

UW LINK Study Newsletter



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A Note From Our UW LINK Team

Hello from the Waisman Center! With the start of this fall term, our UW LINK Study team is reflecting upon what 2025 has brought so far and shares some of the latest findings that continue to inspire and motivate our work.

We remain dedicated to our mission, to better understand the co-occurrence of ADHD and autism in kids while prioritizing the voices of community members. We are committed to conducting scientifically rigorous, transparent, and community-engaged research that protects participants' confidentiality and autonomy.

Our work truly would not be possible without you, and we cannot thank you enough for your continued participation, support, and trust.



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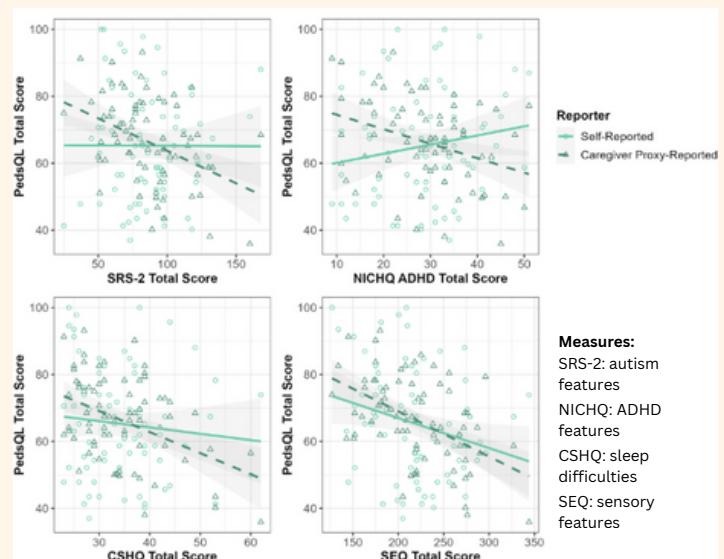


Research Findings from the Labs

Quality of Life in Autistic Children: Discrepancies Between Self- and Caregiver-Proxy Reports and Associations With Individual Characteristics

Emily C. Skaletski, Rebekah M. Rodriguez, Sharon G. Gartland, Karla K. Ausderau, Lauren Bishop, James J. Li, Brittany G. Travers

Autism research typically focuses on caregiver reports of their autistic child's quality of life (QoL). In this paper, we wanted to know if there was agreement between a child's self-report and their caregiver's report about QoL and related features. We found that autistic children and their caregivers have different perspectives on the child's QoL. We also found that sensory features and sleep difficulties were related to a child's QoL from both reporters, while autism and ADHD features were only related to QoL when looking at a caregiver's perspective. This suggests that we should ask children and their caregivers about the child's QoL, as we see differences based on the respondent. We should also focus on supporting a child's unique sensory features and good sleep, as these areas are important for a child's QoL from both perspectives.



To read more, visit <https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.70108>

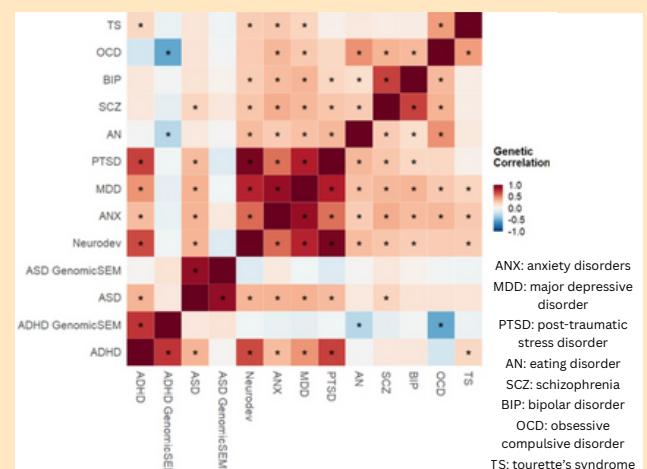
Enhancing the discriminatory power of polygenic scores for ADHD and autism in clinical and non-clinical samples

James J. Li, Quanfa He, Stephen Dorn, Zihang Wang & Qiongshi Lu

Polygenic scores (PGS) use DNA variations to predict, to some extent, potential instances of ADHD, major depression, and autism, among others. However, because there is a lot of genetic overlap between ADHD and autism, these polygenic scores are not very specific. This article tests a new model to improve this specificity, called discriminatory power.

With this new model, which used a statistical method called GenomicSEM, the research team found greater discriminatory power as compared to the previously used PGS development methods. This more specific model could be important for future research, and maybe one day, clinical application.

To read more, visit <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/40490728/>



Lab Member Updates



Congrats to our graduates! We are so proud of Sam Luther, Paige Harvey, Susan Lei, Owen Crowell, Sydney Hemann. We will miss you each in the lab, but are so excited for your next adventures.



Left to right: Lauren Salmi, Susan Lei, Sydney Hemann, Owen Crowell

Welcome our new RA's joining us: Lily Blase, Grace Dykeman, Tiana Edwards, Megan Haas, Rosa Jimenez, Jamie Kortanek, Maxwell Kostopolus, Natalie McDonalds, Nate Navarro, Louisa Shromoff, Verena Sonnleitner-Soto, and Emerald Yuan

And welcome back to Ryan Herchenroether, Goni Hutt, Amelia Levin, and Dhani Skole, who were studying abroad!

