PSYCHOLOGY
FINAL HONOURS DISSERTATION
SUGGESTED TOPICS 2016-17

Signing Up for Projects
This list is designed to help you match your interests with a potential supervisor. You do not need to register your project formally until Friday 22 April 2016, but it is helpful to have this list now, to enable you to talk to potential supervisors and agree on a project choice before the start of the next academic year. Contact details of each supervisor are given to allow you to email or arrange meetings.

Students may work together in pairs on any project, and are encouraged to do so, but only in exceptional circumstances should this number be exceeded. In recent years, almost 40% of projects have been based on the student's own idea rather than a staff member. However, as with literature reviews, make sure you are choosing a topic which a staff member is willing to supervise. If the supervisor is outwith the department, e.g. a clinical or educational psychologist, then you must have a member of staff agreeing to act as internal supervisor when you register the project at the beginning of semester 1. You should submit your choices by ranking your preference of supervisors from 1-6, by 5pm on Friday April 22nd, 2016 using this webform:

http://bit.ly/1UFeaV0

Dr Patrick Sturt
Psychology 4 Course Organiser
March 2016

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DR BONNIE AUYEUNG
Email: bonnie.auyeung@ed.ac.uk
Contact method: email

1. A systematic review/meta-analysis of early child development and/or developmental disorders.

This topic would be co-supervised with Dr Dominika Dykiert. The specific area of focus will be decided between the team.

2. Investigation of social development and temperament in young children.

3. Examination of the relationship between emotional development and symptoms of anxiety and depression.

DR KASIA BANAS
Email: kasia.banas@ed.ac.uk
Contact method: By email to schedule an appointment.

My broad interests lie in figuring out why people do what they do and, particularly, the mechanisms of social influence on behaviour. I have two specific projects in mind (see below), but feel free to contact me if you would like to discuss your own ideas about social psychology that can be explored using experimental methodology.

1. Vicarious licensing in environmental behaviour

Traditionally, social psychologists have argued that people are more likely to be influenced by the norms of a social group if they strongly identify with that group (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990). This makes intuitive sense: why would you care what group X does if you don’t feel particularly attached to X? However, there is new evidence showing that, at least in some situations, strongly identifying with a group may lead people to go against the group norm. This seems to happen when the group has a common goal that is already being achieved, and group members infer that enough is being done, so they don’t need to contribute. This phenomenon is called ‘vicarious licensing’ and it has been described in the domain of moral behaviour, such as workplace discrimination of minority members (Kouchaki et al., 2011). This project would investigate vicarious licensing in a novel domain: environmental behaviour among the students and/or staff at the University of Edinburgh. This kind of work might interest students who are interested in social issues, behaviour change, and innovative ways to measure behaviour in the lab.

References:

2. Social identity and eating

There is strong evidence that social factors influence people’s eating behaviour (Cruwys, Bevelander, & Hermans, 2015). Students could investigate the role of specific social identities or, for example, focus on the consequences of introducing a social identity threat. I have some preliminary data from online studies showing that introducing a gender identity threat leads to more gender-congruent eating (i.e. women eating more healthily, men eating more unhealthily). One potential route for a student interested in this topic would be to replicate this finding in a rigorous lab study and investigate potential moderators. This kind of
work might interest students who are interested in health, social identity, and innovative ways to measure behaviour in the lab.

Reference:

PROF TIM BATES
Email: tim.bates@ed.ac.uk
Contact method: Drop by (F23) or email to arrange a convenient time.

1. Can we change self-control?
High conscientiousness accounts for much of success, and low conscientiousness for much of what people themselves regret.

Models attempting to explain control have come under criticism (for instance limited resource (Baumeister 2012) models have failed to replicate, there is limited support for willpower-mindset effects (Job, Dweck, & Walton, 2010). By contrast, personality (Conscientiousness & effortful persistence Roberts has big, reliable effects. But can we change C? And what do conscientious people do differently?

2. Testing the incremental mindset theory of IQ
Carol Dweck (1998) has suggested that IQ is highly manipulable, reflecting beliefs not biology.

The theory is highly influential (Google executive Eric Schmidt cites it). We will test how belief in improvability relates to IQ. Google scholar will link you into the citations of this study.

3. What is greed and why do people differ in ethics?
While crime occurs more often among the poor, Piff et al (2012) recently reported a series of 6 studies all appearing to show that having money makes people into cheats (by causing greed). Last year, four studies here failed to replicate this, and even found effects in the opposite direction. This year we will try and find out what affects people’s decisions to be ethical.

Reference:

4. Why do we find some buildings beautiful? What is attractive architecture? Are there better and worse objects, aesthetically? Or just opinions that differ?

5. Twin projects
We have resources for a wide range of twin studies: recent work includes optimism, g x SES effects on IQ, depression and conscientiousness, group favouritism, religion and IQ…).

DR TOM BOOTH
Email: tom.booth@ed.ac.uk
Contact method: Email to arrange an appointment to discuss projects.

The projects proposed cover the general research areas of psychometrics, cognitive aspects of survey responding, personality and criterion associations. There is some scope within these projects for students to add additional elements to the studies which they think will be of interest. Where possible, a guiding reference is provided and it is encouraged students have read this material prior to coming to discuss the projects. These projects are intended
for students to work in pairs to collect data, but are broad enough to offer specific questions for individual write ups.

I would also be happy to supervise student suggested projects on personality, health and health behaviours.

1. **Personality and Criterion Outcomes: Are associations specific to the affective, behavioural, cognitive and desire (ABCD) content of items?**

It has recently been suggested that, in the measurement of personality traits, more attention should be paid to the relative content of items in four areas: affective, behavioural, cognitive and desire. It has also been noted that, whilst theory might predict the relationships between personality traits and various outcomes should be present at a global level, some associations are very specific, going as far as being due to single items. This study would look to bridge these two ideas and ask how the criterion associations of personality traits are impacted by assessing personality using items designed and scored to represent the ABCD components.

2. **Do you read what I read? A qualitative study of individuals understanding of questionnaire items and their response format.**

The purpose of this study is to inform on how individuals understand self-report questionnaire items. The project will use “speak out loud” techniques and semi-structured interviews in an attempt to understand how individuals process the wording of items and the response scales used in survey research. We will focus on items common to personality questionnaires in particular, but also questions and response scales typical in health research. This study will draw on learning from an area of research known as cognitive aspects of survey methodology.

