

Faculty Position

July 2025-Present Research Assistant Professor
Department of Psychology and Neuroscience, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Winston Center on Technology and Brain Development

Education and Research Positions

2023- 2025 Postdoctoral Research Associate
University of Southern California, Department of Psychology
Neuroendocrinology of Social Ties Lab
PI: Darby Saxbe PhD

2018-2023 PhD, Brain and Cognitive Science, Department of Psychology
University of Southern California
Advisors: Jonas Kaplan, PhD; Antonio Damasio, MD PhD
Dissertation: The neuroscience of ambivalent and ambiguous feelings

2018-2021 MA, Brain and Cognitive Science, Department of Psychology
University of Southern California

2017-2018 Postgraduate Fellow, Child Study Center
Yale School of Medicine
PI: Marc Potenza, MD PhD
Thesis: Intrinsic functional connectivity in gambling disorder vs. cocaine-use disorder

2016-2018 MRes, Developmental Neuroscience and Psychopathology
University College London

2012-2016 BS, Brain and Cognitive Sciences, BA, Linguistics
University of Rochester

Publications (* = Co-First Author)

20. Newsome, P.*, **Vaccaro, A. G.***, Cardenas, S., Waizman, Y. H., Leon, G. A., Arviv, E. C., Marshall, N., & Saxbe, D. E. (in press) My baby versus the world: Fathers' neural processing of own-infant, unfamiliar-infant, and romantic partner stimuli. *Human Brain Mapping*
19. **Vaccaro, A. G.**, Newsome, P., Waizman, Y. H., Corner, G., & Saxbe, D. E. (in press) Intrinsic resting state connectivity and personal meaning across the transition to fatherhood. *Emotion*
18. Christov-Moore, L., Schoeller, F., **Vaccaro, A.**, Iacoboni, M., Kaplan, J., & Reggente, N. (in press) Individual differences in aesthetic experience highlight the role of interoception in political orientation. *Political Psychology*
17. Wu, H., **Vaccaro, A. G.**, & Kaplan, J. (2025). First-person spoken narratives elicit consistent event structures in angular gyrus. *Cortex*, 185, 286-300.
16. Leon, G. A., Waizman, Y. H., Cardenas, S. I., Arviv, E. C., Newsome, P., **Vaccaro, A. G.**, Morris, A. R., & Saxbe, D. E. (2025). Trajectories of mothers' perinatal depressive symptoms during COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns: The protective role of romantic relationship quality. *Journal of Psychopathology and Clinical Science*, 134(4), 389-399.
15. Horner, S. B., Lulla, R., Wu, H., Shakhivel, S., **Vaccaro, A.**, Herschel, E., Christov-Moore, L., McDaniel, C., Kaplan, J., & Greening, S. G. (2025). Brain activity associated with emotion regulation predicts individual differences in working memory ability. *Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioral Neuroscience*, 25, 329-343.
14. Waizman, Y. H., **Vaccaro, A. G.**, Newsome, P., Aviv, E., Leo, G., Berzenski, S., & Saxbe, D. E. (2025). Behavioral and neural evidence for difficulty recognizing masked sad faces. *Emotion*, 25(3), 706-724.
13. **Vaccaro, A. G.** (2024). Feelings are messy: The feelings we study in affective science should be too. *Affective Science*, 5, 190-195.

