We are celebrating the seventh year of the Texas Twin Project! It was a busy year filled with great research and new publications. In both the Harden and Tucker-Drob Labs, parents of our participants are asked to give samples to collect DNA. We hope you enjoy reading updates from our team. If you’d like to check out the publications mentioned in this newsletter, please visit http://labs.la.utexas.edu/tucker-drob/ or https://labs.la.utexas.edu/harden

Thank you so much for your participation and interest in our research!

The students and staff of the Texas Twin Project (From left to right): Nick Patton, Megan Patterson, Cherry Youn, Dr. Margherita Malanchini, Aditi Sabhlock, James Madole, Andrew Grotzinger, and Sam Freis. Not pictured: Travis Mallard.
ABOVE AND RIGHT: Last year Graduate Student Laura Engelhardt became Dr. Laura Engelhardt! Here, she is pictured with her two faculty advisors Dr. Elliot Tucker-Drob and Dr. Jessica Church-Lang.

BELOW: Dr. Paige Harden discussing genetics and education on the BBC.
ABOVE: Research Assistant Haley Turner presenting a poster using Texas Twin Data at the University of Texas. Pictured from left to right: Dr. Elliot Tucker-Drob, James Madole, Sam Freis, Haley Turner, Aditi Sabhlock, and Cherry Youn

BELOW: Dr. Elliot Tucker-Drob giving a presentation at the University of Southern California using Texas Twin Project Data
RA SPOTLIGHT

My name is Jenefer and I am a senior at the University of Texas at Austin. I have been working in the Twin Brains Lab for almost a year. I love binge watching good TV shows and adventuring in new places. After I graduate, I hope to become a teacher for Teach for America for elementary students!

TEXAS TWIN TURNED RA

Last fall, The Harden Lab conducted a side study in which all of the freshmen students in Dr. Harden’s Introduction to Psychology online lecture were given the opportunity to come into the lab to donate a saliva sample. These were subsequently genotyped, and the students received information about their DNA. For this project, some freshmen volunteered to help collect these more than 1,200 samples. Much to our surprise, one of our volunteers was a Texas Twin who came into the lab when she was in high school. Her name is Julia and she will be volunteering in The Texas Twin Project next semester! We’d like to introduce her to you:

Hi, I’m Julia Pollard-Grayson, a first-year undergraduate student here at the University of Texas at Austin. I’m double majoring in Linguistics and Sociology with a Forensic Sciences certificate and a minor in Anthropology with the goal of working as a forensic linguist after graduate school. Attending UT is apparently in my blood as I'm currently attending UT along with my twin brother who is studying Mechanical Engineering and my parents both graduated with PhDs from UT. My interests outside of academics include photography and the visual arts so I'm often taking pictures around campus or doodling in a notebook.
I received a BSc in Psychology from Goldsmiths University of London in 2010 and an MSc in Developmental Sciences from Birkbeck University of London in 2012. After working as a research coordinator at InLab, under the leadership of Professor Yulia Kovas, I started my PhD at Goldsmiths University of London in October 2013. My PhD research, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, focused on the non-cognitive side of educational achievement. During my PhD work, I started a longitudinal study: a Multi-cohort Investigation into Learning and Educational Success (MILES) and collaborated at several large-scale projects, including the Twins Early Development Study. After receiving my PhD, I worked as a Postdoctoral researcher at the Social Genetic and Developmental Psychiatry (SGDP) Centre, King’s College London, where I remain a Research Fellow, mentored by Professor Robert Plomin. I joined the Texas Twin Project as a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in April 2017, mentored by Dr Elliot Tucker-Drob and Dr Paige Harden. My primary research interests are in the fields of education, cognition and wellbeing, which I approach combining behavioral genetic and developmental methodologies. The goal of my research is to provide knowledge that can inform educational practice and interventions.

I joined the doctoral program in Clinical Psychology in 2015 and graduated from Trinity University in San Antonio with a BA in Psychology. I then worked as a full-time research assistant at Mount Sinai Hospital for Dr. Tom Hildebrandt, where he coordinated projects that investigated disgust learning in anorexia nervosa using facial electromyography, neuroimaging and hormonal assays. My research has focused on genetic and environmental links between hormones and externalizing behaviors. Most recently I have been working on the development and application of new statistical genomic methods for elucidating the joint genetic architecture of complex traits.
I joined the doctoral program in Clinical Psychology in 2017 and graduated from Duke University in 2015 with a B.S. in Psychology. I then worked as a clinical research assistant in the Duke ADHD Program, under Dr. Scott Kollins. While there, I worked on a longitudinal study of the effects of pre- and post-natal maternal environmental tobacco smoke exposure on child neurocognitive outcomes, and whether the effects are associated with specific epigenetic signatures. My current research interests are centered on examining genetic and environmental contributions to the association between executive functions and disruptive behaviors in elementary school children, and how these factors impact academic achievement.