Reference:

3. **Reading and Answering Questionnaires**

**Joint Project: Dr Martin Corley**

This project will use eye-tracking methodology to investigate aspects of questionnaire responding, with respect to both the reading of items and the processing of response scales. There is scope within this broad topic for students to define their own projects. The project will be jointly supervised by Tom Booth and Martin Corley. We anticipate that two key focuses will be established, with a pair of students working on each; however there will be reasonable overlap in the collective project.

References:

4. **Understanding response scales**

**Joint Project: Dr Alex Doumas**

One of the most commonly used measures in psychological research is the rating scale (e.g., wherein one is asked to rate their experience on a scale of 1-7, or on a scale of not-frequently to frequently). Commonly these measures are treated as interval or ratio data for the purposes of analysis. This practice seems highly at odds with what we know about how humans represent magnitude. Specifically, human magnitude estimations seem logarithmic rather than linear. I am working with Tom Booth on a project to investigate human scale judgements.
Language imitation in young children's dialogue Children's language development is affected by the language that they experience from their conversational partner, so that they tend to repeat the words and grammar that they hear.

This tendency can be investigated to answer questions about children's syntactic representations (e.g., Messenger et al., 2012), but it could also be informative about the relationship between imitation and social factors (e.g., van Baaren et al., 2009). For example, language imitation may be related to a fundamental social drive for children to affiliate.

Example projects in this strand include investigating whether children are more likely to imitate a partner when they have been primed with an affiliative goal (e.g., by seeing pictures that evoke affiliation) or when the partner is perceived to be more socially desirable; and whether children learn both from imitating an adult partner's language and from self-imitation. I am also happy to supervise other projects related to language processing (particularly language production) in children.

References:

DR DAVID CARMEL
Email: dave.carmel@ed.ac.uk
Contact method: I am on research leave this year and won’t be at the dissertation topics event. If you are interested in any of my projects, please feel free to contact me by email.

1. Involuntary imitation
People tend to mimic each other’s behaviour – we nod when the person we’re talking to nods, smile when others smile, and so on. This phenomenon may be due to the activity of the brain’s mirror system, which is activated both when a person performs an action and when seeing another person performing the same action. Previous research has shown that people find it hard to inhibit mimicry of another’s actions, even when such mimicry is against their interests: in a game where winning depends on making a different movement from one’s opponent, for example, people still find it hard to stop making the same movement. In this project we ask what is the time window for such involuntary imitation – how long does it take for people to get their own movement under control? A project we carried out last year replicated the finding that people find it hard to inhibit mimicry; this year, we will analyse video clips collected in that project to determine the points in time at which this effect peaks and subsides. We hope to gain an understanding of how separate systems in the brain – the mirror system and voluntary strategic control – interact, and the time points at which each is dominant.

References:
2. Learning to become aware
One of the most popular ways to investigate unconscious perception is by using masking techniques where observers are shown visual stimuli but remain unaware of their presence. These techniques include backward masking (a brief presentation of an image followed by a mask at the same location) and continuous flash suppression (CFS; presentation of a weak-but-visible stimulus to one eye, and a dynamic, high-contrast image to the other eye that renders the weaker image invisible). In previous projects in the lab, we have shown that both types of suppression become weaker over time, such that the suppressed image breaks through into awareness more—and that learning to overcome one kind of suppression makes a person able to overcome the other, suggesting shared underlying mechanisms for the two methods. This project will further examine how the visual system learns to overcome both kinds of masking, by assessing various factors (dominant eye, handedness, etc) that may contribute to learning to overcome suppression.

References:

3. Boundary extension: an illusion of visual memory
We tend to think that we remember photographs reasonably well, but there’s a curious distortion in visual memory: Even a few seconds after seeing a photo, people tend to remember it as if the image extended further into the periphery than it really did. This illusion is known as boundary extension. There are various theories regarding why it happens, but we really don’t have a good understanding of the phenomenon or how it interacts with other functions—for example, would it be enhanced or diminished if people pay attention to the picture versus when they don’t? In a previous project in the lab, we found that rather than simply increasing or decreasing boundary extension, the effect of attention depended on the type of image used. In this project, we will extend this work by creating a new set of pictures and then running an experiment using these images to test the robustness of those previous findings.

References:

4. Perceptual asymmetries across the visual field
We normally assume that our vision is roughly the same across the visual field. This is not the case. Various asymmetries have been found, including better visual performance (at similar distances from fixation) on the horizontal than the vertical midline, and better performance in the lower than the upper half of the vertical midline. In a recent project, we used a popular perceptual task (Karni & Sagi’s (1991) texture discrimination task (TDT)), and found initial evidence that perception might also differ along the diagonal axes of the visual field. This project will substantiate this finding with further experiments.

References:
DR NICOLAS CHEVALIER
Email: nicolas.chevalier@ed.ac.uk
Contact method: By email.

I am prepared to supervise projects investigating cognitive control (executive function) in children and/or adults. Cognitive control is one of the best predictors of academic achievement and life success. Emerging cognitive control during childhood supports greater autonomy and increasingly adaptive behaviour. Projects may include child and/or adult participants; however, projects with children need to be started early and are subject to funding availability. I’m happy to discuss related topics with motivated students.

Projects may relate to the following topics:
- How do children and adults coordinate executive functions?
- Are there potential advantages in having immature cognitive control?
- What are the benefits and costs of disengaging cognitive control?
- Do adults sometimes revert to less mature ways to engage cognitive control?
- Can we help children engage cognitive control more efficiently?
- Does cognitive control predict board-game performance better than intelligence?

References:

DR MARTIN CORLEY
Email: martin.corley@ed.ac.uk
Contact method: By email.

1. Comprehension of disfluent speech
It’s been known for a while that when speakers hesitate, for example saying “um”, “er”, or “like”, listeners’ comprehension processes are affected: They seem to change their predictions of what will be said, and they are more likely to remember hearing words that follow disfluencies. However, to date, our understanding of exactly how disfluencies affect both the processing and the eventual comprehension of messages is incomplete. I’m interested in supervising projects on a range of topics to do with this area, including:

The ways in which disfluencies affect attention, using techniques based on phonetic discrimination tasks;

What exactly constitutes a “disfluency”, using eyetracking or other methodologies;

What listeners think of disfluent speakers, using experimental “games”.
2. The “Little Voice Inside Your Head”
We all experience an inner voice, but what is its relationship to overt speech? One set of studies suggests that our inner voice is like an “underspecified version” of our overt speech, which lacks in phonetic detail. I’m not sure that’s true; but showing that it isn’t is a tricky proposition! If you fancy a challenge, this is for you: It will probably involve fiendishly complicated tongue-twisters.


