Most people know that women’s bodies are seen as objects in this culture and are used to sell everything from clothes (sensible) to cars (not so sensible). This is objectification. This has become so prevalent that some women look at their own bodies through the eyes of outsiders (self-objectification). As you might expect, this is a detrimental phenomenon that has been linked to low self-esteem, negative eating attitudes, and depression.

Our goal for next year is to study objectification in some form using a specialized piece of equipment called an eye tracker, which can gather data about what people are looking within still and moving images and for how long they gaze at that point. This is very new and cutting edge since there is almost no research on objectification using eye tracking data. However, given that objectification involves focusing on parts of women’s bodies, the eye tracker seems like a perfect tool to use to study objectification.

We don’t have a specific research question in mind at the moment, but there are a ton of possibilities. For example, if a participant focuses on a woman’s body rather than her face, is that participant more likely to rate her lower on variables such as intelligence or be less likely to recommend that woman for a job? How does varying a woman’s clothing affect both what people look at and how she is rated or evaluated?

Members of our team will read articles on objectification and its consequences and search for any articles that have used eye tracking in this context. They will also learn how to use the eye tracker. We will then work together to design a study that examines objectification and uses the eye tracker to gather data.

Our goal with each 491 team we work with is to produce high-quality research that can be presented at national conferences and published with students as co-authors. We’ve been able to achieve this goal to date, and we see no reason why we can’t continue this trend with hard work and group bonding as we take on some interesting and challenging research questions.

Our project could move in many different directions depending upon the specific questions we ask. We are only limited by our energy and creativity.

If you want to be part of a collaborative team, if you are interested in objectification and if you want to learn how to use the eye tracker, this is the team for you! We look forward to a year that is both fun and productive.
Within one second of seeing a face we identify the race and gender of the face, decide if the face is attractive, determine whether the face is young or old, interpret the facial expression and, of course, decide if the face belongs to someone we know (e.g., “It’s Dr. Kolar, old, angry male!”) Oddly, we know we do these things but we have little understanding of how these face variables are defined. We do not really know what makes a face male or female, young or old, attractive or unattractive. This year my students are training participants to classify faces into groups to see if they form an average face or prototype for each group even if the groups are composed different race faces. For next year I would like to explore any of the topics relevant to face processing, including how we determine the age, gender, race or attractiveness of a face. The research is experimental and involves using computers to present stimuli and record responses. Only students who are comfortable with computers and with mathematical/statistical analyses should consider joining my team.

**Dr. Virginia Mackintosh**

Parenting attitudes in families of children with disabilities

Over the past few years, I have done some work with Drs. Liss and Schiffrin creating a measure of intensive parenting beliefs (The Intensive Parenting Attitudes Questionnaire; IPAQ). As we have operationalized it, intensive parenting beliefs are made up of 5 components: (1) mothers are more qualified to parent than are fathers (essentialism); (2) parenting is the hardest job there is (challenging); (3) parenting should bring with it great joy (fulfillment); (4) the needs of the children should be a family’s top priority (child centered); and (5) parents must engage their children in stimulating activities to assure proper development (stimulation). Interesting things have been found using this measure. For example, mothers who score high on essentialism tend to be more stressed and depressed.

The studies done so far with the IPAQ have focused on the attitudes and beliefs of the parents, but not on the characteristics of their children. We know that the parent-child relationship is bidirectional and that when the child has disabilities the parent is likely to experience higher levels of stress. The purpose of this study will be to explore how intensive parenting attitudes and beliefs might be influenced by qualities possessed by their offspring.

I am looking for a maximum of 3 students with an interest in special needs populations and their families. It should be a challenging and fun project!

**Dr. Chris McBride**

Although the perception that people eat under stress is consistently perpetuated by the media, the research on stress-related eating is not so clear cut. Most research indicates that, for normal weight individuals who are not dieting, caloric intake actually declines during periods of stress. Conversely, those who are overweight and/or restrained in their eating patterns seem to be most susceptible stress-eating behaviors.

