



## A NEWSLETTER FOR UNDERGRADS AT ROWAN UNIVERSITY

ISSUE #15 Fall 2021

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### IMPORTANT DATES FOR UPCOMING EVENTS

**March 22nd** — *Psychology Job Fair* (virtual): Whether you're currently looking for jobs and internships or are just interested in what is out there, please attend! Students will be able to sign up through ProfLink.

**March 24th** — *Psi Chi International Honor Society Induction* (virtual): Psi Chi members will be inducted into the Honor Society in a virtual ceremony.

**April 19th** — *Psychology Research Conference*: Students will have the opportunity to present their research by giving either an oral presentation or a poster presentation. All are invited to attend. This will be held in Business Hall – Room 104. Details will follow.

**May 6th** — *Psychology Department Awards*

**May 9th** — *University Commencement*

### WHO'S WHO IN THE PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT

**Dr. MaryLou Kerwin**, Depart. Head & Professor

**Dr. Lisa Abrams**, Depart. Chair & Assist. Professor

**Dr. Jim Haugh**, Director of Clinical Training & Assoc. Professor

**Mr. Dan Dantinne**, Assistant to Dr. Kerwin

**Ms. Brenda Harkins**, Depart. Secretary

**Ms. Sherri Vega**, Assistant to Dr. Haugh



**"I'm no longer accepting the things I cannot change... I'm changing the things I cannot accept."**

**- Angela Davis**

# Faculty Spotlight

## Interview with Dr. Kaite Gotham by Angela Colo

In our faculty spotlight this semester, Dr. Kaite Gotham took some time out of her very busy schedule so we could pick her brain a bit. Dr. Gotham came to us most recently from Vanderbilt University where she was faculty, but prior to that she received both her BA and PhD from the University of Michigan. Additionally, she is the Director and Principle Investigator of the Social, Emotional, & Affective Health Lab (SEAHLab). The interview continues on the next page, as well.



### **What made you want to focus on individuals who are neurodivergent?**

**DKG:** It started with the influence of my mother: She was a speech-language pathologist and, while I was a high school student, she took online classes to get an autism educator certification, so I heard a lot about autism in my formative years. Then I had a brief stint teaching English in the Netherlands, and my autistic students were so likable and interesting that I ended up focusing on autism in my grad school applications. By this point, I have several neurodivergent family members, so now my work is even more relevant to me personally.

### **So far, has there been data to support that our interest level in social experiences affects mental and physical health?**

**DKG:** Yes! Data from a couple of studies from our lab (one not yet in press) suggest that, for people who are more motivated for (i.e., want) social experiences, having minimal social opportunity is associated with depressive symptoms. That was in line with our hypotheses. But here is an interesting twist: We also observed that autistic adults who reported low social motivation still tended to report elevated loneliness compared to non-autistic comparisons, and loneliness was strongly associated with depressive symptoms. So some amount of social participation might be protective of mental health regardless of how much you want it. Others are working on this, too. If you're interested in learning more, see this recent review: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1362361320908101>

### **What is a breakthrough or accomplishment you are most proud of?**

**DKG:** I can think of a research finding that I'm most proud of, but honestly my proudest "accomplishment" in my career is building my current lab. I work with an amazing group of trainees, including a Rowan grad as our full-time research assistant, two doctoral students, several bright and motivated undergraduates at Rowan, as well as former trainees who are now later-stage doctoral candidates or post-docs at Vanderbilt and Yale universities. We are diverse in gender, sexual orientation, neurodiversity, race and ethnicity, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Meeting together for our weekly virtual lab meeting enriches my understanding of this science... and it's just fun. Seeing the lab members bond with each other across institutions, get excited about the work, and pull together to accomplish things – that is what gives me the sense of "oh, I made it, I'm a real grown up now," both in my career and in my life as a whole.

**"Life doesn't make any sense without interdependence. We need each other, and the sooner we learn that, the better for us all."**

**– Erik Erikson**

# Faculty Spotlight (cont.)

## Interview with Dr. Kaite Gotham by Angela Colo

**What is your favorite part about your work?**

**DKG:** See previous answer. :)

**What do you like most about having students assist you with your lab?**

**DKG:** I like watching them slowly come to feel a sense of ownership over the research, to the point that they push their projects forward in new directions, or push back on suggestions from me or the group in meaningful ways. I think I always had good critical thinking skills and psychological insight, but it took me a long time to "get" the more scientific aspects of research, so I'm in awe when I watch trainees today catch on so quickly and become colleagues. (If you are a student reading this who does *\*not\** feel like they catch on quickly, hopefully my example can reassure you that there is a place for you, too. Sometimes the harder we have to work for it, the more meaningful the achievement!)



