

The 44th Annual Psychology Prairie Undergraduate Conference



THE UNIVERSITY OF
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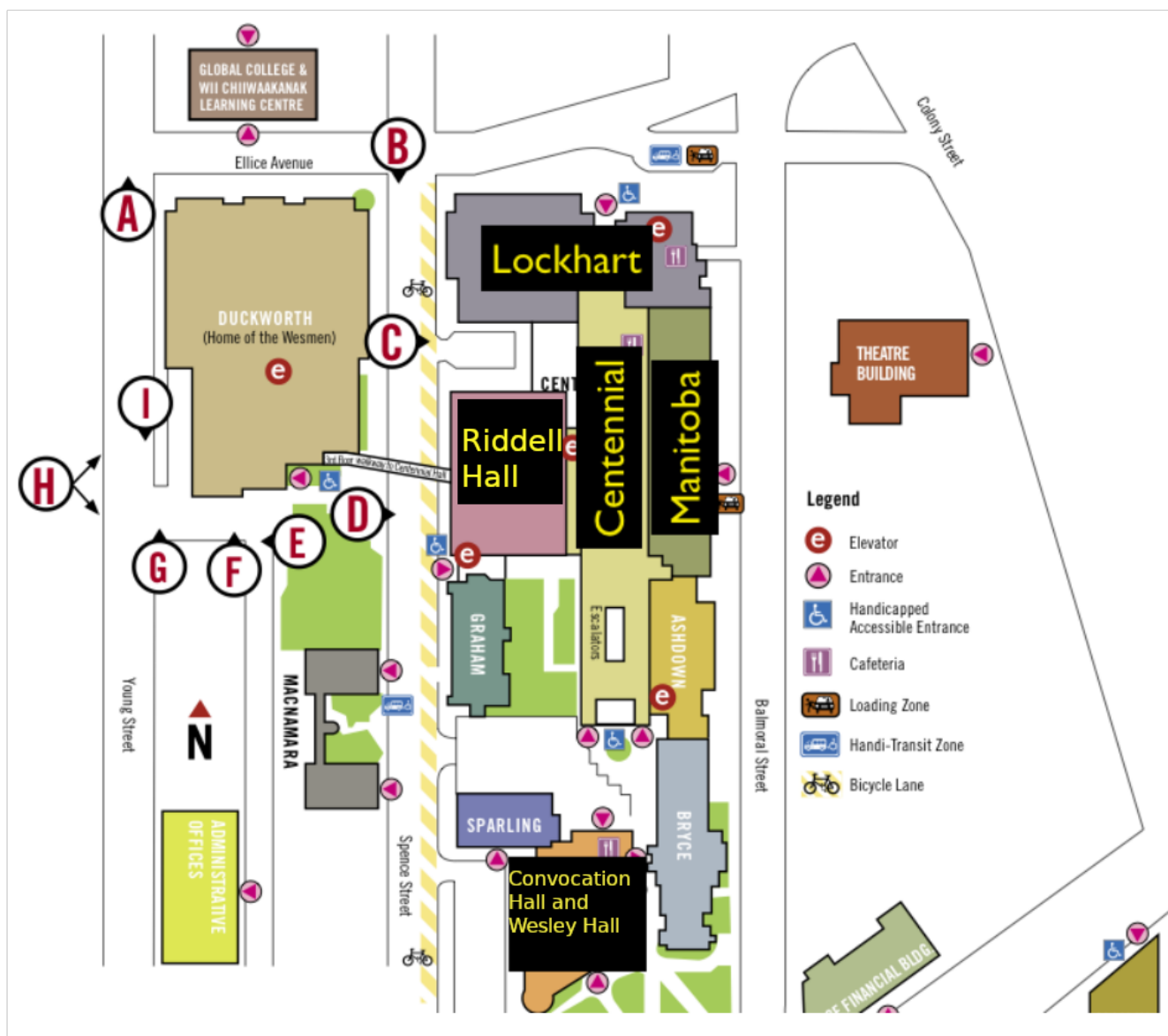
Contents

1	Conference Overview	3
2	Campus Map	3
3	Spoken Presentation Sessions (9:00-10:30)	4
3.1	Session: Cognitive/Physiological (4M37)	4
3.2	Session: Social/Personality (4M41)	4
4	Poster Presentation Session (10:30-11:00) (4L28)	4
5	Spoken Presentation Sessions (11:00-12:30)	5
5.1	Session: Clinical/Health (4M37)	5
5.2	Session: Developmental (4M41)	5
6	Keynote Address (1:30pm in 3C00): Dr. Catherine Lebel	6
7	Sponsors	6
8	Abstracts	7

1 Conference Overview

Time	Activity	Location
8:00 – 8:45	Registration, Reception, and Refreshments	4 th Floor Lockhart Hall
8:45 – 8:55	Opening remarks, Dr. Brandon Christopher, Associate Dean of Arts University of Winnipeg	4M47
9:00 – 10:30	Spoken Presentation Sessions I (p.4)	4M37, 4M41
10:30 – 11:00	Poster Session and Coffee Break (p.4)	4L28
11:00 – 12:30	Spoken Presentation Session II (p.5)	4M37, 4M41
12:30 – 1:30	Lunch	The University Club Wesley Hall
1:30 – 2:45	Keynote Address: Dr. Catherine Lebel, University of Calgary	3C00

2 Campus Map



3 Spoken Presentation Sessions (9:00-10:30)

3.1 Session: Cognitive/Physiological (4M37)

Moderator: Dr. Bruce Bolster

Time	Presenter	Title
09:00	Alanah Pamandanan	The Role of Sensory Processing Sensitivity in Emotional Attentional Blink
09:15	Anjali Sharma	The Influence of Interoceptive Attention on Emotion Regulation
09:30	Debra Alabi	Alexithymia and Emotion-Attention Interactions
09:45	Loveleen Kaur	The influence of interoception on emotional processing
10:00	Yashmeen Kaur	Priming roles of negative prefixes in Lexical Decision Making Task
10:15	Olivia Shyiak	Don't stop believing: How continuity and intended function shape persistence judgements of objects

