2026 Social Sciences Research Colloquium

Poster Presenters

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Margo Hinchberger

Master's, Applied Disability Studies (ABA Stream)

Exploring the Roles of Dual-Diagnosis Justice Case Managers in Supporting Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Across Ontario

Dual Diagnosis Justice Case Managers (DDJCMs) support individuals with dual diagnosis (i.e., an intellectual disability and a psychiatric diagnosis) in Ontario's criminal justice system (CJS). The goal of the DDJCM program is to reduce incarceration rates, promote diversion away from the CJS, and facilitate access to appropriate services through individualized treatment plans and advocacy. Despite the program's longstanding presence, no research has examined how DDJCMs carry out their roles or the extent to which they contribute to therapeutic outcomes (Procop, 2011; Dubé, 2016). Using grounded theory and a conceptual framework that combines the literature on therapeutic jurisprudence and human rights, this study will examine DDJCMs' perspectives on their role and the factors that facilitate and hinder their ability to support individuals with dual diagnosis in Ontario's CJS. Approximately ten DDJCMs from across Ontario will be interviewed. Their interview transcripts will be analyzed using an iterative cycle of open, axial, and theoretical coding in constant comparison to understand how DDJCMs achieve their goals of promoting justice while addressing the root causes of justice involvement and reducing the likelihood of future involvement. Results are forthcoming and will be reported. The findings of this study will provide critical insight into how the DDJCM program bridges gaps among the justice, health, and social service sectors and improves access to justice and outcomes for individuals with IDD.

Supervisor: Lisa Whittingham, Applied Disability Studies

Mike LoveLay

Master's, Applied Disability Studies (LDCC Stream)

A Phenomenological Exploration of Autistic Young Adults' Experiences of Sexual Education

Little is known about how autistic youth without intellectual or developmental disabilities (IDD) experience Ontario's sexual education curriculum. To date, research regarding sexual education and developmental disabilities has largely focused on individuals with intellectual disabilities or has treated autistic people as a homogeneous group. In Ontario, the provincial government mandate sexual education as part of the standard public-school curriculum. Because autistic individuals without IDD are typically included in mainstream classrooms, they will likely receive the standard sex education curriculum, which may not have been adapted to meet their communication and social learning needs. Autistic youth may rely more heavily on formal instruction to acquire sexual scripts, the culturally shared guidelines for sexual and romantic interactions, due to limited alternative opportunities to learn scripts from peers or through implicit social cues. This can have significant consequences, like victimization and continued social isolation, for these individuals. Thus, it is important to examine how autistic individuals without IDD experience the content and delivery of the sexual health curriculum. Using interpretive phenomenological analysis, I will explore the lived experiences of young autistic adults without IDD of Ontario's sexual education to identify clearly the benefits and challenges of participating in sexual education and to determine the appropriateness of the content and delivery. I will use purposeful sampling to recruit three to five young autistic students without IDD from Brock University as participants. This thesis will be an important first step in making Ontario's sexual education curriculum more accessible.

Supervisor: Lisa Whittingham, Applied Disability Studies; Jessica Cauchi, Applied Disability Studies

Samara Osten

Master's, Applied Disability Studies (LDCC stream)

Devotion or Compulsion? Exploring the Lived Experiences of People with Scrupulosity OCD in Faith-Based Communities

Religious participation can foster belonging and well-being, but for people with scrupulosity, also known as religious obsessive-compulsive disorder (ROCD), spiritual practices meant to provide comfort can become sources of anxiety and distress. ROCD involves intrusive fears of sin, improper devotion, or blasphemy, often accompanied by compulsions such as excessive prayer, confession, or reassurance-seeking. Existing research has largely examined ROCD through medicalized, quantitative approaches focused on symptom severity and treatment, overlooking how religious environments themselves shape participation and belonging. Grounded in Critical Disability Studies and the social model of disability, this proposed study asks: how do scrupulosity obsessions shape participation and belonging in faith-based settings? Using a qualitative phenomenological methodology, the study will recruit 5 to 10 adults aged 18 to 65 who self-identify as experiencing ROCD and have current or past involvement in a religious community. Participants will complete 60-minute semi-structured Zoom interviews exploring their experiences. Data will be analyzed through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to prioritize case-by-case depth and to treat each religious experience as unique, with optional member-checking procedures to ensure findings reflect lived experience. By centering the voices of people with ROCD, this study aims to reframe scrupulosity beyond an individual problem and inform faith leaders about practices, language, and rituals that can foster more inclusive and supportive religious environments.

Supervisor: Lisa Whittingham, Applied Disability Studies

Malak Al-Basha and Alexia French

Undergraduate, Applied Linguistics (Speech Language and Hearing Sciences)

How does adult speech exposure relate to conversational turn-taking in toddlers? Does hearing play a factor in this?

The data consists of 159 five minute audio recordings with high quality transcriptions. Each five minute segment is from a day long audio recording that was collected in the family's natural or home environment using the LENA system. There are a total of 53 participants/families. 37 (11 boys, 26 girls) of the participants have mild to moderate hearing loss (HL) and no other documented disability or disorder. 16 of the families are with children who are typically developing (7 boys, 9 girls).

As our research is still ongoing we wish to determine if the number of adult word counts (AWC) in the recordings affect the toddler's conversational turn taking in the recordings. We also wish to determine if the toddlers hearing loss has an affect on their conversational turn taking compared to the toddlers who don't have hearing loss. Our research is still ongoing to be completed by the end of November to present for the Department of Applied Linguistics Symposium.

