



MONMOUTH
UNIVERSITY

PSYCHOLOGY

80th Semi-Annual

Undergraduate Student Conference

April 26, 2025

8:15am-1:30pm

Pozycki Hall

Schedule at a Glance

8:15 AM - 8:55 AM
Pozycki Lobby

Breakfast

8:55 AM – 9:00 AM
Pozycki Auditorium

Welcome Remarks

Dr. Kristin Bluemel, Associate Dean of the
School of Humanities and Social Sciences

9:00 AM – 9:55 AM
Pozycki Auditorium

Paper Session I

10:00 AM – 10:55 AM
Pozycki Auditorium

Paper Session II

11:00 AM – 11:30 AM
Pozycki Lobby

Poster Session

11:30 AM – 12:25 PM
Pozycki Auditorium

Paper Session III

12:30 PM – 1:30 PM
Pozycki Auditorium

Paper Session IV

1:30 PM
Pozycki Auditorium

Closing Remarks and Student Awards

Dr. Lisa Dinella, Professor of Psychology and
Chair of the Student Awards Committee

Paper Session I

Pozycki Auditorium 9:00 AM – 9:55 AM

Moderator: Haley M. Tischler, President of Psi Chi

Izabel Cartagena

Picture Perfect or Perfected Image? The Impact of Self-Esteem on Social Media Posting

Most of the research on social media and self-esteem has focused on how social media influences self-esteem. The limited research focusing on how self-esteem impacts social media use has largely taken a correlational approach. Low self-esteem is correlated with problematic social media use, such as social comparison (Packer & Flack, 2023; Servidio et al., 2024). This research has also largely concentrated on users' likes, comments, and scrolling. The current study evaluated the relationship between self-esteem and social media using an experimental design which manipulated self-esteem. It was hypothesized that those with high self-esteem compared to low self-esteem would choose to post more natural and less curated photos. In this experiment, 61 participants completed an anagram activity and received feedback to shift self-esteem. Participants received positive or negative feedback they believed was based on their performance on the activity. Following the feedback, participants chose a photo they would feel comfortable posting in that moment and answered a number of items about it. The specific aspects that were studied were the editing of photos and the rationale behind choosing a photo to post. Finally, participants completed a self-esteem questionnaire to measure self-esteem levels. The results revealed the manipulation failed and there were no significant differences between the two groups. Self-esteem did not impact the pictures selected. The results may not have been significant, but set up future research further exploring what does impact social media posting.

Mentor: Dr. Ciarocco

Sunny Decker

Woof Your Worries Away! The Effect of Human-Dog Play on Stress

College students experience high chronic stress (Pariat et al., 2014; Kruger et al., 2004). Building on previous research that canine therapy sessions and adult play have been shown to independently lower stress and anxiety (Binfet et al., 2017; Pressman et al., 2009), the present study examined whether active play with one's dog reduces momentary stress more than a comparable passive activity in dog owners. Using a within-subjects repeated measures design, 16 participants who were primary dog caregivers completed three five-minute phases —in-lab baseline (quietly sitting with their dog), walking their dog, and active play (e.g., fetch or tug-of-war). Human physiological stress was indexed via heart-rate monitoring, and subjective stress was measured with an eight-item Likert questionnaire. Concurrently, canine stress and relaxation behaviors (e.g., tucked tail, tail wagging) were coded from video using a custom tracking form and summarized on a -4 to +4 scale. We hypothesized that active play would yield greater reductions in heart rate and self-reported stress than walking, and that dogs would exhibit more affiliative behaviors and fewer stress indicators during play. Although there was no significant difference in physiological stress (i.e., heart rate) between conditions, there were significant differences in perceived stress ratings ($p < 0.012$) as well as canine affiliative behaviors across conditions, with active play often yielding the most beneficial outcomes. These findings of this study can contribute to a better understanding of how human-animal interactions impact not only human stress but also their companion animals.

Mentor: Dr. Mehrkam

Anna Gaglianone

The Power of Connection

This study examined the impacts of social support on the emotional regulation strategies of cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression, as well as academic achievement in subjective and objective terms. Cognitive reappraisal is an emotional regulation strategy that deliberately aims to modify emotional responses to experiences by changing thought processes, while expressive suppression is the act of consciously inhibiting emotion-expressive behaviors (Lopez & Denny, 2019). The present study was correlational and used self-reported surveys to measure social support, emotional regulation strategies, and academic achievement. As predicted, as levels of social support increased, cognitive reappraisal increased, and expressive suppression decreased. Additionally, as levels of social support increased, both the subjective and objective measures of academic achievement also increased. The results of this study demonstrate the importance of social support networks on emotional health and academic success for college students. It supports the implementation of social support programs on college campuses to help college students succeed.

Mentor: Dr. Ciarocco

Lauren Pantelone

Built At Home

This study examined the influence of parental gender role modeling on children's expectations for their future families. A total of 103 Monmouth University undergraduate students completed a questionnaire assessing their gender role attitudes, as well as a separate measure evaluating their parents' division of labor, decision-making, and childcare practices. Participants also reported their own expectations for division of labor, decision-making, and childcare in their future households. To allow for more elaboration, open-ended responses were included to explore participants' ideal future family dynamics and the perceived impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on gender roles within their households. Data analysis revealed that young women participants held more egalitarian gender role attitudes and reported greater perceived competence in future childcare responsibilities than young men participants. Additionally, participants whose parents had a more egalitarian division of child care tasks were more likely to expect an egalitarian division of child care in their own future families. These findings suggest that parental modeling plays a significant role in shaping individuals' expectations for family life and gendered divisions of labor.

Mentor: Dr. Dinella

Caitlin Newsome

The Unspoken Language: Self-Esteem's Influence on Interpreting Nonverbal Cues

This study investigated the influence of self-esteem on interpretations of nonverbal social cues. Previously, there have been connections between self-esteem and social feedback. Self-esteem has increased upon receiving positive feedback and decreased with negative feedback (Kamal et al., 1992). The present study reverses this scenario to determine self-esteem's impact on social feedback, specifically in the form of nonverbal cues. It was predicted that as self-esteem decreased, so would positive interpretations of romantic interest in the "speed-dating" video, happiness in the "people walking" video, confidence in the "business meeting" video, and positive interpretations across all videos. One hundred seven students completed measurements on their self-esteem and interpretations. The interpretations questionnaire contained three subscales, each paired with a corresponding ten second video clip. Against expectations, none of the hypotheses were supported. There was no connection between self-esteem and interpretations of nonverbal cues. This knowledge allows people to be more self-aware in knowing that their level of self-esteem does not cloud their interpretations or judgements of social signals.