3.2 Session: Social/Personality (4M41)

Moderator: Dr. Justin Friesen

Time	Presenter	Title
09:00	Sophie Dexter	Breakup Song Listening and Post-Breakup Adjustment: A Correlational Analysis
09:15	Elinor Shpunt	Analyzing the Role of Compassionate Love in Same-Sex friends
09:30	Shelby Buhle	Dark Tetrad Traits and Victimization Judgements
09:45	Anna Toderash	Subjective Well-being, Social Withdrawal, and the Dark Tetrad of Personality
10:00	Noah Merz Lakser	The Perception of Group-System Conflict Affects the Relationship Between Group Identification and System Justification
10:15	Carter W. Hruby	Abstraction and Aesthetic Perception: Emotional Judgments of AI- vs Human-Generated Artwork

4 Poster Presentation Session (10:30-11:00) (4L28)

#	Presenter	Title
1	Kyra Serek	Actual Similarity Between Romantic Partners in Friends-First versus Dating-Initiation Young Adult Couples
2	Alexandra Pierzchala	Friends-First and Dating-Initiators Differ in Passion but Not Overall Relationship Quality
3	Nyasa Sandhu	Standardization vs. Contextual Care: Rethinking Perinatal Mental Health Assessment across Public Health Nursing Practices
4	Katie Helm	Why Showing Up Isn't Simple: Identifying Barriers to School Attendance Among Indigenous Children in Care
5	MHD Beshar Kashalo,	The Effectiveness of the Unified Protocol as a Transdiagnostic Treatment for Adolescents
6	Eldar Kravitz	Validating the Development of the Ethical Scenario Analysis Tool (ESAT) for Behaviour Analysts
7	Shelby Buhle & Claire Robinson	From Classroom to Community: Applied Psychology Certificate Program

5 Spoken Presentation Sessions (11:00-12:30)

5.1 Session: Clinical/Health (4M37)

Moderator: Dr. Bev Fredborg

Time	Presenter	Title
11:00	Steven Axelrod	Costly Avoidance Under Uncertainty: Testing Intolerance of Uncertainty in a Reward-Based Approach-Avoidance Task
11:15	Adi Keynan	An Exploration of how Experiences of Motherhood Shape HIV Prevention and Treatment Adherence
11:30	Claire Robinson	Exploring Self-Compassion and Occupational Stress Symptoms in RCMP Officers
11:45	Lauren Waldman	Disparities in Pre-Trial Custody: Legal, Social, and Mental Health Factors Affecting Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Individuals in Manitoba
12:00	Mary Ajayi	Can Beliefs About Sexual Power Buffer the Effects of Sexism? Examining Ambivalent Sexism and Psychological Distress
12:15	Hayley Bowley	Healthcare Providers' Perspectives on Mental Health Services for Adults with Autism

5.2 Session: Developmental (4M41)

Moderator: Dr. Stephanie Bugden

Time	Presenter	Title
11:00	Raisa Samiha Alam	Relationship between emotional functioning skills and preliteracy skills in pre-kindergarten children.
11:15	Nerissa Rieu	Evaluating the Effectiveness of TOYBOX Early Literacy and Early Numeracy Interventions in Preschool Settings
11:30	Hailey Zacharias	RAN With It: The Role of Rapid Naming on Literacy and Numeracy
11:45	Julia Spence	The supporting role of emotion competencies on children's academic abilities
12:00	Camryn Kowalchuk	Examining emotion recognition and vocabulary in children using TOYBOX interventions
12:15	Rose Gumber	Bridging Research and Reality: Qualitatively Exploring Stakeholder Priorities for Aging Well

6 Keynote Address (1:30pm in 3C00): Dr. Catherine Lebel

Early exposures with lasting impact: How the prenatal environment shapes brain development



Early brain development is highly sensitive to the prenatal environment, and exposures during pregnancy can have lasting effects on children's brain, cognitive, and behavioural development. Drawing on population-based neuroimaging, and large longitudinal cohort studies, my work examines how prenatal and early-life factors, such as maternal mental health, substance use, and life events, are associated with variations in children's brain structure, learning and behaviour. The findings show that some prenatal exposures are linked to enduring differences in brain development, while others influence developmental trajectories across childhood, highlighting opportunities for prevention and early intervention.

Dr. Lebel is a Professor of Radiology at the University of Calgary and the principal investigator of the Developmental Imaging Laboratory. Dr. Lebel is a prolific researcher and has published papers in prominent journals relating to mental health broadly, and the impacts of prenatal alcohol exposure or prenatal exposure to anxiety and depression to brain development. In addition, her research team has basic research papers expanding our knowledge of cognition and the brain.

7 Sponsors

We are grateful to the generous support of the Research Office at the University of Winnipeg as well as the Dean of Arts for making this year's Prairie Undergraduate Conference possible.

Please join us after the keynote for a reception at the University Club!

8 Abstracts

The Role of Sensory Processing Sensitivity in Emotional Attentional Blink

Alanah Pamandanan. *University of Winnipeg*
Faculty Supervisor: *Stephen Smith*
Second Reader: *Erin Buckels*

The attentional blink is a brief period where people have trouble noticing a target image when it appears soon after a distractor image. Previous research provides evidence that emotional images can change this effect by either helping or hurting attention. However, not much is known about how personality traits affect this process. One important trait is sensory processing sensitivity (SPS), which describes how strongly people notice and react to their environment. People high in SPS may process emotional information more deeply. This study will test whether SPS affects performance on an emotional attentional blink task. Undergraduate students will complete an attention task and a questionnaire measuring SPS. It is expected that people high in SPS will show differences in emotional attention compared to others.