Supervisor: Kirsty Spence, Sport Management; Hillary Ganek, Applied Linguistics

Joseph Cino

Master's, Child and Youth Studies

Bullying victimization and neighbourhood violence: Heterogeneous profiles and their associations with personality

Neighbourhood violence has consistently been implicated as a risk factor for bullying victimization. However, previous studies have primarily been variable-centred, precluding the understanding of how neighbourhood violence is heterogeneously associated with bullying victimization. In addition, few studies have examined how broader neighbourhood contexts interact with individual personality traits to contribute to experiences of bullying victimization. Therefore, we examined retrospective adolescent bullying victimization and neighbourhood violence from a person-centred approach using latent profile analysis (LPA). We then examined mean differences in the profiles on each of the six HEXACO personality traits. In two independent samples (Study 1: N = 475, Mage = 20.20 years, SDage = 2.18, 57.7% women; Study 2: N = 375, Mage = 19.90 years, SDage = 1.95, 56.3% women), four heterogeneous subgroups of individuals were found. As expected, the largest group reflected very low victimization and low neighbourhood violence (Study 1: 64.6%; Study 2: 67.7%), while the smallest group reflected high victimization and high neighbourhood violence (Study 1: 3.2%; Study 2: 5.6%). The two additional groups reflected low victimization and high neighbourhood violence (Study 1: 20.9%; Study 2: 14.9%), and high victimization and low neighbourhood violence (Study 1: 11.4%; Study 2: 11.7%). Significant differences with the HEXACO personality traits were found, but were no longer significant when accounting for multiple testing. These findings indicate that bullying interventions should be tailored to the larger neighbourhood context, while still accounting for individual differences.

Supervisor: Ann Farrell, Child and Youth Studies

Amanda Huynh

Master's, Child and Youth Studies

Who is friends with uncivil adolescents? Exploring the role of behaviour similarity in uncivil adolescents' friendships.

Adolescents befriend and maintain longer friendships with individuals who are similar to them (Burk et al., 2007; Hafen et al., 2011; Ojanen et al., 2010). One variable that might be particularly important for adolescent peers to be similar on is the degree to which they tolerate antisocial behaviours. However, previous literature has only examined similarity in aggression and bullying between friends (e.g., McDonald et al., 2013; Sentse et al., 2014), overlooking the influence of lower-level antisocial behaviours, such as classroom incivility, on adolescent friendships.

Incivility is behaviour that deviates from social norms and is considered rude or disrespectful (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Classroom incivility is a branch of incivility that disrupts the harmonious learning environment and experiences of others (Feldmann, 2001). Since classroom incivility affects other students' academic and personal development (e.g., Marini, 2009), and adolescent students have identified that uncivil behaviours are irritating and slightly serious behaviours (Spadafora & Volk, 2023), it is important to understand how uncivil behaviours may also impact adolescent friendships.

My proposed thesis will address this research gap using longitudinal social network analysis to determine what uncivil adolescents' friendships look like, whether uncivil adolescents choose to befriend other uncivil adolescents, and if their friends' involvement in uncivil behaviours influences their own engagement in incivility over time. This thesis will draw on pre-existing data from an ongoing longitudinal study of adolescent peer relationships (e.g., Spadafora et al., 2022; Spadafora & Volk, 2024). Overall, I aim to further examine the reciprocal link between adolescent behaviour and friendships.

Supervisor: Tony Volk, Child and Youth Studies; Natalie Spadafora, Child and Youth Studies

Amy Wilson

Master's, Child and Youth Studies

"Because I Said So, I'm the Adult": Carceral Logics of Youth Surveillance in Ontario's Bill 33, a Critical Discourse Analysis

In institutional care and education, the familiar refrain “because I said so, I’m the adult,” captures more than spoken parental frustration. It reflects adultism as an operational apparatus of governance (Wall, 2025; Young-Bruehl, 2012). Today, this logic anchors Ontario’s Supporting Children and Students act, 2025 (Bill 33). While framed through a protective rhetoric of “safety,” and “accountability” (Ontario Newsroom, 2025), critics argue the legislation institutionalizes carceral logics that prioritize punitive surveillance, denying community-led care (Saravanamuttu, 2025). I investigate how Bill 33 (2025) textually constructs youth as objects of state control rather than partners in self-determination.

As a work-in-progress, this thesis employs Fairclough’s (2010) Three-Dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) across a bounded data corpus: the operative statutory clauses of Schedules 1-4 of Bill 33 (2025), and targeted Hansard legislative debate transcripts. Methodologically, I analyze micro-level textual features, examining mandatory legal commands, how institutional authority is framed against youth silence, and the systemic erasure of youth consent and participation, alongside meso-level interdiscursive blending of corporate risk audits with vocabularies of care. Through this multi-layered assessment, I examine how Bill 33 (2025) reproduces colonial and patriarchal structures of governance, while interrogating how adultism operates discursively to justify expanded state surveillance.

Grounded in a braided theoretical framework integrating anti-carceral theory (Davis, 2003; Maynard, 2022) Indigenous-feminisms (Coulthard, 2014; Simpson, 2017) and childism (Wall, 2025), this research aims to translate critical policy critique into actionable knowledge mobilization. Preliminary insights will inform accessible policy briefs and youth advocacy tools supporting grassroots resistance and community-based care.