Mentor: Dr. Ciarocco

Tiffany Henao

Pawprints on the Heart: Exploring the Link Between Pet Ownership and Attachment Styles

This study explored the relationship between pet ownership and attachment styles in human relationships and whether individuals who own pets, specifically cats and dogs, demonstrate higher levels of secure attachment compared to non-pet owners. Grounded in attachment theory, the research investigates how emotional bonds with pets may influence interpersonal attachment patterns. Participants ($N = 225$) were categorized as pet owners or non-pet owners. Pet owners completed the Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale (LAPS) to assess the strength of their emotional bond with their pets. All participants completed the Adult Attachment Scale (AAS), which measures secure, anxious, and avoidant attachment styles. It was hypothesized that pet owners would report higher levels of secure attachment and lower levels of anxious or avoidant attachment compared to non-pet owners, with the strength of the bond with the pet playing a role in influencing these relationships. The findings aim to contribute to the growing body of research on the psychological benefits of pet ownership and the potential role pets play in shaping human attachment patterns.

Mentor: Dr. Mehrkam

Adrian Vargas

The Subtle Influence of Fragrance on Attraction

This study examined the relationship between fragrance and perceived attraction. There is a positive increase in perceived attraction when men wear a body spray (Croijmans et al., 2021). Eighty-nine participants were either exposed to one of two fragrances (citrusy or woody) or not exposed to anything. After looking at a photograph of a male, participants were then surveyed about intrapersonal attraction towards the male in the photograph. It was predicted that exposure to any fragrance would positively influence perceived attraction more than not being exposed, and that citrusy scents would influence more than woody ones. Interestingly, both hypotheses were not supported, and there was no significant effect of fragrance on perceived attraction, despite prior research suggesting otherwise. Both scents were equally and highly rated, with the woody scent being more discernable. These findings highlight one of the many complex aspects of attraction and suggest that while pleasant scents are well-liked, they are not decisive factors in attractiveness.

Mentor: Dr. Ciarocco

Paper Session II

Pozycki Auditorium 10:00 AM – 10:55 AM

Moderator: Haley M. Tischler, President of Psi Chi

Natalie Mancera

Bridging Borders: U.S. Born vs. Non-U.S. Born First-Gen Students

This study explored the motivational factors influencing first generation college students' decision to pursue a post-secondary education. The current study has a specific focus on the classification of these motivators into two categories: intrinsic and extrinsic. Additionally, this study investigates whether the birthplace of a student's primary parent figure, either within the United States or outside of the United States, impacts these motivational drivers. It was hypothesized that first-generation students with parents born within the United States were more intrinsically motivated to pursue a post-secondary compared to those with parents outside the United States and that first-generation students with parents born outside of the United States were more extrinsically motivated to pursue a post-secondary

education than students with parents born within the United States. One hundred six first generation students were asked to answer two self-report questionnaires to evaluate the students' drivers behind motivation. Results supported the first hypothesis, indicating a significant difference between first generation students with parents born within the United States and intrinsic motivation. However, no significant difference was found between first generation students with parents born outside of the United States and extrinsic motivation. These findings are useful to educators and institutions alike to gain deeper insight into the motivational drivers behind this group of students in post-secondary education.

Mentor: Dr. Ciarocco

Giana Paquette

Does Having Pets Make You a Better Person? The Influence of Pets on Sympathy and Overall Happiness

This study examined whether pet ownership affects levels of compassion and happiness among undergraduate college students. We expected that students who identified as owning a dog would be more sympathetic and happier than those who did not. We used an independent samples *t*-test to compare the replies of pet owners with non-pet owners in a college student sample. The results indicated a statistically significant difference in sympathy scores, showing that pet owners expressed more pity than non-pet owners. However, there was no significant difference in overall happiness between students who were pet owners and students who were not pet owners. These findings indicate that, while pet ownership may be associated with higher emotional sensitivity and compassion, it does not appear to have a substantial impact on broader measures of well-being such as happiness. The findings complement previous studies associating pet attachment to enhanced empathy, while also emphasizing the varied character of pleasure and the potential role of other contributing factors.

Mentor: Dr. Mehrkam

Esteban E. Cevallos

No Filter, No Fear! The Role of Personality and Need to Belong in Online Social Risk-Taking

This study investigated the influence of personality traits and psychological needs on online social risk-taking using a correlational survey design. It was hypothesized that the more extroverted a person is, the more likely they are to take social risks on social media, while the more neurotic a person is, the less likely they are to do so. Additionally, individuals with a higher need to belong would be more inclined to take social risks. Pearson *r* correlations were employed to test these hypotheses. A total of 112 college students from Monmouth University participated in the study. An online questionnaire assessed online social risk-taking levels, followed by a personality questionnaire to measure extraversion and neuroticism, and a need to belong questionnaire to determine belongingness needs. Contrary to expectations, there was no significant correlation between extraversion and online social risk-taking. However, a positive but weak relationship was found between neuroticism and online social risk-taking, as well as between the need to belong and online social risk-taking. These findings suggest that individuals struggling with managing negative emotions and seeking acceptance or inclusion may actively seek connections in digital spaces, which is considered a safe and comfortable space to do so. Consequently, this study underscores the significance of online platforms in potentially fostering social connections among individuals willing to take a social risk online. Implications and future research directions will be discussed.

Mentor: Dr. Ciarocco

Jaye Haynes

Look Good, Feel Good, Play Good

The current study explores how Monmouth University women student-athletes who play male-dominated sports choose to express their gender identity while playing. Gender schema theorists posit

that gender stereotypes impact people's memory, attention, and behaviors (Thomas, 2016), which is concerning given the findings that gender stereotypes exist about women athletes' personality traits concerning their competitive drive (Pankowiak et al., 2020). What is also concerning is that the media pressures women to conform to beauty standards (Kleemans et al., 2018). These findings led me to hypothesize that women athletes' gender expression of their feminine identity may be uniquely impacted. Seven focus groups were conducted, which consisted of athletes who play women's basketball, women's soccer, women's rowing, track and field, field hockey, women's lacrosse, and women's tennis. Based on a phenomenological thematic analysis revealed the sport these women athletes played did not impact their ideal femininity. The reason for this result was the support of their teammates instilled in them.

