

DUNIGAN FOLK

Department of Psychology
University of Pennsylvania
dunigan@sas.upenn.edu

EDUCATION & ACADEMIC TRAINING

MindCORE Postdoctoral Fellow

University of Pennsylvania

Sept. 2025 – Present

Advisors: Dr. Lyle Ungar & Dr. Angela Duckworth

Ph.D. in Psychology, Social Psychology

University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada

Sept. 2021 – Aug. 2025

Advisors: Dr. Elizabeth Dunn & Dr. Steven Heine

M.A. in Psychology, Social Psychology

University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada

Sept. 2019 – Aug. 2021

Advisors: Dr. Elizabeth Dunn & Dr. Steven Heine

B.Sc. Psychology (Hons.)

University of British Columbia Okanagan (UBCO)

Sept. 2016 – May 2019

Advisor: Dr. Marvin Krank

Cumulative GPA: 90.3%

University of Regina

Sept. 2014 – May 2016

GRANTS

Gates Foundation, “Gallup study of Gen Z and parents on using AI and impact on well-being,” March 20th, 2026 to June 30th, 2026 (\$186,000)

- Co-Principal Investigator

FELLOWSHIPS, HONORS, AND AWARDS

Psychology of Technology Institute Dissertation Award

Psychology of Technology Institute | \$1,500

2026

SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowship (offered, declined)

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada | \$140,000

2025

Psychology Department Fellowship

University of British Columbia | \$18,000

2024

Psychology Department Fellowship

University of British Columbia | \$7,784

2024

Social and Personality Psychology Department Leadership Award University of British Columbia <i>Awarded to one student per year in recognition of their service and participation in the department.</i>	2023
Stanley Coren Award for Most Outstanding Master's Thesis University of British Columbia \$250	2022
Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship - Doctoral Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada \$105,000	2021-2024
Graduate Entrance Scholarship University of British Columbia \$17,500	2020-2021
Department of Psychology Award University of British Columbia \$5,096	2020-2021
Canada Graduate Scholarship – Master's (CGS-M) Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada \$17,500	2019-2020
Deputy Vice-Chancellor Scholarship Average of 80% in previous academic year UBCO \$500	2017-2018
Dean's List UBCO Average of 85%+ in academic year	2016-2018

PEER-REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS

- Folk, D. & Dunn, E. (2026).** How does turning to AI for companionship predict loneliness and vice versa? *Psychological Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09567976261427747>
- Folk, D., Henninger, M., & Dunn, E. (2026).** What does a good day look like?: An interpretable machine learning approach to the American Time Use Survey. *PNAS Nexus*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pnasnexus/pgag014>
- Folk, D., & Dunn E. (2026).** Everything Is Better Together: Analyzing the Relationship Between Socializing and Happiness in the American Time Use Survey. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 17(4), 426-435. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19485506251364333>
- Maheshka, C., Folk, D., & Dunn, E. (2026).** Harnessing artificial intelligence to facilitate difficult conversations. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550626144406>

- Li, R.-N., **Folk, D.**, Singh, A., Ungar, L., & Dunn, E. (2026). Is a random human peer better than a highly supportive chatbot in reducing loneliness over time? *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2026.104911>
- Folk, D.**, Wu, C., & Heine, S. (2025). Cultural variation in attitudes towards social chatbots. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 56(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/00220221251317950>
- Folk, D.**, Heine, S., & Dunn, E. (2025). Individual differences in anthropomorphism help explain social connection to AI companions. *Scientific Reports*. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-025-19212-2>
- Jettinghoff, W., **Folk, D.**, Radjaee, P., Willard, A., Norenzayan, A., & Heine, S. J. (2025). The varieties of nonreligious experience: meaning in life among believers, non-believers, and the spiritual but not religious. *Religion, Brain & Behavior*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2153599X.2025.2546324>
- Mask, M., **Folk, D.**, & Heine, S. (2025). How sources of purpose predict meaning in life, happiness, and psychological richness across cultures. *Journal of Positive Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2025.2500562>
- Folk, D.**, Dunn, E. (2024). Reply to: Strength of evidence for five happiness strategies. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 8(9). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-024-01955-z>
- Folk, D.**, Yu, S.J., & Dunn, E. (2024). Can chatbots ever provide more social connection than humans? *Collabra: Psychology*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.1525/collabra.117083>
- Folk, D.**, & Savalei, V. (2024). Examining the performance of the chi-square difference test when the unrestricted model is slightly misspecified. *Behavior Research Methods*, 56(7). <https://doi.org/10.3758/s13428-024-02384-6>
- Folk, D.**, Rutjens, B. T., Van Elk, M., & Heine, S. (2024). Dare to know! The existential costs of a faith in science. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 20(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2024.2314294>
- Folk, D.**, & Dunn, E. (2024). How can people become happier? A systematic review of preregistered experiments. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 75. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-022423-030818>
- Folk, D.**, & Dunn, E. (2023). A systematic review of the strength of evidence for the most commonly recommended happiness strategies in mainstream media. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 7(10). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-023-01651-4>
- Featured on the October 2023 cover of *Nature Human Behavior*
- Okabe-Miyamoto, K., **Folk, D.**, Lyubomirsky, S., & Dunn, E. (2021). Changes in

social connection during COVID-19 social distancing: It's not (household) size that matters, it's who you're with. *PloS one*. 16(1).
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0245009>

