COGNITIVE AGING LAB NEWSLETTER

Understanding the aging brain | Dr. Lixia Yang

A Message From the CAL Team

Welcome! The Cognitive Aging Lab will now be publishing a biannual newsletter providing key findings from our latest research. This newsletter also gives our readers information on any upcoming studies and/or opportunities to get involved. The purpose of this newsletter is to make our latest knowledge of cognitive aging and its practical implications accessible to our community. We would like to acknowledge and thank all our past and present research participants for their time, effort, and support. Our work would not be possible without this generosity. If you have any questions or comments on anything published in this issue, please find our contact information in the "where to find us" box (page 6).

How to Remember a Familiar Face

Mariah Lecompte & Dr. Lixia Yang

In her Master's thesis, Mariah Lecompte conducted an online study to investigate and compare the memory of young and older adults. This study tested memory strategies and discovered novel findings regarding how to increase the accuracy of both young and older adults' memory when given the task of remembering a person's face and a piece of information about them. The results of this study found that …

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older and younger adults find occupations significantly easier to remember than names regardless of the emotional expression of a person's face. Interestingly, we also discovered that people showing a happy expression were easier to remember than those showing an angry expression when paired with an occupation. Altogether, this suggests that if you want to introduce yourself to young or older adults and increase your likelihood of being correctly remembered, the best way to introduce yourself is by your career, with a huge smile on your face.

The Mental Health of Chinese Canadians During the Pandemic

Linke Yu, Mariah Lecompte, Weiguo Zhang, Peizhong Wang, Lixia Yang

Funded by the New Frontiers Research Fund, Dr. Lixia Yang and Dr. Peizhong Wang investigated the mental health conditions among 471 Mainland Chinese living in Canada, including which sociodemographic and COVID-19 related factors predicted these mental health outcomes. Using an online study, the results revealed that moderate to severe depression, anxiety, and stress levels were reported by 11.3%, 10.8%, 8.10% of participants, respectively. Importantly, employment status, financial status, health status, and perceived discrimination predicted mental health symptoms. Predictors for COVID-19 included engagement in certain precautionary behaviours, knowledge of the virus, and particular experiences with the pandemic. Overall, these findings help identify predictors for greater distress among Mainland Chinese Canadians, a population that is especially vulnerable given the rise in anti-Asian racism during the pandemic.

If you need mental health support, please visit https://toronto.cmha.ca/help-for-seniors/, or call the Ontario Community Helpline, (Tel: 211).

HOW TO GET INVOLVED: RYERSON SENIOR PARTICIPANT POOL

Loneliness, Support, & Life Satisfaction of Chinese Canadians

Chang Su, Lixia Yang, Linying Dong, Weiguo Zhang

Funded by the RBC Immigrant, Diversity, and Inclusion Project, Dr. Yang and colleagues conducted an online study examining the effects of loneliness, social support and life satisfaction on the psychological well-being of 168 Chinese older adults living in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results demonstrated that psychological well-being was positively predicted by life satisfaction and perceived social support and negatively predicted by loneliness. Further, life satisfaction partially mediated the effect of social support on psychological well-being and fully mediated the effect of loneliness on psychological well-being. These results help inform possible community service approaches in enhancing social support and reducing loneliness to promote the psychological well-being of Chinese older adults living in Canada during COVID-19.

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Social Media & COVID-19-Related Anxiety

Dr. Linying Dong, Dr. Lixia Yang, Mariah Lecompte, Alexandra Katsiris, & Cassandra Skrotzki

Does social media help or harm the mental health of older adults during this pandemic? Previous research has demonstrated the benefit of social connection on the psychological wellbeing of older adults, but it is unclear whether using social media as a means of social connection provides these same positive effects. The relationship between mental wellbeing and social media has become especially important to understand, as the COVID-19 crisis has caused older adults to become more reliant on these online platforms to maintain connections and combat isolation. Our lab attempted to understand whether social media can be a resource to older adults by examining its direct and indirect effects on COVID-19 anxiety. To test this, 190 participants completed an online survey that evaluated their social media use and assessed the presence of depression, anxiety, and/or distress symptoms. Overall, we found that those who shared negative information online were more likely to experience COVID-19-anxiety. Interestingly, we found that the type of social connection maintained on social media was a significant predictor of this harmful behaviour (i.e., disseminating negative information). Specifically, those who spent more time connecting with ...
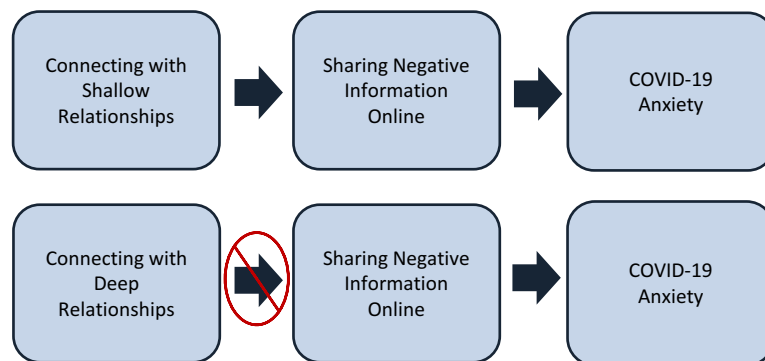
Conceptual model developed from social media study results.