3. Reading and Answering Questionnaires (joint topic with Dr Tom Booth)
This project will use eye-tracking methodology to investigate aspects of questionnaire responding, with respect to both the reading of items and the processing of response scales. There is scope within this broad topic for students to define their own projects. The project will be jointly supervised by Tom Booth and Martin Corley. We anticipate that two key focuses will be established, with a pair of students working on each; however there will be reasonable overlap in the collective project.

**References:**

**DR ALEX DOUMAS**
Email: alex.doumas@ed.ac.uk
Contact method: Phone (0131 651 1328)

My research is focused on answering the questions: How do humans represent information, and how do we learn these representations? Specifically, I am interested in how humans think abstract thoughts, and, specifically, how this ability develops? Most of my work to this point has focused on relational reasoning (e.g., how we make analogies between different domains), but I have also worked in math learning, music cognition, and language parsing. I use both experimental (with children and adults) behavioural methods, and computational models to answer these questions.

I’m happy to supervise students interested in doing cognitive development projects, projects related to how we make analogies or think relationally, or projects on math or music learning.

In addition, I have three ongoing projects that students may become involved with.
1. How do we make analogies and how do we use these analogies to solve problems? How does this ability develop? I am currently working on several projects aimed at looking at the development of analogical reasoning ability in children aged 4-8.

2. I am interested in how we make judgements about how similar two things are. There are several current theories of how human similarity judgement works, and I am interested in deciding between them. I am conducting experiments with adults and children investigating the factors that make two things seem more similar.

3. One of the most commonly used measures in psychological research is the rating scale (e.g., wherein one is asked to rate their experience on a scale of 1-7, or on a scale of not-frequently to frequently). Commonly these measures are treated as interval or ratio data for the purposes of analysis. This practice seems highly at odds with what we know about how humans represent magnitude. Specifically, human magnitude estimations seem logarithmic
rather than linear. I am working with Tom Booth on a project to investigate human scale judgements.

**DR CATHARINE GALE**  
Email: cgale@staffmail.ed.ac.uk  
Contact method: Email is best as I am not in Edinburgh full-time.

Below are two suggested research topics for dissertation projects. Both involve secondary analysis of data obtained from the UK Data Archive. This means that students would not have to collect their own data. Secondary data analysis saves time, but also has the advantage that the datasets are often much larger and of far higher quality than an individual researcher could assemble on their own. There are many useful research skills to be gained from secondary analysis, including the management of large datasets.

1. **Cognitive ability, personality and psychological distress**

There is some evidence from longitudinal studies that people who have better cognitive function may be less likely to experience symptoms of depression, although this is not a consistent finding. Results from other longitudinal studies suggest that being more emotionally stable or more conscientious may reduce the risk of becoming depressed. It is unclear whether these characteristics might interact to influence risk of depression. For example, does the relationship between neuroticism and risk of depression vary depending on level of cognitive ability? This project would use data from Understanding Society, also known as the United Kingdom Household Longitudinal Study to explore the relationships between cognitive ability and personality and later risk of psychological distress.

**References:**


2. **Personality and risk of chronic disease**

Of the Big Five personality traits, conscientiousness is the trait that has been most consistently linked with healthier behaviour and longevity: people who are more conscientious tend to behave in a healthier fashion and live longer. There is some evidence from longitudinal studies that people who are more conscientious have a lower risk of dying from coronary heart disease, stroke or diabetes. Neuroticism too has been associated with some health behaviours—people who are higher in neuroticism are more likely to smoke and to take less exercise—but findings linking it earlier death or risk of chronic disease are inconsistent. This project would use data from Understanding Society, also known as the United Kingdom Household Longitudinal Study to investigate whether conscientiousness and neuroticism are risk factors for the onset of chronic diseases (such as arthritis, chronic lung disease, coronary heart disease, stroke, diabetes) and to explore the mechanisms that might explain these associations.

**References:**


Buck N, McFall S. Understanding Society: design overview. *Longitudinal and Life Course Studies* 2012; 3:5-17. Or see https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/about

**DR WENDY JOHNSON**

Email: wjohnson@staffmail.ed.ac.uk

Contact method: Email beforehand for an appointment during week of 11-15 April as the supervisor is on research leave until then.

I am prepared to supervise Final Honours projects investigating individual differences in intelligence, achievement, personality, and health developmental processes throughout the lifespan. Prior students have completed projects involving academic achievement motivation, narcissism, music preferences, intelligence, socioeconomic status, tuition fees, pain perception in sports, identity, and school mentoring programmes and other topics in a variety of samples. Interested students should contact me to discuss project ideas and design. I can be especially helpful in suggesting methodology.

For conceptual background reading, see:

**Reference:**


**DR PETE LAMONT**

Email: peter.lamont@ed.ac.uk

Contact method: By email

**Belief maintenance: a discursive approach**

Much research has been carried out into paranormal belief, most of which has depended upon questionnaires as measures of belief, despite the fact that psychologists have identified a number of problems with these. Meanwhile, little work has been done on how beliefs are maintained at a discursive level: how are they expressed and defended in the real world? This project would use discourse analysis of published texts in order to examine how beliefs have been constructed and warranted.

**References:**


**Constructing Emotion**

One of the key problems in understanding emotions is how to define ‘emotion’. Many of the disagreements about the nature of emotion are based on radically different definitions. This project will use discourse analysis of published texts to examine how particular understandings of emotion have been used and warranted, in order to understand the basis of the empirical claims that are made.

**References:**


**DR BILLY LEE**  
Email: b.lee@ed.ac.uk  
Contact method: By email

**Exploring Lived Experience**  
I am interested in phenomenological psychology and use experience-near qualitative methods to explore and understand people’s lived experiences. I welcome project proposals on any area of lived experience that holds interest or significance for the student. As part of your dissertation you will receive training in experience-near interviewing and analysis following the method of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This is a relatively new psychological technique that has been used to understand personal experiences around health, sexuality, gender, and identity. IPA is inductive rather than hypothesis driven. You will learn how to bracket your preconceptions in order to attempt to get an "insider perspective" of your participants' experiences. As part of your project you will identify, recruit and interview up to six participants; transcribe the audio recordings; analyse the transcripts; and contextualise your findings. Your data should enable you to critique existing psychological knowledge using the experiential accounts of your participants. Access to a special participant group, perhaps via contacts with a charity or other organisation, is a distinct advantage. I prefer to supervise students who are able to work as a pair.

