

# ROWAN PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT: FALL 2020 RESEARCH BRIEFS

Volume 3 / Issue 1

## CARBBS

The purpose of CARBBS is to provide the atmosphere, connections, and resources that will enable faculty and students within the Department of Psychology to increase production of high quality and high quantity research that is recognized through grant funding and peer-reviewed publications.

## JIM HAUGH

The ROAD (Research on Anxiety and Depression) team has a number of projects that are currently being conducted. Many of these projects have the common theme of exploring the use of mobile apps or other self-help strategies to help individuals experiencing depression and other types of psychological distress. Specific projects include: a) an examination of mobile app use in clients currently being seen in psychotherapy, b) the use of mobile apps to cope with psychological distress during the COVID-19 pandemic, c) factors associated with the adoption and continued use of mobile apps, and d) a self-help, mindfulness-based program for women with breast cancer. Our lab has also started a new line of research focused on the recruitment and retention of traditionally underrepresented groups in clinical psychology. We will be starting two projects, one examining current recruitment efforts via program websites and the other examining decision making by prospective applicants to doctoral programs. Our

team is always looking for new members and we have recently changed the structure of our team to include opportunities for students looking for either part-time (4 hours/week) to full-time experiences (10 hours/week). See our website for more details: <https://theroadresearchlab.wixsite.com/theroad>

## TOM DINZEO

Rowan University Schizophrenia-Spectrum Lab (RUSSL) consists of a mix of graduate and undergraduate students interested in improving the identification and assessment of risk factors related to the development of psychosis and related-issues. There are currently 12 members in the lab, with a diverse range of research interests represented. The lab recently received grants funding two clinical studies involving (1) reducing smoking behaviors in outpatients diagnosed with schizophrenia through the combined use of monetary incentives and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), and (2) an exercise intervention to reduce Parkinsonian symptoms in outpatients with schizophrenia. Other ongoing student-led studies include the following topics in participants with that have varying levels of risk for psychosis (schizotypy): physiological reactivity during an experimental stress paradigm, the relationship of SES and adverse childhood experiences, the factors underlying distorted time perception, sexual risk behaviors, and technology and social media use.





## KAITE GOTHAM

Mood disorders such as depression are more common in the autism community than in the general population, and little is known about why that is or how best to treat depressed mood in people on the spectrum. Luckily, we are in an important phase of history when we are moving beyond autism research largely focused on a “cure,” and toward a holistic approach that values quality of life in neurodivergent individuals.

Dr. Gotham’s research at the Social, Emotional, and Affective Health Lab (SE AHL) focuses on cognitive and social reward processes as potential contributors to emotional health problems in autism. Our goal is to inform targeted treatment development that will improve quality of life in adolescents and adults on the spectrum. We are currently running a research project funded by the National Institute of Mental Health to study one piece of this puzzle: Is repetitive thinking -- which is a characteristic of autism -- associated with depressed mood among autistic adults? Because very little research has been done on repetitive thinking versus more obvious repetitive behavior in autism, our project aims to identify which specific aspects of repetitive thinking are associated with positive and negative health states. From this knowledge, we plan to produce a brief self-report questionnaire about repetitive thinking that can be used with verbally fluent adolescents and adults on the autism spectrum. When we are able to resume in-person data collection (currently on hold because of the pandemic), we will measure biomarkers of sustained thinking using eye-tracking, pupillometry, and electroencephalography (EEG), to comment on how response to emotional material may be associated with repetitive thinking in autism.

In the meantime, we are conducting an online survey of first-semester college students at Rowan University, in which participants complete a brief questionnaire twice per week throughout their first semester. We plan to analyze those data to see if increases in repetitive thinking, social disengagement, or depressive attributional style, precede increases in depression or anxiety scores. We hope these and similar projects open doors to identifying specific mechanisms to intervene upon to improve mood, and thus quality of life, in autistic adults.

