

[NEWS](#) | POSTED JULY 12, 2026

Announcing the 2026 Scholars and Mentors for the Horowitz Early Career Scholar Program

SRCD is pleased to announce the 2026 cohort for the [Towards 2044: Horowitz Early Career Scholar Program](#).

The Frances Degan Horowitz Millennium Scholars Program (MSP) was developed in 1999 as a vehicle to encourage and support scholars from under-represented ethnic/racial groups from North America in pursuing graduate work in developmental science. In 2020, the Wallace Foundation provided funding to SRCD to strengthen the program, extending it from mentorship specifically at the SRCD Biennial to a year-long program. The new name for the extended program is now the Horowitz Early Career Scholar Program. This mentorship opportunity takes its name from the year when the adult population of the United States is estimated to become a diverse majority.

The Horowitz Early Career Scholar Program will provide educational and professional development for scholars from underrepresented groups, giving them a launching point for a career in the field of child development with the guidance and mentorship from more advanced scholars. The selected scholars and mentors will meet online to kickstart the program and then participate in a series of monthly virtual seminars and one-on-one mentor/mentee meetings through December 2026. These experiences will enable the rising scholars to gain valuable exposure to the field and allow them to network not only with their mentors, but also with other scholars and professionals.

The program is led by the Advisory Committee including Dr. Mayra Bámaca (University of California, Merced), Dr. Stephen Chen (Wellesley College), and Dr. Stephanie Miller (The University of Mississippi) and is supported through generous funding from the Spencer Foundation.

Please join us in welcoming this year's Horowitz Early Career Scholar Program cohort of Scholars and mentors!

SCHOLARS

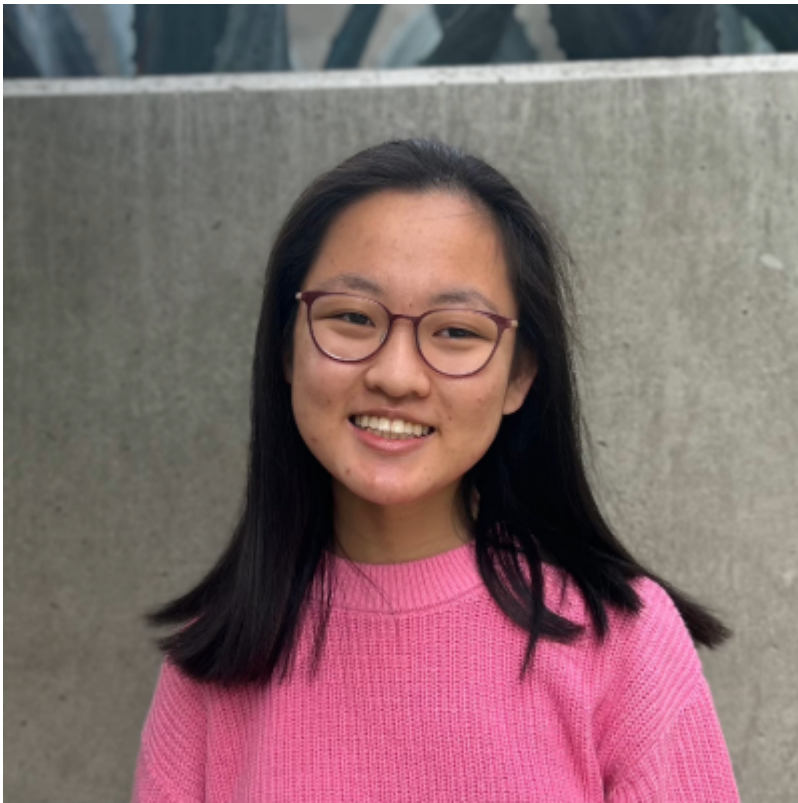


Uma Awasthi, University of Missouri–Columbia

Uma Awasthi is an M.S./Ph.D. student in Human Development and Family Science at the University of Missouri, Columbia. Originally from Nepal, she earned a Bachelor of Public Health (BPH) degree and is currently completing her master's degree as she enters the third year of her doctoral training.

