Stony Brook University
Psychology MA Students
2023 - 2024

Welcome!

Meet Our New Psychology MA Students!

Oluwagbohunmi Aje
(Aje; he/him)
Stony Brook University, 2022
Biology

Previous experience: Since my junior year, I have been working in a research laboratory that studies cognitive and memory impairments in Parkinson's patients. I have worked on a project that focused primarily on visual recognition memory deficits across different age groups and also between sexes. I currently work as a nurse aid in a dementia unit where I interact with, care for, and support individuals with dementia.

Research interests and career goals: My ultimate goal is to pursue a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology and one day work as a university professor. My research interests primarily include studying the pathophysiology of mental disorders such as bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and antisocial personality disorder. I would also like to develop innovative theory and research to increase the efficacy of clinical intervention for these disorders.

Research keywords: Antisocial personality disorder; Mood disorders; Behavioral neuroscience

Elizabeth Aubin
(Liz; she/her)
Stony Brook University, 2023
Business Management,
Marketing Specialization

Previous experience: I was a research assistant in the Consumers Affiliative Processes Lab at Stony Brook University studying value systems and addiction recovery. I am a research assistant now at the Suffolk County Mental Health project, which is a longitudinal study of first episode psychosis trajectories. I conducted my thesis through this lab, looking at neuropathological indicators of cerebrovascular dementia in psychotic disorders. My thesis will be presented at the URECA symposium in May of 2023.

Research interests and career goals: Going forward, I would love to learn more about neuroscience in order to understand how different disorders and medications affect the brain and body. I am especially interested in recovery treatments and how to systematically implement more effective treatments in rehabilitation facilities so that everyone has access to effective, evidence-based help. I am also curious about what long-term effects mental illnesses and their treatments can potentially have on the body. My long-term career goal is to open a facility that will provide accessible help to adolescents struggling with mental health and addiction.

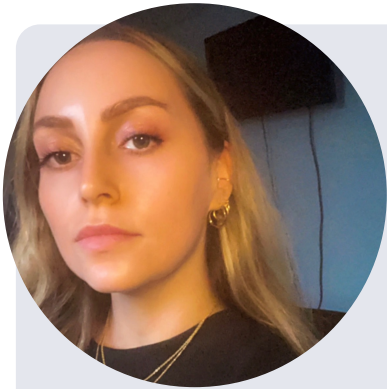**Research keywords:** Addiction; Value Systems; Recovery Treatments

Previous experience: As a research assistant in the Developmental Stress and Prevention Lab, I have experience in coding parent-child interactions, as well as interviewing birth parents and foster parents about their personal feelings and ideas about raising their children. Clinically, I have worked with people who suffer from severe substance abuse who also have mental health ailments to aid in getting them on the right road to recovery.

Research interests and career goals: I am interested in continuing my involvement in research concerning parent-child interactions, with a focus on foster parent-child dyads. I am interested in seeing if differences in parenting behavior affects how a child mentally develops. My career goal is to open my own private practice in underserved communities so that mental comorbidities are addressed and treated. Children do not have to suffer in silence, so I want to make it my goal to ensure that they will not have to undergo that as a result of the lack of resources established in their community.

Research keywords: Anxiety/Depressive disorders; Parent-child attachment; Foster parent-child attachment

Monik Bello
(Monik; she/her)
Stony Brook University, 2023
Psychology

Previous experience: I have been doing undergraduate research as a volunteer in a lab at Stony Brook University Hospital. This allows me to broaden my research expertise and understanding in the areas of PET and MRI scans of anxiety and depression in the cognitive processes of individuals with mental illnesses. I have contributed to projects examining: the role of depression and circadian rhythm misalignment in the metabotropic glutamate receptor, treatment implications of the cholinergic system in age-related cognitive decline, and celecoxib's impact on neuroinflammation in depression using PET imaging.

