

Contact

Yayun Zheng

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yuliya-zzZ

Research Focus

- Computational Social Cognition
- Mental State Inference
- Affective Decision Making
- Social Media and Language
- Theory of Mind
- Human-AI Social Reasoning

Skills

Python & R

- Computational Modeling
- NLP (LIWC, VADER, RoBERTa)
- SPSS, JASP, G*Power
- E-Prime & Qualtrics
- IRB & Project Managing
- Meta-Analysis
- EEG & Eye-tracking

Yayun Zheng

Computational Social Cognition Researcher

I study how humans and AI infer mental states from language and behavior, and how these inferences shape trust, decision-making, and social interaction.

Education

Sept 2024 - May 2026, New York University, New York, US

MA . General Psychology

GPA: 3.7/4.0

Focus: Cognitive Psychology, Human-AI Interaction, Social Cognition

Specializations: NLP applications, AI ethics, computational modeling

Honors & Awards:

PsiChi Graduate Student Member

NYU Graduate Student conference Grant (2025-2026)

NYU Graduate Student Conference Award (2024-2025)

Sept 2020 - Jul 2024, Dali University, Yunnan, China

B.Ed. Applied Psychology

GPA: 3.74/4.0

Honors & Awards:

Yunnan Provincial Merit Student (2022-2023)

Yunnan Provincial Scholarship (2021-2022)

School-level First-Class Scholarships (2020-2022)

Merit Student Award (2021-2022)

Research Experience

Apr 2025 - Present, New York University

Researcher - A ToM Driven Error Taxonomy for Deception Detection in Courtroom Testimonies

Department of Psychology, Supervisor: Dr. Lingfei Luan

- Developed a Theory-of-Mind-based framework for understanding deceptive communication as failures of mental-state inference and social reasoning.
- Constructed a multilingual corpus of courtroom testimony and online interaction data to investigate how intentions, beliefs, and reasoning errors are reflected in language.
- Applied computational and psycholinguistic modeling approaches to identify behavioral and linguistic indicators predictive of deceptive communication.
- Presented findings as an individual oral presentation at the 2026 American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL) Conference.

Apr 2025 - Present, New York University, Belmont University

Research Assistant - Computational Modeling of Online Health Decision-Making

Department of Psychology, Supervisor: Dr. Lingfei Luan

- Investigated how exposure to YouTube-based health information influences behavioral intentions using survey data from 608 young adults
- Applied logistic regression and stacking ensemble learning models to predict behavioral decision-making from demographic and psychometric variables
- Analyzed how online information exposure, misconceptions, and individual differences shape decision-making in digital environments
- Manuscript submitted to *Journal of Medical Informatics*

Mar 2025 - Present, New York University

Researcher - NLP Modeling of Emotion Dynamic and Depression Risk on Social Media Contents

Department of Psychology

- Led a research project on detecting depression risk from social media language using temporally grounded NLP methods.
- Modeled longitudinal emotional dynamics from Reddit data to examine patterns surrounding depression self-disclosure.
- Extracted psychologically informed features (valence trajectory, agency shifts, pronoun use) using LIWC, VADER, and transformer-based models.
- Applied mixed-effects regression and changepoint detection to capture fine-grained emotional fluctuations over time.
- Identified predictive patterns including increasing emotional volatility, declining agency, and non-linear affective shifts prior to depression expression.
- Results accepted for **poster presentation at CogSci 2026** (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil).
- GitHub: github.com/yuliya-zzZ/temporal-emotion-depression-nlp

Oct 2024 - Present, New York University

Researcher - AI & Human Art Perception and Labeling Effect

Department of Psychology, Supervisor: Dr. David Bosch

- Designed an IRB-approved study examining how creator labels (AI vs. human) shape perceptions of creativity, aesthetic value, and artistic intent.
- Conducted mixed-methods analyses integrating qualitative thematic coding with quantitative approaches (ANOVA, t-tests, factor analysis) to investigate mechanisms underlying AI-human art evaluation.
- Co-authored the manuscript's Introduction and Discussion sections, contributing to theoretical framing and interpretation of findings within social cognition and human-AI interaction research.
- Pre-registered the study and supported ongoing experimental implementation and data collection.
- Results accepted for **poster presentation at CogSci 2026** (in-person, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil).

