

Curriculum Vitae

Mason McClay

T32 Postdoctoral Fellow

UCLA Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior / VA MIRECC

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Current Appointment

University of California, Los Angeles — T32 Postdoctoral Fellow, UCLA Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior and VA MIRECC (Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Center), studying psychosis, social cognition, and psychopharmacological interventions.

Mentors: Anya Bershad, MD, PhD; Michael Green, PhD

Education

University of California, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA — Ph.D., Psychology, 2025; M.A., Cognitive Psychology, 2021

Advisors: David Clewett, PhD; Jesse Rissman, PhD

Centre College, Danville, KY — B.S., Behavioral Neuroscience and Classical Studies, with honors, 2017

Advisor: Aaron Godlaski, PhD

Peer-Reviewed Publications

1. Rotstein N, Cohen Z, Welborn A, Zbozinek T, Akre S, Jones K, Null K, Pontanares J, Sanchez K, Flanagan D, Halavi S, Kittle E, **McClay M**, Bui A, Narr K, Welsh R, Craske M, & Kuhn T (2025). [Investigating low intensity focused ultrasound pulsation in anhedonic depression: a randomized controlled trial](#). *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*.
2. **McClay M**, Rouhani N, Clewett D (2025). [Negative emotional events retroactively disrupt semantic scaffolding of temporal memory](#). *Emotion*.
3. Greer J, Laksman C*, Huang R, **McClay M**, Clewett D (2024). [Retrieving neutral semantic memories induces forgetting of related negative memories](#). *Cognition*.
4. Bellaiche L*, Horowitz AH, **McClay M**, Bottary R, Denis D, Chen C, Maes P, & Seli P (2024). Targeted dream incubation at a distance: remote and sensor-free incubation of hypnagogic dreams and mind-wandering. *Frontiers in Sleep, Behavior, and Mental Health*.
5. Clewett D, **McClay M** (2024). [Emotional arousal ripples across time to bind subsequent episodes in memory](#). *Cognition and Emotion*.
6. **McClay M**, Sachs M, Clewett D (2023). [Dynamic emotional states shape the structure of episodic memory](#). *Nature Communications*.

7. Keller N, Cooper SE, **McClay M**, Dunsmoor JE (2023). [Counterconditioning reduces contextual renewal in a novel context but not in the acquisition context](#). *Neurobiology of Learning and Memory*.
8. Salvi C, Iannello C, Cooper SE, **McClay M**, Antonietti A, Dunsmoor JE (2022). [Does social rigidity predict cognitive rigidity? Profiles of socio-cognitive polarization](#). *Psychological Research*.
9. Hennings AC, **McClay M**, Lewis-Peacock J, Dunsmoor JE (2022). [Neural reinstatement guides context-dependent emotional memory retrieval](#). *Current Biology*.
10. Priniski H, **McClay M**, & Holyoak K (2021). [Rise of QAnon: a mental model of good and evil stews in an echochamber](#). *Proceedings of the Cognitive Science Society*.
11. Hennings AC, **McClay M**, Lewis-Peacock J, Dunsmoor JE (2020). [Contextual reinstatement promotes extinction generalization in healthy adults but not PTSD](#). *Neuropsychologia*.
12. **McClay M**, Hennings AC, Reidel A*, & Dunsmoor JE (2020). [Generalization of conditioned fear along a dimension of increasing positive valence](#). *Neuropsychologia*.
13. Salvi C, Iannello P, Cancer A, **McClay M**, Dunsmoor JE, & Alessandro A (2020). [Going viral: how fear, socio-cognitive polarization and problem-solving influence fake news detection and proliferation during COVID-19 pandemic](#). *Frontiers in Communication*.
14. Goodman J, **McClay M**, & Dunsmoor JE (2019). [Threat-induced modulation of hippocampal and striatal memory systems during navigation of a virtual environment](#). *Neurobiology of Learning and Memory*.
15. Kroes MCW, Dunsmoor JE, Mackey W, **McClay M**, & Phelps EA (2017). [Context conditioning in humans using commercially available immersive virtual reality](#). *Scientific Reports*, 7.

Manuscripts Under Review & Preprints

16. Harris B, **McClay M**, Clewett D. [Cognitive reappraisal influences the organization of emotional episodes in memory](#). Under review; preprint available on PsyArXiv.
17. [Leckie L, Bershada A, Heppler J, McClay M, Rappe S, Foster J. The content and structure of dreams are coupled to affect](#). Under review; preprint available on arXiv.
18. **McClay M**, & Dunsmoor JE (2018). [Effects of post-training novelty exposure on contextual fear memory: An attempt to translate behavioral tagging in humans](#). Preprint available on bioRxiv.

Manuscripts in Preparation

19. **McClay M**, Li J**, Sandman C, & Clewett D. Using a novel web app to examine dynamic emotional states and their relation to depression and trauma symptoms. In preparation.
20. **McClay M**, Molla H, de Wit H, Bershada & Bershada A. Divergent conversational mechanisms of social connection under MDMA and Methamphetamine. In preparation.
21. **McClay M**, Vitello, M, & Craske, M. Felt narrative coherence of autobiographical memory relates to anhedonia and reward sensitivity in depression. In preparation.

22. **McClay M**, Nair, Saniya & Clewett, Dave. Event segmentation guided by emotion predicts the network structure of episodic memories. In preparation.