The Influence of Interoceptive Attention on Emotion Regulation

Anjali Sharma. *University of Winnipeg*
Faculty Supervisor: *Stephen Smith*
Second Reader: *Derrick Bourassa*

Emotional regulation involves modifying emotional responses through strategies such as reappraisal or distraction. Researchers have begun investigating the factors that influence both strategy selection and effectiveness. Interoception, the perception of internal bodily sensations, plays an important role in shaping emotional experience; however, its influence on emotion regulation strategy selection remains unclear. The present study examined whether directing attention to bodily sensations altered emotional intensity and the choice of emotion regulation strategies across positive, neutral, and negative images. Using a within-subjects design, all participants completed both conditions: an interoceptive-attention condition, in which they focused on their heartbeat and bodily sensations, and a natural viewing condition, in which they viewed images without specific instructions. After each image, participants rated their emotional intensity and indicated which regulation strategy they would choose. Results revealed a significant interaction between emotion type and strategy, indicating that strategy use differed across emotional conditions. Specifically, participants selected distraction more frequently for negative images, whereas reappraisal was more frequently selected for neutral and positive images. Importantly, this pattern contrasted with effectiveness ratings, which showed that reappraisal was consistently rated as the most effective strategy across conditions. Interoceptive attention did not significantly alter overall strategy selection or effectiveness, although there was a marginal trend toward increased use of reappraisal under interoceptive conditions. These findings suggest a dissociation between strategy effectiveness and strategy selection, such that individuals do not always choose the most effective regulation strategy, particularly under negative emotional conditions. The results extend emotion regulation choice models by highlighting the role of emotional context in strategy selection and suggest that interoceptive attention may have a limited but nuanced influence on regulatory behavior.

Alexithymia and Emotion-Attention Interactions

Deborah Alabi. *University of Winnipeg*
Faculty Supervisor: *Stephen Smith*
Second Reader: *Amy Desroches*

This study examines how emotions affect attention processes, and how these emotion attention interactions are influenced by a person's personality.

The influence of interoception on emotional processing

Loveleen Kaur. *University of Winnipeg*
Faculty Supervisor: *Stephen Smith*
Second Reader: *Stephanie Bugden*

This presentation examines how interoception, or the perception of internal bodily signals, contributes to emotional

experience. Rather than emotions being direct reactions to physiological changes, recent approaches suggest that the brain actively predicts and interprets these internal signals. This process helps explain how the same bodily state can lead to different emotional experiences depending on the context. Evidence from neuroimaging studies shows that prefrontal brain regions play an important role in linking attention to bodily signals with emotional processing. Overall, this work highlights that emotions are shaped by both physiological signals and cognitive interpretation, offering a more dynamic understanding of how emotional experiences are formed.

Priming roles of negative prefixes in Lexical Decision Making Task

Yashmeen Kaur. *University of Winnipeg*
Faculty Supervisor: *Harinder Auja*
Second Reader: *Douglas Williams*

Lexical Decision-Making (LDT) task is a very common method used to study the accuracy and speed of word recognition in linguistic studies. Word recognition has been widely studied with various kinds and categories of stimuli. Similarly, this study uses the 4 types of stimuli -target pairs to test the roles of prefixes in word recognition. The categories are: PRP = Positive regular stimuli word (no prefixes) and positive target word; NRN = Negative regular stimuli with negative target, NPN = Negative prefixed stimuli with negative target and lastly NPP = Negative prefixed with positive target. Data from a total of 37 undergraduate students (N = 37) was used to examine the results of this study. Results from one way ANOVA and paired sample T test does not show any significant difference between the mean response time scores. However, the accuracy rate in NPP word category was significantly higher than NPN. This result indicates that prefix works as a stem to a positive word, and it primes better for a positive word rather than a negative word. Although the results did not show significance in other aspects that were tested in this experiment, a bigger sample size may produce clearer and significant differences.

Don't stop believing: How continuity and intended function shape persistence judgements of objects

Olivia Shyiak. *University of Winnipeg*
Faculty Supervisor: *Brandon Goulding*
Second Reader: *Stephanie Bugden*

Objects, much like people, have identities (Rips et al., 2006). However, objects cannot stay the exact same over time. They break, wear down, and require repairs. Sometimes, objects can be repaired in a way that retains their identity. Other times, these modifications can wipe out objects' identity. This raises the question of how much an object can change before it is no longer considered the same. Despite this, little work has investigated whether continuity of use contributes to judgements of identity persistence. We wondered whether an object persistent in use might retain more of its identity than a restored object that was largely in disuse. Here, we investigate if adults (N = 223) consider both continuity of use and the objects' intended function when making these judgements. Participants were introduced to an object and read about its condition over time, and then asked if it is the same object as before. Our findings suggest that adults rely on intended function when determining the authenticity of an object, as this factor was considered over and above their pattern of use.

Breakup Song Listening and Post-Breakup Adjustment: A Correlational Analysis

Sophie Dexter. *University of Manitoba*
Faculty Supervisor: *Nicholas Evans*

To date, research on listening to sad music that reflects one's emotional state has reported mixed findings on whether this behaviour is adaptive. However, research has yet to address a specific type of song that may depict a relatable experience for many listeners: romantic breakups. The present study sought to address this gap by examining what benefits motivate people who are experiencing a breakup to listen to breakup songs. I hypothesized that people who listened to breakup songs did so because they benefitted psychologically from this behaviour, and that these benefits would be associated with a connection to the artist and emotional processing through self-regulatory goals. A Qualtrics survey was administered to 295 first year psychology students and the data was analyzed through a series of zero order correlations and multiple linear regressions. The results revealed that breakup song listening was positively associated with rumination and negatively associated with adjustment. Keywords: romantic breakup, breakup song, positive adjustment, emotional distress, perceived responsiveness

Analyzing the Role of Compassionate Love in Same-Sex friends

Elinor Shpunt. *University of Winnipeg*
Faculty Supervisor: *Beverley Fehr*
Second Reader: *Daniel Perlman*

My study examined the role of compassionate love (CL) in shaping cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses to a friend's distress (N = 58 friend pairs). One participant (support provider) observed their friend (support recipient) perform an arithmetic task that was meant to induce stress. Results indicated that compassionate love (CL) was associated with greater friend-focused attention during the stress task, supporting the prediction that high-CL support providers would show more other-focused cognitive responses. CL was not significantly related to empathic concern or personal distress, suggesting that CL did not reliably predict emotional responses to the friend's distress. When assessing behavior, CL was strongly associated with willingness to sacrifice on a switching role on a math task. However when presented with a high-cost task (ice-pressor tasks) CL was not significantly related to sacrifices towards a friend in need. Overall, my study suggests that compassionate love promotes other-focused attention and lower-cost supportive behaviors, without increasing emotions or pushing for more costly sacrifices within friendships.

