

## Clinical Psychology Research Projects 2023

### **Ryan Balzan** (Lecturer in Psychology)

My work has particularly focussed on the role that cognitive biases (i.e., problematic thinking styles) play in the development and maintenance of delusional beliefs in people with psychosis. I have also contributed to the development of novel psychological treatments, including the metacognitive training programme (MCT). MCT targets the cognitive biases thought to cause and maintain delusions, with the aim of reducing the severity of these symptoms. Recently, we've extended MCT to other diagnoses, such as eating disorders and depression. We have a couple ongoing MCT projects that might suit a Masters student – one looking at an 'MCT app' in a psychosis population, and one looking at an online version of MCT for older people with depressive symptoms (MCT-Silver).

### **Lisa Beatty** (Associate Professor in Psychology)

My primary interest is psycho-oncology, defined as (1) the study of psychosocial responses to cancer, and (2) psychosocial factors that influence all stages of the disease process, from risk, detection, course, treatment, and outcomes. In particular, I have expertise in the development and evaluation of digital mental health interventions for cancer. Within these broad areas, I would welcome student ideas, or I have a number of specific research projects that would be appropriate, including:

- Symptom Clusters – exploring how physical and psychological cancer symptoms might cluster together, and whether treating one 'sentinel' symptom might lead to improvements across the cluster.
- To develop a 'blended therapy' version of our evidence-based digital mental health program for early stage cancer (where a combination of face-to-face sessions with online self-guided sessions are utilised).

### **Mariëtte Berndsen** (Lecturer in Psychology)

My primary research interests involve the social psychology of emotions, stigma, and prejudice. I would like to supervise projects in the area of:

- Stigma (Masters project). Individuals who deviate (in negative ways) from normative standards in their behaviour and/or appearance are often stigmatized. This is especially so when they are perceived to have some control over their behaviour/appearance (e.g., obese people, people who suffer from depression). How do stigmas affect one's life and can we reduce stigmas?

### **Glen Bodner** (Associate Professor in Psychology)

My research seeks to understand how common study strategies influence encoding and retrieval processes, and to apply that understanding to improve memory and cognitive performance. I also investigate how encoding and retrieval factors, such as context and task, shape memory and the subjective experiences that arise during cognitive processing.

- Recent projects in my lab focus on the utility of a production (i.e., reading aloud) strategy, and of other simple study strategies such as highlighting, for improving learning and memory.
- Most recently, my lab has also begun to explore the influence of art-therapy interventions such as drawing on voluntary and involuntary memory for traumatic events, and on PTSD symptomology.
- These projects are quite applied in nature and may be of interest to Clinical HDR students.

### **Monica Cations** (Lecturer in Psychology)

My research is translational with an aim to improve the quality and safety of aged care. I have a particular focus on psychological wellbeing in aged care environments, young people accessing aged care, and elder abuse.

Current projects for which I am seeking students include:

- **PhD project – mental health service use among older Australians**  
This project will involve using ‘big data’ to examine mental health service use among older Australians and how these services impact wellbeing and outcomes. This project would suit a student with an interest in both psychology and public health, and who enjoys quantitative data analysis.
- **PhD Project (co-supervised by Prof Reg Nixon) – treatments for psychological trauma among older adults**  
Very little is known about how psychological trauma affects older adults, and the effectiveness of existing therapies for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in this population. This project seeks to fill this important research and clinical gap, by examining the need for psychological supports for older adults who have survived psychologically traumatic events and how these supports could be delivered in practice
- **Master’s research project – examining impacts and coping strategies of staff at high risk for harm working in specialist dementia services**

### **Sarah Cohen-Woods** (Matthew Flinders Fellow in Psychology)

*TBC.*

### **Edney, Laura** (Dr, Research Fellow)

I am a health economist with a background in psychology. I am interested in the application of health economics to mental health and wellbeing research to support evidence-informed policy and practice decisions for improved patient experience, population health and health system sustainability. I am happy to consider any projects that students may wish to explore in the area of health economics or health services research relevant to the field of mental health, or I have some specific projects that could be explored for either PhD or Masters projects, including:

1. Investigating the comparative funding of mental and physical health interventions by national- and local-level funding bodies and whether factors generally considered in sensitivity analyses of economic evaluations (e.g., time horizon, outcome measurement, perspective) may disproportionately impact mental health interventions,
2. Estimating the indirect impact of national health spending on wellbeing and the implications of this for the measurement of health opportunity costs and for national health technology assessment decision-making,
3. Developing reference models to be used in economic evaluations for mental health conditions,
4. Estimating the utilisation, costs and outcomes of health care provided to Australian veterans.