Mentor: Dr. Dinella

Jan N. Volkmar

Does Emotional Regulation Influence How People Deal With Conflict?

Effect of Reappraisal and Suppression on Conflict Management Styles

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether there is a relationship between the two emotional regulation strategies, cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression, and the five conflict management styles: accommodating, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and competing. For that purpose, participants were asked to fill out both the Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ; Gross & John, 2003) consisting of ten items and the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Inventory (TKI; Thomas & Kilmann, 1974) including 30 items. By calculating the Pearson r correlation coefficient, the relationships were assessed leading to a total of ten hypotheses. It was hypothesized that cognitive reappraisal will positively correlate with accommodating, collaborating, and compromising behavior and negatively correlate to both the avoiding and competing conflict management styles. Additionally, it was predicted that expressive suppression will negatively correlate with the accommodating, collaborating, and compromising conflict management styles while positively correlating to both avoiding and competing behavior in conflict situations. Out of the ten hypotheses, two were supported by the findings. Expressive suppression was both negatively correlated to the collaborating conflict management style and positively correlated to avoiding behavior in conflict situations. Despite the fact that most hypotheses were not supported, the findings do add to and further the current knowledge about how personality influences conflict management. Implications and future research directions will be discussed.

Mentor: Dr. Ciarocco

Brielle Trinchera

A Paw and A Hand: Can the Physical Interaction Between Humans and Dogs Counteract Apathy?

The present study explored the effect of touch between humans and animals and how this interaction may counteract apathy. The present study used a 2 x 2 experimental mixed design with one between-subjects independent variable with two levels (observing a dog and touching a dog) and one within-subjects independent variable (time) across two levels (pre-test and post-test). A total of 30 Monmouth University undergraduate students served as the participants for this study. All participants were first individually given an apathy scale (pre-test) and then randomly assigned to either the observation condition, where participants observed a dog for two minutes, or the touching condition, in which participants physically interacted with the same dog for two minutes. After the interaction, all participants completed the apathy scale again (post-test). It was hypothesized that 1) physically touching the dog will be more effective at reducing apathy than just observing the dog, 2) apathy will be higher in the pretest than in the posttest scores, and 3) there would be an interaction such that physical touch will counteract apathy the strongest in the posttest, whereas observing the dog will not

counteract apathy as strong in the posttest. The first and second hypothesis had significant differences; however, the third hypothesis did not. Future research and implications of this study will be discussed.

Mentor: Dr. Mehrkam

Madyson Markowski

Scroll for Good: How Social Media Exposure Shapes Prosocial Behavior and Empathy Levels

Using the social media platform Facebook is positively correlated with greater concern for others, suggesting certain social media platforms may even encourage empathy (Collins, 2014). This study evaluated the effect of prosocial and antisocial social media content on empathy levels and prosocial behavior on TikTok. Sixty-three participants were randomly assigned to a video condition (prosocial or antisocial) on the social media platform TikTok. It was predicted that those in the antisocial social media video condition would self-report higher levels of empathy than those in the prosocial social media video condition. Those in the prosocial social media video condition would self-report higher levels of prosocial behavior and would have a higher likelihood of taking a “help the homeless” business card than those in the antisocial social media video condition. Results revealed that video condition did not have an impact on self-reported empathy levels, self-reported prosocial behavior, or behaviorally measured prosocial behavior. These results are important because they suggest brief exposure to negative content on social media is not enough to alter behavior or change empathy levels.

Mentor: Dr. Ciarocco

Poster Session

Pozycki Hall Lobby 11:00 AM – 11:30 AM

Mark Cabrera

New Future Dreams Behavioral Health, Lakewood, NJ: Day program for individuals with psychiatric illnesses

Mentor: Dr. Goodwin

Giavanna Delligatti & Grace Fecsko

Abilities in Action, Wall & Shrewsbury, NJ: Pediatric Therapy – Occupational therapy

Mentor: Dr. Goodwin

Ava DiGioia

Worrywell Collective, Red Bank, NJ: Neuropsychology group private practice

Mentor: Dr. Goodwin

Clara Ford

Middletown North High School, Middletown, NJ: School counseling

Mentor: Dr. Goodwin

Julia Greco, Samantha Romano, & Lia Williams

Center for Vocational Rehabilitation, Eatontown, NJ: Non-profit vocational rehabilitation for disabled individuals

Mentor: Dr. Goodwin

Jenna Pica & Anna Dioguardi
SpOT On Therapy Services, Red Bank, NJ: Pediatric therapy – occupational & speech
Mentor: Dr. Goodwin

Brianna Stoerrle
Calm Shores Counseling, LLC, Point Pleasant, NJ: Counseling private practice
Mentor: Dr. Goodwin

Ashley Myers
The Therapy Institute, LLC
Mentor: Dr. Dinella

Madison Garrett
Long Branch Senior Center
Mentor: Dr. Dinella

Julia Buck
Center for Vocational Rehabilitation
Mentor: Dr. Dinella

Isabella Arieno
Asbury Parks Department of Social Services
Mentor: Dr. Dinella

Haley Tischler
Neuropsychology Rehabilitation Services Lifespan
Mentor: Dr. Dinella

Margaret Kane
Markham Place School, School Counseling
Mentor: Dr. Dinella

Kelsie Butler
The Turner Syndrome Foundation
Mentor: Dr. Dinella

Jessica Magnaye
Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Coastal and Northern New Jersey
Mentor: Dr. Dinella

Marie-Anne Jean
Rebirth Recovery Center
Mentor: Dr. Dinella

Alexa Olsen
New Jersey Reentry Corporation
Mentor: Dr. Dinella

Gabriella Allen

The Intuitive Mind

This study examined the relationship between personality traits, such as empathy and neuroticism, and the individual's gut instinct accuracy. We predicted that higher levels of empathy would be associated with greater gut instinct accuracy and that higher neuroticism would relate to lower gut instinct accuracy. Eighty participants completed assessments of empathy and neuroticism followed by viewing four short movie clips. After each movie clip, participants answered a multiple-choice question predicting what would happen next, relying on the participants immediate gut instinct. Contrary to our prediction, the results did not reveal significant relationships between empathy, neuroticism, and gut instinct accuracy. These results imply that intuitive decision-making may be more strongly influenced by other circumstances. The study is important because we frequently make rapid decisions in our daily lives, whether it's judging ethical behavior, spotting danger, or interpreting social cues. Understanding what affects these intuitive decisions can help explain why some people read social or emotional cues better than others, how anxiety or emotional reactivity may affect our judgment, and what makes one person more attuned than another.