Dark Tetrad Traits and Victimization Judgements

Shelby Buhle. *University of Winnipeg*
Faculty Supervisor: *Erin Buckels*
Second Reader: *Bev Fredborg*

Dark Tetrad personality traits (D4), characterized by diminished empathy and exploitative interpersonal tendencies, may influence the accuracy of victimization judgements. Prior research examining D4 associations with victimization judgement accuracy has produced mixed findings, with little attention to online contexts such as social media. Investigating online victimization judgements is critical for understanding how individuals interpret cues of vulnerability in daily life. The present study examined (a) whether D4 predicts accuracy in judging victimization history from Instagram profiles, (b) whether these traits explain additional variance in accuracy beyond individual differences in empathy, and (c) whether accuracy differed across men's and women's profiles. Undergraduate students (N = 300) completed an online study in which they viewed 20 Instagram profiles and indicated whether the profile owner had experienced victimization on the platform (past year). Participants also completed measures of personality and Instagram use. Results indicated that Machiavellianism predicted lower accuracy, whereas narcissism, psychopathy, and sadism were not significantly associated with accuracy. Although empathy was positively associated with accuracy, D4 explained additional variance in accuracy beyond individual differences in empathy, and empathy was not a unique predictor when controlling for D4. Finally, participants were less accurate when evaluating victim (vs. non-victim) profiles and women's (vs. men's) profiles. The pattern suggests that aversive personality traits, particularly those reflecting a cynical worldview, may distort person perception in online contexts, with aspects of both the perceiver and target impacting the accuracy of victimization judgements. These findings contribute to the understanding of victim selection processes on social media.

Subjective Well-being, Social Withdrawal, and the Dark Tetrad of Personality

Anna Toderash. *University of Winnipeg*
Faculty Supervisor: *Erin Buckels*
Second Reader: *Bev Fredborg*

The Dark Tetrad (D4) consists of four aversive personality traits: narcissism, psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and sadism. These traits are often studied in relation to harmful behaviours, while less is known about how they relate to social tendencies and well-being. In this research, undergraduate participants (N = 558) completed an online survey to assess the D4 alongside relevant social experiences and behaviours (preference for solitude, shyness, and social ostracism) and well-being variables (loneliness, depression, life satisfaction, and happiness) to better understand the social-emotional lives of individuals with high levels of dark personality traits. To rule out alternative explanations for the effects, we also tested whether the associations remained significant when controlling for gender differences and broad (HEXACO) personality dimensions. Results showed that narcissism was linked to greater personal adjustment, with higher narcissism scores associated with higher life satisfaction and lower shyness. In contrast, psychopathy was associated with more frequent experiences of social ostracism and elevated depressive symptoms. Machiavellianism was likewise associated with elevated depressive symptoms, while sadism was associated with lower happiness and life satisfaction. Observed gender differences included a stronger negative association between psychopathy and shyness,

and a positive association between sadism and social ostracism, among women compared to men. These findings align with past research, suggesting that most D4 traits are compatible with feeling excluded or experiencing deficits in well-being. Negative social experiences and dissatisfaction may, in turn, contribute to socially aversive tendencies.

The Perception of Group-System Conflict Affects the Relationship Between Group Identification and System Justification

Noah Merz Lakser. *University of Winnipeg*
Faculty Supervisor: *Justin Friesen*
Second Reader: *Erin Buckels*

There is currently disagreement in the literature as to whether System Justification (SJ; Jost & Banaji, 1994), is distinct from, or is a product of, Social Identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) processes such, as Group Identification (Group ID). A key debate concerns whether Group ID and SJ should be positively or negatively associated within lower-status group. Previous research has found mixed results, with the association at times being positive, and at times negative. However, the extant work has not evaluated the possibility that people, even in lower-status groups, may not always perceive a conflict between group- and system-motives. In the current research, 169 participants, who self-identified as women, completed a measure of Group Identification with their gender and were then randomly assigned to one of two conditions. In the Conflict condition, they read an article stating that gender equality in Canada was decreasing relative to peer nations; in the No Conflict condition, they read an article stating that Canada was among the most gender-equal countries in the world. After reading the article, they completed a measure of system justification. There was a significant interaction between condition and Group ID. In the Conflict condition, Group ID and SJ were negatively associated, whereas in the No Conflict condition, the association was trending positive. These findings help to clarify the discrepancies in the literature and are consistent with System Justification Theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994).

Abstraction and Aesthetic Perception: Emotional Judgments of AI- vs Human-Generated Artwork

Carter W. Hruby. *University of Winnipeg*
Faculty Supervisor: *Harry Strub*
Second Reader: *Aynslee Hinds*

My study compares how people evaluate artworks generated by humans or AI using a new emotional PAAAM scale across 5 styles. A total of 245 participants rated 20 artworks on five PAAAM dimensions (aesthetics, pleasure, arousal, authenticity, and meaning) and completed an authorship-detection task. Contrary to predictions, AI artworks were evaluated more positively than human artworks overall ($M = 4.34$ vs. 4.02), with a large within-subject effect, $t(244) = -12.96$, $p < .001$, $d = -0.83$. This advantage was strongest for aesthetics and pleasure, moderate for arousal and meaning, and minimal for authenticity. Mixed-effects modeling found that origin was statistically significant across all dimensions of PAAAM, except authenticity, along with a statistically significant role for style and an interaction between origin and style. The differences were more evident in Impressionism but not Abstract Expressionism. Both artwork-level analyses and matched-pair analyses substantiated the same findings, with AI-generated images ranking highest. To further investigate these patterns, equivalence tests found that authenticity ratings were equivalent across origins. In contrast, meaning ratings yielded mixed results, with some styles not equivalent. Despite these differences, participants could not distinguish human from AI artworks ($d = 0.39$), showing moderate sensitivity and an anti-AI bias. In sum, these results refute common biases against AI, showing that AI art matches or outperforms human-made art in perception and emotion, but underperforms in tasks such as authenticity assessment.

