



Anxiety Studies at UW Annual Newsletter

2024/25 Faculty and Students

IN THIS ISSUE

Focus On: Recent Work by Anxiety Studies Faculty and Students

New in Anxiety Studies at UW

In the thirteenth year of our operation, we are pleased to share the sixth edition of the AnxietyStudies (AS) Newsletter.

In this issue, our faculty and students introduce themselves and provide insight into their educational and training background, along with their research interests and highlights of their findings. Recent research topics include social anxiety and the self, people's lived experience of repetitive unwanted thoughts, worries, rituals, and safety behaviours, fear of compassion and shame and their relationships to anxiety, and factors that limit the extent to which people benefit from current "gold standard" treatments.

Our ongoing research is richly informed by the findings from studies in which you participated, and we are sincerely grateful for your continued support! If you would like to suggest Anxiety Studies at UW to a friend or family member, please invite them to email us at anxiety@uwaterloo.ca or call us at **519-888-4567 ext. 45920** - we always welcome new members of our research participant pool.

Please also follow us on our website (www.uwaterloo.ca/anxiety-studies) and Facebook page ([Anxiety Studies at the University of Waterloo](#)) for information on anxiety and new developments in understanding and treating it.

David Moscovitch

Ph.D., C.Psych, Professor

Who am I?

I am a Professor of Psychology at the University of Waterloo, and a co-founder of Anxiety Studies. I am actively involved in the clinical supervision and training of graduate students in Clinical Psychology within our Centre for Mental Health Research and Treatment (CMHRT). I am a registered clinical psychologist with the College of Psychologists of Ontario and maintain a small private practice. My specialization is in cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and I am certified as such by The Canadian Association of Cognitive and Behavioural Therapies.

What are my research interests?

My research focuses on social anxiety and the self. I am interested in how social anxiety affects people's psychological, behavioural, neurocognitive, and emotional responses to social stress and reward within interpersonal contexts, with an emphasis on the role of autobiographical memory processes. My work is guided by clinical models of social anxiety disorder and focuses on the development of effective psychological interventions that target core mechanisms.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

1. Moscovitch, D.A., White, K., Hudd, T. (2023). Hooking the self onto the past: How positive autobiographical memory retrieval benefits people with social anxiety. *Clinical Psychological Science*, 0(0).
<https://doi.org/10.1177/21677026231195792>
2. Moscovitch, D.A., Moscovitch, M., & Sheldon, S. (2023). Neurocognitive model of schema-congruent and incongruent learning in clinical disorders: Application to social anxiety and beyond. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 18(6), 1412-1435. (2021).
<https://doi.org/10.1177/17456916221141351>

Christine Purdon

Ph.D., C.Psych, Professor

Who am I?

I am a Professor of Psychology at the University of Waterloo, and a co-founder of Anxiety Studies at UW. I am a Registered Psychologist with the College of Psychologists of Ontario and have expertise in the assessment and treatment of anxiety and related difficulties in adults. My career has been focused on understanding and treating difficulties characterized by unwanted, repetitive thoughts and repetitive and/or prolonged safety behaviours. I am I have practiced and taught cognitive-behaviour therapy (CBT), am a Certified Member and Past President of the Canadian Association of Cognitive and Behavioural Therapies ([Welcome to the CACBT](#)). I am also a member of the Scientific Advisory Committee for Anxiety Canada ([Home - Anxiety Canada](#))

What are my research interests?

I am interested in how anxiety and related difficulties such as obsessions, intrusive thoughts, worry, rumination, doubt, compulsions, avoidance, and fight/flight responses develop and persist. My students and I are currently focused on understanding the lived experience of people with these difficulties and in understanding the role of deep emotions in their persistence. We are also studying that factors that limit the extent to which people benefit from current gold standard treatment strategies. We are extremely grateful to people from the community with and without anxiety difficulties who have assisted us with our research through [Anxiety Studies](#).

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

1. [Chiang, B.](#), & Purdon, C. (2023). A study of doubt in obsessive-compulsive disorder. *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry*, 101753.
2. [McNeil, A.](#), & Purdon, C. (2022). Anxiety disorders, COVID-19 fear, and vaccine hesitancy. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 90, 102598.

Aliya McNeil

Graduate student

Supervised by: Christine Purdon

Who am I?

I am a PhD student in the Clinical Psychology program at the University of Waterloo. I completed my Bachelor of Science in Health Studies and Psychology at the University of Waterloo as well.

What are my research interests?