Mentor: Dr. Ciarocco

Courtney Parise

The Impact of Perceived Environmental Exposure on Selective Attention Capabilities

This study evaluated the influence of environmental exposure on selective attention. Thirty-eight university students were randomly assigned to view a video of a natural environment or an urban environment. An online attentional measure was used to assess selective attention based on the number of errors made and the total test execution time. Additionally, a connectedness to nature questionnaire was administered to gauge participants' subjective sense of connection to the natural world. As predicted, individuals who viewed a natural environment performed better on an attentional measure than those who viewed an urban environment. Although the results of this study were not statistically significant, they could be used to help facilitate further research regarding the Attention Restoration Theory (Kaplan, 1989, 1995) and the role of environmental influences on cognitive functioning.

Mentor: Dr. Ciarocco

Kacper Sobieszuk

How Culture Shapes the Way We Love and Communicate?

This study examined how cultural background influences the way college students navigate romantic relationships. Seventy-two participants completed three self-report questionnaires assessing emotional expression, communication style, and romantic loneliness. Using a quasi-experimental two-group design, the study compared the responses of U.S. and international students. Independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to assess differences between the groups. In contrast to hypotheses, results showed that U.S. students reported significantly greater romantic loneliness than international students, and international students reported more direct communication styles. While U.S. students were slightly more emotionally expressive, this difference was not statistically significant. These findings suggest that nationality may influence how students communicate and feel in romantic settings and may help universities support intercultural connection and student integration.

Mentor: Dr. Ciarocco

Sophia Curcio

Paw-sitive Impact: The Relationship Between Pet Ownership, Mental Health, and Academic Success in College

This study examined the relationship between pet ownership, mental health and academic success. Participants were undergraduate students at Monmouth University currently enrolled in a psychology course. Participants ($N = 120$) were recruited through the SONA participation pool where they completed a 15-minute online Qualtrics survey. It was hypothesized that students who own a pet would report better overall mental health and academic success. Results showed that pet ownership was not significantly correlated with either mental health or academic success in undergraduate students.

Mentor: Dr. Mehrkam

Brooke Sommer

Healing Paws: The Role of Companion Dogs and on PTSD Symptom Management

This study examined the effects of companion dog ownership and those who are diagnosed or exhibit Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms. There were two samples for participation in this study. One sample was from undergraduate Monmouth University students and second was from the general population. The correlations between loneliness, living situation, PTSD symptoms, and companion dog ownership was not significant. These results supported that there are no correlations between those who live alone, loneliness levels, or those who own a companion dog on their PTSD symptoms.

Mentor: Dr. Mehrkam

Christopher Geraud

Tails of Growth: Understanding how Human-Animal Interaction Shapes Only-Children

This study investigates the impact of human-animal interaction (HAI) on the emotional and social development of only-children. While past research has explored sibling support, birth order, and pet ownership independently, the present study seeks to integrate these topics to examine whether pets could bring about the same support that sibling-children receive from their siblings. It was hypothesized that only-children with pet companions would display similar levels of interpersonal sensitivity and emotional regulation as children with siblings. It was also hypothesized that participants who own pets will show higher levels of these variables than those who did not own pets. A total of 176 participants, varying in pet ownership history and sibling status, completed questionnaires assessing interpersonal sensitivity, pet attachment, and emotional regulation. Results revealed that there was no significant difference between only-children and sibling-children in interpersonal sensitivity, emotional regulation, and pet attachment. Similarly, there were no significant differences on these variables when it came to pet ownership. Although there were no significant results to support the hypotheses, this research aids in opening the door for further investigation into the roles pets play in child development, particularly only-children.

Mentor: Dr. Mehrkam

Mariam Khalil

Pawsitive Impact: Pets, Mood, and Resilience

This study examines the positive effects between pets and their owners. The bond between pets and their owners is a unique and powerful relationship that significantly influences human well-being. This study explores the psychological and physical benefits of pet ownership, with a specific focus on emotional resilience and overall mood. Research suggests that owning a pet can foster positive emotional experiences, improve mental health, and encourage physical activity, which in turn benefits overall health. The present study seeks to understand how owning different types of pets for a certain amount of time can affect our moods and emotions differently. A total of 98 participants with different

pets and pet ownership time frame completed a series of three questionnaires about resilience levels, emotional reactivity levels, and pet and emotions levels. Participants signed up through the SONA participation pool to complete these questionnaires. Results show no significant associations among owning a pet for different amounts of time on emotions, mood, and resilience levels. Although results have shown to be not significant, this is a closer step to understanding pet ownership in a different aspect.

Mentor: Dr. Mehrkam

Madison Kapuscinski

Fur-ever in Our Hearts: The Effect of Coping Strategies on Pet Owners' Bereavement:

The current study examined the effect of diverse coping strategies on pet bereavement. One hundred seventeen participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions, journaling, or meditation, and were given a pre and post-test pet bereavement questionnaire to measure their level of grief. It was hypothesized that pet owners would feel less grief after they journaled than before they journaled. It was also hypothesized that pet owners would feel less grief after they meditated than before they meditated. Additionally, it was hypothesized that pet owners who journaled would feel less grief than pet owners did before they meditated. However, after they meditated, the feelings of grief would be similar, but less pronounced. Results revealed that there were significant differences in participants' self-reported grief levels before they journaled and after they journaled. In addition, significant differences in participants' grief levels before they meditated and after they meditated were observed. However, there were no significant differences between the coping strategies and their effect on levels of grief. The findings of this study aim to enhance future research on different coping strategies and their influence on pet bereavement.

Mentor: Dr. Mehrkam

Bridget Collins

The Impact of Pet Ownership on Empathy Development

This study explores the relationship between empathy levels and pet ownership, aiming to understand how owning pets may influence a person's emotional sensitivity and ability to empathize with other humans. Empathy, defined as the capacity to understand and share the feelings of others, plays a vital role in fostering meaningful social connections, emotional intelligence, and overall mental well-being. Pet ownership, particularly of companion animals such as dogs and cats, is often associated with emotional bonding, caregiving, and affectionate interaction. These experiences may contribute to heightened emotional awareness and empathy toward others. The primary focus of this research is to determine whether individuals who own pets exhibit higher levels of empathy compared to those who do not own pets. To investigate this, the study utilized a self-report questionnaire to measure empathy levels across both groups. The questionnaire assessed components such as emotional reactivity, perspective-taking, and compassionate behavior. Additionally, this study explored the role of pet attachment, how emotionally connected individuals feel to their pet, and whether this attachment influences overall empathy levels. By considering both the presence of pets and the emotional connection owners have with them, the study aims to provide better understanding of how human animal relationships affect interpersonal functioning. The findings may reveal valuable insights into the psychological benefits of pet ownership, such as improved emotional health, greater social connectedness, and stronger interpersonal relationships. These outcomes could inform future applications in mental health care, including therapy animal programs and broader use of animal-assisted interventions.

