

## Department of Psychology: RES Supervisor List (Spring Term 2018)

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Email your application to Dr Keith May (keith.may@essex.ac.uk, RES organiser). Your email must include:

1. a one page CV in Word or PDF format attached to the email;
2. a list of any members of staff you would like to work with, in order of preference, with your preferred choice at the start of the list (you can list as many of the staff as you like from the list below);
3. FOR EACH MEMBER OF STAFF ON YOUR LIST OF PREFERENCES, attach a separate short letter (in Word or PDF format) in which you explain your interest in the research project and motivation for working with the researcher.

The closing date for applications is 9:00am Monday 4 Dec (Week 10).

For more details, to go: <https://www1.essex.ac.uk/psychology/careers/research-experience.aspx>

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### **Alasdair Clarke**

I have research interests in visual search, psychophysics, and decision making. The visual search project aims to understand the strategies people make when searching for a difficult to find target (for example, looking for your keys on a messy desk). The psychophysics study aims to resolve an open question in the literature regarding visual crowding, the results of which will tell us whether the way the brain is organised directly affects our perception. In decision making, I am interested in simple tasks and puzzles in which naïve participants perform poorly in, despite the existence of simple optimal strategies.

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### **Marcello Costantini**

A wealth of recent exciting studies has provided novel insights and opened new challenging questions on how the brain binds information from different sensory modalities. With this project we investigate the features of multisensory processing and their alteration in anxiety and depression.

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### Laura Filippetti

The ability to intentionally act in the surrounding environment, to express emotions and desires, and to understand other people's behaviour relies on the primary ability to define one's body as belonging to ourselves and distinguished from others. I'm interested in understanding how human beings develop an integrated sense of self that is grounded to a coherent body representation, and how different processes interact together to maintain and updated self-awareness. My current projects explore 1) the development of body perception in infants, 2) the use of new techniques to study body awareness in children. As a RES student, you would work with me on one of these topics and you will be involved in the recruitment and testing of participants, using behavioural or neural measures (e.g. NIRS). I strongly encourage students interested to apply for a DBS check as soon as possible.



### Tom Foulsham

My research investigates how people perceive and pay attention to the things around them. In particular, I am interested in the neural, visual, cognitive and social processes that determine where people look and what people notice and remember when they look there. Current projects include investigating where people look in art, comics, movies and computer games.



### Veronica Lamarche

My work stems from the big question "What makes some couples more resilient in the face of uncertainty compared to others?" I am currently focused on two research questions: 1) What are the individual differences that predict relationship resilience in the face of uncertainty; and, 2) Do self-regulatory systems managing responses to uncertainty *outside* of the relationship influence relationship regulatory responses *within* the relationship.

You will have the opportunity to learn more about what makes some relationships last while others fail, as well as gain research experience with participant recruitment, setting up experiments, and collecting data. Depending on your interests, experience with data analysis may also be possible.

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### **Vanessa Loaiza**

My research interests primarily concern the interaction between working memory and long-term memory. What are the processes underlying your ability to maintain and update information from moment to moment (working memory)? Do these processes have anything to do with your ability to retrieve that information much later on (long-term episodic memory)? Moreover, do aspects of long-term memory influence working memory processes? Just how similar are working memory and long-term memory, anyway? All of the projects concern these principal research questions, and would involve testing participants on programmed experiments administered on a computer. Participants will be young (18-35) and older (63-80) adults recruited from the local community and university. All RES students for this project will be involved in participant recruitment and testing, but based on your further research interests, you may also enjoy the opportunity to learn more about programming experiments and conducting and reporting statistical analyses.



### **Rick O'Gorman**

Do we care more about family or friends? Do women find intelligent men more attractive at some times of the menstrual cycle? Do the eyes reveal insights into how people feel about taboos? Do people look more at men or women, older or younger (are older women 'invisible')? These are some of the questions that I have studied recently with assistance from a Research Experience Student (or two or three!). This coming term, my focus will turn to two main areas, 1) altruism toward family and friends, and 2) further work on who people look at. My general research interest is in studying human behaviour as a functionally adaptive system; that is, evolutionary psychology--the study of human behaviour and cognition from an evolutionary perspective. Which project is worked on depends on what I need to prioritise, and from discussion with RES applicants.



### **Sheina Orbell**

My research concerns the ways in which motivational and automatic processes control how people regulate behaviour. About 50% of what people do during an average day is controlled by specific automatic processes controlled by habit. Habits are acquired cue contingent responses. They free up cognitive resource and are resistant to conditions of stress or distraction. However, undesired habits also benefit from these advantages, making them very resistant to change efforts. The project you would contribute to this year concerns a new look at self harm behaviours (NSSI). These have been previously thought of as motivated actions, driven by goals. An alternative conceptualisation suggests that they may be driven by habit. Initially we are undertaking a large survey, later stages of the work will include lab based experiments. You will learn something about survey methods, qualtrics, SPSS and psychometric scales as well as learning about current theory regarding self harm. I would also be interested to hear from students interested in working on a qualtrics project that seeks to understand how people recognise and react to symptoms of illness in order to regulate their state of health.