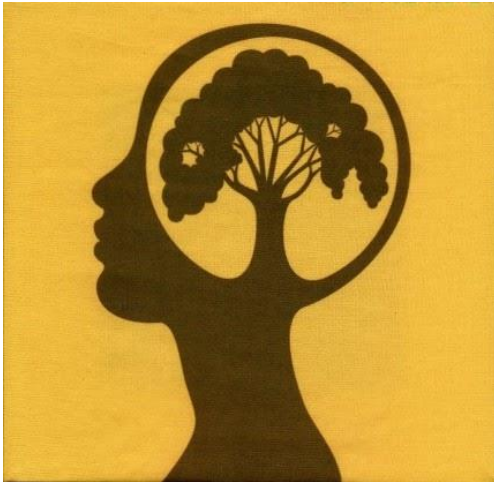
## JONATHAN LASSITER

The Spiritual and Psychological Intersectionality in Research and Thought (SPIRiT) Lab is headed by Dr. Jonathan Mathias Lassiter. We are currently conducting The Black-on-Black Same-sex Love Project that combines symbolic netnography and dyadic qualitative interviews to (a) decode and understand the ways in which Black same-sex male couples (BSMCs) express their romantic relationships in virtual contexts (i.e., social media) via symbolic indicators and (b) determine how BSMCs describe the quality of their romantic relationships and make meaning of them. Findings from this study will inform future couples-based health studies and interventions for BSMCs.



Symbolic netnography is a form of qualitative research that analyzes a specific group's cultural experiences as reflected in their online presentations and interactions. Such analyses are used as building blocks to understand people's behaviors, meaning-making strategies, values, and decision-making processes. Dyadic qualitative methodology assumes that a dyad's reality is co-constructed and thus utilizes qualitative interviewing with both members of a dyad. In our study, couples will be interviewed together at the same time so that we can gain an understanding of how they create a joint picture and shared narrative of their relationship and its meaning. The dyadic qualitative interviewing will be nested within the symbolic netnography.

Currently, students are extracting social media posts from BSMCs' profiles on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. They are also learning how to conduct dyadic qualitative interviews.



### **JEFF GREESON**

This semester, four students in the Mindfulness Lab presented their research at the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies (ABCT) annual convention – the nation's largest Clinical Psychology conference. Gabrielle Chin, a 4th-year PhD student, presented a poster on how dispositional (trait) mindfulness correlates with objective measures of neurocognitive functioning in Rowan students. Emma McBride, a 3rd-year PhD student, presented a poster on a project funded by the NJ Health Foundation, which evaluated a group-based mindfulness program for older adults with Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) and their caregivers. Hana Lee, a 2nd-

year PhD student, presented a poster on a pilot study that shows just 5-min. of “mindful breathing” can help students regulate emotions after experiencing a brief stressor. And, Amanda Colangelo (Class of 2020), presented findings from the same pilot study that suggest students who are better able to “mindfully accept” their thoughts and feelings may also be able to “buffer” their emotional reactions to stress. Finally, we are also excited about a new project funded by the Camden Health Research Initiative, in which we're collaborating with the Dept. of Anesthesiology at Cooper Hospital to study the link between physician compassion and surgery patients' anxiety levels, pain levels, and use of opioid medication post-op.

### **BETHANY RAIFF**

The Health and Behavior Integrative Treatment (HABIT) lab has several active research projects related to Drug Abstinence and Health Promotion. The lab has recently developed one desktop videogame (Up from the Ashes) and another smartphone videogame (Inspired) where smokers could earn game-based incentives (in place of monetary incentives) contingent on web camera-recorded videos showing them exhale into a carbon monoxide (CO) monitor to verify smoking abstinence. In the Fall 2020 Dr. Raiff worked with a group of students in a Software Development class in Rowan University's Computer Science (CS) department to develop a prototype of a new application, called Re-Connect, that blocks access to high-value smartphone applications until the participant meets smoking abstinence goals (i.e., the incentive will be unblocking an already highly valued app). One advantage of this approach is that it is broadly applicable - it is being developed so that it can be applied to a host of health behaviors, not just smoking (e.g., medication adherence, physical activity). The HABIT lab is also working collaboratively with Dr. Tom Dinzeo to extend the traditional mobile contingency

management intervention for smoking cessation to individuals with schizophrenia-spectrum disorders, and has recently begun working on incentive-based behavioral interventions for vaping cessation and opioid abstinence. Finally, the HABIT lab is actively conducting research on behavioral interventions to support physical activity and promote social justice. Below are screenshots of the HABIT lab’s Inspired mobile app.

Screen shots of Inspired (a) Tutorial, (b) Home screen [meta-game], and (c) One level out of 50+ possible game levels [core game]



