

Letter from the chair

Dear Alumni and Friends,

What a spring semester this has been! Despite the much-needed, but at times relentless, rainy weather, we flew in and hosted 15 job candidates who were interviewing for one of 3 new faculty positions in our department. That we were able to search for 3 new hires in a single year is a testament to campus recognition and support of our top-ranked Psychology Department. We are looking forward to announcing the names of our new colleagues in the Fall newsletter.



Our spring was also filled with faculty and students eager to get back into their research labs, lecture halls, and classrooms after the teaching and research hiatus brought on by the strike in late fall last year. The negotiated agreement has already resulted in one increase in salaries for our graduate students and postdocs, with two more scheduled increases in the coming year and a half. This is great news for students and postdocs, to be sure, but the higher salaries do add substantial financial pressure on the campus and departments, including ours. Our department has been and will continue to be fiercely committed to increasing financial support for our graduate students, in particular, and thus graduate funding remains one of our topmost fundraising priorities.

Amidst all the job candidate visits, teaching, and research, our faculty and graduate students continue to [win local, national, and international awards](#), giving us much to be proud of and to celebrate. Go Bears, go Psychology!

On a more personal note, I will be rotating off as Chair come the end of June. It has been a challenging 3 years in this role, but our department has stayed strong and connected through the many challenges we and the world have faced during this time, maintaining, if not strengthening, our productivity and our community in numerous ways. I am grateful for each and every member of our community – faculty colleagues, staff, and students alike. Looking ahead, I am delighted to announce that we will be in exceptionally good hands – my dear colleague, Professor Ozlem Ayduk, will take over as Chair in July. She will lead us forward into a bright future, as we continue to do our work in the classroom, lab, and society at large, doing all we can – as psychologists, citizens, people – to make the world safer, more equitable, more peaceful, and more sustainable.

I wish everyone a lovely and restorative summer.

Give to Psychology, [HERE](#)

Also please send us your stories and life updates — we feature alumni stories on our website and would love to hear from you!

And keep in touch with us via [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and our [Department website](#).

Serena Chen
Professor and Chair



Honors and Awards

FACULTY

Jason Okonofua, assistant professor of Psychology, was named an APS Fellow, a status awarded to scientists who have made sustained outstanding contributions to the science of psychology.

Sheri Johnson, Rudy Mendoza-Denton, and Joni Wallis were elected lifetime fellows of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), the world's largest general scientific society and publisher of the journal *Science*.

Jan Engelmann, assistant professor of Psychology, was awarded the CAREER award by the National Science Foundation to support his research on how children develop rationality.

Ann Kring, professor of Psychology, was elected as a 2023 Fellow of the Society of Experimental Psychologists, awarded to individuals who have made significant contributions to the field of experimental psychology.

Allison Gopnik, professor of Psychology, received the 2023 Distinguished Scientific Contribution to Child Development Life-Time Award from the Society for Research in Child Development.

Charlan Jeanne Nemeth, professor of Psychology, was a featured speaker at the American Psychological Association annual convention. Her talk focused on her new book "In Defense of Troublemakers: the power of dissent in life and business".

Stephen Hinshaw, professor of Psychology, received the Distinguished Career Award from the Society for Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology. He also delivered the John McGovern Lecture at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, entitled "Stigma, Mental Disorders, Families, and Society: A Vital Frontier for Change."

Dacher Keltner, professor of Psychology, released his new book "Awe: The New Science of Everyday Wonder and How It Can Transform Your Life" in January and it is a national bestseller.

Robert T. Knight, professor of Psychology, will receive an honorary doctorate from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in June. The honorary doctorate is awarded to individuals who have distinguished themselves by academic or creative achievement, or whose activities have been of notable benefit to humanity.

GRADUATE STUDENTS

Stephanie Haft, Clinical Science PhD candidate, received the Outstanding Graduate Student Research Award from the Asian Caucus during the SRCD 2023 Biennial Meeting.

My Dao (Social/Personality), **Christopher Gys** (Clinical), **Nick Nguyen** (Clinical), and **Patricia Porter** (Clinical) all received the prestigious National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship to support their graduate work.

Erika Roach, Clinical Science PhD student, received the Ford Foundation Predoctoral Fellowship to support her graduate work.

Marlen Diaz, Clinical Science PhD student, received National Institutes of Health Research Supplement to Promote Diversity in Health-Related Research.

Eli Susman, Clinical Science PhD student, was awarded the Mind and Life Varela Grant, and the Greater Good Science Center Graduate Research Fellowship to fund his research.

Rongzhi Liu, Developmental PhD student, received a Koppitz Fellowship from the American Psychological Foundation to support her dissertation research.