Costly Avoidance Under Uncertainty: Testing Intolerance of Uncertainty in a Reward-Based Approach-Avoidance Task

Steven Axelrod. *University of Winnipeg*
Faculty Supervisor: *Doug Williams*
Second Reader: *Erin Buckels and Bev Fredborg*

Avoidance under uncertainty is a central feature of anxiety, often providing short-term relief at the expense of long-term outcomes. Prior research indicates that intolerance of uncertainty (IU) is associated with avoidance behaviour, but this work has largely relied on paradigms in which avoiding carries little or no explicit cost. As a result, it remains unclear whether IU predicts avoidance when decisions require sacrificing valued outcomes under conditions

of ambiguity. In the current study, 267 undergraduate participants first completed a battery of self-report measures assessing IU and related traits, followed by a modified approach-avoidance conflict task (AACT) and a viewing-time task (VTT). The AACT introduced explicit reward trade-offs in the form of point rewards (low, medium, and high) and ambiguity through trials with hidden reward values (“??”), allowing for the assessment of costly avoidance at the point of decision. Contrary to hypotheses, IU was not significantly associated with costly avoidance, ambiguity sensitivity, or viewing-time engagement. Unexpectedly, across participants, ambiguous (“??”) trials were approached more frequently than low-reward trials (0-1 points), indicating that the ambiguity manipulation did not produce the predicted ambiguity penalty. These findings suggest that IU may not reliably predict avoidance when uncertainty is embedded within reward-based decision contexts and instead indicate that its behavioural expression may be more closely tied to situations in which uncertainty signals threat and avoidance serves a threat-regulatory function.

An Exploration of how Experiences of Motherhood Shape HIV Prevention and Treatment Adherence

Adi Keynan. *University of Winnipeg*

Faculty Supervisor: *Bev Fredborg*

Second Reader: *Stephen Smith*

Manitoba has experienced a surge in cases of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), with rates more than three times the national average. This rise has been accompanied by an epidemiological shift, with new HIV infections disproportionately affecting Indigenous people, women, people experiencing houselessness, and those who inject drugs. Additionally, treatment adherence has been increasingly challenging. When HIV is left untreated, it can result in deleterious health implications for individuals and can significantly increase the risk of transmission, ultimately exacerbating the epidemic. In Manitoba, women have been disproportionately affected by new HIV cases, introducing an unprecedented situation requiring deeper investigation into this sub-population’s unique experiences. This thesis specifically seeks to understand experiences of mothers, who often carry additional responsibilities, including caregiving demands, that may impact their health-related practices. By examining the critical intersection between treatment adherence and the lived experiences of motherhood, this research aims to shed light on their needs and inform improvements to care to strengthen supports. The existing research on motherhood and HIV tends to concentrate on the gestation and infancy period, emphasizing the prevention of mother-child transmission. While this research remains critical, it has resulted in neglect of the broader lived experiences of mothers, especially of those separated from their children, those with older children, or those facing houselessness. To address this gap, we will use a mixed-methods design including a semi-structured interview and quantitative measures. Through a partnership with the Alltogether4IDEAS research consortia from the University of Manitoba and their community collaborators at Siloam Mission and the Manitoba HIV clinic located at the Health Sciences Centre, mothers accessing these services and who have an HIV diagnosis will be recruited. In this study, we will investigate how motherhood, HIV, and other social-related issues (e.g., houselessness) compound to influence a person’s adherence to HIV treatment. This exploratory study hypothesizes that motherhood is related to treatment adherence. Existing literature regarding the specific directionality of this relationship is rather limited and mixed; however, it is suspected that motherhood may function as a motivator for some women, strengthening their commitment to treatment adherence. For others, the added responsibilities and stressors accompanying motherhood may result in increased burdens, posing as barriers to adherence. This research is crucial, as it has the potential to inform policy makers about the unique needs of mothers living with HIV and to contribute to efforts aimed at reducing HIV transmission across Manitoba.

Exploring Self-Compassion and Occupational Stress Symptoms in RCMP Officers

Claire Robinson. *University of Winnipeg*

Faculty Supervisor: *Bev Fredborg*

Second Reader: *Erin Buckels*

RCMP officers are routinely exposed to high levels of occupational stress and potentially psychologically traumatic events (PPTEs), placing them at elevated risk for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The present study examined (1) the relationships among self-compassion, occupational stress, trauma exposure, and PTSD symptom severity, and (2) whether self-compassion moderates the relationship between trauma exposure and PTSD symptoms in a sample of current and former RCMP members. Participants (N = 143) completed a cross-sectional online survey assessing PPTE exposure, PTSD symptoms, operational and organizational stress, and self-compassion. Results indicated that greater occupational stress and PPTE exposure were associated with higher PTSD symptom severity, while self-compassion was strongly associated with lower PTSD symptoms and lower occupational stress. In regression analyses, self-compassion emerged as a significant independent predictor of PTSD symptoms, whereas PPTE exposure

was not significant when self-compassion was included in the model. Contrary to expectations, self-compassion did not moderate the relationship between trauma exposure and PTSD symptoms. Additionally, participants with probable PTSD reported significantly higher levels of occupational stress and lower self-compassion compared to those without probable PTSD, while minimal differences were observed based on sex. Exploratory analyses indicated no significant association between PPTE exposure and self-compassion within PTSD subgroups. These findings highlight the importance of psychological processes, particularly self-compassion, in understanding variability in PTSD symptom severity among RCMP members. Interventions aimed at enhancing self-compassion and addressing occupational stress may represent promising avenues for supporting mental health in policing populations.

Disparities in Pre-Trial Custody: Legal, Social, and Mental Health Factors Affecting Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Individuals in Manitoba

Lauren Waldman. *University of Winnipeg*
Faculty Supervisor: *Bev Fredborg*
Second Reader: *Beverley Fehr*

Indigenous people in Manitoba, Canada are disproportionately overrepresented in pre-trial detention, comprising approximately 77% of the remand population despite representing only 15% of the general population. The present study examined remand likelihood and duration, as well as associated legal, mental health, and sociodemographic factors among Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals. A retrospective file review was conducted on N = 102 adults (Indigenous: n = 25; non-Indigenous: n = 77) referred for Independent Medical Examinations (IMEs) at a forensic psychiatry clinic in Winnipeg, Manitoba between 2017 and 2024. Analyses included chi-square tests, independent samples t-tests, and regression models. A matched subsample (n = 25 Indigenous; n = 25 non-Indigenous), matched on offence type, severity, and age, was used for regression analyses to improve comparability between groups. In the full sample, Indigenous individuals were significantly more likely to be held in pre-trial custody and experienced longer detention durations. They were also more likely to rely on legal aid, experience unstable housing, and present with substance use and other mental health diagnoses. In matched regression analyses, offence severity significantly predicted pre-trial custody, whereas Indigenous identity and age were not significant predictors in the model. Findings point to systemic inequities in the pre-trial detention stage and highlight the need for future research on culturally informed approaches in Manitoba.