Research interests and career goals: My research interests incorporate a broad range of topics, such as individual differences with emotional response and cognitive control; mechanisms supporting attention, emotion, and their interactions; brain development and plasticity of higher cognitive functions; the result of environment on memory and cognitive processes and how they impact and influence the lifespan; and Alzheimer's disease. Additionally, I'd love to research how experiences shape behavior and the brain; the association of psychoactive substances on the brain, and how this can be causal for a multitude of onsets, including brain structure, genetics, DNA, and intergenerational trauma. My long-term goals are earning a Ph.D. in cognitive neuroscience, working as a professor, and perhaps a principal investigator or mentor.

Research keywords: Cognitive processes; Brain development, structure and the effects on human functioning; Decision-making and reasoning.

Samantha Bruk
(Sam or Samantha; she/her)
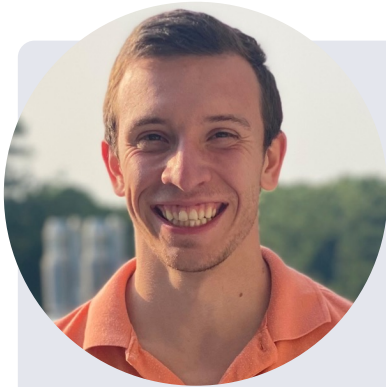Stony Brook University, 2022
Psychology

Inayah Burton-Gruberg
(Inayah or Bibi; she/her)
SUNY Old Westbury, 2022
Psychology

Previous experience: My introduction to research was my Honors thesis about potential predictors of Schizophrenia via a meta-analysis. During my Research, Design, & Analysis courses, I researched the relationship between academic performance and self-reported religiosity/spirituality among college students. I participated in the UCSC pathways project annotating genes for divergent species of Drosophila Melanogaster. I then participated in an REU in Nanotechnology at SBU gathering forcefield parameters for molecular dynamic simulations. My most enjoyable experience was my fieldwork, working with two clinical psychologists, one of which would allow me to administer a battery of tests and score their results.

Research interests and career goals: My long-term career goals involve securing my candidacy for Ph.D. and becoming a clinical psychologist, particularly assisting those suffering from addiction. My research interests involve the use of psychodynamic therapy for addiction, assessment tools, and diagnosis strategies used for addiction and their efficacy.

Research keywords: Addiction; Psychodynamic Therapy; Addiction Assessment

David Fernandes
(David; he/him)
UMass Amherst, 2019
Psychology

Previous experience: I have been volunteering/working in psychology-related positions at SBU since 2017 in the following roles: Research Assistant, Research Coordinator, and Department Assistant. I have mostly worked with people diagnosed with schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. In the Neuropsychology department, I have worked with various age groups and diagnoses. I have also worked for a sleep study that incorporates PET scans.

Research interests and career goals: As a research coordinator, research assistant, and department assistant, I have seen the various levels and steps it takes to gather and clean data; however, I am interested in learning how to develop research questions and data analyses. I'm hoping to take the next step in learning how to use data to create projects and papers. My aim is to get into a Psy.D. or Ph.D. program and one day become a neuropsychologist.

Research keywords: Neuropsychology; Cognition; Mental Health

Srinidhi Jayakumar
(Srinidhi or SJ; she/her)
Virginia Tech, 2021
Psychology

Previous experience: I have worked in four research labs starting from my sophomore year and have worked on research projects focusing on treatment and risk factors associated with mood, personality, and developmental disorders. I have worked with populations of ages between 4-35 years old. I am also licensed as a Mental Health first aider for adults and I have experience in computer programming.

Research interests and career goals: My research interests focus on treatment and prediction of depression and suicide in adolescents and young adults. I hope to integrate neuroscience and clinical psychology into my research. Hence, during my education, I hope to gain a lot of knowledge on the neuroscience and psychology behind mood disorders. My aim is to pursue a Clinical Psychology Ph.D., after which I hope to spend 60% of my time practicing as a Clinical psychologist and 40% of my time conducting research aimed at improving treatment efficacy for depression and suicidality.