In addition to measuring dieting behavior, my current team is examining several mechanisms
involved in stress-related eating. First, using an eye-tracker, we are looking at whether people tend to focus more on food when under stress. Second, we are measuring the impact of stress on actual eating behavior. Finally, we are trying to determine if stress-eating can be changed through exposure to descriptive norms. In past years my teams have examined stress-eating in children and the role of guilt in stress-related eating. While my team next year will work in the area of eating behavior, the exact nature of next year’s topic will be dependent on the interests of the students.

(Basically I love to study eating behavior almost as much as I love to eat!)

**Dr. Dave Stahlman**

The purpose of this research team is to conduct original, non-invasive experimental work investigating learning and behavioral mechanisms in non-human animals. This work can include the use of laboratory rats, terrestrial hermit crabs, or potentially other model species to investigate the content of learning and its impact on performance. There is a great deal of flexibility in the types of phenomena the team could potentially examine. In the past, Dr. Stahlman’s undergraduate research teams have collaborated on experiments investigating both attention and distraction; personality; non-associative learning; caffeine’s impact on spatial learning; and the role of expectancies on creativity and behavioral variability. Students will be required to assist in experimental design, the construction of apparatuses, and will be intimately involved in data collection and analysis.

**Dr. Debra Steckler**

Jeffrey Arnett proposes that a new stage exists between adolescence and adulthood. Arnett’s stage is called “emerging adulthood” and it includes people roughly between the ages of 18 to 25. Emerging adulthood is characterized by five main features: it is the age of identity exploration; it is the age of instability; it is the most self-focused stage of life; it is the age of feeling in-between; and it is the age of possibilities. Arnett and other researchers have investigated this stage and there seems to be agreement among researchers that this stage does, in fact, exist. What researchers have not addressed is - what caused this stage?

Most discussions about the precursors of emerging adulthood have focused on certain sociohistorical events, such as increasing college attendance, the rising age of marriage, and postponing beginning a family. For the past several years my research teams and I have investigated the role that other social factors play in emerging adulthood, such as parenting and music.

So far my research teams and I have discovered that there are significant differences in the parenting styles of the parent and grandparent generations in most of the five Emerging Adult dimensions. However, one dimension that has been causing us trouble is the self-focused dimension, and that would be an interesting area to investigate. Actually interviewing a sample of these two generations about their reasons for their parenting style might be another viable next step. Analyzing social media sites for evidence of the five Emerging Adult dimensions would be a fun and interesting area of inquiry as well.
I’m looking for people who are self-starters, highly motivated, good in stats and methodology, who can work well with others, who want to work hard and have a good time doing it. If this describes you, then see me after the meeting.


Dr. Laura Wilson

It has been estimated that approximately 70% of adults in the United States experience a traumatic event during their lifetime. This experience could involve being in a car accident, being physically attacked, a natural disaster, or witnessing a mass casualty event. Many survivors of these events report difficulties, such as sleep disturbance, changes in mood, and concerns about future safety. However, the majority of survivors do not develop clinically significant levels of persistent psychopathology. Recently, my research has focused on examining how survivors cope following these events and how communities can better support survivors during their recovery.

This project will focus on sexual assault or rape, which is one of the most common and devastating types of traumas. Beyond that, I don’t have a specific research agenda in mind and we will pick research questions as a group. One potential avenue could be to examine factors that impact outsiders’ attitudes towards sexual assault survivors. Potential variables of interest could include sexual objectification, sexual attitudes, blame attributions, perception of victim resistance, or gender stereotypes. A second potential avenue could be to examine influences that predict psychosocial adjustment in sexual assault survivors, such as coping strategies, blame attributions, relationship with the perpetrator, or social support. A third possible research area would be to focus on media portrayal of sexual assault survivors and how media messages contribute to the perpetuation of stigma and negative reactions towards survivors.

As part of this team, you will become familiar with the sexual assault literature, be involved in selecting research questions and designing the research project, and assist in collecting, analyzing, writing up and presenting the data. If you want to learn more, feel free to stop by my office or email me (lwilson5@umw.edu).