**Dr Dan Fassnacht** (Senior Lecturer in Psychology); co-supervised by Dr Kathina Ali (Research Fellow in Psychology)

How can technology be used to promote behavioural change and improve mental health and wellbeing? In my research, I develop and evaluate digital interventions (e.g., Internet, mobile phones or podcasts) to facilitate help-seeking, enhance psychological wellbeing, and prevent and treat mental illness. I am co-leading the Be Well Lab, a collaborative partnership between researchers and clinicians from Flinders University and the South Australian Health & Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI) Be Well Co, which allows us to translate scientific findings into practice, and have a real-world impact on people's mental health and wellbeing.

Current projects include:

- Evaluation of the Be Well Plan in clinical groups (PhD project): The Be Well Plan is an evidence-based, group program (delivered online or in-person) which promotes mental wellbeing and reduces psychological distress. Participants can tailor evidence-based activities to their individual needs and interests, making it suitable for a diverse range of individuals. Currently, the program is trialled among individuals waiting for eating disorder services, and young adults waiting for mental health treatment at Headspace.
- Evaluation of the dual-continua model of mental health (Master project): The dual-continua model suggests that mental wellbeing and mental illness reflect two related, yet distinct dimensions. We are evaluating the dual-continua model in various clinical and non-clinical populations.

**Oren Griffiths** (Lecturer in Psychology)

We use cognitive neuroscience methods to study how people with delusions and other psychotic symptoms form and maintain inappropriate levels of conviction. Projects can involve a range of methods: behavioural methods (reaction time tasks), surveys, psychophysiology (eye-tracking, heart-rate, electroencephalography), and clinical interviews.

Current projects include:

- What are the electrophysiological correlates of feelings and familiarity and insight (the “aha” moment)? And to what extent are these processes disrupted in delusion-prone individuals?
- How does the attentional system learn to selectively orient to important and

meaningful events in the world, and ignore noisy, irrelevant events? Do we need conscious processes to do this? Can conscious beliefs impact upon this selectivity?

### **Eva Kemps** (Professor in Psychology)

My research activities focus on applications of cognitive experimental psychology in health behaviours, in particular eating. One specific area of ongoing research with opportunities for several post-graduate research projects (both at the Masters and PhD level) focuses on subtly changing the food environment to promote healthier eating. In particular, there is an abundance of unhealthy food in the contemporary Western environment, contributing to poor eating habits and rising obesity rates. Emerging evidence, based on the principles of nudging, suggests that making subtle changes to the food environment could combat unhealthy eating and weight gain. The overarching aim of this research is to find the optimal way of presenting food to promote healthier eating. Outcomes have the potential to dramatically change the way in which food is presented to consumers in everyday settings, from how vending machines are stocked, to how service stations set out their food displays, and fast-food outlets, cafés and online food delivery applications construct their menus.

Here are some relevant references, including from current and past students in my lab (\*).

### **References**

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**Daniel King** (Senior Research Fellow in Psychology)

I have a broad interest in the study of behavioural addictions in relation to digital technologies, including but not limited to video gaming and online gambling activities, social media use (Facebook, Instagram), and online purchasing/shopping behaviours. I am also interested in the cross-over/convergence of monetised gaming (e.g., microtransactions) and online gambling. My research has mainly adopted a clinical/social psychology perspective, including studies of the social, cognitive, and motivational determinants of excessive/repetitive behaviours, and investigations of the ways in which certain structural characteristics of these activities may relate to maladaptive behaviours.

## Current projects:

- Systematic review and meta-analysis of the effectiveness of interventions for problematic internet use, including gaming, social media, and other activities.
- Survey-based studies: (1) Australian mental health practitioners' knowledge, attitudes toward, and experiences of problematic internet use, including problem gaming and gaming disorder; (2) Problem gaming and related mental health conditions among Australian young people, including adolescents and young adults.

**Julie Mattiske** (Senior Lecturer in Psychology)

For Masters projects, I am broadly interested in anxiety, anxiety disorders, and health-related issues. I have supervised Masters projects in a range of other areas including perfectionism, schizophrenia, and alcohol dependence. I would be very happy to serve as the internal co-supervisor for most of the nominated health projects, e.g., diabetes, oncology.

