

UW LINK Study Newsletter



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A Note From Our UW LINK Team

Hello and happy back to school season from the UW LINK Study team at the Waisman Center! We hope you all had a great summer, and you've come back refreshed.

Our research collaboration, involving Dr. Brittany Travers's and Dr. James Li's labs, remains committed to furthering our important work studying the co-occurrence of autism and ADHD in children. We will continue to uphold our standards and values and are looking forward to the discoveries this new school year will bring!

We owe a heartfelt thank you to every family who has participated in and supported our work. Your contributions are invaluable, and our research would truly not be possible without you.

We're excited to announce we have opened social media accounts, so you can keep up with us between newsletters! Follow us at facebook.com/UWLINK and [UW_LINK](#) on instagram!

Please keep reading below for the latest updates on what our team has been working on.



(608) 265-7938



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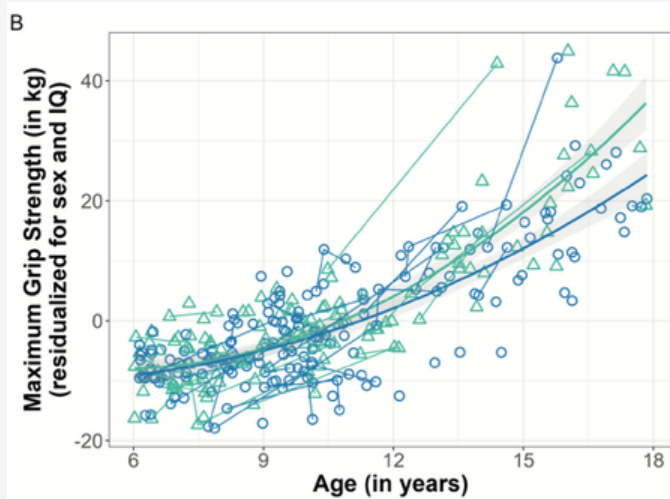
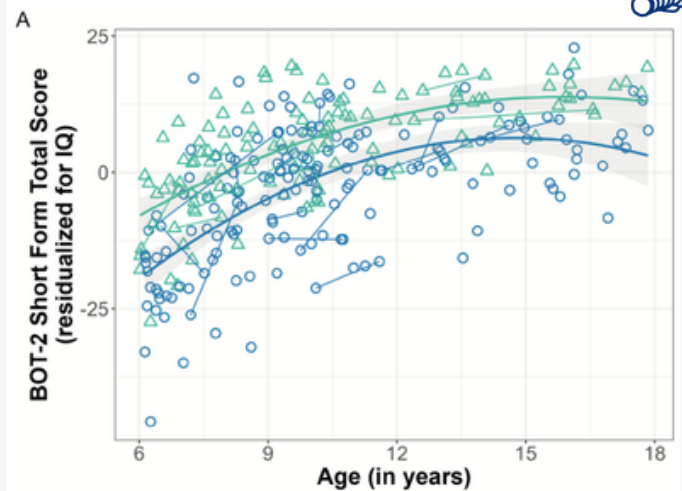
Research Findings from the Labs

Motor Performance in Autistic Youth From Childhood Through Adolescence: Evidence for Both Sustained and Widening Group Differences

Allison R. Block, Emily C. Skaletski, Claire M. Sheedy, Ella A. Vanderpool, Brittany G. Travers

Autistic people sometimes experience differences in motor skills, like drawing, jumping, or gripping, compared to non-autistic individuals. This study looked at these differences over time, from childhood through adolescence. We found unique patterns in specific areas of motor skills. On a measure of general motor skills, which includes fine motor tasks like folding and drawing and gross motor tasks like walking and catching, autistic youth consistently demonstrated lower scores than non-autistic youth from age 6 through 18 years old (Figure A).

Group
▲ Non-Autistic
○ Autistic



However, in a grip strength task, where people are asked to squeeze a device as hard as they can, groups of autistic and non-autistic children showed little differences until their teenage years. Around age 13, we began to see group differences, which grew with age (Figure B). This supports other work showing there are motor differences between autistic and non-autistic youth, and suggests that strength in particular may be an area with unique changes over time.

To read more, visit <https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.70211>

Our team has presented at various conferences in the last few months including...

- **Occupational Therapy Summit** in St. Louis, MO
- **International Society for Autism Research (INSAR)** in Prague, Czech Republic
- **Hierarchical Taxonomy of Psychopathology (HiTOP)** in Minneapolis, MN
- **Behavior Genetics Association (BGA)** in Amsterdam, Netherlands
- **World Federation of Occupational Therapists Congress (WFOT)** in Bangkok, Thailand
- **Sensory Integration Think Tank Summit (SITTS)** in Richmond, Virginia



Lab Member Updates



Congrats to our graduates! We are so proud of Ryan Herchenroether, Goni Hutt, Amelia Levin, Ella Lunderberg, Shu Lan Schaut, and Gloria Tornehl!

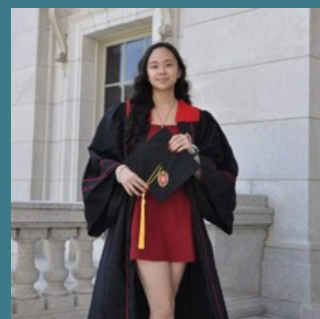


Welcome our new undergraduate research assistants joining us: Natalie Baram, Talia Belinski, Grace Ebert, Londyn Li, Arya Yavuz, Megan Pawola, McKenzie Ngu, Avery Pattridge, and Rachel Pena.

Welcome back to Remy Frank who spent the past semester in Copenhagen, Denmark!