Can Beliefs About Sexual Power Buffer the Effects of Sexism? Examining Ambivalent Sexism and Psychological Distress

Oluwatobiloba Mary Ajayi. *University of Winnipeg*
Faculty Supervisor: *Lisa Sinclair*
Second Reader: *Aynslie Hinds*

Despite advances in gender equality, women continue to experience both subtle and overt forms of everyday sexism, which can undermine well-being and contribute to psychological distress. However, individuals differ in how they interpret and respond to these experiences. The present study examined whether endorsement of Sex Is Power (SIPS) beliefs moderates the relationship between ambivalent sexism and psychological distress. SIPS beliefs reflect the perception that women can gain influence through their sexuality and were examined as a potential vulnerability or protective (buffering) factor. Undergraduate women (N = 222) completed measures assessing their experiences of ambivalent sexism, SIPS beliefs, body shame, and symptoms of depression and anxiety. Moderation analyses controlling for age and race indicated that greater experiences of ambivalent sexism were associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms across overall ambivalent sexism and its subtypes. SIPS beliefs did not significantly moderate these associations. However, exploratory analyses revealed that SIPS beliefs moderated the relationship between body shame and depressive symptoms, such that the association was weaker at higher levels of SIPS. Additionally, SIPS beliefs moderated the associations between ambivalent sexism and anxiety symptoms, as well as hostile sexism and anxiety symptoms, with weaker relationships at higher levels of SIPS. These findings suggest that while ambivalent sexism is consistently associated with psychological distress, SIPS beliefs may serve a context dependent buffering role, particularly in relation to body shame and anxiety.

Bridging Research and Reality: Qualitatively Exploring Stakeholder Priorities for Aging Well

Rose Gumber. *University of Manitoba*
Faculty Supervisor: *Kristin Reynolds*

Second Reader: *Alex Ross*

Despite older adults' and community providers' proximity to experiences with loneliness and social isolation, their perspectives can be underrepresented in shaping aging and health research agendas. With a growing population of older adults and an increased demand for being informed, the current state of research remains inadequately responsive and insufficiently accessible to key stakeholders such as older adults and community providers. Embedded in a larger project, the present study is a qualitative exploration of research questions and priorities most important to stakeholders, relevant to mental health, social isolation/ loneliness (SI/L), and well-being. Reflexive thematic analysis generated four central themes from focus group discussions with stakeholders affiliated with aging-related organizations across Canada: (1) knowledge facilitators, (2) knowledge barriers, (3) knowledge sought and, (4) knowledge mobilization. The results highlight determinants of accessing research knowledge, key areas of interest, and contexts of application, thereby informing knowledge translation efforts and future aging research. Keywords: older adults, aging-well, loneliness, patient-oriented research, qualitative

Healthcare Providers' Perspectives on Mental Health Services for Adults with Autism

Hayley Bowley. *University of Manitoba*

Faculty Supervisor: *Toby Martin*

Second Reader: *Colleen Murphy and Dr Kerri Walters*

The study examines mental health providers' perspectives on the barriers adults with autism face when accessing mental health services in Manitoba. This exploratory quantitative study investigates providers' experiences with service delivery for autism. The research addresses three objectives: (a) assess how often Manitoba providers serve versus decline adults with autism, and why; (b) evaluate providers' training, knowledge, and professional support needs; and (c) explore providers' attitudes and beliefs regarding adults with autism. Approximately 60 providers, including nurses, physicians, psychologists, social workers, and allied health professionals, completed an online survey. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Findings indicate that many healthcare providers report a need for increased knowledge, training, and professional support when working with adults with autism, highlighting gaps in preparedness and confidence. These findings have important implications for improving provider education, informing policy development, and promoting equitable mental health services for adults with autism in Manitoba today. Keywords: autism, adult mental health, healthcare providers, perceptions and attitudes, service accessibility

Relationship between emotional functioning skills and preliteracy skills in pre-kindergarten children.

Raisa Samiha Alam. *University of Winnipeg*

Faculty Supervisor: *Amy Desroches*

Second Reader: *Stephanie Bugden*

The development of early literacy is influenced by various factors such as emotional skills of children, language development and cognitive abilities. While previous research showed that early language plays an important role in later reading, but less is known about how emotional functioning contributes to early literacy skills. This study examined the relationship between emotional functioning and preliteracy skills in preschool-aged children. The sample size consisted of 177 children aged 3 to 5 years in nursery and kindergarten programs. An emotion recognition task and parent-report questionnaire were used to assess emotional functioning like BASC-3. Phonological awareness like CTOPP Elision task and letter identification were used to measure preliteracy skills. Parent-reported questionnaires were used to measure early language development, such as age of first word and age of comprehension of verbal commands. Matrix Reasoning was used to measure nonverbal cognitive ability of the WPPSI. The hypothesis was that children who were emotionally proficient and developed language earlier would show the development of better preliteracy skills. Moreover, this research looked into the contribution of emotional functioning to literacy skills that could not be attributed to language development and cognitive ability. In conclusion, the research will help to better understand the process of early literacy development and also emphasizes the possible significance of emotional skills in facilitating the learning of children.