Finally, a huge congrats to our two doctoral graduates: Dr. Frank He and Dr. Emily Skaletski, who both defended their theses and completed their PhD programs!

Frank is now teaching and researching as an Assistant Professor at Southern Methodist University, and Emily is completing a postdoc at Northwestern University.



Frank He



Emily Skaletski and Bella Flowers

Clinical Psychology PhD student Brooke Sasia was awarded the Wisconsin Distinguished Graduate Fellowship Award by the Waisman Center! Created in 1997, this program aims to ensure that the University has the resources to attract the nation's most talented students and to enable them to pursue their studies at UW-Madison.



Allison (Al) Block (aka Doc Block) completed her Doctorate of Occupational Therapy and passed her national board exam to become a registered occupational therapist! Al now continues in the lab to pursue her PhD in research.

Emily has been an integral part of the UW LINK Study even before its launch in 2021. Emily was influential in developing our study protocol (a big reason we have our participant support “buddy”!), on our first-ever study session, and a pioneer in our data analysis procedures. She masterfully walks the fine line of collecting quality data while always prioritizing participant autonomy and fun. It’s safe to say, the LINK Study would not look the way it does today without her work. Her dedication, creative problem-solving, and compassion made her an invaluable member of our team who we will miss dearly.

Team Spotlight: **(Dr.) Emily Skaletski**



Emily Skaletski and Brittany Travers

Emily is now completing a postdoctoral fellowship within the Center for Education in Health Sciences at Northwestern University in Chicago. There she will focus on learning what autistic adolescents think about participation and quality of life and how we can best measure these constructs (see her paper, “Quality of Life in Autistic Children,” on page 2).

Thanks to Emily for all of her incredible work in the lab, and congratulations on your next steps! We will miss you here, but cannot wait to see what amazing things you do next.

Research Opportunities

Discover, Play, & Learn: Brain Research for Kids

Who: We are looking for English-speaking children 5-13 years old, on or not on the autism spectrum, who are excited to learn about their brains!

What: 6-hours of study activities, including a 20-60 minute MRI. Study activities can be done in one day or multiple days.

Where: The Waisman Center in Madison, WI.

When: We'll work around your schedule!

Compensation: Earn up to \$200 while contributing to important research. We'll take care of travel arrangements (up to \$249) and meals during study activities.



Interested or have more questions?

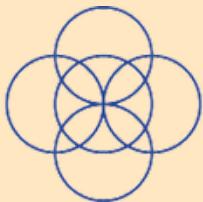
We would love to hear from you!

BrainyMovtStudy@waisman.wisc.edu
(608)263-8913

Join a Waisman Research Registry!

The Waisman Center Registries serves as a connection between families and research projects. The Waisman Clinical Translational Core (CTC) manages databases of individuals and families who have agreed to be contacted by the CTC in a confidential manner (mail or e-mail) with information about studies you may be eligible for. If you indicate on the reply form that you are interested in learning more, your name and contact information will be provided to the research team.

For more information or to sign up, visit the Waisman webpage:
<https://www.waisman.wisc.edu/participate-in-research/enroll-in-research/>



Waisman Studies Currently Recruiting

For a list of other Waisman labs and ongoing projects, visit the Waisman webpage:

<https://www.waisman.wisc.edu/participate-in-research/studies-currently-recruiting/>

Community Events and Resources

Waisman Whirl

September 27, 2025 @ 9:00am-11:00am
1500 Highland Avenue, Madison, WI

Get your shoes and wheels ready for the 2025 Waisman Whirl Run, Walk & Roll. 5k run, walk or roll, and 1 mile walk or roll courses available.

Learn more or register to join here:
<https://www.waisman.wisc.edu/event/run2025/>

Sensory-Friendly Night

October 24, 2025 @ 4:30-7:00pm

Madison Children's Museum

100 N. Hamilton St., Madison, WI

These free museum hours feature a range of calming and engaging activities meant to foster inclusivity.

Learn more here:

<https://isthmus.com/events/sensory-friendly-museum-time-MCM/>

Mental Health and Wellness Fall Fest

September 27, 2025 @ 11:00am-7:00pm

Tyrol Basin

3487 Bohn Rd., Mount Horeb, WI

Join this community festival for movement, art, and nature events that support mental health and wellbeing.

Learn more here:

<https://www.cedarcenter.org/events>



We Rock the Spectrum Milwaukee Kids Gym

140 E Rawson Ave Suite 314, Oak Creek, WI

Looking for a fun, safe, inclusive, and sensory-friendly place to play? This gym features trampolines, swings, tunnels, crash mats, and a zipline!

Learn more here:

<https://werockthespectrummilwaukee.com/>

Wisconsin Science Festival

October 16-26, 2025

Statewide

Science, technology, arts, nature, and more! For its 15th year, the state science fair will have more than 100 events over 10 days and all across Wisconsin. All ages are welcome to unleash their curiosity.!

Find events near you here:

<https://www.wisconsinsciencefest.org/>

Wings for All

November 8, 2025

Dane County Regional Airport

4000 International Ln, Madison, WI

Get ready to travel! With the Arc-Dane County and Delta Airlines, Wings is an airport rehearsal where individuals and families experience the process of checking in, security, waiting, and boarding a plane.

Registration to attend or volunteer will open soon! In the meantime, keep an eye on the Arc-Dane County website and social media for updates about this event and others:
<https://www.arcdanecounty.org/upcoming-events>