Her research focuses on early childhood development, with a particular interest in understanding how family environments, parenting practices, and broader social determinants of health shape children's developmental trajectories. Guided by ecological systems and resilience frameworks, she examines how factors across family, educational, community, and policy contexts interact to influence children's cognitive, socioemotional, and health outcomes, especially among children from low-income and historically underserved families. A central focus of her work is understanding how families serve as protective factors that foster resilience in the face of adversity. She is interested in identifying the family- and community-level processes that promote positive development, school readiness, and long-term well-being while reducing developmental disparities. Through interdisciplinary research that integrates public health and human development perspectives, she aims to generate evidence that informs interventions, programs, and policies that strengthen families and create equitable opportunities for children to thrive.

Outside of her academic work, she enjoys cooking, traveling, and learning about different cultures and perspectives. She also enjoys hiking and trekking and values spending time in nature, which helps her stay grounded and inspired in both her personal and professional life.



Julie Chung, University of Southern California

Julie Chung (she/her) is a PhD student in Education with a concentration in Educational Psychology at the University of Southern California. She is currently a graduate research assistant at the USC Center for Empowered Learning and Development with Technology (CELDTech) and is advised by Dr. Brendesha Tynes.

She earned a B.A. in Education Sciences and a B.A. in Psychological Science from the University of California, Irvine. While at UCI, Julie was an IES-funded Career Pathways for Learning & Education, Analytics and Data Science Fellow, a research assistant contributing to digital learning research, and an instructional design intern working with online courses.

Her research interests include educational technology and the design of digital learning environments that prioritize student voice and identity development. In particular, she is interested in students' perceptions of educational technology and what shapes these perceptions, especially in terms of the learning experiences of marginalized youth such as students with disabilities. She hopes to research and build technologies that support inclusive learning.



Qianjin Guo, University of Pittsburgh

Qianjin Guo is a third-year Ph.D. student in Developmental Psychology at the University of Pittsburgh. She works with Dr. Diana Leyva as a Graduate Research Assistant in the Food for Thought Lab. Her research focuses on how parenting practices shape children's early development and how family-based interventions promote positive developmental outcomes. As an Asian first-generation college student, Qianjin is particularly interested in supporting the development of children from historically marginalized and underserved communities through family-centered interventions. Drawing on her personal experiences, her research examines how family routines contribute to children's academic and social-emotional development and explores ways to integrate routine-based strategies into interventions for low-income families and children.

Outside of research, Qianjin enjoys baking, cooking, volunteering at animal shelters, and spending time with her beloved cat, MaiMai.



Chibuiké Kalu, University of Texas at Austin

Chibuike Kalu is a second-year doctoral student in the African and African Diaspora Studies (AADS) department at the University of Texas at Austin. He holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Nigeria and a master's in industrial and organizational psychology from the University of Ibadan. While working with students as a psychologist, he observed how structural inequalities shaped children's outcomes, as well as the role of community support in promoting resilience. These experiences shaped his interest in strength-based approaches to development. Drawing on his background working as a student psychologist in Nigeria, Chibuike's research seeks to contribute to dismantling traditional deficit-based models in developmental science.

He focuses on early childhood development in West Africa, investigating how cultural identity, supportive family structures, and community engagement buffer the effects of marginalization and poverty. By employing strength-based frameworks and critical quantitative methods, Chibuike aims to inform public policies and educational interventions that empower Black children to reach their full potential.



Cecilia Kankam Kusi, Mississippi State University

Cecilia Kankam Kusi is a first year doctoral student in Human Development and Family Science and a master's student in Early Intervention at Mississippi State University. She earned a Master of Development Practice from Auburn University and a bachelor's degree in Geography and Rural Development from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Ghana. Her research focuses on early childhood development, school readiness, parent-child relationships, early literacy, and family factors that influence child developmental outcomes. She is particularly interested in understanding how family and contextual factors shape children's development and well-being.

Currently, she is a Graduate Research Assistant in the Family Resilience Lab at Mississippi State University, where she contributes to research on family processes, resilience, and well-being. She also volunteers with the Trauma-Informed Parenting and Professional Strategies (TIPPS) Extension Program, which supports families through trauma-informed education and intervention. Her long-term goal is to become a faculty member and Extension specialist who translates research into meaningful community impact through teaching, outreach, and evidence-based interventions.



