

A.J. Ralston

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EDUCATION

Bachelor of Arts in Psychology Expected May 2026
Concentration Certification: Queer Studies and Human Resource Management
Illinois State University, Normal, IL

Associate of Arts Completed May 2024
Concentration: Psychology
Spoon River College, Canton, IL

RESEARCH INTERESTS

- Social influences and barriers within different communities and how they produce health outcomes
- Placebos and noceboes in the queer community and the various health disparities they could potentially cause
- Cross sectional mental health outcomes
- Substance abuse and mental health
- Interpersonal exposure to violence regarding early exposure
- Effective interventions to promote societal change
- Development of artificial intelligence in association with the application of human ethics

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Health Psychology and Health Promotion Lab

Illinois State University

Advisors: Kelly S. Clemens, John Matkovic

Research Lab Manager

Aug 2025 - Present

- Organize data, assign project fractions to other researchers, manage documents and resources, update goals and tasks of the lab, provide general announcements

Trained Lab Research Assistant

Jan 2025 - Present

- Take on assigned research tasks, write article reviews, and gather information to assist other researchers

Research Lab Volunteer

Aug 2024- Nov 2024

- Analyzed barriers and differences in motivations to get both COVID-19 and Flu vaccinations, focused on key factors that go into the research process, assisted with article reviews

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

- **Ralston, A.J.**, Curry, A., Flondro, A., Tornabene, I., (2026, April). *Analysis of the Transgender Community and their Interactions with Healthcare*. Poster accepted to the Midwestern Psychological Association, Chicago IL.
- **Ralston, A.J.**, Putterlik, C., Matkovic, J., & Clemens, K. S. (2026, February). *Socioeconomic Status and Attributional Biases in Explaining Success and Failure*. Poster accepted at the Society for Social Cognition Preconference of the Personality and Social Psychology Annual Meeting, Chicago, IL.
- Clemens, K.S., **Ralston, A.J.**, & Matkovic, J. (2026, April) *Psychological expectancies as mediators of health disparities in transgender adults*. In Clemens, K.S., (chair). *Expectations and Emotions: Psychological Pathways to Improving Health and Treatment*. Symposium accepted to the Midwestern Psychological Association, Chicago, IL.
- Curry, A., Clemens, K. S., **Ralston, A. J.**, & Matkovic, J. (2026, February) *Positive Affective Expectations and Perceived Discrimination as Predictors of Positive Health Behavior in Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Individuals*. Poster accepted at the Society for Personality and Social Psychology Annual Meeting, Chicago, IL.
- **Ralston, A.J.**, Flondro, A., Roberts, A., Tornabene, I., Matkovic, J., Clemens, K.S., (2025, November). *Depression, Anxiety, and Health Factors within the Transgender Community*. Oral presentation at Illinois State University Transgender Resilience Colloquium. Normal, IL.
- Clemens K.S., **Ralston, A.J.**, Odelson, A., & Matkovic, J. (2025, November). *Health expectations in transgender individuals: Implications for health and pain disparities*. Flash talk accepted at the Illinois State University Transgender Resilience Colloquium. Normal, IL.
- Lowrance, G., **Ralston, A.J.**, Clemens, K.S., & Matkovic, J. (2025, November). *Trust and health outcomes of transgender individuals*. Data blitz accepted at the Illinois State University Transgender Resilience Colloquium. Normal. IL.
- Clemens, K. S., **Ralston, A. J.**, Matkovic, J., Kuku, O., & Geers, A. L. (2025, June). *Untangling the relationship between desire and response expectancy: An initial study*. Poster presented at the 5th International Conference of the Society for Interdisciplinary Placebo Studies, Kraków, Poland.
- **Ralston, A. J.**, Clemens, K. S., Matkovic, J., & Geers, A. L. (2025, June). *Intuitive and magnitude dimensions of response expectancy are modulable via affect induction*. Poster presented at the 5th International Conference of the Society for Interdisciplinary Placebo Studies, Kraków, Poland.
- **Ralston, A. J.**, Orhan, B., Parker, R., Saavedra-Carlson, M., Speirer, J., (2025, May) *Using AI as a Research Tool in a Psychology Lab*. Oral presentation presented at the Illinois State University AI and Humanities Symposium, Normal, IL.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Teaching Apprenticeship

Aug 2024- Present

Advisor: Tom Critchfield

Research Methods Lab, Illinois State University

- Teach, direct, and assist individual groups in mock research experiments
- Assist with one 2-hr lab section; attend one 1-hr staff meeting per week; hold one office hour per week; preparation and grading as needed each week
- Mastering competencies on non-pedagogical issues related to teaching (e.g., ethical issues, mandated reporter responsibilities, etc.)

PROFESSIONAL & VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

Caregiver

Feb 2026 - Now

Company: Synergy Homecare of Central IL

Supervisor: Gaye Aaberg

- Provide support and assistance to geriatric individuals who need help with daily activities while remaining in the comfort of their own homes.
- Personal care (such as bathing, dressing, and grooming), meal preparation, medication reminders, light housekeeping, companionship, and transportation to appointments.

Animal Specialist

July 2025-Feb 2026

Company: Pet Central Helps

Supervisor: Lisa Kitchens

- Rehabilitate animals, distribute medicine, caretaker of both sick and stable animals, establish a clean and safe environment, assist with adoption events.

Key Holder/Team Member

Oct 2023-Nov 2024

Company: Dollar General Market

Supervisor: Tara Flammini

- Took on manger duties (e.g., open/closed the store, counted/deposited/delivered money to the bank, unloaded trucks, led shifts, handled conflict on the floor and between employees, worked closely in communication with manager)

Manager Assistant

Oct 2021-April 2023

Company: Havana Pet Cabana

Supervisor: Lindsay Richardson

- Assisted manager in processes such as organization, phone call management, cleanliness, animal care, and animal engagement.

Sexual Education Volunteer

Aug 2023-Oct 2023

Company: Family Planning Service of Western Illinois

Supervisor: Ashley German

- Advocated for sexual health education, prepared and provided sexual health care kits to college students, organized files, and assisted with completing other tasks around the facility.

AWARDS

- Illinois State University Dean's List, Normal, IL 2024-2026
- FIREbird Grant Recipient, Normal, IL 2025
- Illinois State University Civic Engagement Scholarship, Normal, IL 2024
- Spoon River College Dean's List, Canton, IL 2023-2024
- Spoon River College Scholarship Foundation, Canton, IL 2023
- Women's Club Scholarship, Havana, IL 2023
- Rotary Club Scholarship, Havana, IL 2023
- Havana Area Prevention Team Scholarship, Havana, IL 2023

GRANT EXPERIENCE

FireBIRD Grant Recipient

June 2025

Department: Illinois State University Psychology Department, Office of Student Resources

- Explored barriers to healthcare within the LGBTQ+ community
- E.G., trust within physicians, comfortability, access, healthcare factors, health outcomes, etc.

SKILLS AND CERTIFICATIONS

- Statistical software: SPSS, Jamovi, Excell (Moderate) Present
- Mandated Reporter May 2025
- Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Cert. Sep 2024