**Reg Nixon** (Professor in Psychology)

*Not available for supervision in 2023*

**Jessica Paterson** (Associate Professor in Psychology)

My primary interest is in the relationship between sleep, mental health, and psychopathology in children and adults. I also have an interest in the relationship between trauma and sleep – across the lifespan, as well as for anyone who routinely experiences both trauma exposure and sleep disturbance, e.g., emergency service workers. I welcome student ideas within these areas, but also have some specific projects that could be appropriate for either Masters or PhD candidates:

1. PhD or Masters: Assessing the feasibility and efficacy of an intervention integrating existing evidence-based traumatic stress *and* sleep interventions
2. PhD or Masters: What is the mechanistic role of sleep in trauma symptomology? How does sleep before and after treatment sessions impact the efficacy of trauma focused cognitive therapy?
3. PhD or Masters: Sleep, mental health and secondary traumatic stress in children of military families

4. Masters: The psychological, social and emotional impact of caring for someone with PTSD

**Melanie Takarangi** (Associate Professor in Psychology)

*TBC*

**Emma Thomas** (Associate Professor in Psychology):

*TBC*

**Tracey Wade** (Matthew Flinders Distinguished Professor in Psychology) & Dr **Ivana Osenk** (Clinical Psychologist)

In 2022, the Department for Education are rolling out our perfectionism prevention program to schools across years 8-12. Data will be collected at baseline and end of intervention, and hopefully 3-month follow-up. While this is not an RCT, there is the opportunity to compare schools on the waitlist and schools receiving the intervention. This project has been submitted to ethics. A student involved in this project will be expected to liaise with the Department, monitor online data collection, clean and analyse the data. The resulting paper will have the student as first author. This project is aimed towards a Masters of Clinical Psychology student.

#### References

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**Michael Wenzel** (Professor in Psychology)

My research currently focuses on responses to victimizations and wrongdoing in interpersonal or intergroup contexts. I am interested in victims' and wrongdoers' responses to wrongdoing in the form of confession, apology, forgiveness and self-forgiveness, punishment and self-punishment, etc., and the role of these responses in the restoration of justice perceptions, moral identities, and social relationships. I am also specifically interested in the dynamics between these victim and offender responses, the co-engagement of relationship partners about the wrongdoing, and their effects on

self and relationship repair. These projects will be well-suited to a PhD (Clinical Psychology) candidate.

### **Tim Windsor (Associate Professor in Psychology)**

My research interests are concerned with ageing well, and in particular engagement with life in older adulthood. I would be interested in supervising Masters projects concerned with relationships between psychosocial aspects of ageing and aspects of mental ill-being (e.g., depression and anxiety symptoms) and well-being (e.g., subjective well-being and aspects of psychological well-being). Current topics of particular interest include positive solitude and self-regulatory energy as resources for coping with ageing-related losses, awareness of ageing-related change (both losses and gains) and self-compassion.

### **Stephanie Wong (NHMRC Research Fellow & Lecturer in Psychology)**

My research focuses on the cognitive and behavioural symptoms of dementia and related conditions. I am interested in understanding the neurobiological mechanisms that drive these symptoms, improving the way we assess these symptoms in clinical practice, and developing effective interventions. My research methods typically involve a combination of behavioural tasks (e.g., reinforcement learning), standardised questionnaires and neuropsychological tests, clinical interviews and focus groups. These projects would be suitable for either Masters or PhD students.

Current projects include:

- Cognitive impairment and financial capability. Financial mismanagement and exploitation are common in individuals with cognitive impairment. This project aims to investigate the cognitive skills required to undertake everyday financial tasks (e.g., budgeting, paying bills, decision-making), and to develop targeted interventions to support difficulties in performing these tasks. The project will involve cognitive and clinical investigations in healthy individuals and individuals with cognitive impairment (e.g., due to dementia or other neurological conditions).
- Behavioural changes in dementia. When most people hear about dementia, memory loss is often the first thing that comes to mind. However, memory impairment is only one symptom of dementia. Other symptoms, such as apathy, socially inappropriate behaviour, reduced empathy and poor financial judgment, are also common. The underlying neurobiological mechanisms of these symptoms are not well understood. This project will involve a combination of various methodologies, including cognitive and clinical investigations, psychophysiology and eye tracking.
- Behavioural interventions in dementia. In the absence of a cure for dementia, effective non-pharmacological behavioural interventions are urgently needed. This project will adapt, implement and evaluate behavioural interventions for symptoms such as apathy and anhedonia in individuals with dementia.

