

The Affective Development Lab

Overview

This lab is led by **Dr Eleanor Palser**, a licensed clinical psychologist, tenure-track Assistant Professor, and Director of the Pediatric Behavioral Health emphasis at PAU. Research in the *Affective Development Lab* (ADL) focuses on children and adolescents' emotional development and mental health. We are interested in typical development as well as differences associated with neurodevelopmental conditions, including autism, dyslexia, and ADHD.



A sample of current topics

1) The mental health of Autistic people across the lifespan

- Are current diagnostic criteria and intervention approaches for mental health conditions valid and applicable for Autistic children, teens, and adults?
- How can we best support the well-being of Autistic people? Can we leverage strengths and develop novel supports?

2) Examining assumptions about affect and emotion in Autistic people

- Is an “empathy deficit” a helpful and accurate way to characterize the experience Autistic people have when interacting with others?
- Do Autistic people experience “blunted emotions” or might they have differences in identifying, showing, and communicating their emotions?

3) Are neurodevelopmental conditions associated with under-recognized strengths in creativity, empathy, communication?

- What is the prevalence and nature of strengths in neurodevelopmental conditions?
- Are these strengths associated with real-world, educational, and employment advantages?

Training opportunities

We use a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods in our research to allow us to investigate affective phenomena at multiple levels of explanations. There may be opportunities to collaborate 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. Students will gain training in the methods that are of interest to them, as well as gold-standard symptom quantification and cognitive assessment. 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 with neurodevelopmental conditions. The majority of my students co-design their own study and collect their own data. 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 neurodiverse children 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 epalser@paltoalto.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. These references should be able to speak to either your research experience and/or clinical experience with children and adolescents.
3. Unofficial PAU transcript.