

Rui Pei

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RESEARCH AND EDUCATION EXPERIENCE

- 2021-current **Postdoctoral fellow**
 Department of Psychology, Stanford University
 Principal investigator: Jamil Zaki
- 2015-2021 **Annenberg School for Communication**
 University of Pennsylvania
 Ph.D. in Communication
 Advisor: Emily Falk, Committee Members: Robert Hornik, Joseph Capella
- 2011-2015 **Brown University**
 B.Sc. in Cognitive Neuroscience

PUBLICATIONS

Advisees are underlined.

Pei, R., Grayson, S., Soh, S., Appel, R. E., Garcia, S., Bouwer, A., Huang, E., Jackson, M. O., Harari, G. M., & Zaki, J. (in press). Bridging the Empathy Gap: The Impact of Empathic Perception on Social Connections. *Nature Human Behavior*. [[Data & Code](#)]

Pei, R.* & Zaki, J.* (2025). Understanding and fostering social wellness in young adults. *World Happiness Report 2025*

Pei, R., Kranzler, E., & Falk, E. B. (2024). Cultural Values Influence the Developmental Trajectory of Resistance to Social Influence Over the Course of Adolescence. *Developmental psychobiology*, 66(7), e22530. [[Preregistration](#)]

Pei, R., Courtney, A., Ferguson, I., Brennan, C., Zaki, J. (2023). A neural signature of social support mitigates affective responses to negative memories. *Scientific Reports* [[Data & Code](#)]

Pei, R., Cosme, D., Andrews, M. E., Mattan, B. D., Carreras-Tartak, J., & Falk, E. B. (2023). Cultural influence on COVID-19 cognitions and growth speed: The role of collectivism. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, e12908.
 [[Data](#)] [[Preregistration](#)]

Pei, R., Lauharatanahirun, N., Cascio, C. N., O'Donnell, M. B., Shope, J. T., Simons-Morton, B. G., Vettel, J. M., & Falk, E. B. (2020). Neural processes during adolescent risky decision making are associated with conformity to peer influence. *Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience*, 44, 100794.

Pei, R., Schmaelzle, R., Kranzler, E., O'Donnell, M. B., & Falk, E. B. (2019). Neural activity during anti-smoking message exposure predicts subsequent message sharing engagement. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 56 (2, Supplement 1), S40–S48.

Pei, R., Kranzler, E. C., Suleiman, A. B., & Falk, E. B. (2019). Promoting adolescent health: insights from developmental and communication neuroscience. *Behavioural Public Policy*, 3(1), 47 – 71

Liu, J., So, J., **Pei, R.** (2025). Diminished Valuation in the Brain: How Repeated Exposure Reduces Health Message Engagement. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 59, 1-6

Minich, M., Falk, E.B., Cooper, N., Cosme, D., Chan, H.E., **Pei, R.**, O'Donnell, M.B., Cascio, C.N. (2023) Neural correlates associated with conformity across adolescence and early adulthood. *Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience*, 60, 101215.

Brennan, C., Aggarwal, A., **Pei, R.**, Sussillo, D., & Proekt, A. (2023). One dimensional approximations of neuronal dynamics reveal computational strategy. *PLOS Computational Biology*, 19(1), e1010784.

Baek, E. C., O'Donnell, M. B., Scholz, C., **Pei, R.**, Garcia, J. O., Vettel, J. M., Falk, E. B. (2021) Activity in the Brain's Valuation and Mentalizing Networks is Associated with Propagation of Online Recommendation. *Scientific Reports*, 11(1), 11196

Kang, Y., Cosme, D., **Pei, R.**, Pandey, P., Carreras-Tartak, J., & Falk, E. B. (2021). Purpose in life, loneliness, and protective health behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic. *The Gerontologist*, 081

Kranzler, E. C., Schmäzle, R., **Pei, R.**, Hornik, R. C., & Falk, E. B. (2019). Message-Elicited Brain Response Moderates the Relationship Between Opportunities for Exposure to Anti-Smoking Messages and Message Recall. *Journal of Communication*, 69(6), 589-611.

Kranzler, E. C., Schmäzle, R., O'Donnell, M. B., **Pei, R.**, & Falk, E. B. (2018). Adolescent neural responses to antismoking messages, perceived effectiveness, and sharing intention. *Media Psychology*, 0(0), 1–27.

Andrews, M. E., **Pei, R.**, Lauharatanahirun, N., Paul, A. M., & Falk, E. B. (2023). Social media and the social brain. In R. Nabi (Ed.), *Our Online Emotional Selves: The Link Between Digital Media and Emotional Experiences*. Oxford University Press.