Evaluating the Effectiveness of TOYBOX Early Literacy and Early Numeracy Interventions in Preschool Settings

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Second Reader: *Brandon Goulding*

Manitoba provincial data on children’s numeracy and literacy outcomes underscore the critical need for early interventions that build the foundational skills necessary for success prior to formal education (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2023). Previous research indicates that children who begin school behind their peers often experience difficulty catching up (Romano et al., 2010). Thus, the purpose of the current research is to evaluate the effectiveness of TOYBOX early numeracy and literacy play-based learning activities. In the present study, children (Mage = 4 years, range = 32-63 months) were randomly assigned to one of three groups: (1) numeracy, (2) literacy, and (3) control. Children participated in five TOYBOX activities for 10 minutes, three times per week for five weeks. All participants completed pre and post assessments on numeracy skills (number identification, counting, cardinality, and number and set comparisons) and literacy skills (upper- and lower-case identification and sound matching). Preliminary findings indicate that children in the numeracy group improved in their numeracy skills, while children in the literacy group improved in their literacy skills following the interventions. Additional results suggest that greater time spent on activities was associated with further improvements in skills and knowledge. These findings are preliminary, and ongoing analyses will further clarify their significance and implications for early intervention practices.

RAN With It: The Role of Rapid Naming on Literacy and Numeracy

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Rapid Automated Naming (RAN) is a well-established predictor of reading ability, yet its precise role in literacy and numeracy remain unclear. In a RAN task, children are presented with a grid of familiar objects, colours, or digits, and asked to name each item as fast as possible. The present study examined the relationship between RAN and early literacy and numeracy abilities in preschool-aged children. We tested a group of 177 children (ages 3-5) as part of a larger study on early school learning. The present study included a subset of 158 of these children for whom we had data for three key measures: elision, letter identification, number identification, and a dot comparison task. Participants were grouped based RAN performance (fastest; those in the top third based on their timed score, moderate: those in the middle third, slowest: those in the bottom third, and incomplete: those who could not complete the task). We found that children with the fastest RAN times performed better on Elision and Number ID compared to children with moderate, slow, and incomplete RAN times. Children with fast RAN also differed from those with slow and incomplete RAN times on the Letter ID task. Findings from this study will contribute to understanding shared cognitive mechanisms in early academic development and inform early screening practices by identifying RAN as a potential marker of risk for later difficulties in reading and mathematics.

The supporting role of emotion competencies on children’s academic abilities

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Early numeracy and literacy skills are strong predictors of future academic success. Children who enter school with strong foundations in numeracy and literacy show greater learning gains and overall achievement. Research suggests that emotional competencies at an early age are also associated with children’s behaviour in the classroom, their ability to adapt, and their academic success. However, the majority of this research focuses on older children and adolescents, measures emotion competency using parent and teacher reports of children’s abilities, and investigates numeracy, literacy, and emotion in isolation. In the present study, we investigate the supporting role that emotional competency plays on children’s academic abilities, using behavioural measures that assess children’s abilities directly. One hundred and twenty-four Nursery and Kindergarten children from the Winnipeg School Division completed measures of numeracy, literacy, and emotional competency. We found that emotional competency is a strong and unique correlate of numeracy and literacy skills even when accounting for age, gender, and IQ. Our findings demonstrate that emotional competence supports young children’s academic abilities and therefore have important implications for implementing emotion instruction at an early age.

Examining emotion recognition and vocabulary in children using TOYBOX interventions

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Widen and Russell's (2003) emotional development research has been cited for their seminal work on the developmental progressions in basic emotion label usage in early childhood. Specifically, children learn to label basic emotions (happy, sad and then mad) first before advanced emotions (surprised, fear) followed by the complex emotion of disgust. Children's emotion-specific vocabulary size correlates with their emotion recognition knowledge and skills (Streubel et al., 2020). Emotion knowledge has been linked to early academic success and school adjustment (Denham et al., 2012). Despite these findings, there is limited research on the efficacy of emotion interventions designed to support young children's emotional label learning. In the present investigation, participants ages 3-to-5 years from early child-care centres were assigned to one activity group: (1) emotion recognition activities, (2) non-emotions activities, and (2) control 'business as usual.' Children participated individually in five activities (i.e., BINGO, bowling, emotions thermometer, Simon Says emotions, and emotions book reading), for 10 minutes, three times a week for five weeks. The emotions group practiced labeling emotions. Pre- and post-intervention assessments were conducted to evaluate emotion identification, recognition, and vocabulary skills development. It was expected that children exposed to emotions-related activities would improve their emotions vocabulary for complex emotion words. Initial findings are promising but will be finalized before the conference. Results will be discussed in the broader context of emotion recognition and vocabulary development, and implications for further research and programming.

Actual Similarity Between Romantic Partners in Friends-First versus Dating-Initiation Young Adult Couples

Kyra Serek. *University of Manitoba*

Similarity is important for relationships, but it is not well understood how relationship formation may impact similarity among partners. The main objective of the present study was to determine whether those who were friends-first were more similar to their partner compared to those who were not friends prior to dating. I recruited 154 romantic couples (308 participants) from introductory psychology courses at the University of Manitoba to complete a questionnaire. I was able to use a dyadic, cross-sectional design to compare similarities between relationship initiation types and to assess the actual similarities between partners. Contrary to my hypothesis, there was no difference between friends-first and dating-initiation in similarity of communal qualities. However, as hypothesized, I found that dating-initiation couples were matched more similarly in social commodities compared to friends-first couples. These results provide new insight into actual similarities found between romantic partners, specifically for dating-initiation couples. Keywords: actual similarity, friends-first initiation, dating-initiation, communal qualities, social commodities

Friends-First and Dating-Initiators Differ in Passion but Not Overall Relationship Quality

Alexandra Pierzchala. *University of Manitoba*

Relationship quality has been widely studied, yet little is known about how initiation pathways impact romantic relationship quality. The present study examined the link between initiation pathways and relationship quality using an ex-post facto dyadic design, comparing friends-first and dating-initiation couples across five components of relationship quality. I hypothesized that friends-first couples' would report greater relationship quality than dating-initiation couples. I recruited 152 couples (N = 304) through the University of Manitoba psychology participant pool, grouped based on how their relationship was initiated. Participants completed a survey which measured relationship quality. Results indicated no significant differences in overall relationship quality between friends-first and dating-initiation couples. However, a three-level comparison distinguishing best friends, just friends, and strangers prior to dating revealed higher passion among dating-initiation couples, reflecting a small effect. Overall, initiation pathways were not associated with greater relationship quality, with minor differences emerging only for passion across initiation pathways. Keywords: friendship, dating, relationship, relationship quality, relationship initiation

Standardization vs. Contextual Care: Rethinking Perinatal Mental Health Assessment across Public Health Nursing Practices

