

CATHERINE COLE THOMAS

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ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

University of Michigan Assistant Professor of Psychology Assistant Professor of Organizational Studies	2023 – present
Stanford University Postdoctoral Scholar, Stanford SPARQ, Department of Psychology	2022 – 2023

EDUCATION

Stanford University Ph.D. in Social Psychology Dissertation title: <i>Can Psychologically and Culturally Wise Narratives of Aid Better Interrupt Cycles of Poverty and Prejudice? Evidence from Kenya, Niger, and the U.S.</i> Advisors: Hazel Markus, Gregory Walton	2022
University of London M.Sc. in Global Mental Health	2014
Yale University B.A. in Anthropology with Distinction, <i>cum laude</i>	2012

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Keywords: Culture, Poverty & Inequality, Behavioral Science, Prejudice, Social Policy, Field Experiments

AWARDS & FELLOWSHIPS

Social Issues Dissertation Award Winner, Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI)	2023
Dissertation Award - Runner-Up, Society of Experimental Social Psychology (SESP)	2023
Stanford Interdisciplinary Graduate Fellowship, \$143,740 <i>Competitive university-wide, three-year fellowship awarded to 32 Stanford doctoral students pursuing innovative interdisciplinary research</i>	2019 – 2022
Horowitz Foundation for Social Policy, Dissertation Prize, \$7,500	2021
John L. Stanley Award for History and Ethics, \$1,500 <i>International award to 25 early social science scholars advancing urgent policy research</i>	2021

P.E.O. International, P.E.O Scholar Award, \$20,000 <i>Scholarship for academic excellence by women doctoral students in the U.S. and Canada</i>	2021
McCoy Family Center for Ethics in Society, Stanford University Graduate Fellowship, \$3,000	2018

PUBLICATIONS AND PROJECTS

Peer-Reviewed Publications

- [1] **Thomas, C.C.**^{†1}, Schwalbe, M.C.[†], Garcia, M., & Cohen, G., & Markus, H.R. (2024). Inequality in coping and loss: Mostly surviving, some thriving in the COVID-19 crisis. *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*.
<https://doi.org/10.7758/RSF.2024.10.4.03>.
- [2] **Thomas, C. C.**, & Markus, H.R. (2023). Enculturating the science of international development: Beyond the WEIRD independent paradigm. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 54(2), 195-214. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00220221221128211>.
- [3] **Thomas, C.C.**, Walton, G.M., Reinhart, E.C., & Markus, H.R. (2023). Mitigating welfare-related prejudice and partisanship among U.S. conservatives with moral reframing of a universal basic income policy. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 105, 104424.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2022.104424>
- [4] Bossuoy, T., Goldstein, M., Karlan, D., Kazianga, H., Parienté, W., Premand, P., **Thomas, C. C.**, Udry, C., Vaillant, J., & Wright, K. (2022). Tackling psychosocial and capital constraints opens pathways out of poverty. *Nature*, 605(7909), 291-297. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-022-04647-8>²
- [5] **Thomas, C.C.** [†], Otis, N.G.[†], Abraham, J.R., Markus, H.R., & Walton, G.M. (2020). Towards a science of delivering dignity in aid: Experimental evidence and forecasts from Kenya. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 117(27), 15546-15553.
<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1917046117>
- [6] Esopo, K., Mellow, D., **Thomas, C.**, Uckat, H., Abraham, J., Jain, P., Jang, C., Otis, N., Riis-Vestergaard, M., Starcev, A., Orkin, K., & Haushofer, J. (2017). Measuring Self-Efficacy, Executive Function, and Temporal Discounting in Kenya. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 101, 30-45. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brat.2017.10.002>
- [7] **Thomas, C.**, Rathod, S., De Silva, M., Weiss, H., & Patel, V. (2016). The 12-item WHO Disability Assessment Schedule II as an outcome measure for treatment of common mental disorders. *Global Mental Health*, 3(e14). <https://doi.org/10.1017/gmh.2016.7>

Papers Under Review and in Progress

¹ † Shared authorship

² Alphabetical author order

Thomas, C.C., Premand, P., Bossuroy, T., Sambo, A. S., Markus, H.R., & Walton, G.W. How Culturally Wise Interventions Can Help Reduce Poverty. Revise-and-resubmit, *PNAS*.