MANUSCRIPT UNDER REVIEW AND IN PREPARATION

Pei, R. & Zaki, J. (in prep). Quantifying the value of social risk taking. *PsyArXiv*. [\[Preprint\]](#)

Pei, R., & Zaki, J. (in prep). The Dynamics of Social Risk: Evaluating Short- and Long-Term Effects on Well-being and Social Networks

Pei, R., Lauharatanahirun, N., Cascio, C.N., O'Donnell, M.B., Falk, E.B. (in prep). Reward-related neural response during risky decision making reflects adolescents' social network clustering structure.

Cosme, D., Kang, Y., Tartak, J. C., Ahn, J., Corbani, F. E., Cooper, N., ... **Pei, R.**, ... & Falk, E. (in prep). Study protocol: Social Health Impact of Network Effects (SHINE) Study. [\[Preprint\]](#)

So, S., Hu, Z., Talaifar, S., Meca, A., **Pei, R.**, Grayson, S., Vaid, S. S., Ram, N., Zaki, J., Harari, G. M. (submitted). Explaining the Connectivity Paradox: Identity Process, Motivations, and Contexts Associated with Perceptions of Social Media (Im)Balance

FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

- 2019 **Wharton Russell Ackoff Doctoral Student Fellowship.**
 Wharton Risk Management Center
Developmental trajectory of peer effects on adolescent decision making: a cultural perspective
- 2019 **Top Paper Award**
 International Communication Association
 Communication Science & Biology Interest Group
- 2018 **Top Paper Award**
 International Communication Association
 Communication Science & Biology Interest Group
- 2017 **Top Paper Award**
 International Communication Association
 Information Systems Division

INVITED AND DEPARTMENT TALKS

- May 2025 Social Cognitive Neuroscience Lab, PI: Anat Perry
 Hebrew University of Jerusalem (virtual)
Social risks: taking chances to build connections
- April 2025 Peking University, School of Psychological and Cognitive Sciences
 Beijing, China
Social risks: taking chances to build connections
- Oct 2024 Stanford University, Lightening talk in the Psychology Colloquium
 Stanford, CA
Bridging the Gap: Enhancing Empathy Perceptions Fosters Social Connection
- Feb 2023 Northeastern University, Department of Psychology
 Boston, MA
Social risks: taking chances to build connections
- Dec 2022 SCAN Lab, PI: Kevin Ochsner
 Columbia University (virtual)
Social risks: taking chances to build connections
- Dec 2022 Communication Neuroscience Lab, PI: Emily Falk
 University of Pennsylvania (virtual)
Social risks: taking chances to build connections
- Nov 2022 Social Connection Lab, PI: Elisa Baek
 University of Southern California (virtual)

Social risks: taking chances to build connections

Nov 2022 University of California, Santa Babara, Department of Communication
Santa Babara, CA
Social risks: taking chances to build connections

CONFERENCE TALKS

April 2025 Social and Affective Neuroscience Society Annual Meeting
Chicago, IL
Neural Representation in the Salience Network Supports Social Risk Decision Making

March 2025 Society for Affective Science (SAS) Annual Convention
Portland, OR
Bridging the Gap: The Impact of Empathic Perception on Social Connection

Feb 2025 SPSP Annual Convention, Building Connections: Psychosocial Approaches to Reducing Loneliness in Young Adults (Chair of Symposium)
Denver, CO
Bridging the Gap: The Impact of Empathic Perception on Social Connection

May 2023 International Communication Association Annual Meeting
Toronto, Canada
Not Motivated or Too Scared? The Dissociable Roles of Trait Anxiety and Depression in Social Risk Taking.

May 2023 International Communication Association Annual Meeting
Toronto, Canada
Ecological Momentary Assessment of Empathy Contagion in a College Student Social Network.

April 2023 Social and Affective Neuroscience Society Annual Conference
Santa Barbara, CA
Reward-related neural response during risky decision making reflects adolescents' social network clustering structure.

March 2023 Society for Research in Child Development Biennial meeting
Salt Lake City, UT
Reward-related neural response during risky decision making reflects adolescents' social network clustering structure.

Nov 2020 The Medicine, Humanity and Media: Health China & Health Communication
Online conference

Promising themes for anti-smoking campaigns targeting young adults in China: an investigation based on the Integrative Model.

