



UNIVERSITY OF
LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Roinn na
Síceolaíochta
Department of
Psychology



PhD Studentships in Psychology 2023

Applications are invited from excellent candidates in relation to the PhD projects described below. It is recommended that potential applicants contact the supervisors informally prior to applying. Interested candidates may apply for PhD study throughout the year. However, fully funded PhD studentships are available for PhD study starting January 2024. The Studentship will include a stipend (€11,000) and EU fees. For non-EU applicants, a non-EU fee waiver may also be available, but this cannot be guaranteed (a difference of approximately €6000p.a.). Selection for studentships will be competitive and will take place in late November 2023. Shortlisted candidates should be available for interview in late November/early December for an online interview. Note that admission to the faculty of Education and Health Sciences to undertake a PhD degree is a separate process.

Applications can be made by submitting (1) a current two-page academic CV and (2) an expression of interest document to psychology@ul.ie with the subject 'PhD Studentship Application'. The expression of interest document should be submitted in Word (.doc or .docx) format and should be no more than two pages. The applicant should describe their own suitability for one of the advertised projects (50% weighted) and how they propose to develop the project (50% weighted). Queries about the projects can be made to the primary supervisors listed below.

The closing date for applications to the studentship competition is November 16th at 5pm (Irish Standard Time). We reserve the right not to make an award.

Title: Life adversity, depression, and cardiovascular responses to acute psychological stress

Supervisors: Prof Stephen Gallagher (Stephen.gallagher@ul.ie); Dr Tracey Keogh.

Project Description: The cardiovascular reactivity hypothesis is a well-established paradigm for demonstrating how acute psychological stress is associated with heart disease. Recent research from our group has found that early life adversity and depression interact to influence cardiovascular reactivity to acute stressors (Keogh et al, 2022). This PhD project will build on this body of work and examine a range of life stressors to see and in what way they may influence the depression-cardiovascular reactivity association.

We are seeking a high calibre PhD student to become part of our large, internationally highly regarded research programme on cardiovascular reactivity research.

Title: Multiple Identity Integration: Cognitive Consistency as a Core Motive for Group Identification and Intergroup Attitudes

Supervisors: Dr Jenny Roth (Jenny.roth@ul.ie), Dr Paul Maher

Project Description: People usually belong to multiple social groups, which form their social identities. For example, they may be Irish and Catholic or Irish and Protestant, they may be Smoker and Athlete, Vegetarian and Hunter, or Protestant and Unionist. These social identities can be compatible when characteristics, norms, values, and goals are aligned, or they can be incompatible with conflicting group characteristics, norms, values, or goals. This project builds upon a cognitive consistency approach to understanding identification with more than one social group and attitudes towards these groups ([Loughnane, Roth, & van Tilburg, 2023](#); [Loughnane, Roth, Rauner, & Strack, 2021](#); [Roth, Steffens, & Vignoles, 2018](#)). This approach mainly suggests that identification with, and attitudes towards social groups and their perceived compatibility, are interlinked and driven by people's motivation for consistency in their cognitions and judgments. Currently we are extending the previous research in several areas:

- I. We built on a cognitive consistency approach to explain when people can identify with a unifying superordinate social category (e.g., when Irish nationals and British nationals in Northern Ireland identify with Northern Irish as a common ingroup) and how this superordinate group identification affects attitudes between the subgroups (e.g., Irish and British nationals).
- II. We are exploring boundary conditions of the cognitive consistency approach to understanding identification and intergroup attitudes. These boundary conditions include what makes social groups compatible or incompatible, and when incompatibility can be tolerated, the relevance of the social groups for the person, or the effects of similarities/differences vs. complementarity/conflict between the groups.
- III. We investigate cognitive consistency vs other identity motives (e.g., [Vignoles, 2011](#)) influencing group identification.

Any student who wishes to work on the project is invited to follow the general idea and shape their specific direction based on their individual interests.

Title: Identity Compatibility, Well-Being, and Health

Supervisors: Dr Siobhan Griffin (Siobhan.griffin@ul.ie), Dr Jenny Roth

Project Description: People usually belong to multiple social groups forming their social identities (e.g., religious, national, or hobby groups). These groups provide psychological and material resources to cope with stress and benefit health, in an effect known as the 'social cure' (Haslam et al., 2019; Jetten et al., 2012). These social identities can have characteristics, norms, values, and goals that are aligned with each other and in harmony, or they can conflict with each other (e.g., two of these social identities have conflicting goals). For example, a person may be of both Irish nationality and politically Unionist (i.e., want a United Ireland), whereas someone else may be of British nationality and politically Unionist. Another example is a person who may be a wife and a mother, whereas someone else may be career-driven manager and a mother. While some of these combinations of social identities are in harmony, others are more in conflict. Previous research shows that having multiple identities can particularly benefit people's well-being when those identities are *compatible* with each other (e.g., Brook et al., 2008; Iyer et al., 2009). However, this has only been documented in self-

reported well-being, and not in objective indices of stress (e.g., cardiovascular threat/challenge responses, cortisol) despite social identities being linked to long-term physical health outcomes, such as mortality (e.g., Putnam, 2000; Steffens et al., 2016). Also, little is known about why social identity incompatibility may be linked to well-being.

The present research proposal aims to investigate the relationship between multiple social identities and well-being by testing an underlying cognitive consistency mechanism: cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) suggests that inconsistency between cognitions or between cognitions and behaviour leads to the aversive feeling of dissonance. Building on this theorising, we suggest that feelings of dissonance associated with incompatible social identities can be detrimental for well-being.