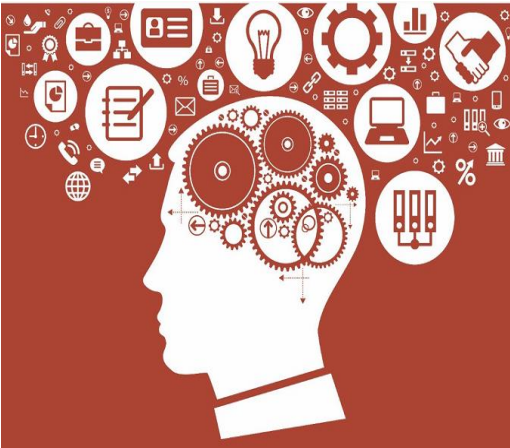
## MEREDITH JOPPA, DJ ANGELONE

The Aggression, Substance, and Sexuality Research Team (ASSeRT Lab) at Rowan University has many interesting, grant-funded research projects currently underway! “Project Date SMART” is an NIH R15 grant focusing on dating violence (DV) and sexual risk prevention for young mothers. The objectives of this project are: 1) identify and test ways to increase recruitment and engagement of adolescent mothers (ages 15-19) from underserved backgrounds in DV and sexual risk prevention research at hospital-based clinics, 2) adapt Date SMART an evidence-informed DV and sexual risk prevention intervention, for adolescent mothers, and 3) conduct a pilot randomized controlled trial of the adapted intervention, Date SMART-Young Moms (YM) in an ambulatory clinic setting at Cooper University Hospital in Camden, NJ. Next, we have “Project G-Date,” an NIH R15 grant to develop and validate a novel paradigm for assessing sexual violence (SV) risk perception in men who have sex with men (MSM). This project will not only assist with understanding factors associated with SV risk, but also serve as a useful step in creating tools to enhance prevention efforts in this susceptible population. We are also working on “Engaging and Retaining Young Mothers and Their Children in the Healthcare System” (EYMIH) which is a project internally funded by Rowan University. The study aims to 1) identify barriers and facilitators to engaging with the healthcare system for young mothers from underserved backgrounds using a mixed-methods research approach and 2) develop accessible, actionable guidance for both young mothers and healthcare providers with the goal of designing a set of tools to increase access, engagement, care coordination, and communication to improve healthcare outcomes. Additionally, our lab partnered with Rowan University’s Title IX Office to identify students’ attitudes and experiences with sexual violence on campus through a Campus Climate Survey. This project was funded by the US Department of Justice (NJ Department of Law & Public Safety).



ASSeRT also maintains expertise with alcohol administration protocols in order to understand the influence of alcohol intoxication on a host of relevant behaviors. We currently have several projects on hold due to COVID. We also have the “Healthy Relationships for Student Athletes” project which is a mixed-methods project that has culminated in the development of an intervention (SPORT) to promote healthy relationships for student athletes. Finally, we have “Sexual Ambivalence,” a study to identify why some people engage in sexual behavior when they feel ambivalent about the activity. We asked participants about their feelings, motives, and behaviors in instances when they have engaged in sexual activities they were not sure about. Typically, we have

a long list of projects in varying levels of development, data collection, analysis, and manuscript development (many of which are in addition to those listed above).



## **POLLY TREMOULET**

The Interaction Design and Engineering for Advanced Systems (IDEAS) lab takes human perceptual, cognitive, and physical abilities and limitations into account when designing and assessing products, environments, and training, with the goal of improving efficiency, effectiveness, safety, and/or human performance. Our diverse team of 10 undergraduate students includes students majoring in psychology, computer science, biological sciences, engineering, health sciences, and biochemistry. The IDEAS lab specializes in applying human factors techniques to help vulnerable populations including patients, children, the elderly and individuals with disabilities. There are three

active research thrusts in the IDEAS lab: 1) Improving the quality of documents produced by electronic health records (especially documents about pediatric and elderly patients). This research is sponsored by a grant from ECRI ([www.ecri.org](http://www.ecri.org)) and was also supported by a Rowan seed award for the 2019-2020 academic year. 2) Enabling more efficient, effective, and satisfying patient care, by improving the technologies used by healthcare providers. This work is funded through NIH Small Business Innovative Research (SBIR) awards to Etiometry, Inc ([www.etiometry.com](http://www.etiometry.com)), and Innovations Unlimited (<https://innovationsunlimitedllc.com>). 3. Exploring how intelligent technologies can be designed and applied to improve the health, safety, and well-being of adults with disabilities. This work is supported by a grant from the New Jersey Department of Health, through The Governor's Council for Medical Research and Treatment of Autism (<https://www.state.nj.us/health/autism>).

## **UPCOMING CARBBS EVENTS**

In the Spring 2021 semester, CARBBS will host a 4-part Research Talk series. Each event will include 4-5 10-15 minute presentations by faculty and/or students. The intention behind this talk series is for members of our department to provide a high level overview of ongoing and future projects to help increase our awareness of one another's research and help spark ideas for future collaborations. We are looking for volunteers willing to talk about their research; if you are interested please reach out to Polly, Sarah, or Dustin.