**How has your research changed your point of view towards neurodivergent individuals?**

**DKG:** I'll say that being part of the clinical research community has changed my POV: when I started my training, there was much more a feeling of "us-them" – neurotypical people carried out the research or clinical care, and neurodivergent people were the participants or patients. While it hasn't changed enough, it has changed pretty broadly since then. At first, involving the autistic community in research (by establishing review boards, focus groups, partnering with self-advocacy groups, etc.) seemed new and trendy and intentional, but slowly our attitudes are changing, so embracing neurodiversity around us in all contexts is just "Life as it Should Be," and we realize that every aspect of our lives -- especially the pursuit of science -- would absolutely suffer without it. We are lucky that now at least two of our current research team members identify as autistic adults, and others are neurodivergent in other categorical or dimensional ways. Now "we" means whoever happens to be conducting a study, and we strive to benefit from the expertise of lived experience, the privilege of scientific training, and the overlap between the two.

To learn more about what Dr. Gotham and her SEAHLab team does, see her website:

<https://www.seahlrowan.com/>.

To apply to be a research assistant in the SEAHLab, see the following link: <https://www.seahlrowan.com/become-a-research-assistant>

**"We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what their color."**

**— Maya Angelou**

# **“My Six-Year-Old Sister Isn’t Scary, I Promise”**

## **by Julia Chard**



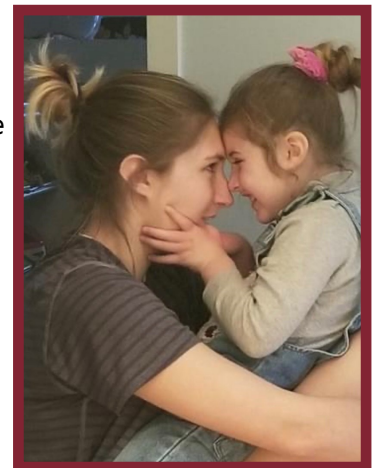
**M**y whole life I was raised by three important rules: 1) never to judge a book by its cover, 2) to always respect people until given a reason not to, and 3) to remember that things are not always how they are perceived. Up until I was 13-years-old, the most difficult of these rules was understanding that we do not always see what happens behind closed doors. That is, until I first met my youngest sister, Eden.

We learned quickly that Eden was different from me and my sister, Devyn. She was not developing as quickly or hitting the typical milestones that most children would. So, when we went to the doctor and found out that she had Cerebral Palsy, it was a big wake up call. My middle sister, Devyn, was 3 at the time, and I had already assumed the role of the third parent – Mommy 2.0. Adding another child to my agenda, especially one with such needs, was something none of us were expecting. I knew about the condition and what it was, but I never considered what it would be like to have a sibling with CP. As a 13-year-old middle schooler, it was difficult, to say the least, to comprehend what this meant for my baby sister and our family.

Eden did progress, even if it was slower than typical kids did, but . Yet, as the years kept coming, so have all of her diagnoses. Eden has, most recently, been diagnosed with a genetic mutation, which, in Eden’s case, has caused Atypical Rett Syndrome. Rett Syndrome encompasses all of her previous diagnoses: Cerebral Palsy (CP), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and Speech Apraxia. With each diagnosis Eden has received, I learn more, not only about her and her needs, but also about what real love and compassion are. I have also seen, firsthand, how judgmental people can be, especially since they often refuse to take the time to try and understand others around them. Parents at the park or playground get angry with Eden, and me, if she 'ignores' their children’s offers to play, while others give us strange looks when she makes her stimulating noises does things that most kids her age do not.

I sometimes think that I am happy that Eden is unaffected by the rude glances from judgmental moms at the park because she does not understand them. Then I think about all the other people in the world with special needs, who DO understand; all of those kids, teens, and adults who get strange looks just because they learn, do, and process things a little differently than neurotypical people. When I think about how angry, upset, sad, and embarrassed they must feel, I cannot help but feel the same way. So, instead of moving along and accepting the fact that people are going to be judgmental, I spread awareness, even when not asked. When Eden and I are at the park and people give funny looks, I tell them she has special needs and is still learning how to play with kids. When they ask what her diagnoses are, I tell them. Sure, maybe it's not any of their business, but I tell them with hopes that perhaps they will do their research, or at least be more kind when they come across any other 'weird kid' at the playground.