Nyasa Sandhu. *University of Winnipeg*

Perinatal mental health is a critical determinant of parental well-being, infant development, and long-term family

outcomes, yet remains inconsistently addressed across public health systems. Despite the central role of Public Health Nurses (PHNs), existing guidelines rely on a fragmented approach prioritizing either standardized screening tools or relational, context-based care resulting in gaps in equitable and effective assessment. This study undertakes a systematic environmental scan and comparative qualitative analysis of perinatal mental health guidelines across Canadian provinces and international jurisdictions, including the United Kingdom, Australia, India, and Nigeria. It examines the use of standardized screening instruments (e.g., EPDS, PHQ-9, GAD-7) alongside relational practices, cultural safety, gender inclusivity, and the clarity of follow-up and referral pathways. Findings reveal a critical divide: tool-driven models provide consistency but narrow the scope of care, while relational approaches enable holistic assessment yet lack structured implementation and accountability. These gaps are heightened in lower-resource contexts, highlighting significant global inequities. In response, this research advances an integrated, evidence-informed framework that bridges standardization and relational care. By embedding culturally safe, gender-inclusive, and context-responsive practices within clear clinical pathways, this work directly informs the enhancement of Manitoba's prenatal mental health guidelines and offers a scalable model for advancing equitable, person-centered perinatal care.

Why Showing Up Isn't Simple: Identifying Barriers to School Attendance Among Indigenous Children in Care

Katie Helm. *University of Winnipeg*

School attendance is frequently oversimplified as a choice made by students or parents. However, for Indigenous youth, showing up is rarely a simple decision; it is a challenge influenced by a complex web of ecological factors. In partnership with the LEAP program, a collaboration between Animikii Ozoson and Island Lake First Nations Child and Family Services, this research identifies the systemic and individual challenges that often prove more influential than the school's own support structures. Using a quantitative survey across Grades 1–10, we measured three pillars essential to the student experience: Physical Well-being, Emotional Safety, and Support. By examining barriers such as food insecurity, anxiety, and peer connection, the study pinpointed exactly where attendance 'bottlenecks' occur. The analysis highlights how these obstacles fluctuate significantly based on a student's grade level and gender identity. The data revealed a striking 'Support Paradox.' While students reported high scores for Support and Connection, indicating they have trusted adults they value. Physical Well-being was consistently the lowest-rated domain; physical hurdles act as a gatekeeper to the building. We also identified critical 'dips' in emotional safety during transition years (Grades 3, 6, and 8) and found that female and non-binary students reported significantly higher levels of anxiety-related avoidance. These findings prove that a supportive school environment is only half the battle. If a student is too hungry to focus or too anxious to enter the building, they cannot access the resources waiting for them. To move forward, social workers and educators must shift from reactive monitoring to systemic advocacy, implementing nutritional programs, 'Cool-Down' zones, and low-stakes entry policies to lower the threshold for every student.

The Effectiveness of the Unified Protocol as a Transdiagnostic Treatment for Adolescents

MHD Beshar Kashalo. *University of Manitoba*

Adolescence (i.e., ages 10-17) is a critical developmental window marked by a peak in the onset of anxiety and depressive disorders. While numerous interventions have been developed to address these disorders separately, they often focus on the symptoms of a single disorder presentation rather than addressing the full constellation of comorbid symptoms. The Unified Protocol (UP), a transdiagnostic treatment, was developed to target the shared underlying mechanisms of these disorders. This study investigated the effectiveness of a 14-week virtual UP group delivered to adolescents ($N = 7$) residing in rural communities of Manitoba. Through the analysis of pre- and post-treatment measures, specifically the Revised Children's Anxiety and Depression Scale (RCADS) and the Adolescent Life Interference Scale (ALIS-I), findings examined to determine the effectiveness of this treatment in reducing symptom severity and improving daily functioning.

Validating the Development of the Ethical Scenario Analysis Tool (ESAT) for Behaviour Analysts

Eldar Kravitz. *University of Manitoba*

Board Certified Behaviour Analysts undergo rigorous ethics training before and after certification. There is room for improvement as ethical violations still occur. To deal with ethical dilemmas, some use decision-making tools. One area that these tools lack is a detailed analysis of a scenario, risking missing vital information. To address this the Ethical Scenario Analysis tool (ESAT) and scoring rubric were developed to provide a structured method of evaluating

scenarios in high detail and quantifying the quality of an analysis. The objectives are to establish the validity of the ESAT and scoring rubric and collect feedback. Five behaviour analysts were recruited to analyze hypothetical scenarios using the ESAT and scoring rubric, rate their components, and provide feedback. Content validity was established for 6 of 11 ESAT items using Lawshe's content validity ratio (1975). Responses indicate the ESAT was important and practical, and the scoring rubric was appropriate for scoring analyses.

From Classroom to Community: Applied Psychology Certificate Program

Shelby Buhle & Claire Robinson. *University of Winnipeg*

Background: Undergraduate psychology education often emphasizes theoretical knowledge over practical application, limiting opportunities for students to engage with real-world contexts. The Certificate in Applied Psychology (CiAP) at the University of Winnipeg was developed to address this gap by providing structured, credit-bearing experiential learning opportunities. Grounded in experiential, case-based, and work-integrated learning principles, CiAP aims to support skill development, professional identity formation, and meaningful community engagement while preparing students for applied careers and graduate training. **Methods:** A descriptive program evaluation approach was used, drawing on institutional data on program development and student registration trends (2020/21–2025/26) and qualitative student testimonials. Existing literature on experiential and work-integrated learning contextualized the program's educational and developmental impact. **Implications:** Evidence from experiential and work-integrated learning literature suggests improvements in student engagement, well-being, academic performance, and professional skill development. Consistent with this, CiAP students report increased confidence, motivation, and perceived relevance of coursework, as well as strengthened connections with peers, professionals, and community organizations. These findings highlight the value of integrating applied and reflective learning into undergraduate psychology education. **Impact:** CiAP represents a sustainable, institutionally embedded model that bridges theory and practice. By connecting students with community organizations and offering structured experiential opportunities, the program benefits students, academic departments, and community partners, and may inform the development of similar initiatives aimed at preparing a diverse and practice-ready psychology workforce.