Supervisor: Allyson Ion, Child and Youth Studies

Erika Savage

PhD, Child and Youth Studies

Cognitive Engagement Across Academic and Sport Contexts

Adolescence is a critical period for school disengagement, which is associated with mental health challenges, school dropout, and difficulties extending into adulthood (Klassen et al., 2021; Fredricks et al., 2019; Archambault et al., 2022). A 2021 study of nearly 15,000 young people accessing community mental health agencies across Ontario found that 46% were at risk of school disengagement (Klassen et al., 2021). School engagement encompasses students' thoughts, emotions, perceptions, and actions related to learning and schooling (Furlong & Rebelez-Ernst, 2023). One dimension, cognitive engagement, refers to the mental effort invested in learning and is important for developing understanding (Barlow & Brown, 2020).

Adolescents also engage in extracurricular contexts, including sports, where cognitive engagement involves focus and interest in learning (Fredricks et al., 2019; Vandell & Simpkins, 2024). However, little is known about how cognitive engagement fosters across school and sport contexts or how experiences in one context may inform engagement in another. My Master's research explored youth's perceptions of cognitive engagement across school and extracurricular contexts. Findings suggested that understanding the reasoning behind goals supported engagement across contexts, while greater choice and control over what and how they learned were particularly important in extracurricular settings (Savage, 2025).

Building on these findings, the proposed study will explore high-school-aged youth's (16–18 years) perceptions and experiences of cognitive engagement in school and sports. By examining the factors that support engagement across these contexts, this research will contribute to understanding how youth engagement may be fostered and sustained across different areas of their lives.

Supervisor: Heather Ramey, Child and Youth Studies

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Freya Burwood

Master's, Child and Youth Studies

Constructing the “Dangerous Youth”: Digital Representation in Instagram Crime Narratives

Drawing on critical discourse analysis and a moral panic framework, this study explores how narratives of threat and social disorder circulate on Instagram. A qualitative content and discourse analysis was conducted on a sample of Instagram posts (x = 20) that produce and share youth crime-related content. The analysis identified several dominant themes, including the amplification and sensationalization of crime narratives and the use of emotionally charged language to heighten perceptions of risk. These representations frequently intersect with broader social discourses related to race and gender, reinforcing existing social inequalities. In addition, some accounts showed explicit ideological positioning that shapes how youth crime is framed and interpreted. The findings suggest that social media platforms serve as powerful sites of meaning-making, where simplified and exaggerated portrayals of justice-involved youth heighten public concern. In doing so, these narratives reflect key elements of contemporary moral panic. This study emphasizes the need to critically examine how digital media shape public perceptions and highlights the broader social implications of these mediated representations.

Supervisor: Voula Marinos, Child and Youth Studies

Ike Ikerionwu

PhD, Child and Youth Studies

Social Media, Social Comparison, Habitus, Field, And Cultural Identity Formation Among Nigerian Youth

This study examines how social media and online communities shape Nigerian youths' cultural identity through Festinger's (1954) Social Comparison Theory and Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, and capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Festinger explains how others become benchmarks for self-evaluation, while Bourdieu situates these comparisons within socially formed dispositions and unequal structures of visibility, recognition, and cultural legitimacy.

Cultural identity emerges as a relational, adaptable practice shaped by interactions between inherited dispositions and digital environments. Participants evaluate belonging, authenticity, aspirations, and ethnic, national, gendered, African, and global identities through encounters with diverse lifestyles, languages, communities, and cultural representations.

Interview findings reveal varied comparative practices: comparison, admiration, aspiration, identification, and resistance to idealized portrayals. These differences reflect participants' histories, including family, ethnicity, education, religion, class, region, and gender. Comparison extends beyond envy or status ranking to cultural learning, questioning inherited beliefs, reconnecting with traditions, and imagining possible selves. Platform algorithms, metrics, and networks structure these encounters, privileging particular identities and forms of capital.

Six interconnected themes emerged: social media as a cultural mirror; aspirational comparison and possible selves; resistance to comparison and rejection of "fake life"; intergroup comparison and national identity negotiation; cultural rediscovery through language, food, music, and tradition; and hybrid, transnational identities.

Together, these frameworks show that social media reshape the conditions under which youth negotiate cultural worth and belonging. Comparison can reproduce hierarchies and cultural pressures while supporting reflection, pride, critique, and renewal. Identity development therefore depends on how youth engage with digital content, beyond time spent online.

Supervisor: Ifeanyi Ezeonu, Sociology and Criminology

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Josie Del Rosso

Master's, Child and Youth Studies

Supporting the Unsupported: What Canadian Young Carers Say They Need

Despite there being over one million young carers living across Canada, very little is known about them, the challenges they face, and what they need to be successful (Charles et al., 2012; Stamatopoulos, 2015a; Waugh et al., 2015). This lack of awareness has led these youth, who provide substantial, ongoing, and unpaid care to their family members, to be excluded from service provision, policy development, and discussions around caregiving (Hanna & Chisnell, 2019; Waugh et al., 2015). This qualitative, exploratory study aimed to address this gap, seeking out the voices of young carers to understand their experiences, needs, and ideas for how to better support them. Three focus groups were conducted (n = 13) – one with young carers in middle school (aged 12-14), and two with young carers in high school (aged 15-18) – attending youth programs across Canada. Participants reported both positive and negative experiences in education, mental health, and within their relationships/friendships. They highlighted the need for more awareness-raising initiatives, resource sharing, targeted services, and social support. These suggestions form the basis of a young carer specific strategy, complementing Canada's current National Caregiving Strategy that, up to now, did not include their voices.

