The Affective Development Lab

Overview

This lab is led by Dr Eleanor Palser, incoming Assistant Professor and Director of the Pediatric Behavioral Health emphasis at PAU. The *Affective Development Lab* focuses on children and adolescents' emotional development. We are interested in typical development as well as differences associated with neurodevelopmental disorders, including autism, dyslexia, and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Current topics

Alterations in affect are at the core of autism diagnostic criteria but have been poorly quantified. Our research seeks to understand how autistic people experience emotion and empathy, and how this relates to core symptoms as well as mental health challenges. We seek to go beyond traditional, limited theories of an empathy deficit to provide a more holistic view of autism. Follow-up work will seek to modify areas of vulnerability through interventions specifically tailored to autistic people. Our work in dyslexia is beginning to expand our understanding of this condition, by moving beyond deficit-based approaches that focus only on academic achievement, and uncovering strengths in empathy and creativity. As such, we are beginning to provide mechanistic explanations for the over-representation of people with dyslexia in artistic and entrepreneurial careers and inform strength-based educational and vocational practices. ADHD is often framed as an alteration in regulatory and inhibitory processes, but emotional contributions have been relatively neglected. Nascent work in the lab considers whether challenges in regulating positive emotions and approach tendencies drive over-activity, inattention, and externalizing behaviors.

Training opportunities

We use a variety of methods in our research to allow us to investigate affective phenomena at multiple levels of explanations. Our research is often conducted in collaboration with the UCSF Dyslexia Center and the UCSF Clinical Affective Neuroscience Lab, facilitating the use of neuroimaging methods including magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and laboratory measurement of emotion. Supported methods include qualitative and quantitative measures including self-report, behavioral coding, autonomic nervous system physiology, and structural MRI. Students will gain training in the methods that are of interest to them, as well as gold-standard symptom quantification.

Research projects will allow students to gain skills in study design, literature review, participant recruitment, administering assessments and experimental protocols, data analysis and visualization, and presenting at professional conferences. Students will gain a significant amount of experience and training hours working with pediatric populations. Dr. Palser has strong track record of co-authoring manuscripts for publication with students and first authorship is encouraged for those that are motivated. Dr. Palser is open to discussing student's research interests and developing projects that are aligned with common goals. The aim to is to help students become independent researchers and produce original research for their dissertations.

Expectations and lab culture

Our overarching goal is to conduct research that is aligned with the priorities, is meaningful to, and improves the well-being of people impacted by neurodevelopmental disorders. Lab members are expected

to have a strong motivation to work with children and adolescents or neurodiverse adults. They will ideally already have some experience working with children with neurodevelopmental disorders but will also bring humility and a willingness to learn to the lab. Strong communication skills are required as well as a desire to work as a team to solve problems and design mutually beneficial structures and practices.

Questions?

Contact Dr. Eleanor Palser at Eleanor.Palser@ucsf.edu

How to apply:

Students interested in joining the *Affective Development Lab* are asked to submit the following:

1. One page cover letter outlining your research interests and reasons for joining the *Affective Development Lab*.
2. Current CV including two references with email contact information.
3. Unofficial PAU transcript.