These constant interactions are what made me realize how important special needs awareness and education truly are. With each of these encounters, I noticed more times than not, it is the older generations who seem to have an issue with Eden. I mention specifically Boomers, as most of the younger moms I come across tend to be more understanding and willing to ask questions. I believe that this is due to how the different generations were raised, and the normalized beliefs for their time.



**“Immature love says: ‘I love you because I need you.’ Mature love says: ‘I need you because I love you.’” — Erich Fromm**



# “My Six-Year-Old Sister Isn’t Scary, I Promise” (cont.)

## by Julia Chard

It may be easier for Millennials, Gen Z, and even some Gen X, to ask questions about autism as we are currently being brought up in a time of learning about and developing equality standards. More people are speaking up about issues that have to be talked about. Baby Boomers were brought up in a time where lobotomies were basically glorified torture techniques to “fix” (mostly just silence) those with special needs and mental illness. Lobotomies were so popular that even Rosemary Kennedy, former President John F. Kennedy’s sister, had the procedure done. My point is, although those on the special needs spectrum have become more normalized, there is still a lot of progress that we, as a society, have yet to make.

Talking about special needs is difficult, and frankly, it can be awkward if you do not have personal experience with it. But just because something is a new concept, does not mean you have to shy away from it. For example, if you grow up hearing about how dogs can bite people, how will you learn that most dogs are actually super sweet, and just want to be loved? You will not, unless you meet a friendly dog or ask someone with experience with dogs. It is the same thing. If you have a question about special needs, ask someone who knows.



I encourage everyone to do their research online, ask people around them who may know about the topic, and simply be mindful of those around them. This can be hard, especially when the media constantly contributes to and strengthens the stereotypes and stigmas made against those with special needs. We were taught that people with special needs ‘look funny’, or generally different from ‘normal’ kids. When I tell people that Eden has CP, they are amazed at the fact that she is not in a wheelchair like how they envision all people with CP are. This is just one example of how the media interferes with people’s perceptions of people with CP and various other diagnoses, especially when, according to the CDC, “Over half (about 50%-60%) of children with CP can walk independently”. We are fed specific images of what people with special needs are ‘supposed’ to look like. Because of this, when a ‘normal-looking’ person does something out of the ordinary, society says that they are weird and avoids them.

If you were to look up “someone with special needs” on google right now, every picture would be of someone who physically looks different in some way. Of course, all of these people have special needs, but these are the only pictures that pop up. It’s easy to forget about the sections of the special needs spectrum that do not affect your physical appearance. Due to the mental image of what we all believe people with special needs look like, forced to us by the media, it becomes hard for people with special needs who look ‘normal’, to talk about their diagnosis without people trying to downplay their struggles. The general population tends to believe that for awareness to be ‘properly’ spread, the people who struggle most from the issue need to be the ones to speak up. Unfortunately for those who do, their arguments are often shot down. In the YouTube video What Women With Autism Want You to Know, women were interviewed to debunk the misunderstandings of Autism, and also speak about how hurtful it is to hear, “You don’t look like you have autism.”

The World Bank says that 15% of people in the world have special needs, whether they be physical, developmental, behavioral/emotional, or sensory-impaired. With those numbers, you would think that the topic of all special needs would have been common practice by now. Unfortunately, this is not the case. I do hope, however, that enough people will speak up, and just enough people will listen, so that all of the stereotypes, rumors, and stigmas about all special needs will be squashed one by one.

# In the Field with Post-Baccalaureate

## Study Coordinator Jared Richards — Interview by Gianna Palermo

Jared Richards is a current post-baccalaureate and study coordinator here at his alma mater. During his undergraduate studies, Jared was heavily involved in psychology research and extracurriculars within the department. Through his extensive involvement, Jared has amassed a wealth of notable achievements and research experiences (one of which inspired his first manuscript publication). Beyond the research, he was an active member of Psychology Alliance and NeuroClub and held leadership positions (including President) in both. He also became a peer mentor, tutor, and learning assistant in the psychology department. He recently graduated from Rowan, with a B.S. in Psychological Sciences, Biology and Neuroscience Minors, and the Honors concentration. Post-graduation, Jared secured a position in Dr. Kaite Gotham's Social, Emotional, and Affective Health lab (SE AHL) as a full-time research assistant, a title he still holds today. There are many options for students in-between having graduated with a bachelor's degree and before beginning graduate school—Jared is a great example of how to maximize your time as an undergrad and how to better prepare for grad school.



