The ATP research team launched an exciting new study in March 2013 in collaboration with the research team of the adult units at The Menninger Clinic. In this study, we are interested in examining structural and functional brain correlates of psychiatric problems in adolescents and adults. To this end, we are asking parents and teens to consent to this study during admission. The teens of those families that consent then undergo a one-hour brain imaging session at Baylor College of Medicine where we assess the processing of reward function. Reward function is an important process in the brain that helps guide decision making—that is, whether to approach or avoid new stimuli. Reward function also helps us learn: if experiences are rewarding then we do more of it. In contrast, if experiences are aversive, we do less of it. Reward function has been shown to be altered in individuals with psychiatric problems. For instance, individuals with depression have been shown to have reduced reward function, while individuals with drug addiction have sensitive reward function. We hope that by understanding more about reward function in the brain we can help teens make better decisions. We are, like always, indebted to the families that support Menninger research and we look forward to keeping our readers updated regarding progress on this project.

Teen dating violence (TDV) has emerged as a major public health concern in adolescence over the past few decades. Research has demonstrated that TDV is associated with both physical and emotional consequences, such that both perpetrators and victims are more likely to experience depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, substance use, and risky sexual behavior (Exner-Cortens et al., 2013). Even more concerning, prevalence rates of TDV are remarkably high, with 10-20% of adolescents having experienced severe dating violence, which may include physical aggression or forced sex. Rates escalate when examining at-risk populations or when less severe forms of abuse are considered (e.g. insults, ridicule, and threats). In addition, TDV may serve to maintain a cycle of violence, such that both perpetrators and victims are at an increased risk for perpetuating this negative form of relating in future relationships (White & Smith, 2009). Given these serious consequences, our study explored several factors that put adolescents at greater risk of being a perpetrator or victim of TDV. Based on data collected from 160 adolescents from ATP, we found that TDV victimization and perpetration were positively associated with aggressive personality traits, substance use, and exposure to mother-to-father violence. The findings from this study have been accepted for presentation at the Society for Research in Psychopathology. Results are also being prepared for submission to a peer-reviewed journal.
Theory of mind (ToM) refers to our capacity to attribute mental states to self and others, enabling comprehension that others have beliefs, desires and intentions different from our own. Several personality disorders exhibit impairment in ToM, one being psychopathy, a disorder characterized by callous affect, manipulation of others, violence, and crime (Hare, 1970). Previous research investigating ToM in the development of psychopathy has been mixed. Several authors have concluded that ToM is not impaired in individuals with psychopathy, an assertion used to explain these individuals’ skill in manipulating others for their own advantage. Other studies, however, have shown that individuals with psychopathic traits have trouble identifying others’ emotions, particularly fear and sadness, a finding suggested to explain the association between psychopathy and aggression.

Based on these studies, it is proposed that while psychopathic traits are not associated with ToM deficits, these individuals have impaired “emotional empathy.”

However, recent studies have moved beyond the narrow view described in past research and conceptualized ToM as a multifaceted construct. In essence, ToM includes both basic, bottom-up processes such as emotion recognition as well as top-down, cognitively demanding processes such as constructing representations of other people’s intentions, beliefs, and desires (Samson, 2009). We believe that adopting this broad conceptualization of ToM is necessary to understand the development of psychopathy.

This study aimed to re-examine the construct of ToM in relation to psychopathic traits. Results showed that the impairments relating to psychopathy integrate socio-affective and cognitive processing to produce a broad ToM impairment. This contrasts previous views of psychopathy as a mainly affective disorder; authors have claimed that these individuals can understand others’ pain, but cannot feel it. We found that errors in lower level ToM (e.g., emotion recognition) lead to errors in top-down function, manifested in this case as hypermentalizing (participants over-attributed and likely misinterpreted others’ mental states). We believe these impairments are specifically related to the core affective component of psychopathy, characterized by a lack of remorse, callousness, and shallow emotions.
Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) is a psychiatric disorder characterized by moodiness, interpersonal problems, impulsivity, and self-harm. It is a major focus of clinical and research attention on ATP because it affects about 30% of inpatient adolescents and is very distressing for both patients and their families. There is a general consensus that disruptions in early caregiver-child attachments are a factor in the development of BPD. However, how disrupted early attachments place individuals at risk for BPD remains unknown.

Against this background, we developed a study to test two hypotheses about how early disrupted attachments relate to BPD. First, we wanted to determine whether overattribution and misinterpretation of mental states in others, known as hypermentalizing, explained this relation. Second, we wanted to explore whether disrupted attachments created difficulties with emotion regulation which, in turn, lead to the instability and impulsivity noted in BPD.