Publications

Social power & emotion regulation

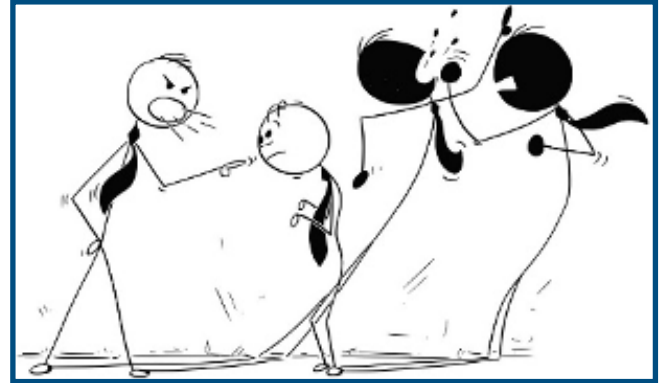
People differ in how they regulate their emotions, but what might lead to these differences in emotion regulation strategies? In their study published in the [Journal of Personality](#), **Felicia K Zerwas, PhD**, together with **Serena Chen, PhD**, and **Iris Mauss, PhD**, investigated how social power (i.e., one's sense of how much influence one has over others) alters the strategies people use to regulate their emotions. They found that individuals with greater perceived social power believed that they did not have to control their emotions, but when they had to, they were able to. Overall, their results suggest that social power and emotion regulation strategies are interconnected, in part, because of their links with emotional beliefs.



Preschoolers learn from novel metaphors

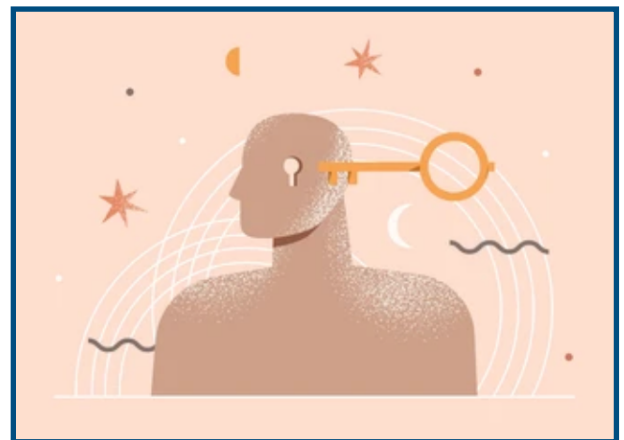
Adults frequently use metaphors, not only to communicate with others, but also to guide their thinking and reasoning. However, less is known about whether young children can also understand and learn from metaphors. In research published in [Psychological Science](#), recent graduate **Rebecca Zhu, PhD** and **Alison Gopnik, PhD**, found that preschoolers who heard metaphors about novel toys (e.g., "Daxes are suns") could then use these metaphors to infer previously unknown information about the toys' functions (e.g., "Daxes light up"). Overall, this research suggests that young children possess an early-emerging capacity to understand and use complex non-literal language.

RESEARCH DISCOVERIES



The autocorrelations in emotion

The visual world around us is naturally autocorrelated, meaning that visual information that we currently see is similar to information we have seen seconds ago. The visual system takes these autocorrelations into account when perceiving the world around us, but does it do the same for emotional information? In a recent study, published in the [Journal of Vision](#), **Jefferson Ortega** and **David Whitney, PhD**, investigated this question by comparing the autocorrelations in humans' individual perceptual reports of emotion and those present in the perceived emotion in videos. They found that the autocorrelations in observers' perception of emotion closely followed those found in the emotion displayed in videos. Their findings suggest that the visual system attempts to match the autocorrelations present in emotional information in order to improve the efficiency, sensitivity, and stability of emotion perception.



Publications

RESEARCH DISCOVERIES

Prefrontal glutamate and working memory in older adults

Why do we get worse at making optimal decisions as we age? In their recent study published in [eLife](#), **Milena Rmus**, and **Anne Collins PhD**, in collaboration with **Matthew Nassar, PhD** from Brown University investigated whether deficits in learning or working memory are responsible for impairments in decision making via the use of cognitive, computational and neural approaches. They found that older adults had significantly more working memory decay (forgetfulness), but not learning impairments compared to young adults. Older adults also had lower levels of glutamate in the prefrontal cortex, a neurochemical important for supporting working memory. Their findings suggest that lower levels of prefrontal glutamate may contribute to failures of working memory systems and impaired decision making in older adulthood.



Clinicians' opinions about technology improvements in clinical care

New technological improvements continue to be incorporated in clinical care. However, little research has assessed clinicians' interest in utilizing technology in their clinical work. In a recent study published in [Behavior Therapy](#), **Peter Soyster** and **Aaron J. Fisher, PhD**, assessed clinicians' opinions related to a mobile assessment platform (MAP) used to collect daily diary data from clients. They found that clinicians who did not identify as male, those with certain clinical orientation (i.e., psychodynamics/psychoanalytic), and those with greater confidence in their clinical skills believed that there were less benefits and larger barriers in using MAP. These findings suggest that there are significant differences across clinicians' opinions of using technology in clinical assessments.

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2023 Commencement

PhD Graduates

CONGRATULATIONS to all of our Ph.D. GRADUATES!

Read on to learn about their graduate research, their post-graduation plans, and some advice they have for future graduates.

Felicia Zerwas, PhD:

Graduate Research: I study the consequences of how people experience and express emotions when they are around close others, including romantic partners and friends.

