Updated: Oct 2026

Daniel Distefano

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LinkedIn

EDUCATION

B.S. Psychology, B.A. Sociology (GPA: 4.0) May 2026
University of Massachusetts Amherst
Commonwealth Honors College
Honors Thesis: *Comparing Unidimensional and Multidimensional Loneliness Scales With Respect to LGBTQ+ Identity*

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Measurement: survey methods; scale development; factor analysis; measurement invariance.
Social Psychology: loneliness research methods; LGBTQ+ loneliness, minority stress and resilience.

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Lab Manager Jul 2026 – Present
Psychology Research on Identity and Substance (Mis)use (PRISM)
Director: Dr. J. Parnes
University of Massachusetts Amherst

- Manages general lab functioning, including student onboarding, IRB protocol submissions, lab meeting facilitation, survey battery editing, and external lab communications.
- Oversees the lab work of undergraduate research assistants, providing 1-on-1 check-ins to ensure a positive and collaborative lab environment.
- Cleans and organizes lab data, creating comprehensive codebooks for ongoing studies.
- Facilitates a scale creation project and instructs research assistants on initial scale development and item design.

Research Assistant Jan 2024 – Jul 2026
Learning Lab & Rudd Adoption Research Program
Director: Dr. J.M. McDermott
University of Massachusetts Amherst

- Conducted an online survey study comparing loneliness scales with respect to LGBTQ+ identity, overseeing participant tracking, data management, and compensation.
- Served as a lead runner in a replication study investigating gender stereotype threat among undergraduates, proctoring two-hour long sessions up to four times a week.
- Coded children's behavior to investigate executive functioning and gender stereotype bias.
- Ensured intercoder reliability in a scoping review by screening over 1,000 abstracts and assessing the credibility of the 15 articles selected for inclusion.
- Organized and cleaned over 560 Qualtrics survey responses by removing duplicate entries and false information, providing detailed instructions for future survey data exporting.

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TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIPS

Experienced Peer Reviewer Sep 2024 – May 2025
Junior Year Writing, Department of Psychology
University of Massachusetts Amherst

- Delivered extensive feedback for two classes of over 20 students, providing robust instructions to improve essay clarity, conciseness, argument, and organization.
- Facilitated in-person review sessions to deliver constructive writing feedback.
- Communicated with course instructor to provide overviews of the class performance.

Teaching Assistant Sep – Dec 2024
Methods of Inquiry, Department of Psychology
University of Massachusetts Amherst

- Addressed students' technical issues in R Studio during weekly lab sessions.
- Proctored exams, graded weekly lab activities, and provided online office hours per request.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Member and Volunteer Amherst, MA
WMUA Amherst Oct 2023 – May 2026

- Created an award-winning, interview-audio feature on the societal contributors to loneliness which plays during WMUA News.
- Engaged in the WMUA DEI to promote diversity, drafting the station's list of values and suggesting possible avenues for platforming local minority artists.
- Broadcasted for WMUA News and engages in the production committee, covering current events and creating public service announcements, respectively.
- Proctored students training in radio operation, providing hands-on experience on personal radio show.

JOURNAL ARTICLES

Distefano, D., McDermott, J. (2026). *A multidimensional approach to loneliness reveals distinct mental health associations among LGBTQ+ young adults: a survey comparing loneliness scales* [Manuscript submitted for publication]. Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Johnston, C., **Distefano, D.**, Neil E., McDermott, J. (2026). *Children and youth services review post-adoption incentives for permanency: A systematic review* [Manuscript submitted for publication]. Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, University of Massachusetts Amherst.

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Distefano, D., (2025) "Loneliness as a Social Issue," Best Text Collection 5(1). doi: https://doi.org/10.7275/best_text.3253

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Distefano, D., McDermott, J. (2026, October 14-16). *Comparing metrics of loneliness with respect to LGBTQ+ identity* [Paper presentation]. Northeastern Educational Research Association, Trumbull, CT, United States.

Distefano, D., McDermott, J. (2026, February 26-28). *Family loneliness matters: The benefits of utilizing multidimensional metrics of loneliness* [Poster presentation]. Eastern Psychological Association, Boston, MA, United States.

Distefano, D., Venter, C., Ferrara, E., Johnston, C., McDermott, J. (2025, October 25*). Are we measuring math anxiety accurately? Factor structure and invariance of the Abbreviated Math Anxiety Scale (AMAS)* [Poster presentation]. New England Psychological Association, Boston, MA, United States.

Solomon, J., Johnston, C., Ferrara, E., **Distefano, D.**, Yang, E., Goodwin, R., Flegenheimer, C., McDermott, J. (2025, October 25). *The effect of math anxiety on response time and disengagement among females under math stereotype threat* [Poster presentation]. New England Psychological Association, Boston, MA, United States.

CERTIFICATES, AWARDS, AND RECOGNITIONS

Social Research Analysis Certificate May 2026
Department of Sociology, University of Massachusetts Amherst

Outstanding Thesis Award Mar 2026
Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, University of Massachusetts Amherst

Honors Dean's Award Mar 2026
Commonwealth Honors College, University of Massachusetts Amherst

Sociology Best Paper Award Mar 2026
Department of Sociology, University of Massachusetts Amherst

Psi Chi Travel Award Feb 2026
University of Massachusetts Amherst ($200)

Honors Research Travel Grant Sep 2025
Commonwealth Honors College, University of Massachusetts Amherst ($125)

Best Multimodal Project Award May 2025
Charles Moran Best Text Contest for Junior Year Writing

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Honors Research Grant Apr 2025
Commonwealth Honors College, University of Massachusetts Amherst ($950)

Phi Beta Kappa Academic Honor Society Recognition Mar 2025
University of Massachusetts Amherst

Honors Research Assistant Fellowship Oct 2024
Commonwealth Honors College, University of Massachusetts Amherst ($750)

UMass Dean's Award Scholarship Feb 2022
University of Massachusetts Amherst

INFORMAL WORKS AND WRITING SAMPLES

Loneliness Scale Development and Validation Project Sep – Dec 2025
EDUC 671: Survey Research Methods

A semester long, independent project developing a multidimensional scale of loneliness and designing a study to validate it. The finalized project included: a literature review of contemporary loneliness research practices, the 20-item instrument, a sampling plan, an administration plan, a data & analysis plan, a focus group report, and a review of possible ethical concerns. The final project may be viewed here.

Exploratory Factor Analyses of Loneliness Scales Project May 2025
SOC 213: Data Collection and Analysis

An independent project conveniently sampling students to evaluate the factor structure of two loneliness scales. Exploratory factor analyses were utilized to assess dimensionality. Statistical practices were self-taught, and the project was regarded by the professor and graduate teaching assistant as graduate-level work. The final project has earned the Sociology Best Paper Award, and may be viewed here.

MEMBERSHIPS

University of Massachusetts Amherst Chapter of Psi Chi
Eastern Psychological Association
Northeastern Educational Research Association

SKILLS

Proficient in survey methodology, Qualtrics, IRB protocol writing, navigating literature databases
Experienced with R Studio, REDCap, MS Excel, SharePoint