

Wilson N. Merrell

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Current Academic Appointments

Aarhus University

2024 – present

Postdoctoral Researcher

Centre for the Experimental-Philosophical Study of
Discrimination ([CEPDISC](#))
Department of Political Science

University of Oslo

2024 – present

Guest Researcher

Department of Psychology
Social Psychology Research Group
Social and Intergroup Relations Lab

Academic Training and Education

University of Michigan

2018 – 2024

Ph.D., Social Psychology

2023

Summer Institute for Personality and Social Psychology

2021

*Graduate Teaching Certificate, Center for Research on Learning
and Teaching*

2020

M.S., Social Psychology

University of Zurich

2023

Summer Research Fellow

International Max Planck Research School on the Life Course

2021 – 2023

Fellow

Macalester College

2012 - 2016

B.A., Psychology (with honors) and Economics

Research Interests

Humans are a hyper-social species. My research examines how people manage the risks of group life (e.g., exclusion, exploitation, and infection) by forming representations of others and regulating affiliation, avoidance, and status allocation. I focus on:

- **Hierarchy, coalitions, and mental representations of groups and places**
Keywords: *intergroup perception, hierarchy, status, coalitions, dehumanization, political imagery, social ecology*
- **Disease concealment, detection beliefs, and affiliation tradeoffs**
Keywords: *behavioral immune system, pathogen management, stigma, disclosure/concealment, sickness behavior*

Publications (* Represents joint first authorship)

1. Vossoughi, N., **Merrell, W.**, Kteily, N., Ho, A. (*In press*). The Role of Egalitarian Ideology in System-Challenging Collective Action among Members of Dominant and Marginalized Racial Groups. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*.
2. **Merrell, W.***, Fan, L.*, Sheehy-Skeffington, J., Thomsen, L. (2025). Resource possession in the mind's eye: Ideological convergence and divergence in the perceptions of poor people. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672251371787>.
3. **Merrell, W.**, Ackerman, J. (2025). Flaunting Porsches or Paris? Comparing the social signaling value of experiential and material conspicuous consumption. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672251331658>. [[Aarhus University Coverage](#)]
4. Ackerman, J., Samore, T., Fessler, D., Kupfer, T., Choi, S., **Merrell, W.**, et al. (2025). I see sick people: Beliefs about sensory detection of infectious disease are largely consistent across cultures. *Brain Behavior and Immunity*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bbi.2025.04.020>.
5. **Merrell, W.**, Vossoughi, N., Kteily, N., Ho, A. (2024). Looking White but feeling Asian: The role of perceived membership permeability and perceived discrimination in multiracial-monoracial alliances. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672241267332>.
 - Winner of the 2024 [Otto Klineberg Intercultural and International Relations Award](#) from the *Society for Psychological Study of Social Issues*
6. **Merrell, W.**, Choi, S., Ackerman, J. (2024). When and why people conceal infectious disease. *Psychological Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09567976231221990>. [[APS Coverage](#)] [[Under the Cortex Podcast](#)]
7. Ackerman, J., **Merrell, W.**, & Williams, L. (2024). Social cognition and consumer psychology. In D. Carlston, K. Johnson, & K. Hugenberg (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Social Cognition*, 2nd New York: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197763414.013.35>.
8. Fessler, D.*, **Merrell, W.***, Holbrook, C., Ackerman, J. (2023). Beware the foe who feels no pain: Relationships between relative formidability and pain sensitivity in U.S. online samples. *Evolution and Human Behavior*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evolhumbehav.2022.11.003>. [[Human Behavior and Evolution Society Blog](#)]
9. Choi, S., **Merrell, W.**, Ackerman, J. (2023). Safety first, but for whom? Shifts in risk perception for self and others following COVID-19 vaccination. *Social and Personality Psychological Compass*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12757>.

10. Choi, S., **Merrell, W.**, Ackerman, J. (2022). Keep your distance: Different roles for knowledge and affect in predicting social distancing behavior. *Journal of Health Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13591053211067100>.
11. Ackerman, J., **Merrell, W.**, Choi, S. (2020). What people believe about detecting infectious disease using the senses. *Current Research in Ecological and Social Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cresp.2020.100002>

Manuscripts under review

1. **Merrell, W.**, Fan, L., Sheehy-Skeffington, J., Thomsen, L. (*Invited R&R*). Height, Hierarchy, and Humanity: A Registered Replication and Extension of Kunst et al. (2019). *Social Psychological & Personality Science*.
2. **Merrell, W.**, Fan, L., Gothreau, C., Laustsen, L. (*Invited R&R*). Democrats and Republicans hold similarly gendered mental images of ideal politicians. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*.
3. **Merrell, W.** (*Invited R&R*). Experiential vs. material conspicuous consumption signal distinct forms of status. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*.
4. **Merrell, W.**, Fan, L., Sheehy-Skeffington, J., Thomsen, L. (*Under Review*). The intergroup folk psychology of spatial resource patchiness.

