Clinical Psychology Research Projects 2022

Ryan Balzan (Lecturer in Psychology)

I am interested in why people form misbeliefs – that is, beliefs not based on objective facts or reality. Misbeliefs are relatively common and include beliefs about pseudoscience, conspiracies or the paranormal. Misbeliefs are also observed in clinical populations, for example, delusional beliefs in people with psychosis. 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. These projects would be appropriate for PhD (Clinical Psychology) students.

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 influences 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.
- Uptake and Adherence to a digital mental health intervention for women with metastatic breast cancer.
- 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:

- Guilt and shame. How do people cope with these emotions (e.g., avoiding specific situations) and how can we mitigate these emotions?
- Stigma. 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 – adapting trauma-informed care for aged care settings
  This translational project will use mixed qualitative and quantitative methods to evaluate implementation of an existing model of care (trauma-informed care) into a new setting (aged care). This project will suit a student interested in applied research, collaborations with industry, and building skills in implementation science (that is, how to implement effective interventions into practice).
- 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)

Unavailable for supervision in 2022

Michael Gradisar (Professor in Clinical Child Psychology)
My interests lie in the aetiology, consequences and treatment of sleep disorders across the lifespan.

Current projects:

- Sleep problems are one of the most common ‘symptoms’ across mental health disorders, and in some cases are integral in the development of the co-morbid disorder. Whilst sleep problems are becoming well characterised in certain mental health disorders (eg, major depression, anxiety disorders), data are lacking for eating disorders. This presents multiple opportunities to explore and characterise the sleep of those with AN, BN etc., with the use of ‘machines that go ping’ and/or ‘big (cloud) data’.
- It is common to hear that a group that has benefitted from the COVID-19 pandemic are pets. Surprisingly, many pet owners have their pets sleep in their bedroom, or even on their bed – despite the potential for the pet’s movements to disturb their owners’ sleep. Whilst there are objective data measuring such sleep disturbances (eg, Fitbits on humans and pets), the time course of sleep disturbance for these ‘bed partners’ is unknown. Do humans move and disturb their pet’s sleep – or do pets move and disturb their owners’ sleep? At this point, the scientific literature has NFI.

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

1. Subtly changing the food environment to promote healthier eating. 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.

2. Nudging framework for digital interventions. As people seek and interact with services in a digitally mediated context, digital nudging can be used as a strategy for health behaviour change. Digital nudging is a strategy derived from behavioural economics which exploits automaticity and refers to shaping people’s behaviours towards a desirable outcome through making the desirable option the salient, easy or default option, rather than telling people explicitly what to do. The objective of this research is to develop an ethically sound, technology-mediated nudging framework and tools that can be used in health behaviour change applications. The research will consist of the following components: (1) map the different digital nudging mechanisms that are available; (2) develop portable, plugin/integration, configurable nudging methods to tap into these; and (3) evaluate these in interventional contexts. Outcomes will result in novel nudging resources for changing health behaviours of populations in a number of possible areas including lifestyle change, optimising health service interaction, preventive health checks and vaccinations.

3. Health in digital interactions. The objective of this research is to create novel approaches for health-related examination of people’s digital interactions, and translate them into tools with intervention applications. For example, decision support applications by health professionals in clinical settings to detect and treat individuals with problems, or self-help interventions which can help individuals integrate technology better in every-day life for mental health and wellbeing. The research will consist of three main components: (1) mapping common, current digital interactions and their relation to health; (2) developing data extraction and interpretation methods and tools; and (3) evaluating the application of these methods with patients and clinicians in mental health settings. Outcomes will result in novel digital health check methods which will have broad utility and applicability in health care and medical research.
Projects 2 and 3 will be conducted in collaboration with A/Prof Niranjan Bidargaddi, a digital health expert in the College of Medicine and Public Health. The projects are part of a larger research project on Using real-time health data to enable personalised, adaptive and early community health care, which involves a partnership between the Digital Health CRC, Flinders University, goAct and SA Health. (For PhD applicants, there is provision for a PhD (top-up) scholarship funded through the partnership).

More generally, I am also interested in supervising projects in the areas of food craving, dietary supplementation, self-regulation, compensatory health beliefs and physical activity.

**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 cosupervisor for most of the nominated health projects, e.g., diabetes, oncology.
Reg Nixon (Professor in Psychology)

My primary interest is child and adult response to traumatic stressors, including acute stress disorder (ASD), posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and Complex PTSD. I have projects in two main areas for 2022.
- Developing and testing a guided self-help PTSD treatment in the context of stepped-care treatment approaches for adults.
- Resilience training / mental health problem prevention [PTSD/depression] in first responders and wellbeing promotion in significant others/family members. This project would piggy-back on a larger funded study.

Melanie Takarangi (Associate Professor in Psychology)

Not available for thesis supervision in 2021

Emma Thomas (Associate Professor in Psychology):

Not available for supervision in 2022

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

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.

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.

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)

*Unavailable for supervision in 2022*

**Robyn Young** (Professor in Psychology)

My interests are in the area of autism. I am interested in early detection, the double empathy dilemma, co-occurring conditions and interactions with the criminal judicial systems. I would welcome any student who is familiar with my research and was prepared to develop and present a proposal to me of research ideas they may have.

**Dr Mikaela Cibich** (Clinical Psychologist, Department of Education)

*TBA*

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

*Unavailable for supervision in 2022*

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

Studyology is a small-group 5x1hour 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.

Three 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)

• Mood & movement: Sport & exercise play a critical role in relation to mental health. This area of research explores the links between mood, mental health, and movement behaviours (sport, physical activity) among different subgroups of people (i.e. athletes, youth participants, cardiac rehabilitation patients)

Dr Michelle Short (Clinical Psychologist, Headstart)

Not available for supervision in 2022