I graduated from NYU in 2013 with a BA in philosophy. After working in the private sector for a few years, I attended UC Berkeley and completed a post-baccalaureate certificate in psychology. At UC Berkeley, I worked in Dr. Sheri Johnson’s Cal Mania (CalM) lab, primarily examining the role of genetics, stress reactivity, and different types of impulsivity in bipolar disorder.

As a member of the Risky Business lab, I am interested in examining the biological contributions to cognitive and emotional aspects of psychopathology. I am currently working on understanding the structure of psychopathology in adolescence using network modeling, and investigating how different types of self-control impact the relationship between symptoms across disorders.

I joined the doctoral program in Clinical Psychology in 2018. I graduated from University of California, Berkeley with a B.A. in Psychology with Honors, where I also minored in Education. Prior to joining the Lifespan Development Lab, I worked as a research assistant in Dr. Stephen Hinshaw’s Berkeley Girls with ADHD Longitudinal Study (BGALS). At BGALS, I examined the moderating effects of response inhibition on the association between social preference/relational aggression measured in childhood, and intimate partner violence measured in young adulthood, among women with and without histories of childhood ADHD. My current research interests include examining genetic mechanisms behind cognitive performance in psychopathology and understanding trajectories of academic achievement and social functioning in children with externalizing disorders.
I am now in my 4th year as part of the Texas Twin Project. While I was in undergrad at UT Austin, the Texas Twin Project was my introduction to psychological research. I am in my second year as a full time research coordinator and handle tasks like supervising research assistants and making sure data collection runs smoothly.

PROJECT COORDINATORS

I have really enjoyed working with our new and returning twin families over the years. The Texas Twin Project has afforded me many opportunities and I have gained research experience, learned advanced statistical modeling, and presented my work at scientific conferences. With the skills I have gained through the Texas Twin Project, I plan to pursue a PhD in Psychology and research the biological and environmental underpinnings of healthy physical and emotional development in childhood and adolescence.

I began working for the Texas Twin Project in Spring of 2016 and am fortunate enough to have had the opportunity to perform several roles in our lab, from Research Assistant to Supervisor to Project Coordinator. In this new role, I work with Sam to supervise data collection, recruit undergraduate research assistants, and keep the project up and running. I graduated from UT in May of 2018 with a Bachelors of Science in Psychology. I am planning to go to graduate school after completing this project coordinator job and am using this opportunity to try my hand at research. Hopefully, this will empower me to learn whether I want to pursue a career in research and academia or a career in social work. I look forward to working with the families in the project for the next two years.

LAB MEMBERS

I joined the doctoral program in Clinical Psychology in 2014. I graduated with an interdisciplinary BA from New York University, where she focused on psychology and the use of creativity in psychotherapeutic interventions. After graduating, I returned to my hometown of Austin, Texas, and began work fulltime at a residential treatment center for children and adolescents. I joined the Texas Twin Project as a research assistant in 2013, and then as a graduate student in May of 2014. My research interests are primarily centered on child-driven effects in parenting adolescents, and gene-environment correlation in the development of adolescent psychopathology.

Sam Freis
Project Coordinator

I began working for the Texas Twin Project in Spring of 2016 and am fortunate enough to have had the opportunity to perform several roles in our lab, from Research Assistant to Supervisor to Project Coordinator. In this new role, I work with Sam to supervise data collection, recruit undergraduate research assistants, and keep the project up and running. I graduated from UT in May of 2018 with a Bachelors of Science in Psychology. I am planning to go to graduate school after completing this project coordinator job and am using this opportunity to try my hand at research. Hopefully, this will empower me to learn whether I want to pursue a career in research and academia or a career in social work. I look forward to working with the families in the project for the next two years.

Nick Patton
Project Coordinator

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Megan Patterson
Graduate Student

I joined the doctoral program in Clinical Psychology in 2014. I graduated with an interdisciplinary BA from New York University, where she focused on psychology and the use of creativity in psychotherapeutic interventions. After graduating, I returned to my hometown of Austin, Texas, and began work fulltime at a residential treatment center for children and adolescents. I joined the Texas Twin Project as a research assistant in 2013, and then as a graduate student in May of 2014. My research interests are primarily centered on child-driven effects in parenting adolescents, and gene-environment correlation in the development of adolescent psychopathology.