Lutz, P. K., O'Connor, B. P., & Folk, D. (2021). Dimensionality, item response theory, effect size attenuation, and test bias analyses of the self-importance of moral identity scale (SIMIS). *Journal of Personality Assessment*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00223891.2021.1991359>

Folk, D., Okabe-Miyamoto, K., Dunn, E., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2020). Did social connection decline during the first wave of COVID-19?: The role of extraversion. *Collabra: Psychology*, 6(1). <https://doi.org/10.1525/collabra.365>

CHAPTERS IN EDITED VOLUMES

Heine, S. J., Folk, D., Guan, K. W., Benjamin, R., Bahng, J. M., & Proulx, T. (2024). An ecology of meaning: An integrative framework for understanding human motivations. *Advances in Motivation Science*, 11.

MANUSCRIPTS UNDER CONSIDERATION

Folk, D., Cai, J., Stenlund, S., Dunn, E. A within-person experiment testing the mood benefits of brief gratitude, meditation, and nature interventions. *Revise and Resubmit at Communications Psychology*

PRESENTATIONS AND POSTERS

Presentation. Folk, D. (2026, May 6th). Can AI companions reduce loneliness? *Invited talk at Stanford CREATE Webinar Series*.

Presentation. Folk, D. (2026, April 26th). How does AI companionship shape social connection? *Invited talk at Yale Social Psychology Current Works Talk Series*.

Presentation. Folk, D. & Dunn, E. (2026, February 26th-28th). Everything is Better Together. Happiness Preconference, Society for Personality and Social Psychology, Chicago, IL, United States

Presentation. Folk, D. (2025, November 18th). How does AI companionship shape social connection and happiness? *Invited talk at the University of Toronto*.

Presentation. Folk, D. (2025, October 24th). How does AI companionship shape social connection and happiness? *Invited talk at the MindCORE Seminar Series at the University of Pennsylvania*.

Presentation. Folk, D. (2025, October 22nd). How does AI companionship shape social connection and happiness? *Invited talk at the Social Psychology Seminar Series at the University of Pennsylvania.*

Presentation. Folk, D. (2025, March 27th). How does AI companionship shape social connection and happiness? *Invited talk at the University of Pennsylvania.*

Presentation. Folk, D. & Dunn, E. (2025, February 20th-22nd). Turning to AI for companionship predicts decreased social connection 4 months later. Psychology of Media and Technology Preconference, Society for Personality and Social Psychology, Denver, CO, United States.

Presentation. Folk, D. & Dunn, E. (2025, February 20th-22nd). Anthropomorphism promotes social connection with conversational AI. Society for Personality and Social Psychology, Denver, CO, United States.

Poster. “What makes a good day?: A random forest analysis of the American Time Use Survey”. Happiness Preconference, Society for Personality and Social Psychology, Denver, CO, United States, February 20th, 2025.

Presentation. Folk, D. (2024, October 28th). How does AI companionship shape social connection and happiness? *Invited talk at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.*

Presentation. Folk, D., Wu, C., & Heine, S. (2024, February 8th-10th). Cultural variation in attitudes towards social chatbots. Society for Personality and Social Psychology, San Diego, CA, United States.

Presentation. Folk, D. (2023). When, why, and for whom do chatbots provide feelings of social connection? *Invited talk at University of British Columbia, Okanagan*

Poster. “Do people turn to chatbots as a source of social connection in their lives?” Psychology of Technology and Media Preconference, Society for Personality and Social Psychology, Atlanta, GA, United States, February 8th, 2023.

Presentation. Folk, D., Yu, S., & Dunn, E. (2022, February 16th-19th). Is a good bot better than a mediocre human?: Chatbots as alternative sources of social connection. Society for Personality and Social Psychology, San Francisco, CA, United States.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Teaching Assistant, Technology and the Good Life
University of Pennsylvania

Sept. 2025-Dec. 2025

Teaching Assistant, Measurement in Psychology
(Graduate-level course)

Sept. 2024-Dec. 2024

University of British Columbia

Teaching Assistant, Existential Psychology
University of British Columbia

Jan. 2023-Apr. 2023

Teaching Assistant, Cultural Psychology
University of British Columbia

Jan. 2022-Apr. 2022

Teaching Assistant, Introduction to Psychology
University of British Columbia

Jan. 2021-Apr. 2021

Teaching Assistant, Science of Happiness
University of British Columbia

Sept. 2019-Dec. 2019

DEPARTMENTAL SERVICE

President Of Graduate Student Society, Psychology
University of British Columbia

Sept. 2022 -Aug. 2023

Diversity Mentor
University of British Columbia

May 2021 – January 2025

Mentored undergraduate students from under-represented groups as they navigated graduate school applications.