- May 2020 International Communication Association Annual Meeting
Online conference
Habitual social media use is associated with increased neural activity in the mentalizing network during social exclusion.
- March 2021 Society for Research in Child Development Biennial meeting
Online conference
Neural activity during risky decision making reflects adolescents' online social network clustering structure.
- Nov 2019 The Medicine, Humanity and Media: Health China & Health Communication
Beijing, China
Adolescent's neural and self-report responses to fear vs. humor appeals in tobacco-prevention messages..
- May 2019 International Communication Association Annual Meeting, Best papers in
Communication Science and Biology
Washington, DC
Neural activity during risky decision making reflects online social network clustering structure.
- May 2018 International Communication Association Annual Meeting, Best Papers in
Communication Science and Biology
Prague, Czech Republic
Safety versus risk endorsing peer attitudes influence adolescent risk taking through distinct neural mechanisms.
- May 2017 International Communication Association Annual Meeting, Best Papers in
Information Systems Division
San Diego, CA
Neural activity during anti-smoking message exposure predicts subsequent message elaboration.

CONFERENCE POSTERS

A neural signature of social support mitigates affective responses to negative memories. Pei, R., Courtney, A., Ferguson, I., Brennan, C., Zaki, J. (2023) Social and Affective Neuroscience Society Annual Conference. Santa Barbara, California

Too scared to reach out? The neural basis of social risk taking. Pei, R., Grayson, S., Ogunbamowo, D., Courtney, A., Zaki, J. (2023) The Society for Personality and Social Psychology. Atlanta, Georgia

Empathy perception gap poses barrier for social connection and wellbeing. Grayson, S., **Pei, R.**, Soh, S. J., Appel, R., Ogunbamowo, D., Courtney, A., Zaki, J., Harrari, G. (2023) The Society for Personality and Social Psychology. Atlanta, Georgia

Age moderated relation between perceived stress and social media use. Xu, Z., **Pei, R.** (2023) The Society for Personality and Social Psychology. Atlanta, Georgia

Does simulated social support reduce negative emotion during autobiographical remembering? Courtney, A., Ferguson, I., **Pei, R.**, Zaki., J. (2022) Social and Affective Neuroscience Society Annual Conference. Virtual

Neural activity during risky decision making reflects online social network clustering structure. **Pei, R.**, Lauharatanahirun, N., Cascio, C.N., O'Donnell, M.B., Vettel, J.M., Falk, E.B. (2019) Social and Affective Neuroscience Society Annual Conference. Miami, Florida

Neural activity during anti-smoking message exposure predicts subsequent message elaboration. **Pei, R.**, Schmaelzle, R., Kranzler, E., O'Donnell, M. B., & Falk, E. B. (2017) Social and Affective Neuroscience Society Annual Conference. Los Angeles, CA

Role of reinforcement learning in tic expression: Integrating methods from behavioral psychology and computational neuroscience. Conelea, C., Frank, M., Frank, H., Wiecki, T., **Pei, R.**, & Freeman, J. (2014) Annual conference of the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies. Philadelphia, PA

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Fall 2017	The Communication Research Experience (COMM310), University of Pennsylvania <i>Teaching assistant</i>
Spring 2013	Elementary Psychology (CLPS0010), Brown University <i>Teaching assistant</i>
Fall 2013	Neural Systems (NEUR1030), Brown University <i>Teaching assistant</i>
Spring 2014	Elementary Psychology (CLPS0010), Brown University <i>Teaching assistant</i>

INDUSTRY RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Jan – Jul, 2018	Microsoft Research Asia (Supervisor: Xie Xing) Beijing, China <i>Research Fellow</i>
May 2013 – May 2015	Pediatric Anxiety Research Clinic of Rhode Island Hospital (Supervisor: Christine Conelea) <i>Research Assistant</i>

SERVICE

2023	Community Neuroscience Initiative, Cornell University
2022	Frosh 101, Stanford University
2019-2020	Disparities and Diversity Science group, University of Pennsylvania
2014-2019	Popular science writings on Psychology in Chinese (link)

AD HOC REVIEWING

PNAS, Child Development, Social and Cognitive Affective Science, Social and Personality Psychology Compass, Media Psychology

AFFILIATIONS

Social Affective Neuroscience Society (SANS)
Society for Personality and Social Psychology (SPSP)
International Communication Association (ICA)
Society for Research on Adolescence (SRCD)

REFERENCES

Jamil Zaki, Ph.D.

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Emily B. Falk, Ph.D.

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Gabriella M. Harari, Ph.D.

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