My PhD research aims to understand how feelings of shame are connected to both intrusive thoughts (unwanted and recurrent thoughts, images, or urges that are distressing) and safety behaviours (mental or physical actions that one feels driven to perform, often in response to intrusive thoughts). My first study will explore this by completing interviews with members of the Anxiety Studies Database. I am also interested in understanding the meaning and importance that people attach to completing compulsions, and whether certain personality traits (e.g., empathy or cautiousness) could be related to these appraisals.

Interesting findings:

My master's research examined the relationship between attachment insecurity and OCD severity, in a non-clinical sample of undergraduate students. Specifically, we found that this relationship may be explained by fears of self-compassion and fears of receiving compassion from others. In other words, greater attachment insecurity is associated with greater fears of compassion, which is in turn associated with greater OCD symptom severity.

CITATION

McNeil, A. (2023). *The Relationship Between Attachment Insecurity and OCD Symptom Severity: The Mediating Role of Fear of Compassion* (Master's thesis, University of Waterloo). <https://uwspace.uwaterloo.ca/handle/10012/19703>

Erin Bowman

Graduate student

Supervised by: Christine Purdon

Who am I?

I am a second year MA student in the Clinical Psychology program at the University of Waterloo. I completed my Bachelor of Science in Psychology and Neuroscience at Wilfrid Laurier University.

What are my research interests?

My master's research will examine how people with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) experience and think about their obsessions. Specifically, I am interested in how people describe the tone (hostile vs. warm) and authority (dominant vs. submissive) of their obsessions and whether particular beliefs about their obsessions are associated with the more severe symptoms of OCD. This work is done in collaboration with the Anxiety Treatment and Research Clinic, St. Joseph's Healthcare, Hamilton.

Jolie Ho

Graduate student

Supervised by: David Moscovitch

Who am I?

I am a 4th year PhD student in Clinical Psychology at the University of Waterloo. I completed my B.A. in Biology and Psychological & Brain Sciences as well as a M.S. in Applied Health Behaviour Research at Washington University in St. Louis.

What are my research interests?

My research focuses on ways for socially anxious individuals to seek close connections by sharing one's true, genuine self and overcoming fears of receiving compassion from others. I recently conducted a study to investigate how socially anxious individuals respond to receiving compassion after experiencing social rejection or a social blunder. Currently, I am launching a study to examine social interactions as they unfold in daily life using a smartphone-based app.

Interesting findings:

One of my studies found that, amongst individuals with clinically significant symptoms of social anxiety from our Anxiety Studies participant pool, fears of receiving compassion from others predicts greater use of strategies used to hide one's true self from judgment and rejection (e.g., staying silent in conversation, mentally rehearsing what to say next).

CITATION

1. Ho, J. T. K., Dupasquier, J. R., Scarfe, M. L., & Moscovitch, D. A. (2021). Fears of receiving compassion from others predict safety behaviour use in social anxiety disorder over and above fears of negative self-portrayal. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 80, 102387. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.janxdis.2021.102387>
2. Ho, J.T.K., & Moscovitch, D. A. (2021). The moderating effects of reported pre-pandemic social anxiety, symptom impairment, and current stressors on mental health and affiliative adjustment during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Anxiety, Stress, and Coping*, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10615806.2021.1946518>

Sophie Kudryk

Graduate student

Supervised by: David Moscovitch

Who am I?

I am currently completing my PhD in Clinical Psychology at the University of Waterloo. I completed an Honours Bachelor of Science with a specialization in Psychology Research at the University of Toronto.

What are my research interests?

My research focuses on the interplay between social anxiety and the autobiographical memory system, including memories of personal events and the self-knowledge that underlies and is formed by these memories. One study currently underway is investigating potential differences in the thought content of those with high and low social anxiety following an anxiety inducing social event, specifically focusing on the memory-related

processes that may be activated while the event is being processed.

Interesting findings:

I recently published a paper in collaboration with several lab members that found combining a measure of social anxiety symptoms and of life impairment due to symptoms can better capture an accurate sample of non-clinical research participants who are likely to have a diagnosis of social anxiety disorder, which is important for conducting research that can be generalized to clinical samples. Additionally, we found that from pre- to post-COVID-19 there was a striking increase in the number of participants who were determined to likely have a diagnosis of social anxiety disorder based on the combined measures.

CITATION

Kudryk, S. M., Ho, J. T. K., Budge, J. R. C., & Moscovitch, D. A. (2024). Identifying analogue samples of individuals with clinically significant social anxiety: Updating and combining cutoff scores on the Social Phobia Inventory and Sheehan Disability Scale. *Psychological Assessment*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pas0001328>

Taylor Crawford

Graduate student

Supervised by: Christine Purdon

Who am I?