Fellowships, Grants & Awards

PALA Pilot Award, VA Greater Los Angeles and San Diego, 2026 - 2027 — PI, \$10,000
for *Opioid Modulation of Linguistic Alignment in Schizophrenia*

National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship Program, 2021–2025 (Award = \$147,000)

Atamede Neuroscience Fellowship, UCLA, Summer 2024 (Award = \$6,000)

Graduate Student Research Mentorship, UCLA Graduate Division, Summer 2021 (Award = \$6,000)

McGuigan Fellowship, UCLA Psychology Department, Fall 2020

Faculty and Brown Research Grant Recipient, Centre College, Summers 2015 and 2016

Henry Barret Boyle Classical Studies Scholar Award, Spring 2013

Residencies & Honors

Banff Scholarship for Writing Residency, Banff Centre, Spring 2024 (Award = \$4,000)

Timing Research Forum Summer Institute, Chios, Greece, Summer 2024

Innovation Award Finalist, Social Affective Neuroscience Society, Toronto, Ontario, Spring 2024

Diverse Intelligences Summer Institute, St. Andrews, Scotland, Summer 2023 (Award = \$6,000)

Summer Undergraduate Research Program (SURP), New York University, Department of Psychology, Phelps Lab, Summer 2016

Summer Undergraduate Research Program (SURP), National College of Natural Medicine, Helfgott Research Institute, Summer 2015

Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF), University of Cincinnati, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neuroscience, Summer 2014

Invited Talks

McClay M (2026). Neuroscience, Poetry, and the Problem of Forgetting. Invited talk presented at the UCLA Medical Humanities Seminar.

McClay M (2026). MDMA modulation of social behavior. Invited talk presented at the VA MIRECC Seminar.

McClay M (2025). How Emotion Weaves the Temporal Tapestry of Memory. Invited talk presented at the VA MIRECC Seminar.

McClay M (2023). Flipping the script: how emotional and linguistic dynamics relate to memory structure and depression symptoms. Invited talk presented at Anxiety and Depression Research Center, Los Angeles, CA.

McClay M (2022). Can the body remember what can't be stored? Invited talk presented at Pacific Ancient and Modern Language Association, Los Angeles, CA.

McClay M (2022). Dynamic emotional states shape the structure of episodic memory. Invited talk presented at Context and Affective Memory colloquium, online.

McClay M (2022). Dynamic emotional states shape the structure of episodic memory. Invited talk presented at Anxiety and Depression Research Center, Los Angeles, CA.

Conference Presentations

McClay M (2024). Dynamic emotional states captured by a mobile tool relates to affective disorder symptoms and memory organization. Talk presented at UCLA Psychology Cognitive Forum, Los Angeles, CA.

McClay M, Bershad A, Heppler J, Leckie L, Rappe S, Foster J (2023). Emotional landscapes of dreams: toward a quantitative interpretation of dream experiences. Talk presented at Diverse Intelligences Summer Institute, St. Andrews, Scotland.

McClay M, Sachs M, Clewett D (2023). Dynamic emotional states shape the structure of episodic memory. Talk presented at International Conference on Learning and Memory, Long Beach, CA.

Li J**, **McClay M**, Clewett D (2023). Using a novel web app to examine dynamic emotional states and their relation to depression and trauma symptoms. Talk presented at Psychology Undergraduate Research Conference, Los Angeles, CA.

McClay M & Clewett D (2021). Emotion's selective and bidirectional influence on temporal memory. Talk presented at UCLA Psychology Cognitive Forum, Los Angeles, CA.

McClay M, Salvi C, Iannello P, Cancer A, Cooper SJ, Dunsmoor JE, & Alessandro A (2020). The relationship between fear of COVID-19, problem-solving, and socio-cognitive polarization during the early peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Talk presented at the Society for Neuroscience of Creativity, online.

McClay M, Dunsmoor JE (2018). Retroactive effects of emotional suppression on episodic memory. Talk presented at Dallas & Austin Area Memory Meeting, Waco, TX.

McClay M (2016). An investigation of contextual fear memory and startle response in humans using immersive virtual reality. Talk presented at NYU Summer Undergraduate Research Program Symposium, New York, NY.

McClay M & Godlaski A (2015). A novel statistical method for emotional category clustering. Talk presented at the RICE Symposium, Centre College, Danville, KY.

McClay M, Campbell E, & Godlaski A (2015). The role of empathy in affective differences between emotion-regulation strategies. Talk presented at the RICE Symposium, Centre College, Danville, KY.

Selected Press

Psychology Today, [*Shaping the “Episodes” in Our Memory*](#)

NPR Science Friday, [*Music’s Emotional Power Can Shape Memories—And Your Perception Of Time*](#)

BBC All in the Mind, [*How music shapes memory*](#)

Inc., [*Neuroscience Just Explained Why Taylor Swift’s Eras Tour Is So Memorable. It Can Work for You*](#)

Past Appointments

University of Texas at Austin — Lab Manager, Dell Medical School, Department of Psychiatry, Dunsmoor Lab, 2017–2020

Teaching & Mentorship

Teaching Assistant, UCLA, Spring 2022 — Psychology of Learning and Memory. Professor: Andrew Wikenheiser, PhD. Student evaluation: 9/9

Teaching Assistant, UCLA, Winter 2021 — Introduction to Cognitive Psychology. Professor: Melissa Paquette-Smith, PhD. Student evaluation: 9/9

Research Mentor, ACME Lab, Summer 2020 – Summer 2025 — training and mentorship of UCLA undergraduate psychology and neuroscience research assistants

Research Mentor, Dunsmoor Lab, Summer 2017 – Summer 2020 — training and mentorship of UT undergraduate psychology and neuroscience research assistants

Editorial and Peer Review Service

Ad hoc reviewer: Nature Communications; Neuron; Emotion; Schizophrenia Bulletin; Journal of Neuroscience; Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience; Behaviour Research and Therapy