12. **Vaccaro, A. G.**, Wu, H., Iyer, R., Shakthivel, S., Christie, N. C., Damasio, A., & Kaplan, J. T. (2024). Neural patterns associated with mixed valence feelings differ in consistency and predictability throughout the brain. *Cerebral Cortex*, 34(4), bhae122.
11. **Vaccaro, A. G.**, Lacadie, C., & Potenza, M. N. (2024). Intrinsic connectivity demonstrates a shared role of the posterior cingulate for cue-induced craving in both gambling and cocaine use disorders. *Addictive Behaviors*, 155, 108027.
10. Waizman, Y. H., Herschel, E., Cardenas, S., **Vaccaro, A.**, Aviv, E. C., Sellery, P., Goldberg, D., Kaplan, J., & Saxbe, D. E. (2024). Neural correlates of inhibitory control in the context of infant cry and paternal adjustment to fatherhood. *Behavioral Brain Research*, 465, 114947.
9. Lulla, R., Christov-Moore, L., **Vaccaro, A. G.**, Reggente, N., Iacoboni, M., & Kaplan, J. T. (2024). Empathy from dissimilarity: Multivariate pattern analysis of neural activity during observation of others' somatosensory experiences. *Imaging Neuroscience*, 2, 1-12.
8. Christov-Moore, L., Reggente, N., **Vaccaro, A.**, Schoeller, F., Plumer, B., Douglas, P. K., Iacoboni, M., Man, K., Damasio, A., & Kaplan, J. T. (2023). Preventing antisocial robots: A pathway to artificial empathy. *Science Robotics*, 8(80), eabq3658.
7. Kaplan, J. T., **Vaccaro, A. G.**, Henning, M., & Christov-Moore, L. (2023). Moral reframing of messages about mask-wearing during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Scientific Reports*, 13(1), 10140.
6. **Vaccaro, A. G.**, Heydari, P., Christov-Moore, L., Damasio, A., & Kaplan, J. T. (2022). Perspective-taking is associated with increased discriminability of affective representations in ventromedial prefrontal cortex. *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*. nasc035.
5. **Vaccaro, A. G.**, Scott, B., Gimbel, S. I., & Kaplan, J. (2021). Functional brain connectivity during narrative processing relates to transportation and story influence. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 15, 351.
4. **Vaccaro, A. G.**, Kaplan, J. T., & Damasio, A. (2020). Bittersweet: The neuroscience of ambivalent affect. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 15(5), 1187-1199.
3. **Vaccaro, A. G.**, & Potenza, M. N. (2020). Neurobiological foundations of behavioral addictions. In S. Sussman (Ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Substance Use and Behavioral Addictions*. Cambridge University Press.
2. **Vaccaro, A. G.**, & Potenza, M. N. (2019). Diagnostic and classification considerations regarding gaming disorder: Neurocognitive and neurobiological features. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 10, 405.
1. **Vaccaro, A. G.**, & Fleming, S. M. (2018). Thinking about thinking: A coordinate-based meta-analysis of neuroimaging studies on metacognitive judgments. *Brain and Neuroscience Advances*, 2.

Manuscripts Under Review

1. **Vaccaro, A. G.**, Shakthivel, S., Wu, H., Iyer, R., & Kaplan, J. T. Individual differences in feelings of certainty surrounding mixed emotions [Preprint]. *PsyArXiv*. <https://osf.io/preprints/psyarxiv/6tmj5/> Revised and Resubmitted at PLOS One

Manuscripts in Preparation († = Co-Senior Author)

- **Vaccaro, A. G.**, Burnell, K., Maheux, A. J., Prinstein, M. J., & Telzer, E. H. The technological future of feeling.
- **Vaccaro, A. G.**, Newsome, P., Waizman, Y. H., & Saxbe, D. E. Neural processing of emotional media in children and parents: Links to family media-use behavior.
- Iyer, R., Nataste, S., **Vaccaro, A. G †**, & Kaplan, J †. Neural synchrony predicts subjective emotional consensus of mixed feelings.
- Newsome, P., Stoycos, S. A., **Vaccaro, A. G.**, Waizman, Y. H., Kaplan, J. T., & Saxbe, D. E. Fear processing across the transition to fatherhood.

Awards and Honors

2024- [USC Dornsife Communicator of the Year Award](#): College-wide award for public communication of research
 2024- [Society for Affective Science Best Dissertation Award](#)
 2024- [Beyond the Ivory Tower Op-Ed Writing Workshop \(John Templeton Foundation\)](#) - \$2000
 2023- Dornsife Neuroimaging Funds for Thesis Work - \$3000
 2023, 2022, 2020- Department of Psychology Doctoral Travel Award- \$1000 each
 2020- Department of Psychology Doctoral Research Grant Award- \$3100
 2020- Department of Psychology Continuing Research Award- \$800
 2018- MRes Degree awarded with Merit
 2014, 2015- University of Rochester Dean's List

Under Review Grant Application

2025

Principal Investigator

\$745,150.00 Huo Family Foundation Junior Faculty Grant

Brain Development and Emotional Responses to Personal Social Media Feeds: A Longitudinal Real-World fNIRS Study