Osei-Tutu, A., Wang, E., Salvador, C. E., Thalmayer, A. G., Ishii, K., Naudé, L., Suo, T., Shino, E. N., Rossmaier, A., Asatsa, S., Boduroglu, A., Alkhadher, O., Sharifian, H., **Thomas, C.C.**, Kitayama, S. Self-promotive interdependence: how emotional expression in sub-Saharan Africa integrates personal and collective success. Under review.

Thomas, C.C., Garcia-Sanchez, E., Qing, C., Maitreyi, A., Hamedani, M., Eberhardt, J. & Markus, H.R. Aid for Agency: Leveraging the American Dream default to increase support for government aid programs among the U.S. public. Under review.

Dada, A., **Thomas, C.C.**, Dweck, C., & Walton, G.M. Being a good ancestor: framing education as a legacy increases parental investment in girls' education in northern Nigeria. Manuscript in prep.

Tong, S., Gonzalez, R., & **Thomas, C.C.** The centrality of social regard to well-being in sub-Saharan Africa. Manuscript in prep.

Thomas, C.C., Schwalbe, M., Lim, C., Burchett, C., Markus, H., & Cohen, G. The impacts of a self-affirmation intervention on low-income Americans' economic and well-being outcomes. Analysis in progress.

Brune, L., Karlan, D., **Thomas, C.C.**, & Udry, C. Impacts of Universal Group-Interpersonal Therapy (G-IPT) on Mental Health and Economic Well-Being in Uganda. Analysis in progress.

Garcia-Sanchez, E., Qing, C., Maitreyi, A., Hamedani, M., Eberhardt, J., Markus, H.R, & **Thomas, C.C.** Positive sum narratives advance bipartisan support for reparative action. Analysis in progress.

Thomas, C.C., Buzan, J., Bernardo, A.B.I., Bryan, G., & Karlan, D. How personal and shared aspirations influence economic development in the Philippines. Data collection in progress.

GRANTS

UM LSA 2024 Social Science Research Funding Opportunities (lead PI), \$12,690	2024 – 2025
UM Poverty Solutions (lead PI), \$25,000	2024 – 2025
The Agency Fund (lead PI), \$214,000	2023 – 2025
<i>“Aspirations interventions for the Self and for Society”</i>	
Wellspring Philanthropic Fund (co-I), \$500,000	2023 – 2026
<i>“Capabilities-based coaching at scale: Digital trainings for ultra-poor rural women in India”</i>	
Berkeley Center for Effective Global Action (co-I), \$8,500	2022 – 2023
<i>“Enculturating Psychological and Development Sciences: A Focus on Sub-Saharan Africa”</i>	
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (co-lead PI), \$684,195	2022 – 2024
<i>“Updating the American Dream”</i>	
Wellspring Philanthropic Fund (lead PI), \$200,400	2016 – 2020

“Agenda Setting and Piloting on the Social Psychology of Barriers to Agency in Low-Income Countries”	
Berkeley Center for Effective Global Action (co-I), \$10,000	2020
“Poverty as a threat to adaptive adequacy: A test of an experimental intervention to enhance dignity and psychosocial, health, and economic outcomes of the poor”	
Economic Security Project (lead PI), \$14,800	2020
“Effects of COVID-19 and CARES Act on views of basic income policy and recipients”	
Stanford King Center on Global Development (lead PI), \$3,800	2019
“‘Personal Initiative’ versus ‘Interpersonal Initiative’: Testing the psychological, social, and economic effects of two models of women’s agency in Niger”	
Economic Security Project (lead PI), \$10,000	2017
“Investigating the Framing Effects of Basic Income Programs on Public Support, Stigma, and Behavior”	

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND POPULAR PRESS

Policy Reports

Thomas, C. C., Premand, P., Bossuroy, T., Sambo, A. S., Markus, H.R., & Walton, G.W. (2024). *How Culturally Wise Interventions Help Reduce Poverty* (Policy Research Working Paper No. 10824). World Bank, Washington D.C. [Link](#).

Bossuroy, T., Goldstein, M., Karlan, D., Kazianga, H., Parienté, W., Premand, P., **Thomas, C.**, Udry, C., Vaillant, J., Wright, K. (2021). *Pathways out of extreme poverty: Tackling psychosocial and capital constraints with a multi-faceted social protection program in Niger* (Policy Research Working Paper No. 9562). World Bank, Washington D.C. [Link](#).

Bidadanure, J., Kline, S., Moore, C., Rainwater, B., & **Thomas, C.** (2018). *Basic Income in Cities: A guide to city experiments and pilot projects*. Prepared by the Stanford Basic Income Lab and the National League of Cities, Washington, D.C. [Link](#).