Selected manuscripts in preparation

Hierarchy, coalitions, and mental representations of groups and places

- **Merrell, W.**, Kruse, M., Laustsen, L. (*In preparation*). Thinking (fast and slow) in conjoint experiments: disentangling automatic and deliberative religious biases.
- **Merrell, W.**, Ho, A. (*In preparation*). How do racially minoritized perceivers categorize dual-minority multiracial people? The case of Kamala Harris.
- **Merrell, W.**, Fan, L., Sønderskov, K. (*In preparation*). Bad is Bigger than Good: Threat and Cognitive Maps in a Shared Urban Ecology
- **Merrell, W.**, Fan, L., Sheehy-Skeffington, J., Thomsen, L. (*In preparation*). Patchy resource ecologies evoke intergroup conflict.

Disease concealment, detection beliefs, and affiliation tradeoffs

- **Merrell, W.**, Meyer, M., Sabree, K., Ackerman, J. (*In preparation*). Widespread disease concealment is linked to fears of social exclusion across societies.
- **Merrell, W.**, Zubaly, B., Ackerman, J., (*In preparation*). Fear of exclusion and exploitation as drivers of infectious disease concealment.
- Fan, L.* , **Merrell, W.***, Donner, M., Ackerman, J., Tybur, J. (*In preparation*). Risking sickness for thee but not for me: Interpersonal value drives illness concealment and infection-risky contact decisions.

Research grants and fellowships

Aarhus University Department of Political Science Small Grants Program (2026), 40,000 DKK (~\$6,300)

Danish National Research Foundation (DNRF)

2026 Research Funding Call, 55,000 DKK (~\$8,600)

2025 Research Funding Call, 161,000 DKK (~\$25,000)

2024 Research Funding Call, 184,000 DKK (~\$28,000)

BeSample Collaborative Grant (2025), \$718

Rackham Dissertation Fellowship (2023), University of Michigan, \$12,629

Sweetland Fellows Seminar, Junior Writing Fellow (2021), University of Michigan, \$11,000

Pillsbury Graduate Research Award (2021), University of Michigan, \$1,000

Evolution and Human Adaptation Program Research Award (2020), University of Michigan, \$1,000.

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

Rackham Professional Development Grant (2023), University of Michigan, \$100.

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

Early Career Award, (2020), Network of Multiracial Scholars, \$100.

Rackham Institute for Social Research Training Award (2020), University of Michigan, \$2,600.

Rackham Conference Travel Award, University of Michigan, \$900 each

- 2024, “Looking White but Feeling Asian: The Role of Physical Permeability and Perceived Discrimination in Multiracial-Monoracial Alliances”
- 2023, “Beware the Foe who Feels no Pain.”
- 2022, “Infectious Disease Concealment.”
- 2020, “Revisiting Conspicuous Consumption as a Costly Signal.”
- 2019, “Conspicuous Consumption of Experiential Goods.”

Honors & Awards

Otto Klineberg Intercultural and International Relations Award (2024), Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, awarded to “the best paper or article of the year on intercultural or international relations.” *Looking White but Feeling Asian: The Role of Physical Permeability and Perceived Discrimination in Multiracial-Monoracial Alliances*.

Provost Teaching Innovation Prize (2021), University of Michigan, annually recognizes the most innovative pedagogical projects across the University. *Inclusive Teaching in Research Methods Courses*.

Chaired Conference Symposia

1. *Rethinking resources: How resource scarcity, patchiness, and unpredictability shape core psychological processes in distinct ways* (co-chair Dr. Julia Buzan). Annual Meeting of the Society of Experimental Social Psychology, Lisbon, PT (2025). Symposium speakers also included Dr. Oliver Sng and Dr. Carsten de Dreu.
2. *Banding together, pulling apart? Challenging racial hierarchy through intraminority coalitions* (co-chair Dr. Nadia Vossoughi). Annual Meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, San Diego, CA (2024). Symposium speakers also included Dr. Chyei Vinluan and Dr. Ashley Berkebile-Weinberg.
3. *Hiding who we are, what we know, and how we feel* (co-chair Dr. Josh Ackerman). Annual Meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology. Atlanta, GA (2023). Symposium speakers also included Dr. Michael Slepian, Dr. Elizabeth Page-Gould, and Dr. Stephanie Chaudoir.