I am a PhD student in the Clinical Psychology Program at the University of Waterloo. I completed my Bachelor of Arts in Psychology at Trent University, and I also have a background in education.

What are my research interests?

I am currently interested in the overlap between obsessive-compulsive disorder and generalized anxiety disorder. Specifically, I am investigating how and why people with these concerns seek reassurance. I am in the process of collecting data for an interview study on reassurance seeking involving participants from Anxiety Studies.

Interesting findings:

My master's research focused on test anxiety. I explored how anxiety symptoms differed in undergraduate students recruited from the university with low, moderate, and high levels of test anxiety. We found many similarities among these groups (e.g., thinking about their grade, feeling guilty, experiencing a racing heart). However, some differences were also discovered (e.g., students in the high anxiety group did not report any calming thoughts to counter their anxious thoughts during the test).

CITATION

Crawford, T. (2021). Distinguishing low, moderate, and high test anxiety [Master's thesis].

UWSpace. <http://hdl.handle.net/10012/17265>

Tyler Eschenwecker

Graduate student

Supervised by: Christine Purdon

Who am I?

I am entering the fourth year of a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology at the University of Waterloo. I completed my Bachelor's of Science at the University of Manitoba and my Masters of Arts degree at the University of Waterloo.

What are my research interests?

My master's research examined the lived experience of anxious thoughts. In my dissertation research I am examining handwashing in people who wash their hands frequently so we can better understand where and how people can get stuck washing repeatedly or for long periods of time. I am also interested in factors that limit the extent to which people can benefit. In collaboration with the Anxiety Treatment and Research Clinic, St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton, I am interviewing people who went through treatment for obsessions and compulsions

but did not experience a notable decrease in those symptoms.

Interesting findings:

In my master's research we found that people with different levels of anxiety often experience anxious thoughts as cold and critical, and these thoughts are often accompanied by less dominant and warmer thoughts. Both of these types of thoughts were often internal representations of family members (e.g., parents).

CITATION

Eschenwecker, T. (2021). When my anxiety speaks to me, what does it sound like? [Master's thesis]. UWSpace.

<http://hdl.handle.net/10012/17255>

Van Bui

Graduate student

Supervised by: David Moscovitch

Who am I?

I am a first year PhD student in Clinical Psychology at the University of Waterloo. I completed my Bachelor of Arts (Hons.) in Psychology at the University of Manitoba.

What are my research interests?

My master's research will focus on topics around social anxiety, social support seeking/receiving, and memory. Specifically, I am interested in exploring whether seeking reassurance is effective for those with social anxiety in reducing uncertainty and distress.

Interesting findings?

My master's research found a significant 3-way interaction between social anxiety, self-doubt, and post-event processing on evaluative threat-related reassurance seeking. The research I plan on conducting next will continue to explore whether excessive reassurance seeking in social anxiety may be driven by heightened self-doubt and engagement in post-event processing, which may hinder socially anxious individuals from receiving high-quality support from those in their social network.

CITATION

Bui, V., & Moscovitch, D. A. (2024). Predictors of excessive reassurance seeking in social anxiety. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 48(2), 292–302. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10608-024-10473-1>

Jenn Fudge

Graduate student

Supervised by: David Moscovitch

Who am I?

I am entering my first year in the MA clinical psychology program at the University of Waterloo. I previously attended the University of Ottawa, where I earned my (Hons.) B.A. in psychology. I also hold an MSc in psychology from Queen's University.

What are my research interests?

Broadly, I am interested in understanding how self-beliefs, memory and emotion regulation interact and contribute to the development, maintenance and potential treatment of social anxiety disorder (SAD). In my master's thesis, I am particularly eager to explore the factors that strengthen adaptive self-beliefs in SAD and the types of interventions that can facilitate this process.

Pragya Sharma

Research Coordinator

Who am I?

I am the research coordinator for the Anxiety Studies, and I assist with recruitment and screening of our participants along with other administrative duties. I completed my Bachelor of Arts (Hons.) in Psychology at the University of Waterloo.

What are my research interests?

I am passionate about Clinical Psychology, with a particular focus on how psychopathology impacts everyday life. My undergraduate honors thesis explored the use of AI-based therapy for undergraduates experiencing anxiety and depression. Through this research, I discovered that trust—both in the help received and, in the technology,—plays a crucial role in the adoption of AI-based therapy. I plan to pursue graduate studies in Clinical Psychology to further deepen my understanding and contribute to this field.