Supervisor: Yana Berardini, Child and Youth Studies; Heather Ramey, Child and Youth Studies

Kira Cocco

Master's, Child and Youth Studies

Neural Responses to Anticipating Social Evaluation in Female Adolescents With and Without Eating Disorders

Eating disorders (EDs) have the highest prevalence in female adolescents, which research often attributes to girls having an increased sensitivity to peer evaluations and subsequently a fear of negative evaluation (FNE). Given the associations between EDs, FNE, and peer evaluations, the present study investigated neural responses to anticipated peer evaluation in girls with and without EDs, as well as varying degrees of FNE, by examining their neural activation patterns during a peer evaluation task. Eighty-three female adolescents (Mage = 16.01, SD = 1.61) who were eligible for either a control group (Mage = 15.41, SD = 1.78) or ED status group (Mage = 16.54, SD = 1.24) completed the Chatroom Interact Task, where they anticipated and received evaluations from peers during functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI). Results demonstrate that girls with ED status had higher neural activity in the anterior insula and amygdala and lower activity in the nucleus accumbens and medial pre-frontal cortex than girls without ED. Additionally, FNE was positively associated with anterior insula activity and negatively associated with activity in the right cingulate gyrus. Finally, FNE was not a significant moderator in the relationship between ED status and neural activity. These results suggest that ED status and FNE are associated with distinct patterns of neural activity when peer evaluations are anticipated. Future research should establish how these neural patterns are associated with social evaluation concerns and how they could be targeted in ED treatment.

Supervisor: Danielle Molnar, Child and Youth Studies

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Patty Moss

Master's, Child and Youth Studies

How Are Individual Experiences of Bullying Victimization Associated With Motivations to Belong in Youth?

Belongingness in schools is a powerful adaptive experience for many youth, supporting positive social relationships and improving academic performance and psychological well-being. Studies on school belonging have focused on perceptions of connectedness; however, they have not considered the motivational processes that drive youth to belong. The Belongingness Orientation Model by Lavigne et al. (2011) posits that both positive (growth-based) and maladaptive (deficit-reduction-based) motivations direct an individual's need to belong, thereby shaping outcomes in interpersonal relationships. While these motivations have been documented in adults, little research has examined them in youth. The goals of this study were to examine whether youth exhibit the same two motivational orientations proposed by the Belongingness Orientation Model for adults and whether victimization experiences are associated with these orientations. It was hypothesized that youth would report different motivations for fulfilling their need to belong, and that victimization would be positively associated with deficit-reduction orientation and negatively associated with growth orientation. The current study used cross-sectional data from self-report surveys administered to 292 students in grades five to eight (Mage = 11.95 years, SD = 1.20; 50% male, 49% female, 68% White). The exploratory factor analysis supports the hypothesis that youth have two distinct motivational orientations. For the second goal, further analyses will examine the links between victimization and belonging motivations. Research on motivational orientations among youth may provide additional insight for school-based initiatives into how youth form peer connections and promote strategies that foster growth-oriented approaches to support positive relationships, especially for youth experiencing bullying victimization.

Supervisor: Naomi Andrews, Child and Youth Studies

Zac Mathieson

Master's, Child and Youth Studies

Effective Ways of Working with Justice-Involved Youth: Perspectives from Community-Based Professionals.

Youth in Canada's justice system are often diverted to community programs. Several youth-serving professionals have shared how they work with youth, yet research with community-based professionals is sparse. We explore community-based professionals' perspectives on their work with youth. Semi-structured interviews with five staff at a Boys and Girls Club in Ontario, Canada were analysed utilizing reflexive thematic analysis. Several strategies were revealed, these included: individualized services, being a supportive adult, collaborating with youth, and collaborating with the community. Participants strategies align with multiple professions, yet most similarly resemble those used by probation. Implications for research, policy, and practice are discussed.

Supervisor: Kaitlin Fredericks, Child and Youth Studies

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Andrew Bassingthwaighte

PhD, Child and Youth Studies

Between Stories, Systems, and Relationships: Rethinking Adoption Through Lived Experience

Adoption is often framed through formal processes and defined roles. Yet lived experience unfolds within relationships and systems in ways that exceed these established understandings. This presentation introduces an ongoing doctoral study that examines adoption through the lived experience of an adoptive father, using autoethnography to explore how personal experience can serve as a site for interrogating broader questions about adoption.

Informed by phenomenology and transdisciplinarity, the study moves beyond treating individual stories as isolated accounts. Instead, it considers how lived experience interacts with the wider social, relational, and institutional contexts in which adoption occurs. Central to the research is an interest in what emerges between different ways of knowing and experiencing adoption. The transdisciplinary concept of the Hidden Third provides a means of engaging these in between spaces without requiring divergent perspectives to be reconciled into a single narrative. A phenomenological orientation toward dwelling with experience similarly creates space to remain with uncertainty and complexity as part of the research process.

Through this approach, the study asks what sustained attention to lived experience can contribute to adoption scholarship. Rather than positioning one experience as representative, it examines how close attention to a situated experience can deepen understanding of adoption and illuminate aspects of the experience that are often obscured by more conventional ways of knowing.