**References:**  

**PROF ROBERT LOGIE**  
Email: rlogie@staffmail.ed.ac.uk  
Contact method: Email for an appointment

1. **Multiple cognitive subsystems**  
One view of cognition is that it comprises a general ability, as, for example, measured by intelligence tests, and that the overall capacity limit of this general ability varies from one person to another. Another view is that cognition comprises several different specific abilities, e.g. verbal, visual, spatial, motoric, learning, retrieval, planning, inhibition, task switching, reasoning, problem solving and doing two things at once. According to this view, each specific ability is supported by different overlapping networks in the brain, each of these abilities has its own capacity, and general cognitive ability is the sum of all of the individual specific capacities working together, with specific combinations of abilities selected according to the demands of a given task. This project will explore the relative merits of these contrasting views of human cognition.

**References**  

2. Remembering to do things: Prospective Memory
Every memory function relies on remembering to carry out our intentions, whether it is to post a letter, meet a friend, turn up for a tutorial or take medicine. This ability is known as Prospective Memory. How we remember intentions at the appropriate time is not entirely understood, and it is known to decrease with age with laboratory tasks but not when tested in the home environment. This project would examine prospective memory in real and laboratory simulated prospective memory tasks, and could focus on healthy young adults, or compare different adult age groups.

References

3. Multitasking
The ability to plan and carry out multiple tasks, as well as to deal with interruptions is increasingly important in daily personal and working lives, yet there is poor understanding of how humans cope so well with multiple competing demands. This project will explore the aspects of cognition that are required for successful multitasking and whether continually swapping between different tasks is more or less effective than tackling and completing one task at a time.

References

4. Human and digital forgetting
Large capacity digital storage is becoming cheaper, and so people tend to store everything that they generate digitally, e.g. photos, texts, emails, and other personal information, and often do not edit or delete what is stored, regardless of whether the material is worth preserving or not. This means that messages, photos and text are stored that will never be used again, and it becomes increasingly difficult to find the item or information that we want to retrieve. This project will explore how people store and organise digital information, the solutions (if any) that they generate to manage the ever larger amounts of digital information that they accumulate daily, and how the use of external, digital storage affects the way that they use their biological memory abilities.
I am interested in a range of social psychological topics. Below I list three topics (sexual objectification, social class and education, and meat-eating) and provide references. However, I am also happy to speak with students about student-led projects in the domain of social psychology. Please bear in mind that I am an experimental psychologist and have no qualitative skills and could not supervise a qualitative project.

1. Sexual objectification involves seeing or treating another person as if they were a sexual object and not a full human being. In recent years, researchers have looked at the psychological processes and some of the consequences of being sexually objectified, as well as who engages in that objectification. Potential projects could examine why people objectify others or the psychological consequences of being objectified.

2. Social class and education. In collaboration with the Social Mobility Foundation (Glasgow), I am interested in conducting work looking at how low-SES students make the transition to university and how this in turn impacts their career aspirations. The topic of education attainment and social class has been extensively researched, but the social aspects of this transition have been relatively neglected (see Stephens et al., 2015). This project will seek to work with the SMF to examine how students make this transition and what predicts successful adaptation to the university environment.

3. The relationship between people and animals is somewhat paradoxical; most of us report loving animals and eating animals. How do people psychologically negotiate this problem? How do they deal with the emotional conflict that can arise when thinking about their consumption behaviours? Potential projects could look at the emotional and cognitive factors at play when people eat meat and/or think about animals.

References:

DR STEVE LOUGHAN
Email: steve.loughnan@staffmail.ed.ac.uk
Contact method: Email and I will set up a doodle poll to arrange a meeting.


**DR MICHELLE LUCIANO**
Email: michelle.luciano@ed.ac.uk
Contact method: By email

I am interested in the genetic and environmental determinants of behaviour and am willing to supervise any projects studying individual differences, particularly in the areas of cognition, personality, well-being and mood. I have previously supervised projects on, for instance, personality, diet, eating behaviour, and mate selection. For those accessing existing data sets there will be an emphasis on more complex statistical modelling. Please get in touch to discuss your ideas or any coinciding interests and we can map out a project.

**Potential project:**
Do personality traits interact to influence internet use?
Literature is accumulating to show the importance of personality in predicting internet use, and potential internet addiction. These studies have investigated the independent effects of different personality traits on internet use. The interaction between personality traits has not been considered, yet such effects might contribute further predictive power beyond the main effects because they consider multiple dimensions simultaneously. In addition to testing the interaction between personality traits on internet use, this study will also investigate personality styles (individuals’ scores on combinations of personality domains, for instance, an individual scoring high on neuroticism and low on extraversion could be classed as a ‘gloomy pessimist’). Given that internet addiction might eventually be classed as a mental disorder, such categorisations would be of use to clinicians and lay people. You will be responsible for questionnaire selection, survey design and administration.

**Some relevant references:**

**Dr Sarah MacPherson**
Email: sarah.macpherson@ed.ac.uk
Contact method: By email.

Below are some suggested research topics for dissertation projects. I am willing to discuss other projects investigating frontal lobe functions such as memory, executive abilities and social cognition and how they are affected by healthy adult ageing and brain damage. Anyone wishing to undertake a patient group project would need to access this group (e.g., via voluntary centres) independently.

**1. The influence of frontal lobe functions on source memory in aging**
With advancing age, individuals show a decline in source memory abilities (i.e., the ability to remember the conditions or context under which a memory was formed) compared to their
relatively intact item memory. Older adults with low frontal abilities have been found to produce more source errors than older adults with high frontal abilities. Different types of source memory judgments exist and age differences have been found when making internal (e.g., did I do something or imagine it?) and external (e.g., did X or Y do something?) source memory judgments but not reality monitoring judgments (e.g., did I do something or did X?). This project will examine the role of frontal functions on these different types of source memory judgments in aging.

References:

2. Clustering and switching in verbal fluency in aging
Verbal fluency is widely used in neuropsychological assessment as a quick and easy test of executive function. In category fluency, individuals are required to generate as many words as possible belonging to a particular semantic category (e.g., animals) while in phonemic fluency, they are required to generate as many words beginning with a particular letter (e.g., C) within one minute. The sequences generated can be scored in terms of total number of words generated, as well as cluster size (i.e., the number of items from the same semantic or phonemic subcategory) and the number of switches between subcategories. Older adults have been found to switch less often between subcategories compared to younger adults and this has been associated with a decline in executive abilities. This project will involve gathering acoustic data from healthy younger and older adults to not only examine the semantic or phonemic information generated but also acoustic and prosodic information with the aim to add to our understanding of fluency performance in healthy aging.