### Can you tell us about some of your research experiences throughout the years?

**JR:** My very first research experience was with Dr. Hough, after I approached him at a psychology department welcome event during my first year at Rowan. I knew I wanted to study the brain somehow, so Dr. Hough's dedication to neuroscience appealed to me. During my second year, I applied to summer research programs outside of Rowan and was fortunate enough to earn admission to the Amgen Scholars Program at UCLA. There, I worked with a large research team using larval Zebrafish (known for its relatively simple nervous system) to investigate the basic cellular-molecular mechanisms of learning and memory.

Coming back to Rowan for my third year, my growing interest in the translation of brain to behavioral science led me to Dr. Greenson's Mindfulness, Stress and Health Lab, where I started to become familiar with concepts such as stress reactivity, perseveration, affect, and protective factors such as mindfulness. My very first research experience was with Dr. Hough, after I approached him at a psychology department welcome event during my first year at Rowan. I knew I wanted to study the brain somehow, so Dr. Hough's dedication to neuroscience appealed to me.

**"... I sought full-time research assistant positions after graduating with my bachelor's degree. Fortunately, I ended up with the opportunity to work with Dr. Gotham in the Social, Emotional, and Affective Health Lab (SE AHL)."**

This experience, as well as the Advanced Research course required by the B.S. degree in Psychological Science, also made me acquainted with basic aspects of the human subject research process. By my senior year at Rowan, I had growing aspirations to pursue a PhD in Clinical Psychology. In order to gain more experience, both to explore my interests and become more competitive for graduate school admissions, I sought full time research assistant positions after graduating with my bachelor's degree.

Fortunately, I ended up with the opportunity to work with Dr. Gotham in the Social, Emotional, and Affective Health Lab (SE AHL) starting Fall 2019. In this full-time research position, I am involved in several projects within the lab, with most of my time dedicated to our NIMH-funded study on repetitive thinking and emotional health in autistic adults.

# In the Field (cont.)

**What did you expect going into your first research lab, and did your experiences meet your expectations?**

**JR:** Eager to study the brain, I honestly jumped into a research lab not even knowing what to expect. I hadn't even taken a psychology course yet! But the experience acquainted me with the research process and gave me a hands-on experience that provided interesting context for what I started to learn in my psychology coursework.

**What skills have you developed and benefitted from as a result of your undergraduate research involvement?**

**JR:** I learned many technical skills specific to each research lab I had involvement in. Generally, I started to gain general familiarity with the research process, from initial efforts designing a study through collecting, analyzing and presenting data. Working on various projects allowed me to practice troubleshooting and critical thinking skills, sharpening my ability to approach a problem by drawing from multiple different perspectives.

**Can you tell us about your current position here at Rowan and what a day on the job looks like for you?**

**JR:** In my current position, I coordinate all aspects (recruitment, eligibility screening, data collection, etc.) for our main in-person study on repetitive thinking and emotional health. Once this study resumed in July 2021 (after being paused due to the pandemic), I started to see adult participants who are autistic and/or depressed, as well control participants who are neither, to take them through our 5-8-hour data collection protocol. In addition to working with teammates on several other projects related to emotional health in autistic adults, I hire and supervise undergraduate research assistants, organize meetings with lab members and external colleagues, and manage many other administrative duties for the lab. It is not always easy to keep up with the demands of a high-paced research environment, but I am very passionate about this work and the fulfillment I get from my position definitely outweighs the difficult moments by far.

**What is your favorite part of the work you do?**

**JR:** This is a tough question, because I really enjoy many aspects of my work. I love getting to have high level discussions about concepts within the important, growing area of research we focus on. But I also really enjoy the hands-on experience of seeing a wide variety of people in our lab and the interchange this experience has with my growing knowledge and ongoing discussions of concepts related to the field. Lastly, one of the best parts of my position is the team I have the pleasure of working with. I am super inspired by and grateful for my highly motivated, supportive and friendly teammates.

**What is next for you in your education and career in psychology?**

**JR:** Right now, I am currently making my first attempt at applying to PhD programs in Clinical Psychology. In graduate school, I hope to study cognitive-affective mechanisms that cut across internalizing (e.g., anxiety and depression) and neurodevelopmental (namely autism) conditions and apply basic findings to inform clinical treatments.