Supervisor: Maureen Connolly, Applied Health Sciences/Child and Youth Studies

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Julia Anita-Maria Collin-Pereira

Master's, Child and Youth Studies

The Association between Anxious and Avoidant Parental Attachment Styles and Young Adults' Experiences with Dating Violence: A Retrospective Quantitative Study

Dating violence (DV) among young people is prevalent across the world. One prominent correlation of DV experiences is parental attachment. Previous studies built within the frameworks of attachment theory have found significant associations between DV and parental attachment. However, limited studies have discovered how factors like self-esteem and gender contribute to this relationship. Understanding these mechanisms could support the development of early DV-based intervention planning. Therefore, we examined whether retrospective anxious and avoidant parental attachment styles during adolescence were associated with DV (both perpetration and victimization) during young adulthood indirectly through self-esteem, and whether these associations were moderated by gender. The sample was comprised of 238 young adults (Mage = 20.05, SDage = 1.75; 56.7 % women) who self-reported on retrospective adolescent attachment with parents (avoidance, anxiety), current young adulthood self-esteem, and current young adulthood dating violence perpetration and victimization. Results of regressions revealed that parental anxiety positively predicted DV victimization; however, neither form of attachment predicted DV perpetration. As expected, both forms of attachment predicted lower self-esteem, but self-esteem did not predict DV, indicating no indirect effects. Also, the relationship between parental anxiety and DV victimization was moderated by gender, with this association being significant for women but not men. These findings suggest that parental attachment styles can predict DV victimization, but there is a gender-specific effect that persists even when accounting for an individual's self-esteem. Therefore, DV prevention efforts should focus on supporting positive parental relationships early in development, in particular among girls and women.

Supervisor: Ann Farrell, Child and Youth Studies

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Kylie Dennis

PhD, Child and Youth Studies

Play Without Ends: Attending to Children's Everyday Engagements

Play is a defining feature of childhood, serving as an integral means of fulfilling developmental and educational ends. This means-ends framework positions play largely as a tool or instrument of learning and, accordingly, often privileges adults' efforts to structure children's play environments and opportunities in a way that maximizes developmental and educational outcomes. Some scholars, however, look beyond the means-ends framework by pointing to other possibilities of play. For example, classic definitions of play suggest that play is marked by freedom (Huizinga, 1955), and even children's own voices demonstrate that play is fun and something children just do (Øksnes, 2013).

Using the Bakhtinian carnivalesque framework to broaden understandings of play beyond the means-ends view, this research used ethnographic observations in a preschool classroom with 11 children three to four years of age to examine their natural engagements in play. Bakhtin made a critical distinction explaining that in contrast to official life, which he suggested was marked by hierarchy and seriousness, unofficial carnival life was characterized by parody, laughter, and playfulness, inviting people to uncover new possibilities and new ways of being together (Øksnes, 2013). Key findings illustrate that children's play reflected the various characteristics Bakhtin attributed to carnival life, including inversion of social hierarchies, free and familiar contact, grotesque realism, laughter, and "losing oneself" in the carnival spirit. This research contributes to under-explored narratives of play, illustrating how children's engagement in play extends beyond means-ends thinking, serving as an example for rethinking what it means to be at play.

Supervisor: Heather Ramey, Child and Youth Studies

Shentong Yan

Master's, Child and Youth Studies

From Eco Action to Eco behaviour

Discussions about the environment are common in families, but their direct impact on children's behavior may be limited without concrete, shared experiences. This study examined a model in which parent-child behavioral engagement mediates the relationship between environmental discussions and children's outcomes. We hypothesized that discussion alone is insufficient; it is the translation of talk into joint activity that effectively promotes children's environmental knowledge and, especially, their pro-environmental behaviors (PEBs).

Using a dyadic survey design, data were collected from 127 parent-child pairs (child M age = 10.4 years, SD = 1.8). Parents reported on their behavioral engagement ($\alpha = .86$) with their child in environmental activities (e.g., recycling, nature walks). Children independently reported on: 1) the frequency of environmental discussions ($\alpha = .79$) with parents, 2) their own pro-environmental behaviors ($\alpha = .82$), and 3) completed a factual environmental knowledge test (KR-20 = .60) assessing ecological principles.

Path analysis supported the proposed mediation model. While child-reported discussion was directly associated with greater factual knowledge ($\beta = .24$, $p = .003$), its link to child-reported PEBs was fully mediated by parent-reported behavioral engagement (indirect effect: $\beta = .18$, $p = .007$; direct effect: $\beta = .11$, $p = .14$).

Findings highlight that verbal instruction ("saying") must be coupled with hands-on, shared experience ("doing") to most effectively foster children's pro-environmental actions. The results imply behavioral-level interventions that equip and motivate parents to move beyond conversation to co-engage with their children in tangible environmental activities. This behavioral pathway is critical for translating environmental awareness into sustainable habits.

Supervisor: Natalie Spadafora, Child and Youth Studies

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Chantal Phillips

PhD, Child and Youth Studies

A Participatory Approach to Engaging Teachers in Professional Development on Understanding Emotions to Reduce Aggression & Violence in the Classroom

Punishment has failed to impact the problem of violence and aggression at school. Recent survey results by Ontario School Board Council of Unions (2025) state that 75% of respondents say they experience violent or disruptive incidents in their work area. Parents of children with disabilities reported in survey that 29% of students had experienced being secluded behind locked doors, and 14% had experienced being physically restrained by staff (Community Living, 2025).

Previous evidence from national surveys post-pandemic suggests that there has been relatively little study of aggression towards teachers (McMahon et al, 2024). Educational staff continue to call for more resources to address issues related to serious incidents (EFTO, 2023; OSBCU, 2025; OSSTF, 2025). The project will address this gap in the research by taking a multifaceted approach to address the problem of aggression, violence, and emotional dysregulation.

Given the complexity of understanding conflict and the best methods for interventions a participatory approach will be taken with teachers and teacher candidates to co-establish objectives for collecting data and developing a community of practice to share knowledge and skills. At the beginning of the research project a wide-ranging search for participants including educational staff and parents, as well as people who are neurodiverse will be conducted. Individuals who are recruited will be asked if they would consider not only participating in interviews but also joining a community of practice. My presentation will discuss how to accomplish stakeholder recruitment and engagement throughout the research cycle which is often difficult to accomplish effectively.