Mentor: Dr. Mehrkam

Cami Chase

“Observe, Conclude, Delete...Or Desire”

This study evaluated an individual’s willingness to socialize with a person with obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). Existing research indicates stigma for people with varying mental health concerns exists and that men with OCD in particular may experience socially-based challenges. One hundred and twenty college students read vignettes that described a man or a woman with or without OCD and then they articulated their willingness to socialize with the individual described. A modified version of the Social Distance Survey by Bogardus et al. (1966) was utilized to assess the participants’ levels of stigma. Contrary to prediction, the results did not indicate significant differences in mental health stigma for men versus women or for people with versus without OCD. This study holds importance as it adds to the literature about OCD and perceived challenges that individuals with this complex disorder may face.

Mentor: Dr. Dinella

Alyssa Korch

GAMEBOY? Why Not GAMEGIRL?

Game publishers prioritize a male audience despite 46% of gamers being women (Entertainment Software Association, 2024; Paaßen et al., 2017). Research shows that women do play video games, but not “hardcore” games as defined as games with increased difficulty, violence, and (more) time commitment (Blackburn & Scharrer, 2019). This study seeks to understand why hardcore games fail to intrigue women. It is hypothesized that exposure to gender stereotypes about women and gaming will lower women’s comfort, self-efficacy, interest and win rates within gaming. Participants were randomly assigned to view non-binary video game characters or sexually objectified characters. They were then asked to complete three questionnaires about their comfort, self-efficacy and gaming interest. Then they were asked to play two rounds of a fighting video game and record their win rates. Although the expected gender differences between men and women’s interest and comfort with gaming were replicated as anticipated, the exposure to sexist images did not decrease women’s responses or ability. Future research should focus on using standardized measures and investigate women’s prior knowledge about gender differences in gamer’s experiences.

Mentor: Dr. Dinella

Paper Session III

Pozycki Auditorium 11:30 AM – 12:25 PM

Moderator: Haley M. Tischler, President of Psi Chi

Maya Ruderman

Pretty Professional

The professional success of women is often influenced by societal perceptions of beauty and age, yet little research has explored how these two factors interact (Aberg, Kukkonen, & Sarpila, 2020; Berggren et al., 2010). This study examined how perceived beauty and age affect perceptions of women’s success in professional settings. 120 undergraduate participants were randomly assigned to view one of four sets of images depicting women who varied in perceived beauty (beautiful vs. not beautiful) and age (young vs. old). Participants then completed a perceived success questionnaire evaluating the women’s perceived intelligence, achievement, work ethic, and leadership. Results are expected to show that women perceived as beautiful will be rated more likely to achieve success in a professional setting as opposed to women perceived as not beautiful, women perceived as young will be

rated more likely to achieve success as opposed to women perceived as old, and women perceived as beautiful and young will be rated more successful compared to those perceived as not beautiful and old. This study highlights the continued presence of appearance and age-based biases, as well as the need to address how these perceptions shape women's opportunities for advancement in the workplace. Findings may inform organizational policies aimed at reducing discrimination and promoting equality in professional evaluations.

Mentor: Dr. Dinella

Sierra Michel and Gia Angelo

Pinwheel Place, Eatontown, NJ: Crisis nursery

Mentors: Dr. Goodwin & Dr. Dinella

Olivia Puzio

Manly? Womanly? Not?

This study evaluated if a person's perceptions regarding personality traits are influenced by the gender of their siblings. One hundred and eighteen participants answered a questionnaire measuring how masculine or feminine they believed a variety of traits were, as well as answering a questionnaire about their siblings. It was predicted that participants from families with all boys and families with boy and girl siblings would agree with gender-typed perceptions of personality traits, whereas families with all-girl siblings would disagree with gender-typed perceptions of traits. As a result, after using a repeated-measures analysis of variance, it was found that there were no significant differences between sibling constellations on their perceptions of how gender-typed traits are. Interestingly, when presented with neutral personality traits, participants with all-boy siblings perceived the neutral traits to be more masculine, whereas participants with all-girl siblings perceived the same traits as being more feminine. These findings indicate perceptions of personality traits are influenced by social factors, reaffirming that personality traits are socially constructed rather than innate.

Mentor: Dr. Dinella

Celeste Tracey

Paws and Relax: The Effect of Watching Animal Videos on Stress and Test Performance

This study aimed to examine if animal content videos could lower stress and increase test performance in college students. Ninety participants (all MU undergraduate students) were randomly assigned to watch one of three videos; a video of a dog, a video of a cat, or a nature video (control condition). Participants were administered both a pre- and post-stress test to evaluate their stress levels before the video and after. Each participant was also given a grade-school level timed multiplication test to measure their test performance to take immediately after seeing the video. While the results did not show that stress levels lowered and test performance increased, there was an increase in stress only for those students who watched the nature video (control condition), suggesting it was not successful in buffering stress as effectively as the dog and cat videos were. The findings of this study contribute new knowledge of how human-animal interactions in virtual modalities may help reduce stress in college students.

Mentor: Dr. Mehrkam

Rafael Martinez Ponce

Art's Effect on Perceptions of Beauty

Given that beauty standards are socially constructed (Rahbari et al., 2018), the goal of this study is to explore what Monmouth University students find beautiful. This study used art to gauge the perceptions of beauty at Monmouth. Using a within-subjects repeated design with four groups, students were tasked with rating and ranking the beauty of an AI generated image of a classically beautiful woman.

This image was then altered to fit into four different art styles: photograph, oil painting, sculpture and impressionism. Given the historical context of oil and sculpture, I expected students to rank these art styles as more beautiful than photography or impressionism. The results showed that while they were ranked higher than impressionism, photography was ranked higher than all other art styles. This may be due to photos being much more prevalent in college-student culture than other art styles or that students are not exposed to other art styles and therefore lack their historical context.