References:

3. Cognitive estimation and general knowledge in aging
The Cognitive Estimation task (CET) was devised to assess the ability to estimate measures likely to be unknown to the participants (e.g., “What is the length of an average man’s spine?”). Executive processes are thought to play an important role in generating suitable cognitive estimates and so the CET is commonly used as a test of executive dysfunction. Yet, aging studies examining the effects of healthy adult aging on the CET suggest that estimation abilities do not decline with age and better general knowledge is thought to compensate for poor estimation abilities. This project will adapt the CET to examine the role that general knowledge plays on the ability to provide suitable estimates.

References:

**4. Reward related performance on the Wisconsin Card Sorting test**

The Wisconsin Card Sorting Test (WCST) is a clinical test of set-shifting, attention, and inhibition. In the task, individuals should sort 128 cards to one of four target cards according to a rule set by the experimenter. Participants are not told the sort rule, and are required to discover the rule for themselves through trial and error. After a series of correct sorts, the rule is changed without participants’ knowledge and they should work out the new rule. Poorer WCST performance is reported in older adults compared to younger adults. However, age effects have been less consistently reported on card sorting tasks that receive rewards for successfully sorting cards. The current project will compare performance on versions of the WCST tasks with and without rewards.

**Reference:**

**DR ADAM MOORE**
Email: amoore23@staffmail.ed.ac.uk
Contact method: Direct email and then interview/discussion about interests, etc. if there are too many slotted for a particular project.

1. What makes a good explanation? Can people spot good explanations and reject bad ones? What structural or informational features characterise good explanations and are there person-level traits/abilities that predict being able to tell the difference between good and bad explanations?

This project will involve students doing the background work completely by themselves (i.e. it is an open idea, on which there may be a vast, or a tiny, amount of previous work).

2. Does cognitive load really reduce/interfere with utilitarian moral judgement? The extant literature on this claim is ambivalent to some extent. A key/landmark paper is highly cited, but many others have failed to find this (or similar) effects. We will undertake to replicate the original study by Greene et al. (2008).

3. What predicts success in the Psychology programme at Edinburgh? We have data from past cohorts, but can we build a successful predictive model? What predictions will it make about who tends to succeed or not, and what might we do about it?

4. I am open to other ideas, broadly in the area of reasoning and/or moral judgement/belief.

**DR ALEXA MORCOM**
Email: alexa.morcom@ed.ac.uk
Contact method: By email

My main research interest is in memory: basic memory mechanisms, and how memory changes as we age. For more details see my website:

http://www.ppls.ed.ac.uk/people/alexa-morcom

In both areas of interest, projects are possible examining how episodic memory changes in ageing, or advancing understanding of how it works in young adults. Student input into the project topic is encouraged. For example, versions of these projects could use online tasks, rather than getting people to visit the lab. There is computing support for this, but the transition would involve a little work. There is also potential for more basic research into how
memory works, just in healthy young adults, on either of these topics. If you’re more computationally inclined, have a look at project 2b.

In general, it's recommended you work with a dissertation partner. This is particularly important for projects on ageing, because of the greater demands in terms of data collection. Dissertation partners usually have different dissertation topics addressing related questions (e.g. one in young adults, one ageing project, or two related ageing projects).

**Episodic memory and episodic memory in ageing**

Conscious long-term memory for specific events is one of the abilities most affected by ageing. Older people have difficulty remembering details and associations between items (Luo & Craik, 2008). Importantly, they can be prone not only to failing to remember unique events, but also to false memories, that is, mistakenly ‘remembering’ events that did not happen.

Background reference:

**TOPIC 1. Proactive control of memory and the effects of ageing**

A little studied aspect of episodic memory is what people do proactively – before retrieving a memory – in order to recover the information they seek. This is an important aspect of memory control if we are not to depend only on environmental cues to trigger recall. Craik’s theory of cognitive ageing (1) states that older adults depend more on cues, and are impaired at cognitive control. There is good evidence that proactive control outside the memory domain is affected, but few studies have examined its impact on memory (Morcom, under review). Such research has often involved neuroimaging (e.g. 2), in order to separate what happens before retrieval from the usual measures of memory (i.e., what is actually retrieved). Therefore, it is difficult to study using only behavioural measures – unless we use particular ‘tricks’. Here are 2 possible projects:

*a) Proactive control by older adults when there is interference.*

One ‘trick’ is Jacoby et al.’s innovative ‘memory for foils’ paradigm (Jacoby, Shimizu, Velanova, & Rhodes, 2005). Jacoby et al. found age-related differences in proactive retrieval control just as we did in an earlier ERP study (discussed in Duverne et al.'s paper). But Duverne et al. (2009) showed that age differences do not always occur. You will extend Jacoby et al’s (2005) study using a task in which there are competing retrieval goals.

*b) Proactive control by older adults: benefits of not using it?*

Another ‘trick’, which allows us to ask a slightly different question, is to measure how selective our memory is when we are trying to retrieve one type of information. Does setting this goal negatively affect our ability to recall other things? This study will focus on effectiveness of proactive control by assessing memory for goal-relevant and goal-irrelevant information. It would be interesting to find a paradoxical benefit to older adults of failures of proactive control: they should be less prone to this ‘down-side’.

On either topic a or b there are also interesting questions to be asked about individual differences in control ability among young adults, which appear to impact memory control.

References:
**TOPIC 2. Ageing, meaning and false memory.**

An emerging hypothesis is that semantic memory can assist episodic memory to a greater degree in older adults, but may also bring a cost in terms of increased false memory (Umanath & Marsh, 2014). This is because memories based on general, gist, information (I saw a cat) rather than item-specific detail (I recall seeing a ginger cat) can be misleading. A number of studies have shown that older adults over-use gist and under-use detail. We recently replicated and extended earlier findings suggesting the semantic information can play a critical role in older adults’ false memory errors in a task involving recognition of pictures of everyday objects (Pidgeon & Morcom, 2014). However, in other types of false memory research, ageing effects are not always found. In a meta-analysis of studies using the Deese-Roediger-McDermott paradigm, Gallo (2006) found non-significant age-related differences in false recognition, agreeing with some of our recent data (Hope & Morcom, paper under review reporting on previous year 4 dissertation work).

**Background references**


**a) Semantic and perceptual effects on false memory**

A neat way to separate different influences on false memory is to vary both semantic and perceptual relations between words presented in different ‘fancy fonts’ (Arndt & Reder, 2003). Our studies so far have combined this approach with word stimuli from the Deese-Roediger-McDermott paradigm (see Gallo, 2006). In this, unlike in Pidgeon & Morcom’s (2014) study, the lures are not necessarily related to studied items by category (e.g. cats, or pets, or animals) but are strongly associated with studied items in semantic memory. If semantic effects on episodic memory are generally stronger in ageing we should find effects in this paradigm too – but so far, we have actually found reduced effects in older adults. This may be because the task discouraged gist processing.

