
Navigating the ‘New’ Normal: Completing a Thesis Two Years into the Pandemic

A warm welcome and happy reading of the third issue of the McMaster Undergraduate Journal of Social Psychology! The 2022 publication marks a pivotal transition of the editorial team of the McMaster Undergraduate Journal of Social Psychology. After developing, cultivating, and guiding the journal and its editorial team since its inception in 2019, Namya Tandon has stepped down as the Editor-in-Chief. Namya’s contributions to the journal and research & knowledge translation activities for Social Psychology undergraduate students is inspiring and transformative. Namya has created an outlet for students to share their research and engage with other student researchers, learning about the human lived experiences of undergraduate students at McMaster, providing a platform for so many to have their voices and experiences heard, recognized, and respected. Namya has created and made such an important contribution and legacy. Namya – the entire past, present, and future editorial team, students, and readers thank you for creating the McMaster Undergraduate Journal of Social Psychology! It has been a pleasure to work alongside such an intelligent, engaged, and passionate individual since the journal’s inception. Namya is currently completing her law degree at Western Ontario. The world is lucky to have such an intelligent, caring, just, and ethical person entering the law profession, ready to make a difference in the lives of others. You are inspiring! You will be greatly missed, but the entire team wishes you success in all your future endeavours.

The McMaster Undergraduate Journal of Social Psychology is pleased to welcome Raisa Jadavji, recently graduated 4th year Social Psychology Student, as the new Editor-in-Chief following Namya’s departure! Raisa enters her new role with a wealth of experience and accomplishments. I’ve had the privilege of not only teaching Raisa in numerous courses during her undergraduate degree, but also working with Raisa when she was a teaching assistant for my Introduction to Social Psychology course. Most recently, Raisa has been a student partner, research assistant, and conference facilitator/developer on my MacPherson PALAT funded grant. Raisa is pursuing a Master of Arts in Child Study and Education at OSIE in September 2022. As a future elementary school teacher, Raisa has a passion for creating accessible, equitable, child-centered educational experiences to foster and educate children and youth. Raisa will make a positive impact and contribution to the lives of those who work, learn, and engage with her! Raisa is an intelligent, dedicated, and talented individual who will help guide the McMaster Undergraduate Journal of Social Psychology editorial team into the new era.

There have been several other transitions at the McMaster Undergraduate Journal of Social Psychology over the past year. Angelo Marmolejo is continuing to serve as a co-assistant editor (thanks Angelo!), joined now by Linette Sapper, who we warmly welcome to the editorial team. We have said goodbye to Jordan Graber who served as graphic designer since 2019 and send a warm welcome to Sarah McBride who now holds the

role. Christina Doan has remained in her role as the layout editor (thanks Christina!). The entire team sends best wishes and thanks to Namya and Jordan as they embark on new opportunities, continued thanks to returning editorial board members, and extends a warm welcome to all new editorial members of the McMaster Undergraduate Journal of Social Psychology!

Having taught the capstone course since 2014-2015, some may wonder if there are repeated research studies/topic areas or how the class has grown and changed over the years. The Social Psychology Program has experienced significant growth since my earlier years of teaching and supervising students. The most recent 2021-2022 class consisted of 19 thesis project groups with 101 enrolled students. As an educator, it is so exciting and inspiring to see a new generation of student scholars interested in pursuing a degree in Social Psychology, with a desire to learn more about and understand the diversity of the human lived experience. This year, there were four thesis papers that met the minimum standard of excellence of a grade of 85% or higher on the final thesis paper submitted for the capstone course, as per the publication criteria.