Mentor: Dr. Dinella

Rachel Ruiz

Paws and Hearts: Unraveling the Influence of Dogs and Cats on the Dynamics of Romantic Relationships
The objective of this study was to see if dogs and cats influence romantic relationships, regarding trust, intimacy, commitment, satisfaction, love and overall relationship quality. A total of 120 participants from Monmouth University and the general population took a relationship questionnaire to answer questions about different aspects of their relationship followed by a demographics questionnaire. It was hypothesized that there would be a significant difference in the means between each of the subscales for the different types of pet owners. A one-way ANOVA revealed no significant differences in the means of the subscales (trust, intimacy, commitment, satisfaction, love and overall relationship quality) of the following types of pet owners: dog owners, cat owners, dog and cat owners, and no pets/other pets. The hypothesis was not supported. The results of this study encourage more research to be done in the area of dogs and cats in romantic relationships, as the literature needs expanding.

Mentor: Dr. Mehrkam

Danielle Salama

Listen To Me!

Phubbing: A Sequence of Devaluing Women

The current study investigates the new phenomena called “phubbing,” which is when you ignore someone in person to attend to your phone. Existing research indicates that women are more sensitive to being phone snubbed, and the current experiment investigates if their experiences with societal sexism might be the underlying explanation for this gender difference. Each woman read either an article on sexism or a neutral article and was then exposed to a staged phubbing interaction. The sexism-primed group was predicted to report more emotional sensitivity to being phubbed. Results showed that the difference in phubbing sensitivity between groups was not significant. The phubbing sensitivity scale, however, demonstrated high internal consistency ($\alpha = .87$), which indicates strong measurement reliability. These results suggest that phubbing might not have a stronger effect than broader social issues, and they highlight how complex the relationship is between what is going on around us and how we see ourselves. Further studies should test alternative moderators and stronger priming procedures. Interestingly, the results indicate that phubbing is potentially becoming normalized, given that all women participants were only moderately distressed by being phubbed by the researcher.

Mentor: Dr. Dinella

Paper Session IV

Pozycki Auditorium 12:30 PM – 1:30 PM

Moderator: Haley M. Tischler, President of Psi Chi

Amber West

How “Chilly” is it at Monmouth?

In the current study, 130 undergraduate students from a private university completed the *Perceived Climate Scale*, a 28 item, 7- point Likert scale survey (Janz & Pyke, 2000) that asked about their perceptions of the “chilly climate” at Monmouth University. The “chilly climate” refers to a concept in which women may experience a “chilling” feeling if they are being subtly discriminated against in their college classrooms (Hall & Sandler, 1982). There has been past research that has supported that women do feel as though subtle sexism occurs in college classrooms, but other research has supported that sexist classroom practices may no longer exist in modern classrooms. The results showed that students at Monmouth do perceive a “chilly climate” in their classrooms and women perceive it more than men. It was not supported that the gender of the professor or the student’s major at Monmouth impacts their perceptions. There may be other factors that cause students to perceive a “chilly climate” in their classrooms.

Mentor: Dr. Dinella

Archie Bird IV, Sunny Decker, Jenn Eisele, and Celeste Tracey

Reflections from Field Experience in Animal Behavior

Mentor: Dr. Mehrkam

Magali Umana

Wanted Qualities in a Romantic Partner

This current study was conducted to see if there are any correlations between the feminine and masculine emotional expression that an individual's parents might have and what those individuals want in a potential romantic partner. It was hypothesized that participants who have parents who gender their emotional expression will wish for a romantic partner who also has gender-conforming emotional expression. A sample of 112 Monmouth University students completed one survey for each of their “parent figures” (P1 = Mother, P2 = Father) gendered emotional expression and one survey for a potential romantic partner gendered emotional expression. The results indicated that the more gender-conforming feminine expression mothers had, the more likely the participants wanted a romantic partner that had gender-conforming feminine expression. The father’s gender-conforming feminine emotional expression did not predict the romantic partners' feminine emotional expression. The more gender-conforming masculine expressions mothers had, the higher the probability that the participants wanted a romantic partner with a gender-conforming masculine expression, indicating that although fathers gendered conforming emotional expressions did not predict the desired romantic partners gendered emotional expression, the mothers gendered conforming emotional expression did predict.

Mentor: Dr. Dinella

Mackenzie Vreeland

‘Tail-Wagging’ Your Way to a Match: Influences of ‘Swiping Right’ on Tinder

The present study examined the influences of dog breed and dog presence in online dating profiles on ‘swiping’ behaviors (i.e. interest level in profile) on Tinder. Also, researchers examined the influences of dog presence on perceptions of ‘red flags’ (i.e. toxic traits) in online dating profile bios. Ninety-one

students enrolled in psychology courses at Monmouth University were instructed to analyze one of three randomly assigned online dating profile pictures of a female/male with either a dog not present, a Goldendoodle present, or a pit bull present. The participants then completed the Likelihood to Swipe Questionnaire, which asked if they would swipe right (interested), neutral (nor am or am not interested), or swipe left (not interested). Then, all participants were asked to analyze one of two randomly assigned 'red flag' online dating profile bios of a female/male with either a dog not present or a dog present in the photo attached to the bio. Participants were asked to complete the same questionnaire again, as well as complete the Positive Partner Attributes measure by rating the profiler's perceived trust, respect, commitment, and communication score. The manipulation checks were included on the demographics page and the Likelihood to Swipe Questionnaire, which asked the participant whether or not they saw a dog in the profiles. It was hypothesized that a dog being present and the breed being a Goldendoodle in profile pictures would make users more likely to 'swipe right' than a dog not being present or the breed being a pit bull. Also, it was hypothesized that users would be more likely to 'swipe right' on a dating profile with 'red flags' when a dog is present than when a dog is not present. Contrary to the hypotheses, there were no significant differences found to support the conditions when looking at the users' perceptions and their likelihood to swipe. Implications and future research directions will be discussed.

