

Soyeon Choi

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Academic Appointment

Postdoctoral Research Associate, Aug. 2024–Present

University of Wisconsin–Madison, Department of Psychology

Advisor: Nicholas R. Buttrick

Affiliations: Institute for Clinical and Translational Research AHEAD Scholar
Center for Community and Nonprofit Studies Affiliate

Education

Ph.D., Social Psychology, 2024

University of Michigan

Advisor: Joshua M. Ackerman

Dissertation: Motivational Trade-Off Between Disease Avoidance and Interpersonal Affiliation

Graduate Data Science Certificate, Michigan Institute for Data & AI in Society

M.A., Social Psychology, 2018

Yonsei University

Advisor: Eunkook M. Suh

B.A., English Language and Literature; Psychology, 2016

Yonsei University

Research Interests

I examine how individuals perceive ecological dimensions (e.g., pathogen prevalence, resource availability, population density) and how these perceptions shape motives and goal pursuit, particularly in the domain of social relationships. I employ a variety of methods, including controlled experiments, observational studies, analyses of social network datasets, and agent-based simulations with large language models.

Fellowships, Grants, & Awards

Research Grant (\$10,000), University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2024–2025

Ph.D. Fellowship, Korea Foundation for Advanced Studies (\$65,000), 2018–2023

Rackham Graduate Student Research Grant (\$3,000), University of Michigan, 2023

Hough Summer Research Fellowship (\$2,000), University of Michigan, 2021, 2022

Rackham Graduate Student Research Grant (\$1,500), University of Michigan, 2020

Institute for Social Research Training Award (\$2,500), University of Michigan, 2020

Rackham Conference Travel Award, University of Michigan, 2019, 2020, 2022

Rackham International Student Award (\$10,000), University of Michigan, 2019

Brain Korea 21 Scholarship, National Research Foundation of Korea, 2016–2018

Incoming Graduate Student Scholarship, Yonsei University, 2016

Merit-based Undergraduate Scholarship, Yonsei University, 2011, 2012, 2014

Publications

- Choi, S.**, Lee, K., Sng, O., Ackerman, J. M. (2025). Infected Smallville: How disease threat shapes sociality in LLM agents. *International Conference on Machine Learning, Multi-Agent Systems in the Era of Foundation Models Workshop*. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2506.13783>
- Ackerman, J. M., Samore, T., Fessler, D. M. T., Kupfer, T. R., **Choi, S.**, Merrell, W. N., Aarøe, L., Aavik, T., Acabado, S., Akello, G., Alfian, I. N., Al-Shawaf, L., Alvarez, M. M., Ammann, J., Arikan, G., Asha, S. A., Astobiza, A. M., Baeza-Ugarte, C. G., Barclay, P., ... Žeželj, I. (2025). I see sick people: Beliefs about sensory detection of infectious disease are largely consistent across cultures. *Brain, Behavior, and Immunity*, 128, 737–750. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bbi.2025.04.020>
- Merrell, W. N., **Choi, S.**, & Ackerman, J. M. (2024). When and why people conceal infectious disease. *Psychological Science*, 35(3), 215-225. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09567976231221990>
- Mentioned by 62 news outlets, including USA Today, MSN, Yahoo News, Healthday News, and Michigan News
- Choi, S.**, Merrell, W. N., & Ackerman, J. M. (2023). Safety first, but for whom? Shifts in risk perception for self and others following COVID-19 vaccination. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, e12757. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12757>
- Choi, S.**, Merrell, W. N., & Ackerman, J. M. (2022). Keep your distance: Different roles for knowledge and affect in predicting social distancing behavior. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 27(12), 2847-2859. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13591053211067100>
- Mentioned by The Medical News, MedicalXpress, and Michigan News
- Ackerman, J. M., Merrell, W. N., **Choi, S.** (2020). What people believe about detecting infectious disease using the senses. *Current Research in Ecological and Social Psychology*, 1, 100002. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cresp.2020.100002>
- Lee, D. I., Gardiner, G., Baranski, E., **International Situations Project Members**, & Funder, D. C. (2020). Situational experience around the world: A replication and extension in 62 countries. *Journal of Personality*, 88(6), 1091-1110. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12558>
- Choi, S.**, & Suh, E. M. (2018). Retrospective time travel in life satisfaction judgment: A life history approach. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 129, 138-142. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2018.03.017>
- Suh, E. M., & **Choi, S.** (2018). Predictors of subjective well-being across cultures. In E. Diener, S. Oishi, & L. Tay (Eds.), *Handbook of Well-Being*. Salt Lake City, UT: DEF Publishers.

Manuscripts Under Review

Choi, S., Jeong, O., Cha., Y., & Buttrick, N. R. *Historical pathogen threat and social ties: Strengthening bonds, weakening bridges*. Invited revision at *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. [Draft available upon request]

Choi, S. & Ackerman, J. M. *Infectious disease concerns predict narrow friendship networks*. Invited revision at *Evolution and Human Behavior*. [Draft available upon request]

Presentations (*Invited)

Choi, S. (2025, August). *How pathogen threat shapes our social lives*. Talk presented in the Psychology Department at Yonsei University, Seoul, Republic of Korea.*

Choi, S., Lee, K., Sng, O., Ackerman, J. M. (2025, July). *Infected Smallville: How disease threat shapes sociality in LLM agents*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Conference on Machine Learning, Multi-Agent Systems in the Era of Foundation Models Workshop, Vancouver, Canada.