Articles, Blogs, and Podcasts

Thomas, C. (2024, April 26). “[Culturally attuned development: Why it matters & how to do it](#)”. The Agency Fund Blog.

Thomas, C. & Kumar, S. (2024, April 10). “[Beyond “The Poor”: Using Empowering Narratives to Advance the Impacts of Aid](#)”. FinDev Gateway.

Byrne, Dom. (2024, January 26). [Why we should think about more than cash when seeking to eradicate poverty](#). Nature Careers Podcast.

Bossuroy, T., Premand, P., & **Thomas, C.** (2023, February 16). [Can Psychosocial Interventions Make Anti-Poverty Programmes More Cost-Effective? Evidence from Niger](#). VoxDev.

Thomas, C. (2022, December). [Commentary](#). In Wein, T., Blair, M., & Mungomba, T. *The Dignity Report 2022: Gathering Allies Worldwide*. IDinsight.

Thomas, C., Kalkstein, D., & Walton, G. (2020, June 17). [How the Coronavirus Crisis Is Opening the Door to Universal Social Policies in the U.S.](#) *Time*.

Thomas, C., & Haushofer, J. (2015, April 21). The Relationship Between Depression and Poverty. *Foreign Affairs*.

Haushofer, J. & **Thomas, C.** (2015, April 23). Cash: a simple remedy for domestic violence? International Growth Centre: Ideas for Growth Blog.

Haushofer, J., Shapiro, J., & **Thomas, C.** (2015, January 28). Does Money Buy Happiness? A new answer to an old question. Society for Personality and Social Psychology: Character and Context Blog.

Selected Media Coverage

Russell, L.F. (2025, August 14). What does it mean to be interdisciplinary? The case for collaboration across fields. UC Berkeley Center for Effective Global Action (CEGA).

Weir, K. (2025, June 30). Breakthrough Psychological Science: Culture and the self: the universal capacity to be shaped by your contexts. American Psychological Association.

Sleek, S. (2023, April 25). The Value of Values in Poverty Reduction. APS Observer.

Mohideen, F. (2023, March 16). Recapping the 2023 Presidential Plenary: How Norms Change – Part 1. Society for Personality and Social Psychology Newsletter.

Anthes, E. (2020, September 10). The great experiment. The Washington Post.

Beyer, R. (2020, July 27). A cultural approach to development. Stanford King Center on Global Development.

Crawford, K. (2020, June 25). 'Poverty alleviation' and 'needy?' Why words can do more harm than good when offering help, Stanford study finds. Stanford Report.

Regan, S. (2020, June 4). Social psychology PhD student shares research on universal basic income. Stanford Daily News.

SELECTED PRESENTATIONS

Invited Talks and Panels

2025

University of Michigan, ICOS (Interdisciplinary Committee on Organizational Studies)

UC Berkeley Center for Effective Global Action (CEGA)

NYU Department of Sociology, Cash Transfer Lab

2024

University of Chicago, Department of Psychology

London School of Economics (LSE), Psychological and Behavioural Science Departmental Seminar Series

Society for Personality and Social Psychology (SPSP) Annual Convention, Advances in Cultural Psychology Pre-Conference

U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Behavioral Economics Forum
University of Michigan, Department of Psychology, Personality and Social Contexts Brownbag
Johns Hopkins University, SEE Change (Self-Empowerment and Equity for Change Initiative) Conference
University of Texas, Austin, TxBSPI Lab
Ashoka University, Centre for Social and Behaviour Change, Panel with Nobel Laureate Kailash Satyarthi
Cornell Center for Behavioral Economics and Decision Research (BEDR)
University of British Columbia (UBC) Vancouver School of Economics, Behavioural Seminar Series

2023

University of Michigan, Institute for Social Research
University of Michigan, Ross School of Business
University of Waterloo, Department of Psychology
Stanford University, Stanford Center on Poverty & Inequality, The Voices Project Conference
U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)
Society for Personality and Social Psychology 2023 Annual Convention, Presidential Plenary
Stanford University, Department of Psychology, Social Psychology Area
Stanford University, Stanford Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law, Freeman Spogli Institute

2022

University of Chicago, Booth School of Business
World Bank, Social Protection and Jobs Global Practice
University of California–Berkeley, Psychology and Economics of Poverty Convening, [panel](#)

2021

University of Virginia, Department of Psychology, Social Psychology Area
University of Wisconsin–Madison, Department of Psychology, Brauer Lab
Jain Family Institute, Basic Income Research and Action Labs Seminar (BIRAL)
Stanford University, Stanford Basic Income Lab, What’s in a Name? Practitioner’s Workshop
University of Michigan–Ann Arbor, Poverty Solutions, New Directions in Basic Income Research Workshop

Chaired symposia

Thomas, C. & Stephens, N. (2021, February). *Capitalism and Interdependence: Strange bedfellows or oil and water?* Society for Personality and Social Psychology 2021 Annual

Convention.