The project aims to test A) the causal relationship between (in) compatible social identities and self-reported well-being and physiological markers of stress, and B) whether these associations are driven by cognitive dissonance. The anticipated research will consist of experiments manipulating the perceived compatibility of social identities and testing its effect on physiological indicators of stress, affect, and well-being.

Title: A Prospective, Longitudinal Investigation of Intergenerational Homelessness in Ireland

Supervisors: Dr Ronni M. Greenwood (Ronni.greenwood@ul.ie) & Dr Sarah Jay

Project description: Families are the fastest growing segment of the homeless population in Europe. Even though childhood homelessness is a significant predictor of adult homelessness, very little is known about the intergenerational cycle of homelessness. Homelessness, a situation of extreme social marginalisation, is associated with poor mental health, poor physical health, addictions, and shorter life spans. The individual and social costs of homelessness are profound. We are seeking a PhD student to design and initiate a prospective, longitudinal investigation of intergenerational homelessness in Ireland that will: a) map family members' entries, exits, and returns to homelessness; b) identify individual and ecological risk and protective factors for children's returns to homelessness as adults; and c) identify the social, psychological, and health correlates of homeless trajectories. The PhD student will join our international team of researchers and Irish partners in the voluntary and statutory sectors and will join the Well-being in Social Context Lab (WISC), a group of researchers focused on ecological influences on individual and collective well-being.

Title: What makes something moral? Applying a moral categorisation approach to better understand how people know right from wrong.

Supervisors: Dr Cillian McHugh (Cillian.McHugh@ul.ie), Prof. Eric R. Igou

Project Description: Recent work in moral psychology has proposed that when people make moral judgements, the cognitive processes at play are the same as those involved in categorisation more generally (McHugh, McGann, Igou, & Kinsella, 2022). That is, we *categorise* people/actions/events as morally right or morally wrong (or not morally relevant). One prediction of this approach is that moral judgments and categorisations should be both influenced by the same kinds of contextual influences

(order effects, mood effects, typicality effects). Another prediction is that when making a moral judgement, the target of the judgement matters, and that people judge *actions* differently to how they judge *actors* (the person who commits the act). We are seeking a PhD student to join this emerging programme of research to build on this categorisation approach to moral judgment. Specifically, the student will design studies to test the theoretical predictions of the model. It is also hoped that this project will move the study of moral psychology beyond abstract hypothetical life-and-death scenarios, and study more real-life every-day moral categorisation (e.g., anything from judging the behaviour of friends/colleagues/strangers to more complex issues such as abortion, euthanasia, political decisions).

Title: Parents with disabilities/additional needs.

Supervisors: Dr Elaine Rogers (elaine.m.rogers@ul.ie) and Professor Patrick Ryan

Project Description: Parents with disabilities, particularly cognitive impairment, face challenges, including a much greater risk of losing custody of their children, and challenges with family reunification. This can occur in the absence of dedicated parenting supports. This PhD will investigate this phenomenon from various perspectives, including exploring the experiences of stakeholders across relevant community, health and social services, and legal settings. The methodologies will comprise both qualitative and quantitative approaches. We are seeking a PhD student with an interest in working with parents with disabilities and the systems and contexts of interest.

Title: Onset and Management of Psychological Distress During Critical Life Phases: The Impact of Wearable Sensor Devices to Identify and Manage Distress

Supervisors: Professor Eric R. Igou (Eric.Igou@ul.ie) (primary supervisor), Dr. Aoife Whiston
Assistant Professor Elayne Ahern, PhD and Full Professor Donal Fortune

Project Description: Recently, we conducted research on the impact of stress on residual symptoms in remitted and partially remitted depression using wearable sensor devices from Analog Devices Inc. (ADI; Whiston, Igou, Fortune, Analog Devices Team, & Semkovska, 2022, 2023). This new project builds on this previous work but extends it by examining critical life phases of men and women: identifying vulnerabilities, resilience, and coping by using such wearable devices. The idea is that continuous real-time and real-life sampling of stress serves as a reliable predictor of psychological crises, resilience, and coping in conjunction with self-report scales. This research will help improve the use of sensory devices and create the grounds for successful interventions. We anticipate this novel approach will lead to numerous publications in international top-tier clinical and social psychology journals.

Title: Social Judgments and Decision Making as a Function of Emotions

Supervisors: Dr. Paul Maher, Associate Professor (primary) (Paul.Maher@ul.ie) and Professor Dr. Eric R. Igou

Project Description: Context effects in social judgments and decision making have a long history in social psychological research. Much of this research examined context effects as a function of how information is categorised (leading to assimilation and contrast effects, e.g., Schwarz & Bless, 1992). Affective experience can be conceptualised as contextual stimuli, and accordingly, much research has also examined the effects of moods and emotions on social judgments and decision making. Our approach re-addresses the idea that affect and categorisation impact on social judgments and decision making (e.g., Isen et al., 1978). However, our approach goes beyond earlier approaches by focusing on *specific* emotions and *how* they impact social judgments and decision making via *categorisation* processes. We will apply our general hypotheses to political judgments and person perception. We expect this research to provide the grounds for theoretical contributions to the relationship between affect and cognition in social judgments and decision making. We further anticipate that this research will be published in top-tier international journals in social, political, and cognitive psychology.