Choi, S. & Ackerman, J. M. (2025, April). *Infectious disease concerns predict narrow friendship networks*. Poster presented at the Wisconsin State Capitol, Madison, WI.

Choi, S. (2025, March). *How pathogen threat shapes our social lives*. Talk presented in the Psychology Department at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, Madison, WI.

Choi, S. & Ackerman, J. M. (2025, February). *Friendship network in the context of disease avoidance*. Poster presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, Denver, CO.

Choi, S. (2023, October). *Investigating shifts in risk perception with a prospective cohort design*. Talk presented at CloudResearch.*

Choi, S., Merrell, W. N., & Ackerman, J. M. (2022, February). *Psychological consequences of COVID-19 vaccines: The effects of vaccination on risk-related judgments for self and others*. Talk presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, San Francisco, CA.

Choi, S. & Ackerman, J. M. (2020, February). *How much of the past do people value when making decisions?* Poster presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, New Orleans, LA.

Choi, S., Ackerman, J. M., & Merrell, W. N. (2019, May). *What do people think diseases look, smell, sound, taste, and feel like?* Poster presented at the Annual Meeting of the Human Behavior and Evolution Society, Boston, MA.

Choi, S., & Suh, E. M. (2019, February). *Are you happy with your friends? The impact*

of behavioral immune system on social networking strategy and subjective well-being. Poster presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, Portland, OR.

Choi, S., & Suh, E. M. (2018, May). *Pathogen threat, optimal social network, and subjective well-being.* Talk presented at the annual meeting of the Korean Psychological Association, Seoul, South Korea.

Choi, S., Choi, M., & Suh, E. M. (2017, August). *What makes us stronger? The influence of resource scarcity on persistence following success and failure.* Poster presented at the annual meeting of the Korean Psychological Association, Seoul, South Korea.

Choi, S., & Suh, E. M. (2017, March). *The influence of childhood socioeconomic status on seeing the past through rose-tinted glasses.* Poster presented at the biennial meeting of the International Convention of Psychological Science, Austria, Vienna.

Choi, S., & Suh, E. M. (2017, January). *Retrospective mental time travel in life satisfaction judgment: A life history approach.* Poster presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, San Antonio, TX.

Teaching Experience

Graduate Student Instructor, University of Michigan

[PSYCH 280] Introduction to Social Psychology

Winter 2022 [Teaching evaluation: 4.9/5.0]

Winter 2020 [Teaching evaluation: 4.4/5.0]

Winter 2019 [Teaching evaluation: 4.0/5.0]

Fall 2019 [Teaching evaluation: 4.7/5.0]

- Taught three discussion sections of 25 students each; designed the syllabus and lesson plans, collaborated with the teaching team to develop exams, and held regular office hours

Graduate Student Instructor, University of Michigan

[PSYCH 330] Topics in Biopsychology: Evolution and Behavior

Winter 2021 [Teaching evaluation: 4.7/5.0]

- Taught three discussion sections of 20 students each; prepared lesson plans, created materials and online spaces for class activities, and held office hours

Teaching Assistant, University of Michigan

[PSYCH 385] Evolutionary Psychology

Fall 2020

- Created exam questions, graded assignments, and held office hours

Teaching Assistant, Yonsei University

Psychology of Work, *Spring 2017*

Perfectionism and Mental Health, *Fall 2016*

Mentoring	<p>Undergraduate Senior Honors Thesis Mentor, 2024–2025 Department of Psychology, University of Wisconsin–Madison Natalie L. Ernst (co-mentored with Nicholas R. Buttrick) “The Experience of Effort”</p>
	<p>Independent Research / Lab Research Supervision, 2019–2024 Department of Psychology, University of Michigan Rachel Annex Akhila Archakam Ginger Blodgett Sierra Daniels Caitlin Fagel William Gonzalez Wenting Guo Haley Henry Cara Jhang Emmaleigh Krause Katarzyna Lyszczyk Emma Lewis Jian Sun Helen Yang</p>
Industrial Experience	<p>External Relations Intern, Jan 2015–Jun 2015 McKinsey & Company, Seoul, Korea</p>
Professional & Community Service	<p>Volunteer, Madison Children’s Museum, 2023–2024 Psychology Student Academic Affairs Committee, University of Michigan, 2022 Psychology Graduate Student Leadership Committee, University of Michigan, 2022 Board Member, UM Asian Psychology Student Association, 2019–2021 Mentor, The Michigan Association of Psychological Scholars, 2020 Interpreter, International Exposition, South Korea, 2012 Cultural Exchange Volunteer, UNICEF Korea, South Korea, 2011</p>
Ad Hoc Reviewer	<p>Social and Personality Psychology Compass, Evolution and Human Behavior, Current Research in Ecological and Social Psychology, Journal of Health Psychology, Scientific Reports, Public Opinion Quarterly</p>
Professional Affiliations	<p>Society for Personality and Social Psychology American Psychological Association Association for Psychological Science Human Behavior and Evolution Society Social Personality and Health Network</p>