Mentor: Dr. Mehrkam

Alyssa Rodriguez

What's So Funny?: The Harm in Humor

The effects of comedy on audiences has been researched for quite some time now, with multiple studies finding a relationship between comedy topics and positive attitudes towards marginalized groups (Riquelme et al., 2021; Thomae & Viki, 2013; Vizcaíno-Cuenca et al., 2024; Weber et al., 2023). I hypothesized that participants who viewed a disabled comedians' performance would report higher positive attitudes towards marginalized groups and proclivity to action in support of marginalized groups. In this study, 101 undergraduate participants were randomly assigned to watch a comedy clip that discussed disability, feminism or a neutral topic. This study examined the effects of comedy on audience members. An attitudes and actions questionnaire was used to score the participants' attitudes towards marginalized groups as well as their proclivity to action in support of marginalized groups. Contrary to our hypotheses, there were no significant differences based on the topic of the comedy performance, challenging previous findings on comedy and its effects on audiences. These results emphasized the importance of investigating other factors in attitudes towards marginalized groups, such as implicit biases and social reinforcers. This study promotes the importance of research on disability and gender.

Mentor: Dr. Dinella

Maggie Ryan

Buffer or Bluff: The Effects of Dog Videos on Stress and Self-Esteem During a Challenging Task

This study investigated whether exposure to a short dog video could buffer individuals against the effects of stress by improving self-esteem and reducing stress levels. Participants ($N = 31$) were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: (1) no video, (2) video before the stress task, or (3) video before and during the stress task. Participants completed pre- and post-task assessments of self-esteem and stress using the State Self-Esteem Scale (SSES) and State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI). The stress task consisted of a series of unsolvable anagrams, designed to temporarily lower self-esteem and increase stress. It was hypothesized that those who viewed the dog video both before and during the task would report the highest self-esteem and lowest stress levels, followed by those who viewed the video only before the task. A 3 (condition) \times 2 (time: pre, post) Repeated Measures ANOVA was used to analyze the data. Results revealed a significant main effect of time, indicating that the stress task

successfully increased stress and decreased self-esteem. However, there were no significant main effects of condition or interaction effects between time and condition for either outcome variable. These findings suggest that, under the conditions of this study, dog video exposure did not significantly buffer participants from the effects of the stress task. Limitations and directions for future research are discussed.

Mentor: Dr. Mehrkam

Leilani Alma

Athletes Today

Mental health stigma can be a barrier to someone seeking the help they need, which is concerning for athletes given that research indicates that high-pressure competitive environments increase risk for mental health concerns (Russell et al., 2022). Research also shows stigma in men is higher for them than for women (Younan et al., 2019). This study examines whether gender differences exist in rates of mental health stigma held for men versus women athletes. Participants were shown a series of men and women athletes and given vignettes about their mental health, and then participants were asked to complete a survey assessing the level of mental health stigma they held regarding the athletes. This within-subjects experimental design will reveal whether participants judge men versus women athletes differently. It is anticipated that male athletes will receive more stigma than women athletes. Other implications and further research will be discussed.

Mentor: Dr. Dinella

Dear Celeste,

We are so incredibly proud of you. Watching you reach this moment fills our heart with overwhelming joy and admiration. We've seen the late nights, the sacrifices, the self-doubt, and the quiet moments of perseverance that got you here. You earned every bit of this accomplishment.

This isn't just the end of a chapter — it's the beginning of something even more beautiful. You've proven that you can overcome, that you can rise, and that you are capable of more than you even realize. Hold that truth close as you step into the next part of your journey.

You inspire us — with your strength, your kindness, your courage, and your heart. Wherever life leads you next, we know you'll leave your mark, because you always show up with everything you've got.

Celebrate this moment. You deserve it more than words can say.

With all our love,
Mom, Grandmom, Enzo, Jade, Alex, and Georgia



Dear Maddie,

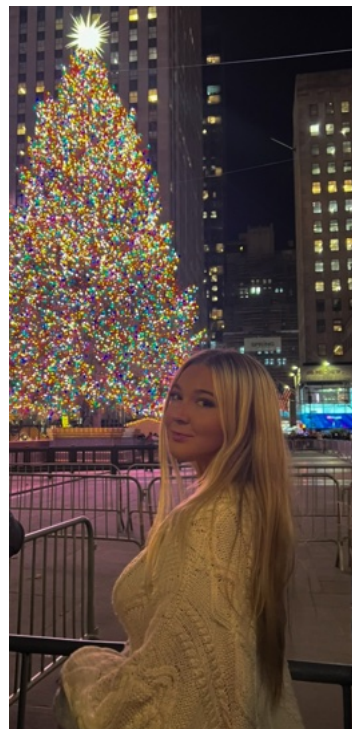
You are nothing short of amazing and words can never express how SO VERY PROUD we are of you. Your hard work and dedication are just one example of what you are capable of. We can't wait to see your presentation of your thesis, we know it will be great. We know you will continue your success in Grad school as we continue to watch you grow and succeed.

The world is yours to make what you may and choose your path. Don't be afraid to make mistakes because that's when growth happens. Keep on smiling with your beautiful smile, sense of humor and carry all your experiences with you proudly. You're beautiful, intelligent and unstoppable - this will bring you anywhere you desire in life.

Remember the journey is just as important as the accomplishment, so keep having fun along the way. God Bless you always Maddie. Thanks for being the best daughter we could ask for. We love you and you will always be my baby girl.

Love You Always Maddie girl!

Mom, Karl and our woofs (Lola, Runty, Boca and Sadie)



Congratulations Maggie Ryan on the completion of your thesis and graduation. We are so proud of you! You did it!

Love,

Mom & Dad

Maeve, Nora, Meghan,

John, Liam & Dan



CONGRATULATIONS OLIVIA!

This achievement is a testament to your hard work and determination! We are so incredibly proud of your dedication and amazing work ethic. You have the creativity to do whatever you can dream. We cannot wait to see you present your research and to celebrate this accomplishment!

Love,
Mom, Dad, Julia & Alexa



Sunny May,

You can't be afraid of heights
When you are at the top!

Be proud of you!
Good luck at Columbia!

I love you!!!! -mommy



Alyssa, you have always been an inspiration to us. From your early years, we recognized your special qualities, and as a teenager, your immense potential was evident. Now, as a young adult, it's truly rewarding to see everything coming together for you. Witnessing your excellence and your wholehearted embrace of each step in your journey is incredibly gratifying. During your time at Monmouth University, you have grown tremendously, both intellectually and professionally. This is just the beginning of an extraordinary journey where you will continue to grow, improve, and undoubtedly shine. We are immensely proud of you, and you can always count on us to be there, celebrating all your future achievements

Love Mom, Dad, Jordan and Kaitlyn



Dear Alyssa,

Today is a celebration of your hard work, dedication, and brilliance — the culmination of years of learning, growing, and dreaming. Watching you reach this milestone fills us with indescribable pride and joy.