**What would you tell an undergraduate student, considering getting involved in a psych research lab?**

**JR:** I highly recommend research involvement to anyone who wants a practical experience to contextualize what they learn in their coursework. Don't hesitate to talk to your professors, they are here to help you and will want to nurture your budding enthusiasm for psychology! Even professors who aren't directly involved in a research lab at Rowan will be able to help steer you in the right direction. Look into research labs you might be interested and apply to them or contact their professor! Ask many questions in your classes and in your research lab! You'd be surprised how many important conversations could get brought up by asking what you almost dismissed as a silly question. Lastly, it's okay not to know exactly what you want to do right when you first start doing research. As a matter of fact, being too fixated on an initial goal might make it more difficult for you to gain exposure to other great options. Accept that your path could involve many unexpected twists and turns and view them as growth opportunities. Have an open mind, take advantage of each experience that comes to you, and trust in yourself that your efforts will eventually take you where you need to be!

# Clubs & Organizations

## PSI CHI

Psi Chi is an international honor society whose purpose is to "encourage, stimulate, and maintain excellence in scholarship of the individual members in all fields, particularly in psychology, and to advance the science of psychology." Spring 2022 deadline: March 1st.

For eligibility requirements and more details, visit: [https://csm.rowan.edu/departments/psychology/studentsresources/student\\_organizations/](https://csm.rowan.edu/departments/psychology/studentsresources/student_organizations/)

## PSYCH & LAW CLUB

Does social and criminal justice reform interest you? Or learning more about the crossroads of psychology and law? Do you enjoy discussing our understanding and response to crime? Come join us and make an immediate impact on our more local communities as well as help fundraise for national organizations such as the Innocence Project.

For more details, visit our ProfLink page: <https://rowan.campuslabs.com/engage/organization/psychandlawclub>

## PSYCHOLOGY ALLIANCE

Psych Alliance is a student-run organization whose members are able to discuss a broad range of aspects in the field of psychology, such as: graduate school, GRE prep class requirements, networking/social platform, lab involvement, etc. You can find out more by signing up for the club via ProfLink or emailing: [psychalliance@students.rowan.edu](mailto:psychalliance@students.rowan.edu).

## ABA CLUB

Are you interested in learning more about Applied Behavior Analysis? Check out the ABA Club, a student-run organization that exposes undergrad and grad students to this exciting field via guest speakers, presentations, and community service projects! To learn more, contact: [abaclub@rowan.edu](mailto:abaclub@rowan.edu)

## NEUROCLUB

The NeuroClub is an organization designed to create a network and support system that allows those interested in the Neuroscience field to gain knowledge, set themselves up for success, and communicate with a group of students who share similar interests. Members have the opportunity to hear from speakers, participate in community service events, and network with other students in the Neuroscience field.

For more information, please contact: [neuroclubrowan@gmail.com](mailto:neuroclubrowan@gmail.com).

## Counseling & Psychological Services



The Counseling & Psychological Services staff provides free confidential therapy for students regarding a wide range of mental health issues. They help students develop effective coping strategies, manage their stress levels, and make healthy decisions to improve their overall well-being. Contact the CPS staff to schedule an appointment. If you're not quite sure if therapy is for you, *Let's Talk* is a program that gives you the opportunity to chat with a counselor without making an appointment ahead of time. Drop-in hours are held at different sites on campus—check it out!

For more info, call:

**856-256-4333**

or visit:

[www.rowan.edu/studentaffairs/counseling](http://www.rowan.edu/studentaffairs/counseling)

### **The Wellness Center @ Winans Hall Hours**

8:00 am to 5:00 pm Monday-Thursday

8:00 am to 4:00 pm Friday

### **After Hours Emergencies**

Call Public Safety at 256-4911 and ask for *Counselor on Call*

### **Emergencies During Office Hours**

Visit the Wellness Center and ask to speak with someone immediately



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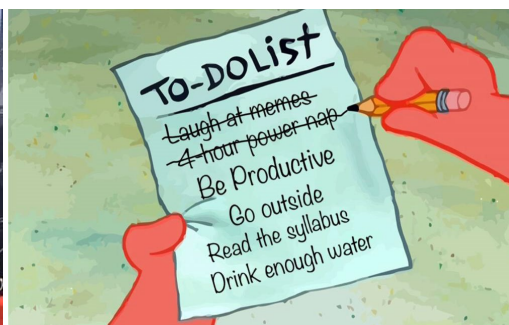
***Got ideas, suggestions, questions?  
Like to talk and write about psychology?  
Interested in joining us next academic year?***

Send all comments and inquiries to [getpsyched@rowan.edu](mailto:getpsyched@rowan.edu).



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## Psycholo-Memes



**asking for extra credit, never attends class**