Collaborators: Drs. Burnell & Telzer (UNC)

Selected Conference Presentations and Posters

- Newsome P, **Vaccaro, A. G.**, Cardenas, S., Waizman, Y. H., Valen, N. A., Arviv, E. C., Leon, G. A., & Saxbe, D. E. Cortical Midline Discriminates Infant and Familial Cues in First-Time Fathers. Annual meeting of the Society for Biological Psychiatry, 2025
- **Vaccaro, A. G.** No ambivalence about it: Mixed feelings are essential to a full theory of affective neuroscience. Society for Affective Science, 2025 (**Invited Talk**).
- Newsome, P., **Vaccaro, A. G.**, Waizman, Y., Stoycos, S. A., & Saxbe, D. E. Machiavellian traits underlie reduced amygdala and dorsolateral prefrontal cortex activation to fearful faces in expectant fathers. Annual meeting of the Society for Biological Psychiatry, 2024.
- **Vaccaro, A. G.**, Waizman, Y., Newsome, P., & Saxbe, D. E. Neural changes in meaning-making in the transition to fatherhood. Society for Affective Science, 2024.
- **Vaccaro, A. G.**, Wu, H., Iyer, R., Shakthivel, S., Christie, N., Damasio, A., & Kaplan, J. T. Predicting bittersweet feelings from neural events during naturalistic movie watching. Social Affective Neuroscience Society, 2023. (**Blitz Talk**).
- Wu, H., **Vaccaro, A. G.**, & Kaplan, J. Understanding the neuroscience of human event segmentation using the Hidden Markov Model and naturalistic fMRI of story listening. Social Affective Neuroscience Society, 2023.
- Horner, S., Lulla, R., Wu, H., Shakthivel, S., **Vaccaro, A.**, Herschel, E., Christov-Moore, L., McDaniel, C., Greening, S., & Kaplan, J. T. Predicting individual differences in working memory ability from neural patterns during emotion regulation. Social Affective Neuroscience Society, 2023.
- **Vaccaro, A. G.**, Heydari, P., Christov-Moore, L., Damasio, A., & Kaplan, J. T. Perspective-taking is associated with increased discriminability of affective representations in ventromedial prefrontal cortex. International Society of Emotion Research, July 2022.
- **Vaccaro, A. G.**, Shakthivel, S., Wu, H., & Kaplan, J. Individual differences in feelings of certainty surrounding mixed emotions. Poster presented at: Society for Affective Science, March 2022.
- Christov-Moore, L., **Vaccaro, A.**, Damasio, A., & Kaplan, J. Neurobiological affective processes' contribution to general intelligence. Organization of Human Brain Mapping, 2020.
- Potenza, M. N., **Vaccaro, A.**, & Dong, G. Neurobiology of addictive behavior. Symposium for the International Conference on Behavioral Addictions; June, 2020; Nottingham, UK. (Canceled due to COVID-19).
- **Vaccaro, A. G.**, Scott, B., Gimbel, S., Damasio, A., & Kaplan, J. Insula connectivity during narratives predicts willingness to donate to a cause. Poster presented at: Cognitive Neuroscience Society, 2020.
- Scott, B., **Vaccaro, A.**, Kaplan, J. Functional Connectivity of the Insula During Narratives Compared to Rest; Poster session presented at: University of Southern California; Summer 2019
- Lamb, R., **Vaccaro, A.**, Yip, S. The Role of Corticosteroid Receptor Genes in Vulnerability in Drug-Related Substance-Abuse Disorders. Poster session presented at: Yale Child Study Center; July 23, 2018; New Haven, CT
- **Vaccaro, AG**, Potenza MN. Intrinsic Connectivity During Cue-Induced Craving: A Comparative fMRI Analysis of Pathological Gambling and Cocaine Dependence. Poster session present at: Yale Child Study Center; June 26, 2018; New Haven, CT

Publications for Popular Press

Vaccaro A.G. (2024, September 20). Why do we feel mixed emotions? Brain science has an answer. *U.S. News & World Report*.

Vaccaro, A. G. (2024, April 26). Opinion: Is social media really rewiring kids' brains? Here's what the science really says. *Los Angeles Times*.