Research keywords: Depression and suicide; Treatment; Prediction

Alexis Koslofsky
(Alexis; she/her)
Stony Brook University, 2022
Psychology

Previous experience: For the past 3 years, I have been working full-time at an in-patient drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility as a medical assistant while completing my undergraduate degree. I interact with patients on an everyday basis educating them on medicated assisted treatment to assist them in finding the best possible course of treatment for their addiction(s). I also correspond with the facility M.D., Psychiatric NP, and clinical staff to create and maintain individualized treatment plans for the patients. In recent months, I have been developing and teaching a bi-weekly lecture on the Medical Aspects of Addiction, the content of which varies week to week.

Research interests and career goals: Working in the field of Addiction treatment has, for me, brought to light the glaring issues and drawbacks in the current model of inpatient Substance Use Disorder/ Addiction treatment for individuals with co-morbid disorders. My goal is to earn a Ph.D. in clinical psychology in order to join current researchers and scientists discovering answers to the questions surrounding the causes of SUDs through a neuropsychological lens and developing more efficacious treatments of disorders co-occurring with SUD than currently exist. I am specifically interested in researching psychedelic treatments for such individuals as past and current research has produced promising results, although there is much more to be learned.

Research keywords: Substance use disorder/Addiction; Addiction treatment; Psychedelic treatments for mental disorders

Kierra Law
(Kierra; she/her)
Wake Forest University, 2022
Psychology & Sociology,
Concentration in Crime and
Criminal Justice

Previous experience: While at Wake Forest University, I tailored my research to topics such as the relationship between race and mental health disparities. I also volunteered as a certified peer educator for two years educating the community about sexual assault and consent and advocating for better policies and services for survivors of sexual assault. In addition to that, I have volunteered as a mentor for students in grades K-12 who live with learning and developmental disabilities, and I currently work at a school serving students in grades 6-12 who are overaged or in need of credit recovery or individualized education plans.

Research interests and career goals: I am interested in researching mental disorders, particularly mood, anxiety, and personality disorders. I would also like to explore the intersection of different social identities and mental health. I am particularly interested in studying racial and ethnic disparities in mental health care. My ultimate goal is to become a practicing clinical psychologist, develop more culturally sensitive and effective treatments for minorities struggling with mental illness, and spearhead a community-based initiative to promote better mental health outcomes in minority populations and support students of color who are interested in pursuing careers in the field of clinical psychology.

Research keywords: Psychopathology; Treatments; Minority populations

Taylor McKnight
(Taylor; she/her)
University of Albany, 2022
Psychology
Concentration in Criminal
Justice

Previous experience: At UAlbany, I was a Research Assistant in Dr. Gaesser's Imagination Lab where I facilitated experiments and gathered/analyzed data for the collaborative study on spontaneous memory identity, trait empathy, and episodic memory retrieval. After graduation, I took a gap year to immerse myself in the field. During this time, I worked as a Residential Counselor in an OMH group home and still currently work as a Behavioral Health Assistant at Northwell Health. These positions have given me crucial insight into psychological disorders and the day-to-day struggles individuals brave.

Research interests and career goals: I have great interest in involving myself in longitudinal studies on mood disorders and their effect on individuals. As well, I have interests in PTSD, interpersonal relationships, and personality traits. I have a strong passion for psychology and plan to attain a PhD in Clinical Psychology where I can truly make a positive impact on people's lives and the advancement of treatment in mental health disorders.

Research keywords: Personality; Developmental Psychopathology; Interpersonal Relationships

Previous experience: During my undergraduate years, I was able to develop a research study along with my mentor. The study is titled "Exploration of Loneliness and Intrusive Thoughts," and it is a study that seeks to understand the association between loneliness and intrusive thoughts. I also presented a poster at Adelphi's Conference for Scholarship and Creative Works.

Research interests and career goals: My research interests are anxiety, anxiety-related disorders, OCD, and Depression. Overall, I am open to learning more about these interests and expanding my interests through this program. My career goal is to become a Clinical Psychologist. I hope to become someone capable of working with clients and continue inspiring myself to pursue my interests in psychology academically through research.