From the moment you began this journey, your passion, resilience, and curiosity have lit the path forward. You've embraced challenges with grace and courage, and your commitment to excellence has inspired everyone around you.

As you present your work today, remember **you are ready**. You are more than enough. And no matter what comes next, you have already achieved something truly extraordinary.

We're standing beside you, cheering you on with full hearts.

With love, pride, and endless admiration —

Congratulations, Alyssa. This is just the beginning.

Love always,

Your biggest fans 🧡

Mom and Dad



Congratulations on completing your internship and on graduation, Haley! We want you to know how incredibly proud we are of you. Watching you grow and achieve so much has been the greatest joy, and you have amazed us with your dedication, strength, and kindness. Your commitment and passion with everything you involve yourself in inspires us. You are a remarkable young lady who embraces every challenge and isn't afraid to shoot for the stars.

Good luck at Villanova next year! We can't wait to see where your next chapter brings you. Keep putting love out into the world and keep chasing your dreams.

Love always,

Mom, Dad, Jake, Tex, Roxie & Ozzy



Congratulations Brielle! Always so proud of your hard work, especially this semester. We know this presentation will be amazing, and we are so excited to see it. We love you so much. Love you always,
Mom, Dad and Ava

Dear Amber,

To say we are proud would be an understatement.

You are chasing all your dreams and we can't wait to see you accomplish everything you set out to do.

Congrats!

We love you!

Dad & Mom



Congratulations, students! Your accomplishments and impact truly embody the department motto: Pick Your Little Piece of the World and Improve It! May your hard work and passion continue to inspire your peers, mentors and colleagues. Bravo on this amazing achievement!

Wishing you all the best in the future,
Joann Greco

MONMOUTH UNIVERSITY | PSYCHOLOGY

Success is liking yourself, liking what you do and liking how you do it. ~ Maya Angelou

On behalf of the Department of Psychology faculty, we are so proud of you for achieving a major milestone in your academic careers. We wish you continued success in what you do and who you choose to be, both personally and professionally.

All the very best,
Dr. Hatchard
Chair of Psychology

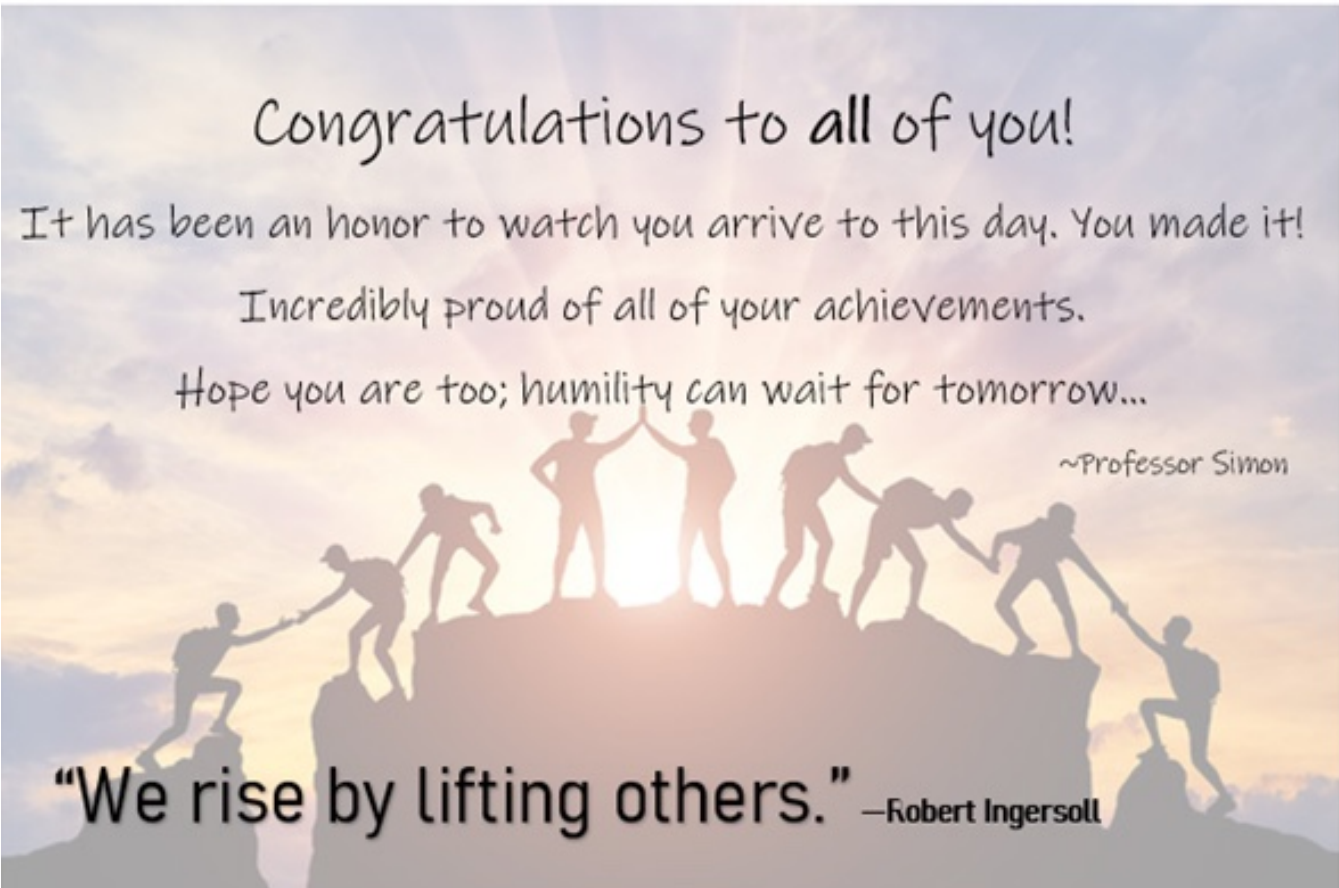
Congratulations to *all* of you!

It has been an honor to watch you arrive to this day. You made it!

Incredibly proud of all of your achievements.

Hope you are too; humility can wait for tomorrow...

~Professor Simon

A silhouette illustration of a group of people climbing a mountain peak. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow behind the figures. The people are in various stages of ascent, with some reaching the top and others still climbing. The overall mood is one of achievement and teamwork.

"We rise by lifting others." —Robert Ingersoll