Conference presentations

Thomas, C. C. (2024, April). *Aspirations, Agency, and Other Life Skills: Addressing Psychosocial Constraints for Poverty Reduction*. SEE Change (Self-Empowerment and Equity for Change Initiative) Conference, Johns Hopkins University, Washington, D.C. Presentation.

Thomas, C. C. (2024, April). *Building Personal or Interpersonal Initiative? How Psychologically and Culturally Wise Interventions Help Reduce Extreme Poverty in Niger*. CECA Psychology & Economics of Poverty Convening 2024, University of California, Berkeley. Presentation.

Thomas, C. C. (2024, February). *Centrality of Social Regard for Well-being in sub-Saharan Africa*. Advances in Cultural Psychology Pre-Conference at the Society for Personality and Social Psychology 2024 Annual Convention, San Diego, CA. Presentation.

Thomas, C. C. (2024, February). *Updating the American Dream to Combat a Culture of Poverty and Prejudice*. Society for Personality and Social Psychology (SPSP) Annual 2024 Convention, San Diego, CA. Presentation.

Thomas, C. C. (2023, September). *Updating the American Dream to Combat a Culture of Poverty and Prejudice*. Society of Experimental Social Psychology (SESP) Annual 2023 Meeting, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI. Presentation.

Thomas, C. C. (2023, September). *Tackling Psychosocial and Capital Constraints to Alleviate Poverty*. Advances in Field Experiments (AFE), University of Chicago, Chicago, IL. Presentation.

Thomas, C. C. (2023, May). *From Outside In: Independent Versus Interdependent Motives for Economic Mobility in West Africa*. Association of Psychological Science, Washington D.C. Presentation.

Thomas, C. C. (2023, March). *Culturally Wise Interventions Can Help Reduce Poverty in West Africa*. International Convention of Psychological Science, Brussels, Belgium. Presentation.

Thomas, C. C. (2023, February). *Culturally Wise Interventions Can Help Reduce Poverty in West Africa*. **Presidential Plenary at the Society for Personality and Social Psychology 2023 Annual Convention**, Atlanta, GA. Presentation.

Thomas, C. C., Sambo, S. A., Premand, P., Bossuroy, T., Markus, H. R., & Walton, G. M. (2022, February). *Solidarity breeds prosperity? Comparing independent versus interdependent initiative interventions on women's economic development in Niger*. Advances in Cultural Psychology Pre-Conference at the Society for Personality and Social Psychology 2022 Annual Convention, San Francisco, CA. Presentation (Winner of Data Blitz Award).

Thomas, C., Sambo, S. A., Premand, P., Bossuroy, T., Markus, H. R., & Walton, G. (2021, March). *Solidarity breeds prosperity? Comparing independent versus interdependent initiative interventions on women's economic development in Niger*. CECA Psychology & Economics of Poverty Convening 2021, University of California, Berkeley. Presentation.

Thomas, C., Sambo, S. A., Premand, P., Bossuroy, T., Markus, H. R., & Walton, G. (2021, February). *Leveraging interdependence to advance economic development in West Africa*.

Society for Personality and Social Psychology 2021 Annual Convention. Symposium Presentation.

Sobowale, K., Thomas, C., Forget, E., & Harper, A. (2019, May). *A Basic Income: Promises and Pitfalls for People with a Psychiatric Disability*. Panel presented at the 2019 Annual Meeting of the American Psychiatric Association, San Francisco, CA.

Thomas, C., Reinhart, E., Markus, H., & Walton, G. (2019, February). *Is Freedom the Way to a Conservative Heart? Moral Reframing of Universal Basic Income Increases Conservatives' Support and Reduces Stereotypic Thinking*. Society for Personality and Social Psychology 2019 Annual Convention, Portland, OR. Data Blitz Presentation (one of 36 selected out of 2,100 submissions).