As you will discover when reading these four articles, our undergraduate students are emerging young scholars interested in exploring timely, socially relevant, and important topics impacting their fellow peers. The four studies included for publication in this issue include the following (ordered alphabetically by study title with authors alphabetically by last name): **Assessing Perceptions of Mental Health Literacy Among Undergraduate McMaster Students** by Lina D'Ambrosio, Julia Kay, Victoria Iro, Caterina Meli, Sabrina Rodrigues, and Laura Torres; **Self-Perceived Changes in Personality and Identity Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic** by Grace Gatt, Angelo Marmolejo, Sabryna Nguyen, Jessica Polsoni, and Serena Singh; **Social Media as a Stage: A Behind the Scenes Analysis of Performative Activism, "Cancel Culture," and Effective Allyship** by Amira Abdalla, Natasha D'Souza, Ria Gill, Raisa Jadavji*, and Claudia Meneguzzi; and, **You Can Count on Me: The Relationships Between Housing, Social Integration, and Adjustment Among First-Year McMaster Students** by Jessica C. Aranyush, Maiya M. Bertola, Katherine R. Cooper, Jewel Pheasant-Dumont, and Vanessa J. Richards.

As I noted in my 2021 Faculty Foreword, the pandemic changed the learning landscape of the capstone course. The 2021-2022 academic year for the capstone course ushered in what may be the 'new' normal as we experienced a mostly online learning environment like 2020-2021, but with some in-person elements. With in-person activities and classes on hold until February 2022, our class remained online for most of the academic year. For our poster session held in March 2022, groups had the option to present in-person or present virtually via Zoom. These options were offered to allow accessibility, flexibility, and learning options for the poster session best suited to the learning and personal needs of each group. Based on the number of groups that selected each option, I have decided to keep the two-option poster session format as part of the 2022-2023 capstone course design. As with past capstone thesis projects completed since March 2020, the students' individual and collective adaptation to change was admirable and impressive. While only a portion of the thesis papers completed during the 2021-2022 academic year are

included in this issue of the McMaster Undergraduate Journal of Social Psychology, the work completed by the entire class is commendable and should be recognized. If you would like to know more about the other projects completed during the 2021-2022 academic year, please see this link: <https://socialpsychology.mcmaster.ca/news/annual-poster-session-showcase>

The research studies in this third issue of the McMaster Undergraduate Journal of Social Psychology reflect different dimensions of university life and experiences, providing an outlet for those who participated in the respective studies to share their experiences on topics such as knowledge of mental health literacy, impacts on identity and personality as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, how social media becomes a tool for performative activism, 'cancel culture' and allyship, as well as the connection between where first-year undergraduate students live and the level of integration and adjustment they experience as part of the transition to university. As with many studies conducted in the course and in the social sciences more generally, the sample sizes in these published studies are not generalizable. However, the findings in each study emphasize the importance of inclusivity of the McMaster undergraduate student population's voices, experiences, and perceptions to improve services, resources, supports, educational opportunities, and health, wellness, and well-being of our students, both in-person and through online formats such as social media, as well as in on and off campus environments.

Abdalla et al., (2022) investigated how social media is used as a mechanism for activism and advocacy, leading to 'performative activism' and "cancel culture", as termed by Saint-Louis (2021). Using an online anonymous survey to collect their data, Abdalla et al., (2022) were interested in understanding motivations for, and influences on, engaging in online activism. Interestingly, participants noted lower efficacy between online activism and significant change, along with being motivated to engage in this process because of 'cancel culture'. Education versus engagement in online activism, according to Abdalla et al., (2022), was seen to be a more suitable alternative. To be an effective ally, Abdalla et al., (2022) concluded that greater focus and reflection on personal motivations and intentions when engaging in social media activism is required to foster not only meaningful and effective allyship, but also to create, develop, and promote long-term sustainable change.

Aranyush et al., (2022) and Gatt et al., (2022) both explored the impacts of COVID-19 on different facets of the McMaster University undergraduate students' lived experiences. Aranyush et al., (2022) employed an online anonymous survey to explore the experiences of social integration and adjustment among first-year undergraduate students, assessing if any differences exist between on and off-campus students. While not all results were statistically significant, Aranyush et al., (2022) found that place of residence did impact social integration, with high reported levels among students living in shared student off-campus housing compared to those living in residence or at home with family. Importantly, the group learned students had supports in place, including emotional, instrumental, and interaction-based, particularly through their peer relationships. Gatt et

al., (2022) found over 95% of their anonymous survey participants experienced impacts to their university experience, also noting how the pandemic in turn impacted their sense of identity and personality, including habits, and changes to past-times and interests. The group did not find any significant difference and/or changes in neuroticism and extroversion in fourth to first-year students. The group also found that impacts to life transitions, such as a global pandemic, can greatly impact the life experiences, identity, and personality traits of undergraduate students.