Feb 2026 - present, New York University

Researcher – Prosocial Behavior and Social Decision-Making in Large Language Models

Department of Psychology, Supervisor: Dr. Todd Gureckis

- Led a collaborative research project investigating prosocial behavior in large language models using a dynamic cooperative decision-making paradigm.
- Coordinated project meetings, designed prompting strategies, and organized the experimental workflow across collaborators.
- Conducted statistical analyses using mixed-effects models to compare human and LLM helping behavior across partner policies and environmental contexts.
- Co-authored the manuscript, contributing to study design, data analysis, and scientific writing.

Feb 2025 - Present, New York University

Researcher - Cultural Bias in ToM Evaluations in LLMs

Department of Psychology, Supervisors: Dr. Michael Joffe & Dr. Mike Clarke

- Authored a research proposal on cultural bias in Theory of Mind (ToM) evaluation in large language models
- Applied psychological theory and cultural frameworks to analyze GPT-4 and DeepSeek performance
- Developed a quantitative coding scheme for benchmark evaluation; manuscript in progress

May 2024 - Present, New York University

Researcher - VLTm Activation and Visual Working Memory Capacity

Dali University (Prof. Xiumei He) & New York University (Prof. Shannon Tubridy)

- Designed a delayed change-detection experiment to examine how activated long-term memory affects VWMC
- Developed E-Prime protocol; analyzed K-values and reaction time using SPSS and JASP
- Presented at the 29th Annual NYU MA Psychology Research Conference (2025)

Sept 2023 - May 2024, Dali University, Dali, China

Degree Thesis - Systematic Meta-Analytic Review (Umbrella Review) on Pro-Environmental Behaviors

Li Lab

- Conducted an umbrella meta-analysis (n=42) on psychological drivers of environmental behavior
- Performed systematic literature searches under PRISMA guidelines; extracted and coded effect sizes

Sept 2021 - Jul 2024, Dali University, Dali, China

Research Assistant - Self-Efficacy & Wellbeing Studies

Li Lab

- Analyzed survey data on Big Five traits and happiness using SPSS, JASP, and network analysis
- Built and interpreted structural equation models for lab-based research projects

Publications & Conference Presentations

Conference Presentations:

- **Zheng, Y. (2026, March).** A theory-of-mind driven error taxonomy for deception detection in courtroom testimonies. **Individual oral presentation** at the **2026 American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL) Conference, Chicago, IL.**
- **Zheng, Y. (2026).** How do emotional dynamics in social media language reflect depression risk? An NLP-based analysis. **Poster presentation** at **CogSci 2026** (accepted), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Journal Publications:

- Zheng, Y. (2022). A theoretical analysis of Satir iceberg model for two-child families. *International Journal of Education and Humanities*. <https://doi.org/10.54097/ijeh.v4i2.1613>

Manuscripts Under Review:

- **Zheng, Y. (2026).** Leveraging Machine Learning to Evaluate Social Media Health Campaign: A Predictive Model for safe-sex Intention. Submitted to *Journal of Medical Informatics*.

Conference Proceedings:

- Zheng, Y. (2023). The unusual yellow hue and 65% saturation: The interaction of color hue and saturation on time perception. In *Proceedings of the 2023 International Conference on Applied Psychology and Education*. https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-158-6_35
- Zheng, Y. (2023). How culture affects mental representations of diagonal time lines: Effect of the domain lateral and vertical MTL. In *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Public Culture and Social Services*. https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-130-2_17

Teaching Experience

Sept 2025 - Dec 2025, New York University

Head Course Assistant - Introduction to Psychology

Supervisor: Prof. Jay Van Bavel, Department of Psychology

- Appointed as one of two Head Course Assistants, overseeing a large undergraduate course
- Reviewed and coordinated exam materials, including developing protocols to address AI-related academic integrity concerns
- Designed and implemented an attendance and participation grading system for recitation sessions
- Consulted with former Head CAs to manage the team of Recitation Leaders more efficiently

Practical Experience

Oct 2023 - Dec 2023, China National Institute of Standardization (CNIS)

Lab Assistant - Human Factors Research

- Operated EEG and physiological sensors; processed 3D modeling data for “digital human” project

Recommendation Info

David Bosch, Ph.D.

Clinical Associate Professor of Psychology
Department of Psychology, New York University
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Lingfei Luan, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Psychology
College of Sciences & Mathematics, Belmont University
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