Conference Presentations

1. **Merrell, W.**, Fan, L., Sheehy-Skeffington, J., Thomsen, L. (October 2025). Folk beliefs about ecological resource patchiness and intergroup hierarchy. Talk presented at the Society for Experimental Social Psychology, Lisbon, PT.
2. **Merrell, W.**, Fan, L., Gothreau, C., Laustsen, L. (June 2025). Do Democrats and Republicans hold similar gendered mental representations of the ideal politician? Talk presented by Lasse Laustsen at the European Political Science Association, Madrid, ES.
3. **Merrell, W.**, Fan, L., Sheehy-Skeffington, J., Thomsen, L. (June 2025). Folk beliefs about ecological resource patchiness and intergroup hierarchy. Talk presented at the Human Behavior and Evolution Society, Atlantic City, NJ.
4. **Merrell, W.**, Fan, L., Sheehy-Skeffington, J., Thomsen, L. (February 2025). Mapping conflict: How spatial resource patchiness shapes perceptions of territoriality. Data blitz presented at the Conflict and Conflict Resolution pre-conference, Society for Personality and Social Psychology, Denver, CO.
5. **Merrell, W.**, Fan, L., Sheehy-Skeffington, J., Thomsen, L. (February 2025). Patchy resource ecologies can evoke intergroup conflict. Data blitz presented at the Evolutionary Psychology pre-conference, Society for Personality and Social Psychology, Denver, CO.
6. **Merrell, W.**, Ho, A. (November 2024). How do racially minoritized perceived categorize dual-minority multiracial people? The case of Kamala Harris. Talk presented at the Danish Political Science Association, Odense, DK.
7. **Merrell, W.**, Fan, L., Sheehy-Skeffington, J., Thomsen, L. (September 2024). Resource possession in the mind's eye. Talk presented at the Conference on Discrimination, CEPDISC, Aarhus, DK.
8. **Merrell, W.**, Choi, S., Ackerman, J. (June 2024). When and why people conceal infectious disease. Talk presented at the Human Behavior and Evolution Society, Aarhus, DK.

9. **Merrell, W.**, Choi, S., Ackerman, J. (April 2024). When and why people conceal infectious disease. Talk presented at the European Human Behavior and Evolution Association, Montpellier, FR.
10. **Merrell, W.**, Vossoughi, N., Kteily, N., Ho, A. (February 2024). Looking White but feeling Asian: The role of physical permeability and perceived discrimination in multiracial-monoracial alliances. Talk presented at the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, San Diego, CA.
11. **Merrell, W.**, Choi, S., Ackerman, J. (February 2023). Infectious Disease Concealment. Talk presented at the Society for Personality and Social Psychology annual conference, Atlanta, GA.
12. **Merrell, W.**, Vossoughi, N., Seifert, C (February 2021). Incorporating Critical Pedagogy in Psychological Research Methods. Talk co-presented with Dr. Nadia Vossoughi at the Society for the Teaching of Psychology Pre-Conference at the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, virtual.

Invited Talks

École Normale Supérieure, Evolution and Social Cognition Team (October 2025)

Danish National Research Foundation (August 2025)

Aarhus University, Migration & Ethnicity Workshop (March 2025)

University of Oslo, Department of Psychology (April 2025)

University of Richmond, Department of Psychology (December 2024)

St. Olaf College, Department of Psychology (December 2024)

Haverford College, Department of Psychology (January 2024)

Gustavus Adolphus, College Department of Psychology (December 2023)

Beloit College, Department of Psychology (November 2023)

Lake Forest College, Department of Psychology (November 2023)

Teaching experience

Spring 2025

Instructor of Record, “Promoting Change through Social Psychology.” Part of the Global Mobility, Inclusion, and Diversity in Society MA program at the University of Oslo. Co-taught with Dr. Thomas Schubert and Dr. Charles Samuelson. (no student evaluations)

Spring 2025

Instructor of Record, “The Social Psychology of Inequality: Groups, Hierarchies, and Discrimination.” Upper-level BA Course at Aarhus University. Co-taught with Dr. Lei Fan. (4.9/5.0)

Fall 2021

Instructor of Record, “Separating Fact from Fiction in Psychological Science;” self-created course developed for the Sweetland Fellows Seminar as a first-year writing seminar in the English department. ([Syllabus](#)) (5.0/5.0)

Winter 2021

Graduate Student Instructor, “Introduction to Psychology.” Responsible for test creation and grading assignments. (no student

evaluations)