This project will use an important manipulation not made so far: to vary the encoding task to determine when older adults rely on gist and when they process item-specific information.

**References:**


**b) A model-based approach**

A limitation of prior work on knowledge and episodic memory in ageing has been use of different, difficult-to-compare ways of assessing the role of gist in memory. In new work, we are using specific model-derived measures of conceptual structure to investigate false memory and the role of meaning in ageing, using a computationally explicit model of semantic memory to ask whether and how prior knowledge has a greater impact on false recognition of pictures of common objects in older adults than in young (the Conceptual Structure Account; (Clarke & Tyler, 2015)).

Depending on results of current year 4 projects, we will determine the next step in understanding how conceptual structure impacts episodic memory.

*There is also plenty of scope on this topic for novel studies in young adults.*
Reference:

DR CANDICE MOREY
Email: cmorey@staffmail.ed.ac.uk
Contact method: By email. I am available to meet in person from 29 March until 1 April and from 18-20 April.

Research interests and methods
I am interested in working memory, is the umbrella term used to encompass the processes engaged during thinking: holding information in mind, making decisions about that information, deciding what information to pay attention to and what information to ignore, etc. One thing that is clear is that working memory is limited: it is only possible to think about a small amount of information at any one moment. It is therefore very important to understand how this limited resource can be used. I am especially interested in understanding how diverse kinds of information, such as sounds and images, can be remembered simultaneously. If we understood what kinds of information or mental processes could be performed well simultaneously, then we would be in a stronger position to make good recommendations about what kinds of tasks are fine to do at the same time and which combinations are likely to lead to errors.

I have specifically selected these projects for feasibility. I think these can all be carried out in under one year and that there is sufficient amount of relevant research to make clear predictions about outcomes. Each project will begin with pre-registration of our methods, hypotheses, and analysis plans, followed by data collection and analysis. I would be very interested in pre-registering these projects with a journal, which increases the chances of timely publication of our results regardless of the outcome. Please get in touch early if this appeals to you; we would need to work on that in advance.

In addition to these projects, feel free to discuss your own ideas or variations with me as long as they are related to the general themes of my research.

1. Why are visual memories more prone to interference than verbal memories?
In short-term memory, verbal information has a number of advantages compared to visual information. Verbal memory spans are typically longer than visual ones, and verbal information is fairly resistant to interference from non-verbal information. In comparison, memory for visual information appears more fragile. Why is this? The time-based resource sharing model of working memory proposes that verbal information has exclusive access to a specialized rehearsal mechanism that cannot be used to boost memory for visual images. It is widely believed that rehearsing verbal information requires attention initially, but that after a little while rehearsal proceeds automatically. This hypothesis generates novel predictions about how timing of presentation of verbal and visual stimuli should determine whether verbal information interferes with visual information or not.

References:
2. Are there effortful and automatic components of visual working memory?
In verbal short-term memory, it is believed that rehearsal starts off effortful but becomes automatic. There is likewise some evidence that effort is involved in maintenance of visual information. Evidence from eye movements suggests that when trying to remember abstract visual information, participants look back to where the finer details were during retention, as though they are trying to retrieve them. This behaviour is reduced when attention is divided. Possibly though, this behaviour was influenced too much by the possibility to remember the visual items with verbal labels. We will replicate and extend previous findings, either confirming that dividing attention eliminates the effortful component of visual maintenance, or learning that this process depends on verbalization.

References:

3. Individual differences in the vividness of visual memories for details and structure
Evidence suggests that in addition to visual details, the broad structure of visual scenes are encoded into memory. Memory for this structural information is not explained very well by many models of visual working memory, which focus on quantifying the amount of information held in mind. Possibly, quantification of visual memory requires both levels of representation. We will modify an existing questionnaire about visual memory, the Vividness of Visual Imagery Questionnaire, in order to make the questions distinguish between remembering broad structure of scenes and fine details, and analyse responses to learn whether we can distinguish these forms of visual memory in healthy participants, and perhaps in individuals with reduced visual memory functioning. Much of this research could be accomplished with web-based testing. Strong statistical skills (or motivation to learn new techniques) would be beneficial.

References:

4. How are visual and verbal details linked together?
Learning associations between verbal and visual details is important both practically and theoretically. Practically, we know that broad associations between concepts can help memory. Theoretically, models of working memory differ in how they presume connections can be made between diverse stimuli with verbal and visual or spatial features. One of the simplest ways to study cross-domain feature binding is by presenting simple materials, such as spatially-arranged letters, and testing participants' memory for one kind of feature. By measuring accuracy and speed, you can infer whether both features or only one kind is remembered. In many studies like this however, the research design does not distinguish well between intentional encoding of the two feature types (i.e., the participant tries to remember them both) and incidental encoding. The retro-cue method is an effective way to
disentangle at one point, encoding or maintenance, attention towards a stimulus changes. We would combine methods used to study cross-domain feature binding (e.g., Elsley & Parmentier, 2015) with pre- and retro-cue designs (e.g., Morey, et al., 2013; Shimi, et al., 2012) to extend knowledge in this area.

References:

DR RENE MOTTUS
Email: rene.mottus@ed.ac.uk
Contact method: By email

1. Personality variation among couples
Personality variation does not exist only between individuals but also within individuals over time and in relation to situational circumstances and individuals’ activities. One hitherto unstudied question is whether personality variability is similar among people living together such as couples. Although couples’ static personality trait-levels display only a small tendency of being similar, it seems possible that that their daily personality variations are at least to some extent synchronous. Daily variability in personality manifestations would be measured using smartphones.

References:

2. Age differences in personality variation
Personality variation does not exist only between individuals but also within individuals over time and in relation to situational circumstances and individuals’ activities. One would expect, however, that within-individual variability decreases as people get older. This could at least partly be because people's environments become increasingly stable and more matched to their inherent dispositions. This study would attempt to investigate age-differences in within-individual personality variation. Daily variability in personality manifestations would be measured using smartphones (the project could combine new data with already existing data).

References:

3. Personality types
Although personality differences among people are often expressed by means of continuous traits, it is also possible to distinguish between types (or classes) of people. This study could identify types in several already existing datasets and look into their replicability across
cultures, rating methods (self-reports, informant-reports), demographic groups and questionnaires. The study could also test the predictive validity of types.