Analisa Padilla, University of California, Santa Cruz

Analisa Guerrero Padilla (she/her/hers) is a proud Chicana pursuing her doctorate in developmental psychology at the University of California, Santa Cruz, under the mentorship of Dr. Danny Rahal. She received her AA-T in psychology at Fresno City Community College before transferring to California State University, Fresno (Fresno State), where she completed her B.A. and M.A. in psychology under the mentorship of Dr. Rosa Toro.

Analisa is passionate about implementing strength-based approaches to promote health equity among youth of color and those with marginalized identities by examining how systems of oppression, family systems, and culture shape health behaviors among adolescents and emerging adults. Specifically, Analisa examines how civic engagement can promote well-being and influence substance use, focusing on the roles of political efficacy and meaning-making.



Rosalia Rojas, Tufts University

Rosalia Rojas (she/her) is a fourth-year Ph.D. student in Child Study and Human Development at Tufts University. In 2020, she received her B.A. in Child and Adolescent Development with an emphasis in Applied

Developmental Science from California State University, Northridge. Throughout her undergraduate career, she built the foundation for her academic and personal development by studying Chicano History, detailing the implementation of social change on the Mexican-origin population in the United States. She leverages her own Latina identity to researching and advocating for educational and mental health resources for youth.

Prior to entering graduate school, Rosalia worked with Latine families and children in hospital and school settings. She was a bilingual postgraduate associate at the Yale Child Study Center, a City Year Los Angeles AmeriCorps member and data coordinator, and a clinical research assistant at Boston Children's Hospital. These roles highlighted the sensitivity of community-based research in fostering youth development, reinforcing her research interests.

Rosalia's research focuses on contextual factors outside the family that support healthy development of youth from socioeconomically disadvantaged and racially-ethnically marginalized backgrounds. Specifically, she is exploring how neighborhood and housing contexts are associated with adolescent and family well-being. Her research employs national longitudinal datasets and advanced quantitative methods to address policy-relevant questions. In addition, she contributes to the Housing and Children's Health Development study, analyzing the population-based sample on how housing characteristics are associated with family stress. Her applied research experience has been instrumental in refining her research focus and understanding how policies intersect with child development.



Justin Ruiz, Boston University

Justin Ruiz is a third-year doctoral student in the Applied Human Development program at Boston University. He works in the Social Learning Lab under the supervision of Dr. Kathleen Corriveau. His research interests examine how children learn from and trust nonhuman sources, with a particular focus on technology, media, and artificial intelligence (AI). Justin is also interested in exploring ways to positively utilize technology and AI in educational spaces and how certain contexts play a role in children's learning with technology. His career goals involve providing valuable mentorship for undergraduate and graduate students through his teaching and research, and assisting in the development of children's educational media.

Originally from Hawaii, Justin identifies as a Filipino-American first-generation student. He received his B.A. from Amherst College in Psychology and Education Studies, working as a thesis student in the Child Learning and Development Lab. Justin currently contributes to mentorship programs and is actively involved in service roles within Boston University and the Cognitive Development Society. In his free time, Justin enjoys dancing and baking!



Neslihan Sunmaz, Loyola University Chicago

Guided by a deep interest in how social contexts shape young people's lives, Neslihan studies the development and well-being of immigrant-origin and underrepresented youth. She earned her M.A. in Psychology from Koç University, in İstanbul, Türkiye. In her master's thesis, she examined patterns of time use among adolescents from low-resource and refugee backgrounds, analyzing how these experiences relate to their well-being.

Neslihan is currently a third-year Ph.D. student in Developmental Psychology at Loyola University Chicago. Adopting longitudinal and mixed-method approaches, her current research focuses on immigrant-origin youth's sociopolitical development and critical consciousness across election years and how this process intertwines with their hopefulness. She also serves as a board member of the Enhancing Diversity in Graduate Education (EDGE) student organization at Loyola.

With a strong foundation in both quantitative and qualitative methods, Neslihan aims to advance actionable developmental science that improves the lives of children and adolescents from diverse backgrounds. She strives to be a researcher who bridges science and action, turning research insights into real change by working with community partners, educators, and policymakers to build systems where all young people

can thrive and reach their full potential.