Post-Graduation: I am moving back to Arizona and will be starting a remote postdoc position focused on increasing data and science literacy among high schoolers and community members.

Advice: Create your own community of thoughtful people and allow them to support you during the rough times and the fun times.



Isabelle Boni, PhD:

Graduate Research: During my PhD, I studied mathematical cognition from a cross-cultural and comparative perspective. Some of the topics I have researched include counting, arithmetic, and geometry.

Post-Graduation: In the fall, I will start a postdoc as part of the ManyNumbers project in Boston College.

Advice: Pursue ideas you are excited about, let go of perfectionism, nurture your relationships, and make room for hobbies--when there's a film festival in town, I'm there!

Want to keep up with our students?

Be sure to [follow us on Twitter!](#)

2023 Commencement

PhD Graduates



Jenna Wells, PhD:

Graduate Research: My research examines interpersonal emotion, aging, and health, with a focus on dementia caregiving relationships.

Post-Graduation: I am moving to Ithaca, NY! I'll be joining the faculty as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology at Cornell University.

Advice: Prioritize your health and relationships. Learn how to say "no" to things. Remember that you are doing the best you can.

Jonathan Tsay, PhD:

Graduate Research: My research centers on how humans acquire, adapt, and retain motor skills. Try it out for yourself [here](#).

Post-Graduation: I will be a postdoc with Prof. Tamar Makin at the University of Cambridge for a year to examine how humans learn to associate semantic meaning with gestures. I will then open the Computational Action Lab in the Department of Psychology at Carnegie Mellon University in the fall of 2024.

Advice: I recommend reading Karen Kelsky's, "The Professor is In." It was an insightful and actionable read. I wish I rock climbed more consistently during graduate school: it is a fantastic way to spend quality time with friends/lab-mates while also getting a serious workout.



Support more cutting-edge psychology research [HERE](#)

2023 Commencement

PhD Graduates

Monica Ellwood-Lowe, PhD:

Graduate Research: I study how children's early environments help to shape their learning and brain development, especially in the context of socioeconomic and structural inequality.

Post-Graduation: I'll be heading to Philadelphia in the fall, to start a postdoc at the University of Pennsylvania.

Advice: It's not going to happen according to plan, but it's going to happen. Work toward becoming the person you want to be and the rest will follow. Also, please drink some water.

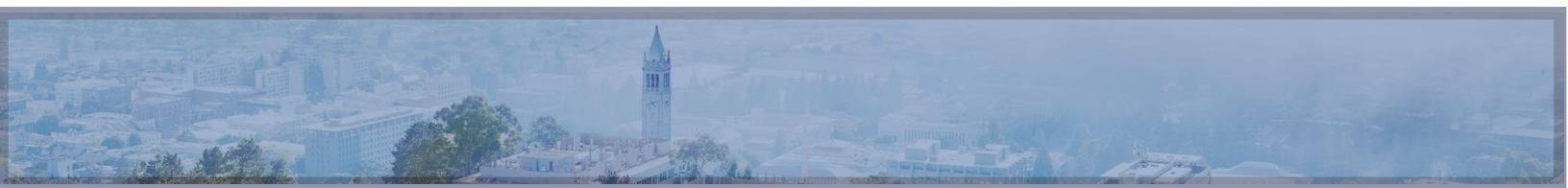


Ryan Lundell-Creagh, PhD:

Graduate Research: My work at Berkeley focused on context effects. I study how the situations that individuals are in can influence the personality traits that are expressed; and, in turn, how underlying personality traits might result in differential situational experiences. I also study the interactions between personality and emotion, and individual differences in emotion perception and regulation.

Post-Graduation: I have accepted a postdoctoral position as a college fellow at Harvard University, with a specialization in teaching psychology.

Advice: Don't overwork yourself! Everything takes a lot more time than you think it will, and I've found it is best to try and focus on one or two projects at a time and see them to completion before taking on something new.



2023 Commencement

PhD Graduates



Willa Voorhies, PhD:

Graduate Research: My research explored how the structure of the brain supports the acquisition of complex skills like reasoning that scaffold learning and cognitive development in children.

Post-Graduation: Going forward I hope to apply what I've learned to education and help create better programs and policies around science and data literacy in schools.

Advice: Say yes to adventures with friends! Your research will be there when you get back!



Courtney Armstrong, PhD



Manon Ironside, PhD



Garret Zieve, PhD

Charter Hill Society for Psychology

The Charter Hill Society is a community of alumni dedicated to supporting UC Berkeley Psychology: its students and faculty, and each other. Members will be invited to special programming for Psychology as well as to events with Charter Hill members from around the College. Recent lectures and events have featured Nobel laureates and leading figures in Psychology and Neuroscience.

Charter Hill members make a three-year pledge to the Psychology Department of \$1,000 or more per year. Gifts directly support the students and faculty of Berkeley Psychology.

To become a member of the Charter Hill Society, make a three-year recurring commitment at tinyurl.com/GiveBerkeleyPsych. (One-time gifts can also be made.)

For more information or questions, contact Anya Essiounina:
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