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[www.dascpitt.org/content/olino-thomas-phd](http://www.dascpitt.org/content/olino-thomas-phd)

## **What does your research focus on?**

My primary line of research examines the role of appetitive motivation in the development of unipolar mood disorders using multiple types of methodologies, including, self-reports, behavior, and functional neuroimaging. While there is well-established literature on appetitive motivational deficits in individuals with depression, it is less well known if this pattern of functioning is present before the onset of the disorder. Thus, my work focuses on children and adolescents without a personal history of depression, but who are at high risk for developing depression. If these alterations are identified before the onset of depression, I hope to be able to develop prevention strategies to target this dimension of risk.

## **What drew you to this line of research and why is it exciting to you?**

During my undergraduate studies, I was initially more interested in externalizing behavior problems. However, my first research experience, with Dan Klein, Emily Durbin, and Elizabeth Hayden, focused on observational assessments of temperament. In contrast to my initial expectation, the young children who displayed low levels of positive emotion and minimal enthusiasm for social engagement stood out as being most interesting to me. These children sparked interests in the developmental implications of reduced positive emotion and how emotional style and temperament develop. Regardless of the methodology that I am using to pursue a research question about positive emotion and/or appetitive

motivation, I can always visualize the constructs of interest based on the observations of young children.

### **Who were/are your mentors or scientific influences?**

I have been fortunate to have exceptional mentors and role-models. Dan Klein has been a longstanding mentor to me and is the most important influence for my work. During my graduate training, he always had time to discuss scientific projects and broader professional issues. Dan was, and continues to be, very supportive of pursuing research questions that pique my interests. Following graduate school, I began a post doc with Erika Forbes as my primary mentor (with this relationship continuing during my National Institutes of Health Career Development Award). She provided an excellent opportunity to build on my experience of behavioral observations of positive emotions by learning about and incorporating neuroscience perspectives on reward and adolescent development. Our discussions about developmental neuroscience have been particularly valuable for my current and planned work. I hope that I can provide the type of mentoring that I received from Dan and Erika to my own students in the future.

I have also benefitted from informal mentoring from many sources. Emily Durbin and Elizabeth Hayden were excellent role models for how to be productive in graduate school (and beyond). Peter Lewinsohn and John Seeley have been extraordinary role models for navigating and maintaining successful collaborations. I have also benefitted greatly from generous collaborations with Jennifer Silk, Ron Dahl, and Neal Ryan, who have all made important contributions to my early career development — both for empirical and conceptual discussions, as well as practical advice about building a research program from soup to nuts.

### **What's your future research agenda?**

My future work will focus on the interaction between the development of appetitive motivation and risk for depression: How does appetitive motivation develop from childhood through adolescence, and how do these developmental patterns differ in individuals at high and low risk for depression? Results of these studies may identify when appetitive systems are more malleable to change, which may inform periods of development when prevention strategies may be more successful. In addition to this substantive question, I am also interested in identifying and developing measures that would be appropriate to assess appetitive motivation across childhood and adolescence.

### **What publication are you most proud of?**

Olino, T. M., Yu, L., Klein, D. N., Rohde, P., Seeley, J. R., Pilkonis, P. A., Lewinsohn, P. M. (2012). Measuring depression using item response theory: An examination of three measures of depressive symptomatology. *International Journal of Methods in Psychiatric Research*, 21, 76–85.

While the primary theme of my work is on risk for depression, I am most proud of a paper that, I think, has practical implications for assessment. Using many statistical indices, the instruments that we use to assess depression (and psychopathology, more generally) are highly similar. In the manuscript, we used item response theory methods to examine how measures of depression severity (two self-report inventories and a diagnostic interview) provide information about different levels of depressive severity.

Based on the results, we were able to identify ways in which the measures differ and how these differences have practical implications for assessment.