Sijia Zhao, University of Missouri–Columbia

Sijia Zhao is a third-year graduate student in Human Development and Family Science at the University of Missouri–Columbia. Her research adopts a multilevel perspective to examine how macro-level environmental factors, particularly early adversity such as homelessness, interact with micro-level cognitive processes, especially mathematical cognition, to shape children’s developmental trajectories. By linking contextual risk with underlying learning mechanisms, she aims to better understand how children develop resilience through both external supports, such as stable educational systems, and internal strengths, such as cognitive ability. She hopes her work can inform more effective interventions and educational practices for children facing adversity. Outside of academia, she is a proud mom of two fur babies: her cat, NiuNiu, and her dog, Miss Kitty.

MENTORS



Riana Elyse Anderson, Columbia University

Dr. Riana Elyse Anderson is an Associate Professor at Columbia University's School of Social Work. She earned her PhD in Clinical and Community Psychology from the University of Virginia, completed a Clinical and Community Psychology Residency at Yale University's School of Medicine, and a Fellowship in Applied Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Anderson uses mixed methods to study discrimination and racial socialization in Black families, translating her findings to help families heal from racial stress and trauma. Her research focuses on how family-based interventions can improve Black youth's psychosocial well-being and health-related behaviors.

She is the developer and director of the EMBRace (Engaging, Managing, and Bonding through Race) intervention and the Founder and CEO of RACE Space Inc. Her work has been supported by the Ford, Robert Wood Johnson, and W.T. Grant Foundations, the National Institutes of Health, and the Society for Research in Child Development. A committed public scholar, Dr. Anderson frequently shares her insights through blogs, media, and public talks, with appearances in *The New York Times*, *CNN*, *The Today Show*, and *The Times London*. Nationally, she serves on the APA's Children, Youth, and Families Committee, SRCD's Equity &

Justice Committee, and SRA's Anti-Racism Task Force, and consults with organizations including Google, YouTube, and Nickelodeon. Recognized with over twenty national awards, Dr. Anderson is dedicated to fostering racial healing through research, mentorship, and public engagement.

Finally, Dr. Anderson was born in, raised for, and returned to Detroit and is becoming increasingly addicted to cake pops.



Annabelle Atkin, Purdue University

Dr. Annabelle Lin Atkin is an Assistant Professor in Human Development and Family Science at Purdue University. She received her B.S. in Psychology and Asian and Asian American Studies at the University of Connecticut, and her Ph.D. in Family and Human Development at Arizona State University. Her research interests are in the race-related development of Multiracial and Asian American adolescents and young adults. Using quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods approaches, her research has examined how different types of messages from parents about race and culture (racial-ethnic socialization) are associated with discrimination, racial identity, family relationship quality, critical consciousness, and mental health for

Multiracial and Asian American youth.

She has also developed measures for studying Multiracial family experiences and utilizes critical Multiracial theory to inform her conceptual and empirical work. Her goal is to raise awareness about Multiracial experiences and the limitations of monoracial frameworks in science and in society broadly through education and outreach.



Natasha Chaku, Indiana University

Dr. Natasha Chaku is an Assistant Professor at Indiana University's Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences. She earned her PhD in Developmental Psychology at Fordham University and completed a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Michigan. Dr. Chaku is interested in understanding how pubertal development is associated with cognition, health, and wellbeing across the lifespan and how links between puberty and lifespan outcomes differ across different social contexts.

To investigate these questions, she uses intensive longitudinal assessments (e.g., daily diary), physiological data collection (e.g., saliva), and behavioral assessments (e.g., neurocognitive testing) alongside secondary

data analyses and community-oriented data collection (e.g., youth participatory action research) to better understand youth's lived experiences. Dr. Chaku has translated her work for a variety of audiences via blogs, videos, articles, and presentations for community organizations.



Christina Cipriano, Yale University School of Medicine

Christina Cipriano, PhD, is the inaugural Joseph W. and Alma W. Keilty Endowed Chair in Education and Professor at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, where she directs the Education Collaboratory at the College of Education. Drawing on her decade of research at the Yale Child Study Center, where she maintains a secondary appointment as Full Professor, Dr. Cipriano's work advances inclusive and equitable social and emotional learning research, practice, and policy with students and schools worldwide. A graduate of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, the Boston College Lynch School of Education and Human Development, and Boston College Law School, she brings rigorous, cross-sector science to some of education's most urgent challenges.