References:

DR ANTJE NUTHMANN
Email: Antje.Nuthmann@ed.ac.uk
Contact method: via email to arrange a meeting; away 12 April - 15 April

My current research interests include perceptual, oculomotor and cognitive control in everyday visual-cognitive tasks like scene perception, object-in-scene search, and reading. I approach these issues with experimental, corpus-analytical, and computational modelling techniques. Because human visual perception involves active information seeking via eye movements, I use eye tracking as my primary behavioural method. As the proposed projects involve eye tracking, students will learn how to collect such data with an eye tracker (technical equipment), and how to process and analyse the data.

A. Effects of semantic consistency on eye movements during scene viewing
The human visual system can use the context of a real-world scene to guide attention through eye movements. In this project, we define context through an object’s semantic relationship with the scene. An object is semantically inconsistent if it doesn’t fit into the scene, like a basketball in a kitchen scene. An assumption made in the literature is that an inconsistent object is more informative than a consistent one, and so should draw attention and eye fixations if object identities and meaning can influence eye-movement control. This project will attempt to replicate results from previous studies on the topic.

References:

B. Effects of target size on the visual span during search in real-world scenes
Visual span denotes the region around the current point of gaze from which viewers can take in “useful” information when viewing a scene or searching for a target object in the scene. In this experiment, we will measure the size of the visual span during a scene search task using the gaze-contingent moving window paradigm. The idea is to degrade scene information outside of the window that moves with the observer’s eyes. The general logic is to reduce the size of the window to find the smallest window that still supports normal search behaviour. The specific aim of the project is to test whether visual span size depends on target size (Nuthmann, 2013, for speculations). To facilitate the target size manipulation, we will use context-free letter targets. To assess visual-span size, the target size manipulation (small vs. large) will be crossed with 3 different window sizes (plus no-window control conditions).

References:


C. Eye-movement control during reading (2 projects)

When reading a line of text, our eyes do not move smoothly along the text, but make short and rapid movements (saccades) intermixed with stops (fixations) lasting about 200 ms. During fixations, the eyes remain relatively still and visual information is extracted from the text. The projects will contribute to what is called a (correlational) corpus study with a quasi-experimental design (cf., Kliegl et al., 2004). That is, subjects will be reading some 150 single sentences forming the Edinburgh Sentence Corpus (ESC) with no explicit experimental manipulation. For each word of the ESC, information about word length and word frequency is available. Some word predictability norms are also available, to which project students may contribute. The eye-movement data will reveal on which word, or even letter within a word, readers fixate. Students are expected to study relevant literature and decide on a question and/or type of analysis they want to test with the collected eye-movement data. To give an example, the project could investigate how fixation times vary as a function of word properties, using multiple regression analysis (cf., Kliegl et al., 2004).

References:


PROF MARTIN PICKERING

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Contact method: By email.

Having a conversation is something we do every day and yet we still know very little about how our cognitive system can manage it. Most research in psychology of language focuses on how we speak or how we process what others say, but understanding conversation requires bridging the two, and one way of doing this is to test two speakers instead of an individual speaker or an individual listener. Project 1 and 2 below take this approach. Project 3 looks at one core component of smooth conversations: the ability to anticipate when the current speaker will stop speaking.

1. Imagining what you are saying

What happens if I imagine you speaking while I am preparing to speak? In previous work, we showed that when we imagine that somebody is speaking at the same time as we are, our language production system undergoes increased interference (even if we cannot hear the other person speaking at all; Gambi, Van de Cavey, & Pickering, 2015). In other words, we take longer to start speaking if we know that another person is speaking at the same time as us. We think this happens because we cannot help but representing the fact that somebody intends to speak, which could help explaining why people rarely speak at the same time in conversation. But can we do more? Can we also represent what somebody is about to say (e.g., are they going to talk about food, furniture, or some other semantic category)? This project will build on our previous study and test whether speakers can, after all, form more
detailed “images” of their partners’ speech when they are given information about what their partners will say in advance.

Reference:

2. Speaking as one
A remarkable phenomenon that happens in conversation is people completing one another’s utterances. This phenomenon is interesting because one speaker seems able to anticipate and coordinate with what the other is about to say in real time. In this project, we’ll ask pairs of participants to jointly describe a simple action depicted on a picture. One person will start the description and the other will finish it off, trying to leave no silent gap in between (i.e., as if the whole description had been made by a single speaker). By comparing this situation to individually produced descriptions, we’ll test whether coordination of utterances between speakers is similar to coordination of utterances within speakers.

Reference:

3. Anticipating when you’ll stop speaking.
Across languages, people take turns speaking with a median latency of 0 to 200 ms (Stivers et al. 2009). This suggests that they do not simply wait for another person to stop speaking, but they try to actively anticipate when they will stop. One hypothesis is that they can do this by guessing the content of the speaker’s utterance (for example, forming a rough estimate of how many more words they are going to utter; De Ruiter, Mitterer, & Enfield, 2006). This project investigates what type of information listeners can use to make these guesses.

References:

4. Social aspects of alignment
People tend to repeat each other’s choices of words and grammar in a way that appears to underlie communicative success (Pickering & Garrod, 2004). To what extent is this tendency affected by social factors? Do interlocutors tend to like partners more if they repeat aspects of their utterances? And are people more likely to align with people who they appear to have more in common with? This project will combine work in social psychology and the psychology of language using experiments that measure the causes and effects of linguistic repetition.

Reference:

DR HUGH RABAGLIATI
Email: hugh.rabagliati@ed.ac.uk
Contact method: By email

My lab works on how children learn language, with a particular focus on meaning: How children learn the meanings of words, and how they learn the procedures for mapping complex thoughts to structured sentences. More broadly, I am interested in conceptual development (which can interact with language development, and pose fun questions about
linguistic relativity) and cognitive development. Typically we assess questions about these domains by recording children’s explicit responses to questions while also monitoring eye movements as a more implicit measure of understanding.

While a lot of our research involves testing children, we also ask questions that are easier to answer by testing adults, for example, the role of conscious awareness in understanding language.

I am only likely to supervise a few projects this year. Some example projects are below, but I’m always happy to chat with motivated students who want to design their own project. Developmental work is typically arduous: Recruiting and testing children takes a lot of time. Project students will therefore be expected to muck in in the lab, helping everyone in recruitment, testing and data processing. This means starting research early, i.e., get in touch as soon as you can. If you haven’t read any of my papers, you can find them on our lab website: http://www.psy.ed.ac.uk/homepages/the-rab-lab/

1. Language processing in adults
What role(s) does conscious awareness play in how we understand language? In this project, students will use techniques like masked priming and continuous flash suppression to test whether information that is recovered from unconsciously presented words is combined together to create sentence level meanings.