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### **Silke Paulmann**

It has been said that 10% of misunderstandings are due to differences in opinion while 90% are due to wrong tone of voice. I am interested in the 90%. My research thus explores how we communicate emotions and social attitudes via speech. I look at both the perception of tone of voice and the way we produce it. Projects with me will focus on exploring which variables can influence how emotional and attitudinal language processing works. For instance, recent studies have explored how personality, history of alcohol abuse, language and culture background, or state of mind (e.g., stress, motivation) influence how social communicative intentions are processed.

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### **Gerulf Rieger**

My work has focused on sexual orientation: how it is organized, how it develops, and how it affects a person's life. I use a wide diversity of methodologies, ranging from self-report to assessing physiological activity in order to pursue my research. I use home videos and childhood photos to examine behavioural signals of childhood masculinity-femininity and how they predict adult sexual orientation. In another line of research, I study the association of sexual orientation with physiological sexual arousal in order to illuminate sex differences in sexual attraction. Using a different methodology, pupil dilation, I am currently conducting research that will aid in explaining how early sex and sexual orientation differences in sexual attraction patterns emerge.

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### **Jonathan Rolison**

A major focus of my research is risk taking behaviours across adulthood. Some of my research is aimed at explaining why people become more cautious in older age and whether age changes in risk taking behaviours are beneficial or harmful. My research also explores people's understanding of information about risk, and in particular, health-related risks, such as cancer risks. One of my aims in this area is to develop methods for overcoming barriers to effective risk communication. As a RES student, you would work with me on one of these topics, which would include recruiting and testing participants from the local community. You would learn about how to conduct psychology studies to answer psychological questions and how to interpret the findings of psychology studies.

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### **Gillian Sandstrom**

I am interested in social relationships and how they contribute to our well-being. In particular, I study interactions with strangers and "weak ties" (i.e., acquaintances). Why do we seem so afraid to talk to strangers when all of our friends start out as strangers? Are there times when we are afraid to talk even to people that we do know well (e.g., they get diagnosed with an illness, something traumatic happens to them)? Why is it easy to talk to some people and hard to talk to others? Why do some relationships develop, and others dissipate (i.e., How/when does a stranger turn into a weak tie, and how/when do weak ties turn into strong ties?) What are the benefits of feeling connected to others?

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## **Andrew Simpson**

### **Making it easy to do the right thing**

Inhibitory control is the ability to regulate our own thoughts and behaviour. It is central to the way we take charge of our own lives, and research suggests that good inhibitory control helps us to be effective and fulfilled adults. I study the emergence of this process in young children (around the ages of two to five years). I am particularly interested in what determines the need for inhibitory control. This is important in young children, because their weak inhibitory control means that they can dramatically improve their performance, if they can side-step the inhibitory demands of a task or situation. But even as adults, we know that it takes effort to control our thoughts and behaviour, and that sometimes we fail, with consequences for ourselves and others. Understanding how children and adults can adjust their thinking to reduce the need for effortful inhibitory control can benefit both them and us. It is this process that you will be helping me study.



## **Miroslav Sirota**

In my research, I am trying to understand how people estimate, judge, reason and make decisions in situations of uncertainty and risk, how people perform these processes “on their own” and “in the presence of the others”, and how people perform these processes “in the lab” and “in the wild”. My basic research interests include perceptions of verbal probabilities, statistical reasoning, and intuitive and deliberative processing. My applied research interests include uncertainty and risk communication (e.g., climate change communication, communication between patients and doctors), and diagnostic and management decision-making of doctors. I am also a part of the Psychological Science Accelerator, a network of lab across the world (see <http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2017/11/new-accelerator-aims-bring-big-science-psychology>) and you might help with running some studies in this accelerator (e.g., the first study focus on social judgments of human faces). We will also run a research project focusing on how using our hands to interact with materials can facilitate problem-solving. Students will gain experience in participant recruitment, data collection and data analysis.



## **Elia Valentini**

My research investigates how people perceive negative valence information, how they interpret both physical and psychological events as threatening. Some keywords in my projects are therefore "threat", "pain", "anxiety", "emotion", "attention". Current projects would involve measuring subjective reports (i.e. from sensory ratings to personality questionnaires), cognitive and behavioural performance in a multisensory setting and mostly using the EEG. Students will undergo a progressive induction process from literature search and databasing, through design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

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## Loes van Dam

I'm interested in multisensory perception and goal-oriented behaviour. When we interact with our direct surroundings, e.g. picking up a cup of coffee, we appear to do so seemingly effortlessly. Yet, even such simple every-day tasks involve sensing the 3D position and orientation of the cup (sensory processing), making an educated guess whether it is currently full or empty to estimate its weight (cognitive processing), and having an idea of our own limb position and where it needs to go next (movement planning). My research investigates how the human perceptual system sorts and combines relevant pieces of both sensory and cognitive information for performing such simple goal-oriented tasks. As a RES student you would work with me on this topic and for instance recruit and test participants. You would also have the chance to learn about how to analyse and interpret behavioural data and to have a look at the programming of such experiments.

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