Research keywords: Anxiety; Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD); and Depression

Tareik Mohamed
(Tareik; he/him)
Adelphi University, 2023
Psychology

Previous experience: During my undergraduate career, I worked as a research assistant in the Westerman lab, whose area of focus was human memory. Over the course of my time in the lab, we conducted experiments related to two different topics: the impact of photo-taking on memory and metamemory for emotional and neutral stimuli. As a research assistant, I ran experiments with undergraduate participants, collected data, attended weekly meetings with the lab, and remained up-to-date with the literature. Aside from my time in the lab, I also worked as a teaching assistant for two psychology classes: General Psychology and Psychological Tests.

Research interests and career goals: I have a wide-range of research interests related to clinical psychology, some of these being obsessive-compulsive disorder, depression, schizophrenia, and personality disorders. I am intrigued by the biological causes of these disorders, as well as how symptomology presents throughout the lifespan. In terms of my career goals, I plan on obtaining my PhD in clinical psychology, after which I would love to practice as a clinical psychologist, while keeping ties to academia. I would love to work as a professor because I aspire to teach and conduct further research on my topics of interest.

Research keywords: Personality disorders; Clinical psychology; Obsessive-compulsive disorder
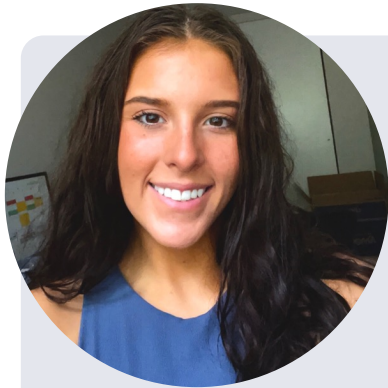
Kayla Rust
(Kayla; she/her)
Binghamton University, 2022
Psychology & Spanish

Previous experience: I was originally in artificial intelligence research, performing undergraduate research in robotics with Dr. Pieter Abbeel at UC Berkeley and then doing full-time research engineering in computer vision at a San Francisco start-up. Then I decided to change careers. I currently volunteer with Dr. Eduardo Bunge at Palo Alto University, where I've helped with numerous psychotherapy and technology projects: exploring how users with ASD use mental health chatbot apps, clinicians' perceptions of videoconferencing therapy, developing a parenting chatbot using ChatGPT, etc. I'm also assisting Dr. Bonnie Halpern-Felsher at Stanford with analyzing the efficacy of Minecraft for vaping education.

Xin Yu (Dennis) Tan
(Dennis; he/him)
UC Berkeley, 2017
Electrical Engineering &
Computer Science

Research interests and career goals: My research interests are broadly in depression and anxiety. Given my prior background in artificial intelligence and cognitive science, I am especially enthusiastic in studying the cognitive and affective neuroscience of these disorders, CBT and mindfulness-based psychotherapies, and the use of technology for prevention and treatment. My long-term career goals are to obtain a PhD in clinical psychology and then become a professor, researcher, and part-time clinician. I hope to serve the world by researching and spreading knowledge of mental health.

Research keywords: Depression and anxiety; Cognitive and affective neuroscience; Technology and artificial intelligence

Previous experience: As an undergraduate research assistant in Dr. Altarriba's Cognition & Language Laboratory since summer 2022, I have gained valuable experience in collecting, inputting, and analyzing data from participants. One study that I have collaborated on, building on Dr. Altarriba's prior research, explores the emotional connotations of words. Specifically, the idea that some words, such as "crime," elicit a higher rate of emotional arousal than others, like "toothbrush." Dr. A has also discussed, in her previous work, how there are factors that can contribute to the arousal rate. Overall, this experience has deepened my knowledge of the relationship between language and cognition.

Alissa Usyk
(Alissa; she/her)
Stony Brook University, 2022
Psychology

Research interests and career goals: Personally, my research interests can spiral into many different topics, but I am particularly drawn to cognition and memory, neuroscience/neuropsychology, and childhood development. Throughout my academic journey, I have been fascinated by the inner workings of the brain and its development, and my mentors have helped me find these interests. Ultimately, my goal is to become a professor and researcher, using my passion for psychology to inspire others and make contributions to the scientific community! By deepening our understanding of how the brain works and develops, I hope to help address important questions in psychology and improve our overall understanding of human behavior.

Research keywords: Cognitive processes; Neuroscience; Childhood development