Thomas, C. (2018, February). *The Meaning of Money Matters: Effects of Cash Transfer Framings on Recipient Agency in Kenya*. The Psychology of Inequality and Social Class Preconference at the Society for Personality and Social Psychology 2018 Annual Convention, Atlanta, GA. Presentation.

Thomas, C. *, Otis, N. *, Abraham, J., Walton, G., & Markus, H. (2018, February). *Culturally Relevant Construals of Cash Transfers Affect Recipient Agency: Evidence from Kenya*. Intervention Science Pre-Conference at the Society for Personality and Social Psychology 2018 Annual Convention, Atlanta, GA. Poster (Winner of Poster Session).

Thomas, C. (2017, June). *Universal Basic Income: The Meaning of Money Matters*. Presentation at the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues 2017 Conference, Albuquerque, NM. Presentation.

TEACHING

Courses

University of Michigan, ORGSTUDY 495: Behavioral Science for Social Impact (Winter 2024, Winter 2025)

Teaching Assistant

Stanford University

- PSYCH 251: Experimental Methods w/ Michael Frank
- PSYCH 252: Statistical Methods w/ Tobias Gertsenberg
- PSYCH 75: Introduction to Cultural Psychology w/ Hazel Markus
- PSYCH 138/238: Wise Interventions w/ Greg Walton
- PSYCH 70/SOC 2: Self & Society: Introduction to Social Psychology w/ Alia Crum and Robb Willer

Guest Lecturer

Stanford University: PUBLPOLI 1: Introduction to Public Policy

University of Michigan: OS 305: Inside Organizations

AFFILIATIONS & PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

Professional service

SPSP Intervention Science Pre-Conference, Co-Organizer (2022 - 2025)

UC Berkeley CEGA's Psychology and Economics of Poverty (PEP) Conference,
Co-Organizer (2023 - 2024)

University of Michigan Institute for Social Research's Research Center for Group Dynamics
Seminar Series "Psychological Diversity Across the Globe", Co-Organizer (Fall 2023)

World Bank's Partnership for Economic Inclusion, Researcher (2022 – 2023)

The Agency Fund, Advisor (2021 - present)

Diversity Committee and Service, Stanford Psychology (2021 - 2022)
Volunteer for Paths to PhD, sub-committee on inclusion in curricula

Graduate Program Committee, Stanford Psychology (2020 – 2021)

Open Science Committee, Stanford Psychology (2018 – 2020)
Co-led creation of the departmental open science guide

Ad-hoc journal reviewer: *Current Directions in Psychological Science, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences NEXUS, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, American Psychologist, JAMA Psychiatry, Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, Economic Development and Cultural Change, Social Psychological and Personality Science*

Affiliations

American Psychological Association (APA), Member

University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research, Faculty Affiliate

University of Michigan's Poverty Solutions, Faculty Affiliate

Stanford SPARQ, Faculty Affiliate

QUANTITATIVE TRAINING

PSYCH 252: Statistical Methods for Behavioral and Social Sciences

PSYCH 254: Lab in Experimental Methods

STATS 209: Statistical Methods for Group Comparisons and Causal Inference

STATS 196A: Multilevel Modeling Using R

MS&E 226: Fundamentals of Data Science: Prediction, Inference, Causality

SOC 302: Introduction to Data Science

EDUC 430A: Experimental Research Design and Analysis

PSYCH 290: Natural Language Processing & Text-based Machine Learning in the Social Sciences

WORK EXPERIENCE

Consultant, World Bank, Partnership for Economic Inclusion	2022 – 2023
Consultant, Behavioral Insights Team	2022 – 2023
Graduate Research Fellow	
Stanford Center on Poverty & Inequality	2018 – 2022
Stanford Basic Income Lab	2018
Consultant, World Bank, Sahel Adaptive Safety Net Program, Niger	2017 – 2019
Research Specialist, Department of Psychology, Princeton University Busara Center for Behavioral Economics, Nairobi, Kenya PI: Johannes Haushofer	2014 – 2016
Mental Health Counselor, Third Way Center, Denver, CO	2013
Capacity Building Fellow in Microfinance, Project Muso, Boston, MA	2012 – 2013

FIELD RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Kenya, Niger, Togo, India (Bihar, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Maharashtra), Philippines, United States (Mississippi Delta, California)

PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

Skills: R, behavioral science / intervention design, qualitative research, sociocultural analysis, partnerships, field experiments, lab experiments, research with hard-to-reach populations, causal inference, linear mixed models, reproducible research & open science, data visualization

Languages: French (intermediate)