Reference:

2. Language development
a) Language comprehension
How do children learn to understand sentences? One possibility is that they learn via prediction: They constantly make guesses about what they will hear next, and then revise their internal grammars whenever there is a mismatch. In this project, we would use eye tracking to examine whether young (3 - 5 year old) children really make predictions about upcoming words, and if so, what sort of predictions they make? For instance, do they predict the sounds of upcoming words? This work is potentially important for understanding why some children have difficulty acquiring language.

Reference:

b) Language production
A critical component of carrying on a conversation is ensuring that you speak in a clear and understandable way. For instance, if you were planning to meet a friend, you would not tell them to meet you outside the coffee shop, because Edinburgh is full of coffee shops. Rather, you would need to specify the exact shop. Children learning to talk need to master this task and, as anyone has ever had a conversation with a young child can attest, they do not always succeed. We are interested in studying why children have difficulty monitoring the comprehensibility of their speech.

Reference:

c) Linguistic and conceptual development (incl. relativity)
Language provides a code for teaching complex thoughts. How do children take advantage of this code? Studies in this area can examine a) what types of explanations children like to
listen to, and b) whether learning about the structure of a language can help teach children something about the world.

**Reference:**

**DR RICHARD SHILLCOCK**  
Email: r.shillcock@ed.ac.uk  
Contact method: By email and daily office hour.

1. **Haploscope study of the recognition of single words.** The student will use a haploscope, which projects the two halves of a word to the contralateral visual cortical hemispheres. This technique allows us to investigate all the factors that affect isolated visual word recognition. It has produced the most comprehensive extant (statistical) model of visual word recognition (see indicative bibliography). The student will run 24 participants in a short experiment and analyse the results. The student can help decide which aspects of visual word recognition are investigated.

**Indicative bibliography**  

2. **The work of a counselling practice.** For the last two years, students have carried out qualitative and/or questionnaire-based dissertations at an Edinburgh-based counselling practice. They have chosen the topic in consultation with the manager of the practice. Some interest in a particular aspect of counselling would facilitate things. Interested students are advised to look at previous dissertations. One involved schools-based counselling. The other involved sexual therapy.

3. **The work of a consultant oncologist.** In 2015-16 we have had access to an oncology consultant and two students have carried out dissertations arrived at in discussion with the consultant. One involved the giving of bad news. The other involved cancer patients’ and their carers’ attitude to being diagnosed with cancer and being treated for it. If the consultant is willing to extend this contact to a second year, then the student(s) will decide on a topic in discussion with the consultant. Interested students are advised to look at 2016’s dissertations.

4. **The work of a residential school.** In 2015-16, one student’s dissertation concerned the workings of a small residential school for children and young people with behavioural and/or attachment problems often with very unstable backgrounds involving abuse and deprivation. The student conducted semi-structured interviews with the various care-workers there, as well as reviewing the psychological and legal background of residential education and care. The student was also working in an informal internship there in her spare time during her fourth year. The student was committed to a career in adolescent-oriented clinical psychology and the project has turned out to be a substantial stepping-stone in that direction. The school may be happy to repeat this access next year. The degree of involvement regarding the ‘internship’ is negotiable. See the relevant submitted dissertation from 2015-16 for further background.
I will be offering four projects in 2016-2017

1. The causes of misinterpretation
The psychology of language seeks to explain how we deploy a range of different types of information in real time, to arrive at the successful interpretation of language. However, what many existing theories fail to explain is why we often misinterpret sentences, even when they are quite simple. This project would involve examining misinterpretations experimentally, with the aim of testing theoretical claims about why they arise. Two possible causes that could be investigated are (a) interference in memory retrieval processes; (b) the subconscious adjustment of expectations to allow for the possibility of errors in the input.

References:

2. Processing of mathematical expression
In daily life, human cognition often requires the processing of information that has a hierarchical structure (i.e. the recognition of a complex object requires the recognition of its sub-parts). This project will explore how people process hierarchically structured mathematical expressions, such as $2 + 3 \times 5$. The project may use reaction-time recording, a priming methodology, or eye-tracking.

References:

Projects 3 and 4
In addition to the above projects, I would be happy to supervise any project within a wide range of topics in cognitive psychology. I am best qualified to supervise projects in the psychology of language, but I have interests in other areas such as musical cognition. I would also be happy to supervise replication study of an existing published piece of research.

DR ALEXANDER WEISS
Email: alex.weiss@ed.ac.uk
Contact method: By email to set up an appointment

Students choosing me as their dissertation supervisor will be required to devise their own dissertation project. I am willing to supervise feasible dissertations that focus on topics such as human or nonhuman animal personality, animal behaviour, evolutionary psychology, health psychology, and aging. Please see me before you decide to select me as it is important that we discuss the potential feasibility of a project or any pitfalls.
These qualitative projects will use discursive psychology analysis. Full training in this approach to analysis will be given and no prior expertise will be assumed.

1. ‘Are we European?’: identity and other rhetoric in live debates relating to the EU referendum.

Previous research has investigated whether people in Britain have a sense of European identity, whether this identity is perceived as threatening to or incompatible with national identity, and how British (or Scots'/English) people’s attitudes towards European identity compare with citizens’ of other European countries. This research has largely employed surveys or interviews in which respondents are asked directly about their identities. The proposed research could exploit current debate on the ‘hot’ topic of ‘our’ relation to Europe, and analyse naturalistic data (e.g. radio call-in discussions) to explore whether and how identity is made relevant in these debates, or whether other rhetoric is used.

References:

2. Making (gender) relevant.

In their classic paper, Stokoe and Smithson (2001) argued that we should explore when people themselves make gender identity relevant to their current activities or talk, rather than assuming that gender is a relevant identity at any moment. Adopting a similar approach, Cashman and Raymond (2014) examine how gender was made relevant in discussions of the women’s World Cup Football tournament (2011). They show how the discussion dichotomized men and women’s football and reproduced ‘normative gender roles and expectations’. This study could extend this to further naturalistic contexts, or other social categories (‘white’, ‘single parents’ etc).

References:

3. Interviewing as interaction

A number of studies have turned attention to interviewing not just as a way of collecting data for research, but also as a distinct form of interaction in itself. Abell et al (2006), for example, look at the effects of interviewer self-disclosures on subsequent interaction; Widdicombe (2015) looks at how the interviewer’s identity is variously constructed and used as a resource in interaction. It is also clear that some kinds of interviewer responses generate more talk than others. This project could extend this work, by looking at further features of interview talk in a research or naturalistic context.

References: