

— Spring 2025 —

UW LINK Study Newsletter



INSIDE, WE TALK ABOUT:

Research
Findings-
Page 2

Lab Member
Updates -
Page 3

Community
Events and
Resources-
Page 4

A Note From Our UW LINK Team

Hello, and Happy New Year from the Waisman Center! Our UW LINK Study team, composed of Dr. Brittany Travers' and Dr. James Li's labs, hopes you had a delightful holiday season and a pleasant start to the new year. As we continue to study the co-occurrence of autism and ADHD in children, we are excited to see what this year brings us. We wish you a fruitful 2025 as well!

Thank you to all of the families who have participated in our study and continue to support us! Our work would not be possible without you. Continue reading for updates on what we have been up to.



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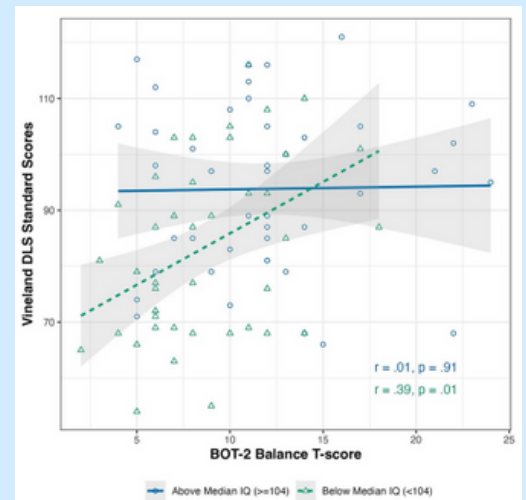


Research Findings from the Labs

The relation between specific motor skills and daily living skills in autistic children and adolescents

Emily Skaletski, Sailery Cardona, Brittany Travers

Many studies relate motor skills (e.g. balance, coordination, fine movements) and daily living skills (e.g. dressing, scheduling, managing money, cleaning). This paper examines which specific motor skills most impact daily living skills in autistic youth 6 to 17 years old. Our researchers found that several motor skills (fine motor precision and integration, balance, dexterity, and coordination) did relate to daily living skills, however, the strength of this relationship weakened after accounting for IQ, leaving only fine motor precision as significant.



[Read more here:](#)



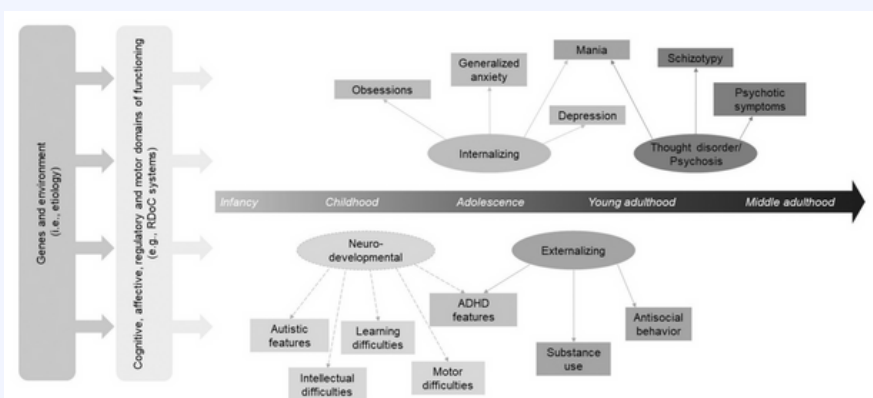
These findings highlight the importance of fine motor skills with regard to daily living skills, at least for autistic youth. Individuals working to support autistic youth in improving their daily living skills may want to focus on fine motor skills to start, especially with autistic youths with lower IQ scores.

Where do neurodevelopmental conditions fit in transdiagnostic psychiatric frameworks? Incorporating a new neurodevelopmental spectrum

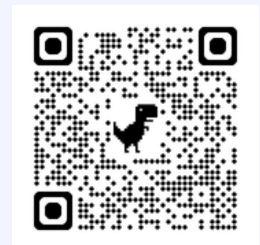
James Li et al.

The predominant way of thinking about mental health and psychiatry employs a “check-the-box” approach to acquiring a diagnosis (e.g. going down a checklist of symptoms or features). This method does not consider the common cooccurrence of multiple conditions well. As such, newer models are being developed. This paper addresses how a neurodevelopmental cluster, including conditions like Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADHD, and Learning Disabilities, might fit into these newer models.

The inclusion of a neurodevelopmental cluster is not only supported by evidence but also important for clinicians working to determine the best practices to support clients and patients who present with these cooccurring conditions.



[Read more here:](#)



Congrats to Brooke Sasia, who's had her first manuscript with the lab accepted for publication in the journal *Development and Psychopathology*!

Using a large preexisting database, Brooke used genetic information to predict the externalizing behaviors (e.g. antisocial behaviors, substance use) over time and across development from 13 to 41 years.



Team Spotlight: Quanfa “Frank” He

Since the launch of our UW LINK Study in November of 2021, Frank has been a part of numerous study sessions in different ways. One of the few team members who can administer all of our assessments, Frank has conducted many of our neurocognitive assessments with the children participants and worked with parents on our clinical interview.

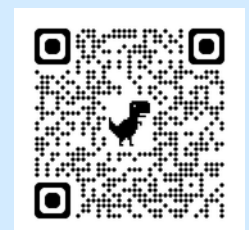
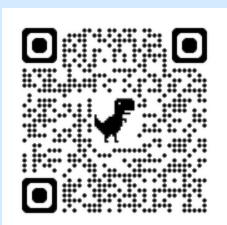
During study sessions with Frank, it's not uncommon to see him pivoting to administer our assessments while sitting on the floor or under a table, finding ways to engage with our kids beyond what the testing manual might direct. He's patient, thoughtful, and adaptable with study participants, their families, and our research team and collaborators.



Beyond being a core member of our team, Frank is in his last term as a PhD student under the direction of Dr. James Li. His research examines youth mental health, with a focus on racial and ethnic minority populations. You can read some of Frank's published manuscripts below. Starting this August, he will be a tenure-track assistant professor at Southern Methodist University to continue researching and teaching.

Thanks to Frank for all of his work in our lab, and congratulations on the new job!

[Neurogenetic mechanisms of risk for ADHD: Examining associations of polygenic scores and brain volumes in a population cohort](#)



[Factorial invariance in hierarchical factor models of mental disorders in African American and European American youths](#)

Lab Member Updates



Congrats to Anna Gillespie, who graduated with her degree in psychology in December! Anna joined our lab in the summer of 2023. We will miss her at Waisman, but are excited to see what her next chapter brings!



Between the labs, six students are studying abroad:

- Ryan Herchenroether
- Goni Hutt
- Amelia Levin
- Dhani Skole
- Ella Mahaney
- Ellie Sprinkmann

While we will miss them this semester, we know they will have an amazing experience and are excited to hear about what they learn on their adventures!



Four second-year Occupational Therapy Students from Travers Lab will be completing their Level II fieldwork next semester in various community settings.

Good luck Sarah Dehnel, Kaitlyn Hoang, Shelby Hornberg, and Crystal Garcia!

Community Events and Resources

Waisman Day with the Experts

February 22, 2025 @ 9:00 am -

11:30 am

1500 Highland Avenue, Madison, WI

Topic: Autism

Come learn about the newest research findings related to autism. This event also features a panel of autistic individuals and caregivers.

Elephant and Piggie's "We are in a Play!"

April 5- April 20, 2025

MYArts Starlight Theater (1055 E Mifflin St)

All shows in this production are sensory friendly!

One Walk, Big Strides for Autism 2025

April 27, 2025

Autism Society South Central Wisconsin

McKee Farms Park 2930 Chapel Valley Rd, Fitchburg, WI

Sensory-Friendly Madison

Capitol's Hockey Game

with the Arc Dane County and Autism Society South Central WI

February 16, 2025 @ 3:05 pm

Bob Suter's LEGACY20 Arena (2616 N Pleasant View Rd, Middleton, WI 53562)

Enjoy an afternoon of hockey with no light show, limited or no music, and limited announcements.

Purchase tickets for \$17 here: bit.ly/arcdcccaps

View a social story about the event here:

<https://shorturl.at/Qu6PL>



Madison Children's Museum

A place for children to explore, be creative, make friends and have fun

New events posted frequently

[Click here for more information](#)