Supervisor: Dawn Zinga, Child and Youth Studies

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Rawan El Haj

PhD, Child and Youth Studies

Healthcare Access and Social Inclusion in the Settlement Experiences of Refugee and Newcomer Children and Youth in Canada: A Scoping Review

Background: Healthcare access and social inclusion are important dimensions of refugee and newcomer children's and youth's settlement, yet Canadian scholarship has generally examined them as parallel domains. This scoping review mapped what is known about healthcare access and social cohesion among refugee and newcomer children and youth in Canada and examined where the two bodies of evidence intersect. Methods: The review followed Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) methodology for scoping reviews and was reported with reference to PRISMA-ScR. The Population–Concept–Context framework guided this scoping review's questions and eligibility criteria. Five databases; MEDLINE via PubMed, PsycINFO, CINAHL, Scopus and Web of Science, were searched for English-language empirical studies published from 2016 to 2026. Following calibrated screening, 55 studies were included. Findings were charted and synthesized through a thematically organized narrative approach. Results: The evidence was predominantly qualitative and concentrated in major newcomer-receiving provinces and urban settings. Four interconnected themes were identified: structural and institutional production of healthcare access; communication, navigation and relational support; social infrastructures of belonging and inclusion; and recognition, belonging and agency within unequal institutions. Healthcare-focused and social-inclusion studies rarely examined the two domains together, but repeatedly identified overlapping mechanisms, including language and communication, institutional navigation, supportive relationships, racism and institutional responsiveness. Conclusion: Healthcare access and social inclusion should remain analytically distinct, but the Canadian evidence indicates that both are shaped through children's and families' interactions with interconnected institutions. Future research should directly examine these intersections, foreground children's own perspectives, differentiate migration pathways, and use longitudinal and intersectional approaches to understand how institutional access, trust and belonging change over time.

Supervisor: Christiana Okyere Folson, Child and Youth Studies

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Christina Gregory

Undergraduate, Critical Criminology

Invisible & Delayed Action: slow reforms to canada's seasonal agricultural worker program

This paper examines why reforms to Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) have been slow, driven by cultural, socioeconomic, and political structures that systematically undervalue racialized migrant labour. Using the work of Bauder (2005), Patrias (2016), Preibisch & Otero (2014), Weiler & McLaughlin (2019), Perry (2012) and Lozanski & Baumgartner (2020), I analyze how historically racial ideologies, employer-driven power imbalances, and sociocultural representations of migrant workers have portrayed them as disposable and undeserving of full citizenship and labour protections. Historical beliefs about racialized agricultural labour indicate that reforms in labour policies are implemented when white workers advocate for change, revealing racial bias in policy enactment and enforcement. The paper further examines how the SAWP's overall design, particularly tied work permits, the absence of paths to citizenship, and reliance on employers for housing, healthcare, and status, creates an "unfree" labour force that limits worker advocacy and enables employer exploitation. Media representations and tourism render migrant workers invisible, further justifying government inaction and reinforcing their exclusion from the communities. This systematic undervaluing of migrant workers and reform delay is maintained through political and economic interests such as employers' dependency on vulnerable workers and weak enforcement of work regulations. My paper contends that systemic racism and the normalization of the disposal of migrant labour explain the persistence of institutional disparities within the SAWP, while acknowledging counterarguments that policy delays occur partly due to the complexity of international agreements. Activist groups and researchers argue that meaningful reform requires stricter enforcement of labour regulations, the implementation of open work permits, clear pathways to permanent residency and citizenship, and the recognition of migrant workers as integral members of Canadian society who truly belong.

Supervisor: Trent S. Newmeyer, Sociology and Criminology

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Ally Negus

Master's, Critical Sociology

Navigating Independence From Home to Campus Life: Understanding First-Year Students' Mental Health, Coping Strategies, Lived Experiences, and Belonging at Brock University

Imagine arriving at Brock University and being expected to live with a complete stranger for eight months while simultaneously navigating the transition from adolescence into adulthood. For many first-year university students, this experience represents a sudden and significant shift in independence, responsibility, and social adjustment. Next, imagine experiencing a mental health crisis during this transition and being placed on a waitlist for months for both Student Health Services and counselling, with little access to immediate support or alternative resources given to you. For many students, this is not a hypothetical scenario, but rather an ongoing reality. Finally, imagine beginning university knowing no one, feeling isolated and lonely, and lacking a meaningful support system or trusted individuals to confide in during this major life transition. These experiences reflect the everyday realities faced by many first-year students as they attempt to adapt to university life.

Supervisor: Michelle Vine, Applied Health Science

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William Nicholson

Undergraduate, Geography and Tourism Studies

“How do you show that you’re queer enough?” The Emergent Geographies of Negotiating Safety on University Campuses for Queer Students

Queer approaches have been increasingly implemented as a critical framework in geography to contest dominant power dynamics that dictate how space is created and perceived. Past research identifies that university campuses provide a complex spatiality to feelings of safety, both as places that encourage difference and exploration, and as places that discard queer identities through heterocisnormative and homonormative space-making practices. In turn, this leads to feelings of unsafety amongst Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer, Intersex and Asexual (2SLGBTQIA+) students. This study aims to interrogate current understandings of safety, and to employ an alternative analysis of the co-construction of queer space and safety. Between the 15th and 17th of October within an Ontario university, I conducted 6 interviews and a 5-person focus group that highlighted queer students experiences and how they negotiated their own queer identity in relation to their personal feelings of safety. Through thematic analysis, this research uncovers the underexamined ideas of safety, how the spatial ‘sanctioning’ of safety vastly underestimates the complexities of queer space, and that queer students claim university spaces in the absence of institutional recognition. It further highlights how the power dynamics of hetero and homonormativity impact feelings of safety.