An award-winning scholar and internationally regarded expert in the science of learning and development, Dr. Cipriano has been recognized with the Distinguished Contributions to Human Development Research Award from the American Educational Research Association (2025), the Exceptional Achievement in Educational Measurement Award from the National Council on Measurement in Education (2025), the National Voice of Change in Public Education from the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative (2023), and the Joseph A. Zins Award for Career Contributions to Action Research (2022), among others.

She has published over 130 papers, commentaries, and reports in top-tier journals including *Child Development* and the *Review of Educational Research*, and media outlets including The Washington Post, NPR, The New York Times, PBS, and Education Week.

Her award-winning, best-selling book, *Be Unapologetically Impatient: The Mindset Required to Change the Way We Do Things* (2025), is essential reading for educators, providers, parents, and anyone committed to improving the lives of children and families. A prolific public scholar and speaker, Dr. Cipriano brings to her science her lived experience as a first-generation high school graduate and mother of four. Learn more at drchriscip.com.



Nada Goodrum, University of South Carolina

Dr. Nada Goodrum is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of South Carolina. She received her B.A. in psychology and international studies from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and her Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Georgia State University. She completed her predoctoral internship and postdoctoral fellowship at the Medical University of South Carolina. Her research investigates family- and community-level influences on youth well-being among families affected by major stressors. Her work currently centers on the impact of family stressors, such as trauma, racism, financial strain, and parental substance use, on child health and parent-child relationships.

She is interested in parents' role in promoting child and adolescent health and preventing the intergenerational transmission of risk. The goal of her research is to promote health equity by using knowledge about risk and protective factors to guide the development of family-based, trauma-informed prevention and intervention efforts. Her research is primarily conducted among communities of color, and she strives to adopt a multicultural and social justice lens in her work. She is also a mother of three girls and enjoys coffee, baking, and houseplants.



Caroline Greiner Richter, University of Alabama at Birmingham

Dr. Caroline G. Richter is an Assistant Professor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) and Director of the Science of Child Development and Neurodiversity Lab, STARS lab. Her research focuses on cognitive and socio-emotional processes that shape academic achievement, adaptive functioning, and emotional well-being in children who are neurodiverse, including those with learning disabilities, Williams syndrome, and Down syndrome.

Her work investigates how these processes contribute to developmental and educational outcomes, with the goal of informing targeted assessments and interventions. By studying both typically developing and neurodiverse children, Dr. Richter aims to develop approaches that support improved quality of life for children and their families across diverse contexts.



Soojin Park, University of Washington

Soojin Oh Park is an Assistant Professor of Learning Sciences and Human Development at the University of Washington. Her interdisciplinary research seeks to address critical gaps in the scholarship of early childhood development and parenting through three interconnected strands of research: 1) examining the role of family literacy and culturally sustaining pedagogies on the early language and literacy development of Dual Language Learners (DLLs); 2) amplifying culturally-embedded parenting practices for schools and policies to build on what families do, as opposed to what they lack; and integrating the first two strands to inform 3) equity-driven improvements of early learning programs, policies, and systems in equitable collaborations with historically marginalized communities.

Dr. Park's work has been supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Bezos Family Foundation, Buffett Early Childhood Fund, Harvard Center on the Developing Child, Heising-Simons Foundation, National Center for Children and Families, National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families, and Yale School of Medicine Child Study Center. Dr. Park currently serves as the Publicity Committee Chair for the Society for the Study of Human Development, a Member of the SRCD Equity & Justice Committee, and a member of the Dual Language advisory group for the Washington Department of Children, Youth, and Families.