I am also happy to discuss other project ideas relating to memory, executive function and social cognition in ageing and dementia.

**Lydia Woodyatt** (Associate Professor in Psychology)

*TBC*

**Robyn Young** (Professor in Psychology)

Autism is my main area of interest and I would be happy to supervise any structured well-considered project in this area.

- Cross cultural identification by persons on the spectrum.
- Can persons with ASD anticipate the potential harmfulness of a crime?
- Zalla, Barlassina, Buon & Leboyer (2011) conducted a study that required a degree of anticipation of the consequences of behaviour and interpretation of intent and studied judgments of wrongfulness by typically developing individuals and individuals with ASD. The findings indicated that typically developing individuals tended to focus on the potential harmfulness of the behaviour in determining the reason behaviour was wrong; (e.g., “it will hurt her”; Zalla et al., 2011, p. 122). This was in contrast to the justifications provided by individuals with ASD for why certain behaviour was wrong, which tended to focus on normative rules, including social norms, including behaviour not being socially acceptable (Zalla et al., 2011). It has been suggested in the literature that the tendencies to focus on rules described above may be linked to ToM deficits (Lerner et al, 2012). A study that investigated this hypothesis.
- Training persons with ASD in how to identify being scammed. How responsive are persons with ASD to training. Are they more vulnerable and are they able to be trained. Is this related to Theory of Mind?

**Dr Samantha Finan** (Clinical Psychologist Child Protection Service, Flinders Medical Centre/Adjunct Doctor within College of Education, Psychology and Social Work)

At the Child Protection Service, FMC we work with children where abuse or neglect has been substantiated and children and families who are at significant risk. My primary interests include creating a better understanding of the needs of the population that the CPS works with and understanding the factors which will increase families' engagement with assessment and intervention services. I have three potential project areas for 2023.

- Developing and rolling out additional developmental, trauma and mental health screening for children, in out of home care, whom attend our service for Comprehensive Health and Development service.
- Qualitatively assessing families understanding of engagement with CPS and wider intervention services, including both facilitators and barriers to engagement.
- Auditing referrals to better understanding the prevalence and type of sexualised behaviours being reported for children referred to the CPS service.

Some of these projects may piggy-back on larger funded studies. A Psychology Discipline staff member will be required for co-supervise.



**Dr Gareth Furber** (e-Mental Health Project Officer, Health Counselling & Disability Services, Flinders University)

I am interested in the intersection of mental health and productivity, with a focus on those in universities - students and staff. I sit within a couple of teams that deliver programs in the mental health space (Health, Counselling and Disability Services and Oasis). One of our programs, Studyology, is a program that teaches psychological tools, derived from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), to tackle procrastination. The program, whilst well described and developed has not been formally evaluated. This would make a good project for a Masters student.

### **Studyology**

Studyology is a small-group 5 x 1hour clinical program designed to help students overcome procrastination and study avoidance. It was developed by Ben Smith and Gareth Furber at Flinders University, based on the principles of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). The program (in various forms) has been delivered to 5 student groups thus far, with anecdotal reports of high satisfaction with the program and noticeable improvements in study motivation and satisfaction. The program has attracted the attention of educators outside of the university and thus it is important the program is formally evaluated to determine its value. We think this is the ideal program for a small crossover RCT with a waiting list control group assessing stress, mental health and study satisfaction as outcomes. Program slides and facilitator manual and facilitator training can be provided by Gareth Furber. The program can be delivered face-to-face or online. This project is best suited for a Masters of Clinical Psychology student.

**Ivanka Prichard** (Associate Professor in Health & Exercise Psychology, College of Nursing & Health Sciences)

My current research interests lie in the area of health psychology and body image, with a focus on the impact of social media on physical activity, food consumption, and body image.

Two broad areas of ongoing research with opportunities for several post-graduate research projects include:

- **Social media & body image:** Social media use is linked to a myriad of mental health concerns, including increased depression, body dissatisfaction and disordered eating symptomatology, and decreased self-esteem. This line of research aims to examine components of social media to determine the impact of different forms of social media (i.e. different platforms, different content) on body image.
- **Mothers, families, and body image:** Becoming a new mother is a significant time full of important identity and bodily changes for women. This area of research focuses on understanding body image in the postpartum period and developing interventions to promote body confidence (see <https://www.bodyconfidentmums.org/> for more information)