Keywords: Safety, Genderqueer, University campuses, heteronormativity, homonormativity

Supervisor: Geography and Tourism Studies

Brianna Halencak

Master's, Psychology

Adult and Teacher Recognition of Sexual Grooming Behaviours

Grooming is commonly used by perpetrators of child sexual abuse (CSA) to obtain and maintain contact with child victims, and early identification of these behaviours is pertinent to reducing the occurrence of CSA. The current study examined adults' ability to identify various grooming behaviours, and whether teachers show a greater awareness of these behaviours than non-teachers. Online participants (N = 626; n = 312 teachers) read two vignettes depicting an interaction between an adult and child, with the presence of grooming strategies (i.e., touch, isolation, and secrecy) were varied in a 2 (touch vs. no touch) x 2 (isolation vs. public) x 2 (secrecy vs no secrecy) between subjects design. Participants were asked a series of questions to assess their awareness of the presence of grooming. Overall, participants only identified grooming 47.8% of the time and there was no significant difference in rates of identification based on teacher status. However, significant differences arose in participants' identification of grooming based on the type and number of strategies that were present in the stories. Specifically, participants were significantly more likely to identify grooming when secrecy was present compared to when physical touch and isolation were present. Additionally, participants were significantly more likely to identify grooming when multiple behaviours (physical touch, isolation, and secrecy) were present, compared to when any single behaviour was present alone. Adults' poor recognition of grooming in the current study indicates a need for targeted educational efforts to assist in early identification of behaviours related to abuse.

Supervisor: Angela Evans, Psychology

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Kayleigh Boogaart

Master's, Psychology

Being older, feeling older, and wanting to be older: Using response surface analysis to examine the relationships between subjective age discrepancies and life satisfaction

Subjective aging pertains to how old individuals feel (felt age) and how old they would ideally like to be (desired age). Most adults feel younger than their chronological age, and desire to be even younger than the age they feel. Research suggests that greater life satisfaction is related to having: (1) a felt age that is younger than one's chronological age (a more negative felt age-chronological age discrepancy), (2) a desired age that is closer to one's chronological age (a smaller negative desired age-chronological age discrepancy), and (3) a felt age that is closer to one's desired age (a smaller positive felt age-desired age discrepancy). Theoretically, there are different underlying motivations and meanings of each discrepancy. Empirically, however, the same three variables (i.e., chronological age, felt age, desired age) comprise the three discrepancies, leading to ambiguity regarding the unique contributions of each discrepancy when they are examined separately. In the present work we are addressing this issue by simultaneously examining all three discrepancies. We are utilizing data from the Midlife in the United States (MIDUS) study, a longitudinal study with over 7000 participants from across adulthood. The dataset includes self-report measures of chronological age, felt age, desired age, and life satisfaction. We are utilizing response surface analysis to examine the unique predictive effects of the three discrepancies on life satisfaction. Analyses are currently underway. Our findings will help determine the unique implications of each subjective age discrepancy and help inform best analytic practices for future research on subjective aging.

Supervisor: Michael Busseri, Psychology

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Sophie Litalien

Master's, Psychology

Early-life Caregiving Environment on Sex-specific Brain and Behavioural Development in Octodon Degus

Early-life caregiving plays an important role in shaping offspring brain and behavioural development, including survival, growth, and psychosocial well-being. Disruptions in parental care negatively affect development in various animals, including rodents. However, research has primarily examined maternal contributions, while the roles of fathers and alloparents remain less understood. Octodon degus are social rodents that raise offspring in flexible family structures, receiving care from mothers, fathers, and alloparents. This thesis will examine how variation in early-life caregiving environments influences brain and behavioural development in male and female degu offspring. Degus will be raised in one of three caregiving environments: (1) mother-only care, (2) biparental care from the mother and father, or (3) maternal care with a female alloparent. Male and female offspring will be assessed at weaning (5 weeks of age) and during juvenile development (6 months of age). Anxiety-like and exploratory behaviours will be assessed using the open-field test and burrowing task. Anogenital distance and circulating testosterone will be measured to examine sexual development and potential endocrine differences. Brain tissue will be collected for immunohistochemical analyses of neurogenesis, cell death, extracellular matrix, and microglial activity. It is hypothesized that maternal-only and female alloparental care will produce distinct neurodevelopmental and behavioural profiles compared with biparental care, with effects differing by sex. The study will provide insight into how variation in early-life caregiving environment contributes to sex-specific differences in brain and behavioural development.