259 adolescents took part in this study by completing interviews about their early attachments to caregivers and answering questions about symptoms of BPD and their emotion regulation abilities. Finally, adolescents watched a short movie about four characters getting together for a dinner party and answered questions about the characters’ mental states. Our results show that both hypermentalizing and emotion dysregulation play a role in the relation between disrupted attachment and BPD, but that these relations are primarily driven by hypermentalizing.

These findings will add to growing knowledge about factors in the development of BPD. Moreover, this study provides first evidence that hypermentalizing and emotion regulation are mechanisms by which disrupted attachments lead to BPD and, therefore, shows that these may be important targets for early intervention.

Adolescence is period marked by numerous significant changes in the brain, affecting how teens think, feel, and behave. It is also a time when establishing and maintaining relationships is important. To succeed in navigating these relationships, teens must rely on their social cognitive abilities, or their ability to interpret and make sense of the social world. Many researchers have examined an aspect of social cognition called Theory of Mind (ToM), which is the capacity to think about and understand what motivates behaviors in self and others in terms of mental states (i.e. thoughts, beliefs, desires, and feelings; Sharp et al., 2008). Social cognition is a complex process, involving other cognitive resources such as executive functioning (EF) which is a higher-order cognitive ability that is important in achieving goal-directed behaviors (Carlson & Moses, 2001; Carlson et al., 2004). EF can be viewed as a unitary construct as well as a construct made up of several components such as the ability to develop goals and plan tasks, initiate activities, shift from one activity to another, the ability to hold information in working memory to carry out tasks, the ability to inhibit behaviors, control emotions, and monitor behaviors.

Developmental researchers have established a link between ToM and EF in infants and children (Perner & Lang, 1999), however there has been limited research in adolescents. Therefore, the aim of a current study was to examine the relation between ToM or mentalizing function with EF in adolescents. Findings revealed that both global EF and specific domains of EF were significantly associated with ToM and mentalization measures.

Importantly, emotional control was shown to independently predict mentalizing capacity after controlling for the effects of age and IQ. Results from this study provide evidence for the ToM-EF link in adolescence with emphasis on emotional control. Findings from this study will be presented at the annual Texas Psychological Association convention in November 2013, and submitted to a peer-reviewed journal for publication.
**Let’s Welcome to Our New Research Staff!**

**Lacey Hutchison, BA**  
Research Coordinator

Hi ATP! I am the new Research Coordinator I on ATP. I am a recent graduate of St. Edward’s University in Austin, TX where I studied psychology. While working toward my undergraduate degree, I became interested in self-compassion and its potential impact on treatment of psychological disorders that plague adolescents. While here at Menninger, I hope to learn more about the different aspects of treatment and the cohesive program and environment that is provided here. As a research coordinator, I work with current patients on their admission and discharge assessments, as well as treatment follow-up assessments for former patients and their families. Your participation and dedication is exceptionally valuable as we all work towards common goals. I look forward to meeting and talking with you all.

**Will Mellick, BS**  
Duncan Fellow

I recently began as the new Duncan Fellow, and am incredibly grateful and excited to be joining the ATP team. Everyone has been kind, welcoming, and helpful in getting me acquainted to the Menninger Clinic. I have been consistently impressed with the joy and dedication that everyone brings to ATP, and I look forward to contributing to this fantastic environment. While my time at ATP is largely spent on research, I am also conducting assessments and helping out with psychoeducation groups. I know my time on ATP will provide excellent supplemental learning for my ongoing studies at the University of Houston, where I am a second-year graduate student in the clinical psychology doctoral program. I look forward to meeting you all!

**Claire Hatkevich, BS**  
Research Assistant

Hello, all! I’m a first year graduate student in the Clinical Program at the University of Houston. I came to the ATP from the University of Delaware where I studied a family therapy model, Attachment Based Family Therapy, for suicidal adolescents and their caregivers. As a graduate student, I am interested in looking at precipitants to self-injurious and suicidal behaviors, as well as attachment relationships. At ATP my primary roles will include administration of research assessments and clinical interviews. During this time I look forward to working with each adolescent in the program. I hope to contribute to the existing, warm, patient-focused environment at Menninger and to each adolescent’s growth in this program. Likewise, I am excited to work alongside the clinicians, psychiatrists, and research assistants who already facilitate patient growth in this setting.

**Mary-Madison Eagle, MA**  
Practicum Student

I’ll join ATP at The Menninger Clinic in September 2013 as a practicum student. I am a 4th year graduate student in the clinical psychology doctoral program at the University of Houston. I graduated from Vanderbilt University, receiving my B.S. in Human and Organizational Development and Spanish. In May 2012, I earned my M.A. in psychology from the University Houston. My research interests include emerging personality disorder, psychopathy, malingered and deception detection, risk assessment, and quantitative methods. Looking forward to meeting you all!