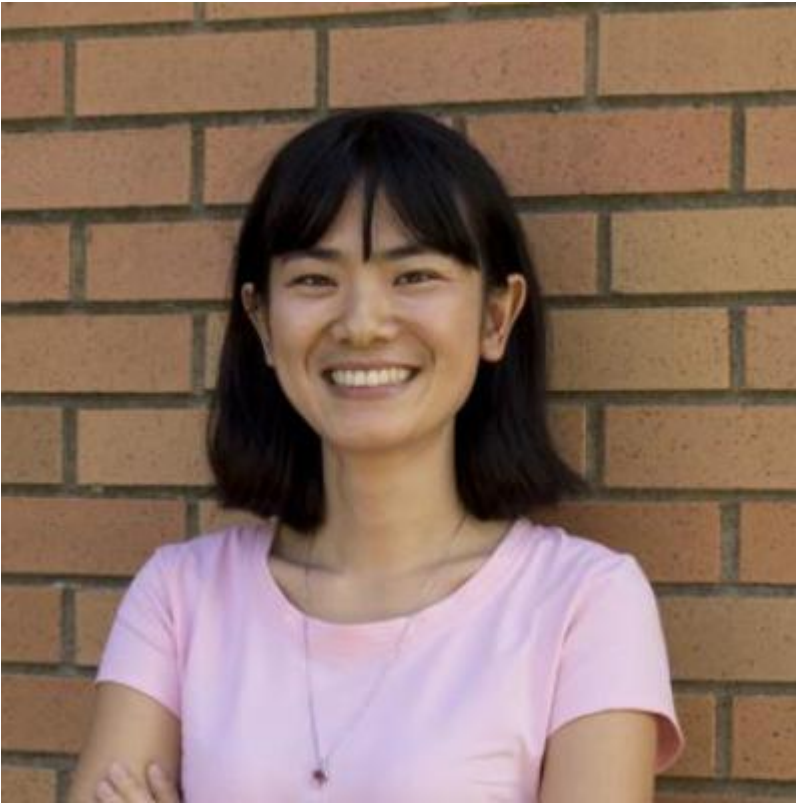
She earned her doctorate in Human Development and Education from Harvard University, a M.Ed. in Educational Policy and Analysis from Harvard, a M.S.Ed. in Learning, Teaching, and Literacies and a B.A. in Psychology from University of Pennsylvania.



Kristia Wantchekon, Georgetown University

Dr. Kristia Wantchekon is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at Georgetown University. She joined the faculty in fall 2022, after completing her Ph.D. and postdoctoral training at Harvard University. Her research focuses on the developmental processes through which adolescents and young adults come to understand themselves with respect to their race and ethnicity as well as the diversity of beliefs and feelings they can hold about their ethnic-racial group membership. She studies the implications of these identity processes and beliefs for young peoples' psychosocial adjustment (e.g., mental health, academic outcomes, social skills) and resilience in the face of ethnic-racial discrimination and ethnic-racial stressors.

She is also interested in how ethnic-racial identity formation takes place in the school context. Her mixed methods work (e.g., longitudinal surveys, semi-structured interviews, daily diary surveys) seeks to bridge theory and empirical research with practice to inform school and community-based interventions that support youth well-being. She was a SRCD Millennium scholar in 2017 and is excited to pay that enriching experience forward to current graduate students.



Yingying Yang, Montclair State University

Yingying Yang is an Associate Professor of Psychology at Montclair State University, where she directs the Spatial and Cognitive Development Lab. After completing her Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology at The University of Alabama in 2015, she served as a Research Associate Professor at Sun Yat-sen University in China before returning to the U.S. in 2017. Her research investigates how children, adolescents, and adults, both typically developing and those with intellectual or developmental disabilities, acquire spatial knowledge, memory skills, and problem-solving abilities in everyday contexts.

Over the years, she has been awarded several grants from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Science Foundation (NSF) to advance understanding of spatial cognition and to improve equity and inclusion in research participation. She has published over 40 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters, presented findings at international conferences, and served as a reviewer for prominent journals and granting agencies.

As a teacher and mentor, she is passionate about guiding students from diverse backgrounds. She strives to cultivate an inclusive and supportive environment in her lab, where she encourages students not only to

develop robust research skills but also to discover the joy and relevance of developmental science.



Chenyi Zhang, Georgia State University

Chenyi Zhang is an Associate Professor of Psychology at Montclair State University, where he directs the Spatial and Cognitive Development Lab. After completing his Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology at The University of Alabama in 2015, he served as a Research Associate Professor at Sun Yat-sen University in China before returning to the U.S. in 2017. His research investigates how children, adolescents, and adults, both typically developing and those with intellectual or developmental disabilities, acquire spatial knowledge, memory skills, and problem-solving abilities in everyday contexts.

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