- Winter 2020 and Fall 2020 **Graduate Student Instructor**, “Research Methods in Psychology.”
 Taught two lab sections per semester of 20 students each, designed lesson plans, oversaw semester-long individual research projects. In Winter 2020 developed modules on critical pedagogy to create a more inclusive research methods curriculum. ([materials](#)) (4.9/5.0)
- Winter 2019 and Fall 2019 **Graduate Student Instructor**, “Introduction to Social Psychology.”
 Taught three discussion sections per semester of 25 students each, designed lesson plans, wrote exams with teaching team, and held office hours. (4.9/5.0)

Undergraduate Research Advising

At the University of Michigan, students engage with research labs by signing up for courses that provide them with different levels of research training. Under “independent research supervision” you will see students I have supervised who developed their own projects for year-long or semester-long papers. Oftentimes my role here was to provide feedback on big picture theoretical ideas, help them design studies, and provide feedback on analyses and manuscript drafts. Under “lab research supervision” you will see projects I have supervised as part of my own or my advisors’ broader program of research. For these students my role was to teach and oversee literature reviews, data cleaning in R, stimuli development, participant recruitment, and conducting laboratory studies.

Independent research supervision

- AY 2021-2022 Honors Thesis (co-advised with Dr. Josh Ackerman)
 Ariella Kushner
Disease concealment and welfare trade-off ratios
- Fall 2021 Directed Advanced Research for Psychology
 William Gonzalez
Lay beliefs about scent and social class
- Fall 2020 Directed Advanced Research for Psychology
 Ariella Kushner
Social harm and infectious disease concealment

Lab research supervision

- Sclera coloration and infectious disease threats* (Spring 2023, 1 RA)
Motivations underlying infectious disease concealment (Winter 2023, 2 RAs)
Experiential conspicuous consumption, dominance, and prestige (Fall 2022, 3 RAs)
Environmental harshness and pain sensitivity (Winter 2022, 5 RAs)
Children’s perceptions of status signals (Fall 2020, 3 RAs)
Strategic disease concealment (Winter 2020, 3 RAs)
Speed of processing in online dating (Fall 2019 3, RAs)
Humblebragging in the online and offline sphere (Winter 2019, 3 RAs)

Other undergraduate research supervision

- Fall 2023 – Present Independent Research Project (co-advised with Dr. Daniel Fessler, UCLA)

Kristin Pischel, Reem Chaar (UCLA)
Muscularity myths and racial bias

Service to the field and public communication

Ad hoc reviewer: *Evolution and Human Behavior, Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin, Group Processes and Intergroup Relations, Journal of Personality, Social Cognition, British Journal of Psychology, Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, Infant & Child Development, Personality & Individual Differences, Evolutionary Psychology*

Program committee: *Human Behavior and Evolution Society (2024), CEPDISC Annual Conference on Discrimination (2025)*

Public communication: *Motivational frictions* ([Psychology Today blog](#))

Positions Held

2021 - 2023	Graduate Student Instructional Consultant , Center for the Research on Learning and Teaching, University of Michigan.
2019 - 2020	Academic Mentor for Football , Academic Success Program, University of Michigan Athletics Department
2016 - 2018	Research Analyst , The Brattle Group, Washington DC
2013 - 2016	Research Assistant , Macalester College eye-tracking lab (Dr. R. Brooke Lea), St. Paul MN

Leadership, Departmental Service, & Campus Involvement

2021 - 2022	Social Area Departmental Associate , University of Michigan, attended faculty meetings to serve as one of two student representatives for our area.
2021	Graduate Student Admissions Committee , University of Michigan, one of four students chosen to read applications and decide on admissions for the next cohort of social area students.
2020	Recruitment Weekend Organizer , University of Michigan, one of two students chosen to plan and facilitate recruitment weekend activities for prospective students
2019 - 2020	Diversity Representative , Psychology Diversity Committee, University of Michigan
2019 - 2022	Co-chair , Asian Psychological Student Association, University of Michigan
2018 - 2019	Treasurer , Asian Psychological Student Association, University of Michigan

Professional Memberships

Society for Personality and Social Psychology
 Society for Experimental Social Psychology
 Human Behavior and Evolution Society

European Human Behavior and Evolution Society

Programming and Analytic Skills

Programs and languages: R, Stata, SPSS, MPlus, excel, javascript, Qualtrics, SR Experiment Builder, SR Data Viewer

Methods and techniques: Reverse correlation, geospatial analysis, linear mixed models

References

Dr. Lotte Thomsen
Professor of Psychology, University of Oslo
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Dr. Josh Ackerman
Professor of Psychology, University of Michigan
joshack@umich.edu

Dr. Arnold Ho
Associate Professor of Psychology, University of Michigan
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Dr. Theresa Tinkle
Director, Sweetland Center for Writing, Professor of English and Arthur F. Thurnau Professor, University of Michigan
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