We're also introducing a new cohort of OTD students to the team: Rorie Braband, Juliette Pena, Gabby Rivera, Lexi Schofield, Betsy Skaar and Zoe Moore.

Farewell to our favorite Research Technician, Susan Lei, who is leaving Waisman after 4 years on our team to pursue her Radiology Technologist certification through the Minneapolis VA Healthcare System. We will miss her profoundly, but cannot wait to see all she does next! **Good luck, Susan!**



Congratulations to our lab members who won various awards in this past year!

- **Jamie Kortanek** presented two award-winning posters! They were recognized at the UW Kinesiology Banquet with the Graduate Student Poster Award and placed OT Summit 2nd at the OT Summit Conference
- **LiChen Dong** was acknowledged for his exceptional teaching with the Advanced Achievement in Teaching Award
- Both **Grace Dykeman** and **Rosie Klayman** received the Bryan's Aspiring Psychology Student Awards
- **Caitlin Proffitt** was accepted to UW-Madison's Bachelor of Social Work Program. We'll miss her in the lab while she's doing full-time fieldwork, but are excited for what she does next!

Lab Member Updates



The end of an era...

Project manager Rebekah Rodriguez has accepted a new position as an academic advisor with the department of Anthropology. She has been with the LINK Study since its inception, and while she will be sorely missed, we know she will continue to excel at this new job and beyond. Thank you Rebekah!



Shu Lan



Zibby

Lab members Shu Lan Schaut and Zibby Lunger will be taking over the project manager duties, so now when you call our office you will be able to talk to one of them! Make sure to say hi at your next visit.

Congrats to Dr. Li, who was named an Associate Editor for Research in Child and Adolescent Psychopathology (RCAP)

RCAP is a premier academic journal in child and developmental mental health research, publishing eight issues a year. It is the official journal of the International Society for Research in Child and Adolescent Psychopathology (ISRCAP).



Undergraduate Research Assistant Zibby Lunger receives a competitive Hilldale Fellowship! This award provides support for students pursuing independent research with a faculty advisor. Zibby, with guidance from Brooke Sasia and Dr. James Li, will look at quality of life outcomes for autistic children with various other co-occurring mental health conditions. We're excited to see what she finds!



Team Spotlight: Brooke Sasia



Brooke has been instrumental in our UW LINK Study from its start! She's been involved in all aspects of our project, working directly with child and parent participants, analyzing data, and creating the training protocols we still use to teach new students today. Her calm, professional, and friendly demeanor has been a grounding presence for participants and study staff alike! She never fails to recognize the needs of those around her, bringing out the best in everyone lucky enough to work with her.

Not only an expert assessor, always collecting reliable data while creatively adapting and engaging each unique participant, Brooke is also a phenomenal teacher, mentor to undergraduate RAs (like Zibby!), budding clinician, and researcher. Her dissertation (which she passed without revisions in May) adds new and important ideas to the world of developmental clinical psychology. Now, she is off to the University of California, San Francisco for her Predoctoral Internship, the final step in her clinical psychology PhD. There, Brooke will provide direct care to families in underserved communities, work in advocacy roles to address barriers to care, and continue conducting assessments.



Thanks to Brooke for all she has done here, and congratulations on her next steps! We will miss her dearly, but have no doubt she will do incredible things in San Francisco and beyond!



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

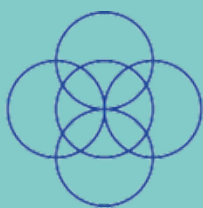


Join a Waisman Research Registry!

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
CENTER

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

Green County Cheese Days

September 18-20th, 2026

Kids' Street day: September 19th, 2026

As the oldest food festival in the Midwest, downtown Monroe celebrates cheesemaking and Swiss traditions ranging from how it's made to parades led by Brown Swiss cows! You can even meet Wedgie the Cheese Days mascot!

Learn more here:

<https://www.cheesedays.com/>

Waisman Whirl

September 26, 2026 @ 9:00am-11:00am

1500 Highland Avenue, Madison, WI

Get your shoes and wheels ready for the 2026 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/run2026/>

Golden Days Harvest Festival

September 26-27th, 2026

Mill Street - Green Lake, WI 54941

A family-friendly celebration with fun activities for all! From craft fairs to face painting to live music, there is something for everyone to enjoy!

Learn more here:

<https://chamber.visitgreenlake.com/events/details/golden-days-harvest-fest-2026-840232?calendarMonth=2026-09-01>



Outdoor Movie Night - Ghostbusters

October 2nd, 2026 @ 6:30pm-8:30pm

Washington Park 1115 Washington St, Manitowoc, WI 54220

Kick off the spooky season with a Halloween classic at Washington Park! Enjoy concessions including popcorn, cotton candy, and more!

Learn more here:

<https://www.visitmanitowoc.com/event/outdoor-movie-night-ghostbusters/3954/>

Wisconsin Science Festival

October 15-25th, 2026

Statewide

Ten days of events in 56 of Wisconsin's 72 counties celebrating science, art, and technology! The 16th annual festival invites all ages to unleash their curiosity with events ranging from hands-on expos, story times, and more!

Find events near you here:

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



Madison Scaled Up Reptile Expo

November 8th, 2026 @ 10:00am-3:00pm

Madison Marriott West, Middleton

Conference Center

1313 John Q Hammons Drive, Middleton, WI 53562

Discover and interact with thousands of species ranging from snakes to lizards to frogs and more! Explore the various enclosures, plants, etc for the wide array of reptiles.

10am VIP Admission: \$15

11am General Admission: \$8

Learn more here:

<https://www.scaledupexpos.com/madison-wi>