**RESEARCH-TEAM PROJECTS**

**(PSYCHOLOGY 491 & 492)**

**2015-2016**

***Dr. Steve Hampton***

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 have found that people can make accurate global assessments of attractiveness as well as accurate race classifications of faces when the faces are presented for only 16 milliseconds. Obviously, attractiveness and race are primitive aspects of faces that our brain is designed to notice with only the briefest glance. I am looking for students interested in experimental psychology who would enjoy working on the topic of face processing. Must not be afraid of computers or statistics.

***Dr. Dave Kolar***

For many years, both academics and non-academics alike have been concerned about the impact that humans have on the environment.  With our emphasis on explaining human behavior and mental processes, psychologists should have a lot to say about how we can get people to minimize their impact on the environment. Next year, my research team will focus on how we can take what we know about human behavior and have an effect on issues related to the environment.  In previous years my research teams have evaluated attitudes we have about the labels ‘green’ and ‘environmental’, steps we can take to change environmental attitudes, and food waste on campus at Mary Washington.  Next year, one area we might consider studying more is overconsumption.  People in the U.S. buy more products and consume more resources that most other countries.  Why?  What can we do to change this?  Other potential questions we could study include: 1) Why are some people more concerned about the environment than others?  2) How can we change behaviors (recycling?) related to the environment?  3) How do attitudes about the environment develop?  4) How do others influence our attitudes about the environment?  So our focus will be on the environment, but I will leave the specific direction we take up to the students who are on my team.

***Dr. Virginia Mackintosh***

Parenting a child or children with special needs brings with it a myriad of challenges. Some of these challenges are the same that all parents face (e.g., balancing work and home responsibilities, finding time for each child), but there are also unique difficulties. One issue that I am especially interested in is that of choosing and providing treatments for children with developmental disabilities. Can families access the treatments they want for their children? What expectations do they have for those treatments? How do they prioritize their resources in terms of money, time, and energy?

I don’t have a firm idea of just how to go about this study, though I think it would be interesting to have a qualitative component so that we can learn directly from parents the issues most salient to them regarding treatments. It is possible that we would begin with a small qualitative study and then follow up with a larger quantitative approach.

I am looking for 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. This intersection of dieting behavior and stress-induced eating has been a major focus of my research, but I am open to looking into other areas of research that examines why, when, and what we eat.

In the past, students on my research teams have explored several mechanisms involved in stress-related eating. They have studied attentional focus on food using the eye-tracker, the roles of guilt and mindfulness in stress-induced eating, the types of stressors (e.g. cognitive or social) that elicit eating behavior, and how descriptive norms impact eating. While my research team will work in the area of eating behavior, the exact nature of next year’s topic will be dependent on the specific interests of the students.

***Dr. Holly Schiffrin***

In the past, my research teams have focused on two primary topics including positive psychology and parenting issues. The goal of positive psychology is to identify and enhance the human strengths and virtues that make life worth living and allow individuals and communities to thrive.   One premise of positive psychology is that a better way to help people flourish is to identify their strengths and use them more rather than identifying people’s weaknesses and focusing on how to improve them.  However, there hasn’t been much research to support this hypothesis. One research idea I would like to pursue is to examine this concept experimentally.  Another potential project would be to follow up on research I have conducted on the impact of intensive and helicopter parenting practices on the well-being of both parents and children.  Some potential questions could include examining (1) the impact of mindful parenting on improving maternal and child outcomes; (2) the impact of helicopter fathering on father and child outcomes; (3) the impact of helicopter parenting on male versus female children; or (4) the impact of “helicopter professoring” (expanding the concept of helicopter parenting to a new group).  The project pursued will depend upon the research interests of members of the team. Whatever the final topic, I am interested in working on applied issues related to well-being that have practical applications. My research team will be involved in designing the study as well as developing data collection instruments, collecting data, analyzing data, as well as writing reports and making presentations to summarize the findings.  Depending on the outcome of the study, we may also submit the results of our investigations for presentation at a national conference or publication in an appropriate journal. If you have questions or are interested in learning more about these projects, stop by my office (Annex B, Room 117) or send me an e-mail (hschiffr@umw.edu).

***Dr. Hilary Stebbins***

My past 491/492 teams have worked with me on research involving the processing of emotional facial features, specifically with regards to attentional processes. We have used multiple paradigms that often involve designing within subjects studies where emotional images are displayed on a computer and participants’ reaction times and accuracy to these stimuli are recorded over multiple trials. One specific direction that I am interested in for the 2015 – 2016 year is to consider the role of sleep deprivation as it relates to emotional processing. There is a fair bit of literature on manipulated and acute sleep deprivation and its effects on emotional processing, but less so on the more chronic low level deprivation that one often sees in a college population. It is possible that this work may involve measuring physiological arousal using heart rate, skin conductance and/or EMG (changes in facial muscles) measures. While I have a general sense of what I am interested in pursuing next year I will also expect and encourage students on my team to develop their own questions related to these topics. You will be involved in helping to design studies to answer your questions as well as implementing, analyzing, writing up, and presenting the results of these studies. If you have questions or are interested in learning more about these projects, stop by my office (Annex B 118) or send me an e-mail (hstebbin@umw.edu).

***Dr. Laura Wilson***

One of the hottest topics on college campuses currently is sexual assault. Recently, there has been a push for a better understanding of the occurrence of sexual assault, how to best support survivors, and how to improve prevention strategies. The focus of this research team will be on sexual assault or rape, which is one of the most common and devastating types of traumatic experiences. 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 student attitudes towards the occurrence of sexual assault on campus and sexual assault prevention programs. A second potential focus would be to examine factors that impact outsiders’ attitudes towards sexual assault survivors. 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 are interested in this research team, then please email me so we can discuss your research interests (lwilson5@umw.edu).