

Esther Li, Ph.D.

Scientist | Human Factors
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Professional Profile

Dr. Li is a human factors scientist and developmental psychologist with expertise in human development, decision-making, and communication. She investigates human factors in accidents involving pedestrians and vehicles, slips, trips, and falls, consumer products, and warnings and risk communications.

Dr. Li specializes in incidents involving children and adolescents, including analyzing the role of child supervision in accidents and considerations for effectively conveying risks and warnings for products intended for or used by children. She has extensive experience in designing and conducting research that examines how people perceive information, assess risks, and make decisions. She is proficient in qualitative and quantitative research methods, as well as scientific communications to technical and non-technical audiences.

Dr. Li has applied her expertise to solve real-world User Experience (UX) problems across industries. With respect to automated vehicles, she conducted generative research to evaluate operational risks and inform product growth strategy. In education technology, she applied user-centered design principles to improve the usability of learning applications for families with children. She also directed end-to-end research programs for software-as-a-service (SaaS) products, applying diverse research methods (e.g., A/B tests, segmentation analyses, focus groups, usability studies) to identify user needs, optimize user experiences, and promote user engagement and retention.

Dr. Li earned her Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology from the University of Rochester. Her research focused on adolescent-parent relationships, with an emphasis on adolescent information management, communication patterns, and parental monitoring. She investigated how adolescents and caregivers communicate, seek, and manage information, and examined the motivations underlying these behaviors and their implications for adolescent well-being.

Academic Credentials & Professional Honors

Ph.D., Developmental Psychology, University of Rochester, 2025

M.A., Psychology, University of Rochester, 2023

B.A., Psychology, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2017

Professional Affiliations

Human Factors and Ergonomics Society

American Psychological Association

Society for Research in Child Development

Society for Research on Adolescence

Publications

Li Y, Smetana JG. [Social-cognitive domain differences in adolescent disclosure to mothers and fathers and links with adjustment](#). Journal of Family Psychology. Advance online publication. 2026.

Smetana JG, Li Y, Mncwabe S. [Voluntariness, timing, and consistency in adolescent routine disclosure and lying to parents](#). Journal of Adolescence 2024; 96(1):152–166.

Liu J, Midgett AJ, Li Y. [I just don't agree with my parents: why Chinese adolescents keep secrets](#). Journal of Social and Personal Relationships 2023; 1–25.

Li Y, Smetana JG, Yau J. [Patterns of reasons for not disclosing personal activities and feelings to mothers and fathers among ethnically diverse adolescents](#). Journal of Youth and Adolescence 2022; 1–14.

Li Y, DeJesus JM, Lee DJ, Liberman Z. [Social identity and contamination: young children are more willing to eat native contaminated foods](#). Journal of Experimental Child Psychology 2021; 201:104967.

Presentations

Li Y, Smetana GJ. Differences between adolescent disclosure with parents and links with adjustment. Poster presented at Society for Research on Adolescence, San Diego, CA, 2023.

Li Y, Smetana GJ. Patterns of reasons for not disclosing personal activities and feelings to mothers and fathers among ethnically diverse adolescents. Virtual talk at Society for Research on Adolescence, New Orleans, LA, 2022.

Li Y, Smetana GJ. Adolescent information management with mothers and fathers. Poster presented at Society for Research on Adolescence, New Orleans, LA, 2022.

Li Y, Smetana GJ. Adolescent information management with mothers and fathers. Poster presented at the Society for Research in Child Development (virtually due to COVID-19), 2021.

Longtin M, Li Y, Lee DJ, Liberman Z. Social identity and contamination: young children are more willing to eat native contaminated foods. Poster presented at the Undergraduate Research Colloquium, Santa Barbara, CA, 2018.

Li Y, Woods V. The effects of social media on online multimedia learning. Paper talk presented at the UCLA Psychology Undergraduate Research Conference, Los Angeles, CA, 2017.