Supervisor: Paula Duarte-Guterman, Psychology

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Emily Dale

Master's, Psychology

Power Balances in Indirect Aggression: Associations with Peer Relations in Adolescence

Bullying is a subtype of aggression defined by an imbalance of power favouring the perpetrator. However, relatively little is known about aggression when the perpetrator has equal or less power relative to the victim. In addition, there is a limited understanding of the general peer relations of the perpetrators of aggression within different power balances relative to the peer group rather than in relation to the victim. To address this gap, this proposed research will examine whether power balances in which the perpetrator has more, equal, or less power than the victim are differentially associated with aspects of the perpetrator's general peer relations, including victimization, friendships, attractiveness, and dominance. Peer nomination measures were collected from adolescents aged 14-18 from a high school in Southern Ontario. A multigroup path analysis is planned to answer the research question. Based on previous research, we expect high-power perpetration of indirect aggression to be positively associated with attractiveness and dominance. Moreover, we anticipate that equal-power perpetration of indirect aggression will be positively associated with victimization, attractiveness, and the number of friendships. In contrast, low-power perpetration of indirect aggression will be positively associated with victimization but negatively associated with attractiveness. This research seeks to expand on the limited research on aggression within different power balances and provide greater insight into how aggression within different power balances is related to the perpetrator's general peer relations. In addition, these findings may help to inform how interventions can be tailored to address aggression against different victims for different purposes.

Supervisor: Drew Dane, Psychology

Casey James

Undergraduate, Psychology B.A Honours (Research) (graduated spring 2026)

Integrating the Ternary Goal Model and Subjective Trajectories for Life Satisfaction: Predicting Motivation for a Satisfying Future Life

The present study examined subjective trajectories of life satisfaction in relation to goal orientation, with a particular emphasis on maintenance goals and motivation to have a satisfying future life. Whereas prior research has largely focused on goal orientation as a process directed towards change (i.e., approach and avoidance goals), the present study adopted a ternary goal model (progress, maintenance, protection), which conceptualizes maintenance as a distinct goal orientation focused on maintaining a stable current state. In a preregistered, correlational study, an online sample of 856 American participants (Mage = 38 years; 58.3% female) completed self-report measures assessing their subjective trajectories of life satisfaction, appreciation and threat concerning one's current life, goal orientation (progress, maintenance, protection), and motivation for the future. Supporting our hypotheses, regressions analyses found that inclining subjective trajectories (past to current, current to future), along with greater perceived importance of progress, maintenance, and protection goals, each had a positive and unique predictive effect on motivation to have a satisfying future life. That is, individuals who perceived their lives as improving over time and who perceived progress, maintenance, and protection goals as more important tended to be more motivated to have a satisfying future life. Taken together, the present study provides insight into the relationships between beliefs about how life unfolds over time, goal orientation, and motivation to have a satisfying future life and provides new evidence that maintenance goals are a unique and distinct motivational process.

Supervisor: Michael Busseri, Psychology

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Kinza Riaz

Master's, Sustainability

Seeing Water Futures: Spatial Determinants and Moderators of Empathy in an Augmented Reality Flood-risk Intervention

Climate change impacts often feel distant in space, making it harder for people to support water-resilience policies. This “geographical discounting” could limit public engagement in planning. Immersive experiences that induce empathy may make future climate risks feel more immediate and personally relevant.

This study examines whether a place-based augmented reality (AR) experience can shift empathy and pro-environmental attitudes by presenting realistic future flood scenarios in a familiar Niagara location. The AR experience overlays projected flood extents and depths for 2030 (realistic), and 2050 (worst-case), onto recognizable shoreline features, including beaches, park wildlife, and infrastructure, with historical context referencing a 2017 flood event.

The research goal is to investigate how individual’s proximity to flood-prone areas shape their baseline empathy and response to the AR experience. The main research question is: Do people living closer to flood-prone areas show stronger baseline empathy for those affected by climate change? The primary hypothesis is that people living closer to an area projected to experience a flood or those who are likely to be affected by a flood are associated with higher baseline empathy and pro-environmental attitudes.

Methodologically, participant postal codes (Forward Sortation Areas, or FSAs) will be linked to flood inundation maps to measure water level, distance, and exposure, along with pre- and post-surveys to measure empathy and attitudes. This study is expected to improve understanding of how place and proximity impact climate empathy while demonstrating a scalable AR method for place-based communication and provide insights to support water-resilience engagement in flood-vulnerable regions.

Supervisor: Marilyne Carrey, Environmental Sustainability Research Center (ESRC)

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Kaila Belovich

Master's, Sustainability

Exploring visitor preferences and perceptions of resilience along the shoreline of western Lake Ontario

Communities along Lake Ontario's shoreline are frequently experiencing the negative impacts of extreme weather as climate change threatens the stability and resilience of aging infrastructure. As continuous retrofits become expensive, nature-based solutions can be more cost-effective adaptations long-term. This exploratory study examines whether visitors' perceptions of shoreline risks and resilience, preferences for shoreline landscapes, and human–nature connectedness are related in public shoreline areas along western Lake Ontario. From June to September 2026 a survey was administered to visitors at nine public shoreline locations within the Lake Ontario Coastal Resilience Pilot Project's boundary led by the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority. 553 survey responses were collected (approximately 60 per location) using a convenience sample. Preliminary results show that visitors' preferences for shoreline landscapes do not always align with their perceptions of shoreline resilience. When shown three shoreline designs depicting different resilience measures (i.e., engineered, ecological, and hybrid), 53% selected a different landscape as most resilient than the one they most preferred. Furthermore, 70% preferred a more natural-looking (ecological) landscape while only 37% selected it as most resilient. Additional analyses of participants' risk perception and nature relatedness scores will support the interpretation of preference and resilience perception patterns and help clarify potential motivations behind responses. Analyzing these variables together provides empirical evidence to inform community engagement, communication, and education strategies. When used to tailor these strategies, this research supports the potential to enhance shoreline sustainability and resilience, and guide decision makers towards enhancing public support for adaptation measures that prioritize nature-based solutions.

Supervisor: Julia Baird, Environmental Sustainability Research Centre