D'Ambrosio et al., (2022) researched the perceptions of mental health literacy among McMaster University undergraduate students. Using an anonymous online survey to collect their data, the group explored the connection between one's perceived mental health literacy (how much one perceives to be literate and/or knowledgeable on mental health), attitudes towards health-seeking behaviour, and supports provided on campus through educators and support services such as the Student Wellness Center, investigating if any differences existed between faculty of study. D'Ambrosio et al., (2022) found that stigma surrounding mental health impacted health-seeking behaviour, as did one's level of mental health literacy.

All four studies noted how important supports, additional resources, and educational and knowledge translation activities on campus are to student success, health, identity, and wellness, and how these services can be improved to further provide supports to students to foster and sustain the academic, social, and overall health of the undergraduate student population.

A new edition to the 2022 edition of the McMaster Undergraduate Journal of Social Psychology is the publication of the abstracts of the presenters from the first annual Social Psychology Undergraduate Research Conference, held in January 2022. As the Principal Investigator, I received a PALAT Grant provided by the Paul R. MacPherson Institute for Leadership, Innovation & Excellence in Teaching at McMaster University (awarded for 2021-2022). The MacPherson PALAT research grant (2021-2022) supported the development of a student-run undergraduate pre-conference workshop and conference event for McMaster University undergraduate Social Psychology students, along with hiring of student research/conference assistants and the evaluation of the conference for future priority setting and planning. When I received the grant, I reached out to then-editor Namya Tandon to see if publication of the student presenters' abstracts was something the journal would be interested in. I fully acknowledged and disclosed my multiple roles as Faculty Advisor of the McMaster Undergraduate Journal of Social Psychology and grant recipient of the PALAT grant to Namya so she was able to make an informed decision with the editorial team. The team decided to go ahead with the publication of the conference abstracts. I hope you enjoy reading about the interesting papers presented at the first annual Social Psychology Undergraduate Research Conference! Please join me in congratulating all those involved in the inception, development, and presentation of their work at the conference! A special note of thanks to Claudia Meneguzzi who supported the editorial team of the McMaster Undergraduate

Journal of Social Psychology in collecting and reviewing the abstracts prior to publication.¹

I hope you enjoy reading the important, interesting, and socially relevant social psychological research studies of the four respective groups featured in the third issue of the McMaster Undergraduate Journal of Social Psychology, along with the conference abstracts from the first annual Social Psychology Undergraduate Research Conference. The collection of work in this publication showcases the academic excellence and achievements of the students in the Social Psychology Program. The entire editorial board should be commended for their hard work and dedication on the publication of the third issue of the McMaster Undergraduate Journal of Social Psychology. I continue to be honoured to work, as Faculty Advisor, alongside intelligent, motivated, dedicated, and inspiring students: Raisa, Angelo, Christina, Linette, and Sarah, who serve as editorial board members, along with the four groups who were eligible for publication this year. Congratulations to all involved in the publication of the third issue of the McMaster Undergraduate Journal of Social Psychology - your hard work, dedication, and inspiring work is recognized, respected, and appreciated! Until next year's issue, stay safe, take care, and be well!

Sincerely and with best wishes,

Dr. Sarah Clancy, PhD
Faculty Advisor, McMaster Undergraduate Journal of Social Psychology
SOC PSY 4ZZ6 Capstone Instructor and Thesis Supervisor for all student group projects
Assistant (Teaching) Professor
Honours Social Psychology Program
Department of Health, Aging and Society
McMaster University

¹ Both Raisa Jadavji and Claudia Meneguzzi are employed as research assistants/conference organizers & facilitators, paid for by the PALAT Grant provided by the Paul R. MacPherson Institute for Leadership, Innovation & Excellence in Teaching at McMaster University