Ryerson University

"shallow relationships" online (i.e., an acquaintance, lacking an emotional connection), were more likely to share negative information and therefore more likely to experience COVID-19-anxiety. However, participants who spent more time connecting with "deep relationships" online (i.e., close friends and family) were less likely to engage in this risky behaviour and thus significantly less likely to experience this COVID-19-related anxiety. While findings from this study are preliminary, they do provide some practical knowledge for social media use, as we continue to rely on it for social connection during the pandemic. Who do you use social media to connect with?

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JACKMAN FOUNDATION PSYCHOLOGY RESEARCH EXCELLENCE
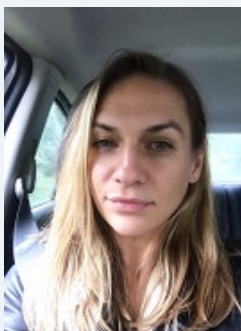
Kathryn Bolton, a graduate student in our research lab, was awarded the Jackman Foundation Psychology Research Excellence Grant, an award presented to graduate students in the Psychology MA or PhD program at Ryerson University. Applicants are evaluated based on the scientific merit of their proposed study, the applicant's research approach, the originality of their proposal, and the impact of the planned research project. Kathryn received this award for her thesis project which aims to understand how the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted psychosocial wellbeing as it relates to cognition in older adults. She plans to use the Jackman Foundation Psychology Research Excellence Award to support the operational costs of her thesis project.

COVID-19 Related Risk Perceptions Among Chinese Canadians

Mariah Lecompte, Dr. Alyssa Counsell, Dr. Peizhong Wang, Dr. Weiguo Zhang, & Dr. Lixia Yang

An online study was launched during the peak of the first wave of COVID-19 to identify demographic predictors for COVID-19 risk perception among Chinese residents in Canada. It was found that increased COVID-19 personal experience was associated with an increase of self-infection risk perception, perceiving the pandemic as a real threat, and infection rate prediction. We also found that gender was associated with higher future infection rate prediction, with women predicting an 18% higher future infection rate than men. This suggests that among our sample of Chinese residents in Canada, knowledge of others with confirmed, suspected, or possible COVID-19 was related to an increase of personal and general risk perception and that participants with COVID-19 experience and females in our sample had higher percentages of future infection rate predictions.

WHERE TO FIND US

Email us at cal@ryerson.ca if you have any questions or comments on this issue.

Check out our Twitter @CogAgeLab to get our latest research updates.

Visit our website to learn more about our research lab at https://psychlabs.ryerson.ca/cal/ .

Check out our Facebook page to get our latest research updates.

CLICK THE LOGOS!

Special Congratulations

The Cognitive Aging Lab would like to extend congratulations to the following lab members for their recent academic successes. Mariah LeCompte successfully defended her Master's Thesis comparing memory strategies in younger and older adults. Kesaan Kandasamy successfully defended his Master's thesis examining inhibition and cognitive control of older and younger adults. Both Mariah and Kesaan have started their PhD placements following their defense. Lingqian Li successfully defended her dissertation on age-related deficits in associative memory. She has now completed her PhD under the supervision of Dr. Lixia Yang. Well done Mariah, Kesaan, and Lingqian!

MEET OUR TEAM

From top left: Dr. Lixia Yang (PhD, Lab Director, Professor); Max Marshall (RA); Kathryn Bolton (MA student); Mariah Lecompte (PhD student); Angela Xiang (RA, Lab Manager); Sonja Givetash (MA student); Kesaan Kandasamy (PhD student); Alexandra Katsiris (RA); Abbisha Saseekaran (RA, thesis student); Cassandra Skrotzki (PhD student)

Not Pictured: Lingqian Li (PhD student), Natalie Loserro (RA), Sana Junaid (RA), Julia Scaringi (RA)