Vaccaro, A. G. (2023, December 1). Banning cellphones in schools is not so simple [Letter to the editor]. *The Washington Post*.

Selected Media Engagement

Vaccaro, A.G (2025, Apr 10) The Rise of Youtube and How It's Changed Our Lives. *Interview on The Pulse NPR*

Vaccaro, A.G (2025, Mar 24) Containing multitudes: Why feeling mixed emotions can actually be healthy. *Interview in Salon*.

Vaccaro, A.G. (2024, Sep 24). Nostalgia is a mixed bag. *Interview on KCBS- San Francisco*.

Vaccaro, A. G. (2024, Jul 25). What exactly are mixed emotions? Dr. Anthony Vaccaro breaks it down. *Interview on the Ross Kaminsky Show*.

Vaccaro, A. G. (2024, Jun 29). Kun je echt gemengde gevoelens hebben? Nieuw onderzoek onthult van wel. *Interview in Scientias*.

Vaccaro, A. G. (2023, Dec 26). Schools in 41 states have spent millions on pouches to lock up kids' phones. *Interview for NBC News*.

Vaccaro, A. G. (2023, November 16). Making empathy artificial. *Interview for Communications of the ACM*.

Teaching Experience

Spring 2025

Guest Lecture

Course: Neuroscience 525, Advanced Overviews in Neuroscience II
"Emotion"

Spring 2020,

Fall 2020-Fall 2024

Guest Lecturer

Course: Psychology 426, Motivated Behaviors and Addiction
"Gaming, Immersion, and Addictive Behavior"

Fall 2024

Guest Lecture

Course: Psychology 555, Introduction to Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging
"Naturalistic fMRI Paradigms"

Fall 2022

Guest Lecture

Course: Psychology 612, Social Neuroscience
"Mixed Feelings and Ambivalence"

Spring 2022

Teaching Assistant- Leading Lab Sections

Course: Psychology 165, Drugs Mind and Society
Average Course Evaluation: 4.00/4.00

Fall 2021

Teaching Assistant- Leading Lab Sections

Course: Psychology 316, Non-Experimental Research Methods
Average Course Evaluation: 3.71/4.00

Spring 2021

Teaching Assistant- Leading Lab Sections

Course: Psychology 165, Drugs Mind and Society
Average Course Evaluation: 3.90/4.00

Fall 2020

Teaching Assistant- Grading and Extra Help

Course: Psychology 326, Behavioral Neuroscience

Spring 2020

Teaching Assistant- Leading Lab Sections

Course: Psychology 165, Drugs Mind and Society
Average Course Evaluation: 3.58/4.00

Fall 2019

Teaching Assistant- Leading Lab Sections

Course: Psychology 165, Drugs Mind and Society
Average Course Evaluation: 3.73/4.00

Summer 2019

Guest Lecturer

Course: Introduction to Mental Health at University of Southern California Summer Program
"Research on Internet Gaming Disorder"

Spring 2019

Guest Lecturer

Course: Psychology 434, Neuropsychology

“Neuropsychological Assessment of the Frontal Lobes”

Undergraduate Mentoring

-Judge for the University of Southern California Undergraduate Research Symposium in 2021, 2022, and 2023

-Mentored students in the USC Neuroscience Undergraduate Research and Learning Program for underrepresented minority undergraduates in Summers 2019, 2020, and 2024

-Served as research mentor for USC neuroscience students: **Helen Wu, Rishab Iyer, Shruti Shakthivel, Alex Faizat**

Ad Hoc Peer Reviewer

Addiction

Addictive Behaviors

Behavioural Brain Research

Biological Psychology

Brain Stimulation

Canadian Journal of Addiction

Cognitive Neuroscience: The Biology of the Mind (6th ed., W.W. Norton Textbook)

Comprehensive Psychiatry

Current Addiction Reports

Emotion

Frontiers in Digital Health

Frontiers in Psychiatry

Frontiers in Psychology

Journal of Behavioral Addictions

Language and Cognition

Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B

Pediatrics International

PLOS One

Scientific Reports

Professional Service

Guest Editor- *Brain and Environment* - Special Issue on ‘Social Media, Brain and Social Cognitive Behavior’

Society for Affective Science- Awards Committee: 2024-Present
