2020 Report of Research conducted from Professor Tom Denson’s Laboratory at the School of Psychology, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia

If you participated in one or more research studies from our laboratory, you will find the study title, the researchers in charge, what you may have done as part of your participation, and the results (if available). If you have any questions, please email Prof Denson at t.denson@unsw.edu.au. Thank you one and all for your participation. Without it, we wouldn’t be able to understand important aspects of human thoughts, feelings, and behavior.

**Title:** The Effects of Alcohol Priming and Individual Differences in Alcohol Use and Trait Aggression on the Ability to “Read” Angry Crowds

**Researcher:** Carmin Lin, Forensic Psychology Masters student

**Description:** The *crowd emotion amplification effect* occurs when individuals overestimate the average emotion level of crowds they observe (Goldenberg et al., in press). This inaccurate “reading” of crowds has been shown in recent research, but the reported directions of estimations have differed (Goldenberg et al., 2020; in press). To address this discrepancy, the present study aims to replicate the amplification effect for evaluations of anger crowds. Specifically, this study investigates whether alcohol priming and gender of an observed crowd will influence evaluations. Findings support an overestimation of anger when participants evaluate a crowd compared to a single face. Anger is also significantly overestimated when faces of men are observed compared to faces of women. Results further show that individual differences in alcohol use, and trait aggression when interacted with crowd size, have small effects on anger amplification. However, priming with alcohol and neutral drink images show no differing effect on anger overestimation. This study reveals unexplored and key characteristics of an observer and a crowd that would impact on how angry crowds are judged, and hence, potentially mistreated. The topic of safe crowd management is of paramount importance in today’s social and political climate.

**Title:** Crowd Emotion Amplification: Impact of Crowd Race, Gender and Alcohol Priming on Anger Perception

**Researcher:** Libby Shuttleworth, Clinical Psychology Masters student

**Description:** Seemingly peaceful crowds can quickly and unpredictably turn violent. Accurate emotion perception of crowds displaying anger is therefore crucial in order for observers to respond and de-escalate tensions effectively. However, recent studies suggest there is a *crowd emotion amplification effect*, whereby individuals overestimate the average intensity of a crowd’s emotion. This study aimed to replicate the crowd emotion amplification effect in crowds displaying neutral-angry facial expressions. It also explored whether crowd gender, race and alcoholic cues may impact this amplification. 111 participants from American completed a task asking them to rate the average emotional intensity of single faces or crowds of twelve faces. These faces varied in race (African American vs. White) and gender (Male vs. Female). Before each task, participants were primed with images of alcoholic or non-alcoholic beverages. Results demonstrated that participants overestimated the average
emotion intensity of crowds displaying neutral to angry facial expressions significantly more than individual faces. This amplification was not influenced by the gender of the crowd or presence of alcoholic cues. Race did not have a main effect on amplification, however the results suggested an interaction effect between crowd race and size. Post-hoc analyses revealed that size of array significantly predicted amplification for White Faces only. Potential mechanisms underpinning these results, implications and directions for future research are discussed.

Title: The Effect of a Brief Mindfulness Meditation on Romantic Jealousy

Researcher: Briana Kouloukakis, Psychology Honours student

Description: Romantic jealousy is a significant risk factor for intimate partner violence. The present experiment tested the efficacy of a 5-minute mindfulness meditation for reducing induced jealous emotions and consequential behavioural intentions (those including violence). The experiment also examined the potential moderating roles of individual differences underpinning these effects. Specifically, attachment-related anxiety and trait aggression were expected to be positively associated with the jealousy variables in the control, but not mindfulness, condition. Attachment-related avoidance, and trait mindfulness and humility were expected to be negatively associated with the jealousy variables in the control, but not mindfulness, condition. Results showed no significant main effects or interactions. Exploratory analyses revealed that meditation ease ratings negatively correlated with attachment-related anxiety and avoidance, and trait aggression, and positively correlated with trait mindfulness and humility. These unexpected findings are proposed to underpin the non-significant interactions and main effects. Potential mechanisms by which each trait was associated with ease of meditation ratings are discussed. In combination with the extant literature, these findings suggest that long-term, individually tailored mindfulness interventions may be required to reduce jealousy-induced intimate partner violence.

Title: Worthy of all (reap)praise? Cognitive reappraisal as a strategy to reduce emotional reactions to moral violations: an experimental study

Researcher: Danika Adamski, Psychology Honours student

Description: Immoral actions, and particularly those that transgress sacralised values, can elicit discrimination and violence via the expression of strong negative emotions. However, limited research has experimentally explored strategies to regulate these reactions. The present study experimentally examined cognitive reappraisal as a strategy to reduce negative emotions and hatred in response to moral transgressions. Mechanical Turk workers were randomly assigned to a cognitive reappraisal condition or to a control condition. Participants rated their emotional reactions and hatred in response to five videos, each violating a different moral domain, as defined by Moral Foundations Theory. They also completed the Moral Foundations Sacredness Scale (MFSS), to indicate their personally sacred values. Compared to controls, the reappraisal condition had no significant effect on negative emotions or hatred, with or without controlling for the effect of moral sacredness. Additionally, the MFSS revealed limited convergent validity in the sample. These findings diverge from a vast literature showing
cognitive reappraisal as an efficient strategy to regulate emotions. Limitations and implications for research into the regulation of moral reactions are discussed.

Title: Can mindfulness reduce expressions of anger and aggression in romantic relationships?

Researcher: Stephen Chan, Psychology Honours student

Description: Violent people in intimate relationships struggle to control their anger and aggression. Mindfulness has been proposed as a strategy to regulate emotions and reduce reactivity to distressing stimuli. The current experiment considered whether a mindfulness induction could reduce expressions of anger and aggression in relationship contexts. Moreover, individual personality differences and relationship factors were considered as possible moderators of intervention effectiveness. Participants either watched a brief mindfulness meditation or an educational control video. Following this, they imagined themselves in a hypothetical jealousy-provoking scenario in which they overheard their partner flirting with a friend. During the scenario, they were regularly instructed to express their ongoing thoughts and emotions. Participants’ responses were coded for emotional and behavioural expressions. Results show that mindfulness did not significantly reduce expressions of anger, aggression, jealousy or negative affect. However, among participants who underwent meditation, trait humility was inversely related to aggressive expressions directed at the hypothetical interloper. This significant finding was discussed in the context of ego-threat. Other null findings were linked to procedural constraints, participant characteristics and broader theoretical limitations. The present findings suggest that certain individual differences may moderate the effectiveness of a mindfulness intervention.

Title: Depressive Symptoms, Goal Progress, and Goal Rumination (advertised as ‘Mood, Goals, and Attention’)

Researcher: Dilan Sellahewa, MPsysch(Clin)/PhD student

Description: Extensive research links depression to frequent rumination about current distress. However, far less is known about whether depression is also related to rumination about unfulfilled personal goals (‘goal rumination’). This study investigated relationships among depressive symptoms, goal rumination, and a potential mediating variable: low perceived goal progress. Participants (N = 211) reported on depressive symptoms, nominated an important personal goal, and rated recent progress towards that goal. Next, participants undertook a prolonged attention task, while periodically reporting their thought content (including occurrence of goal-related thoughts). Finally, participants completed a measure of recent goal rumination in daily-life. Higher depressive symptoms were associated with more frequent goal rumination, as measured during the attention task and with respect to daily-life. Higher depressive symptoms were also associated with lower perceived goal progress. However, goal progress did not predict goal rumination, and consequently did not explain the relationship between depressive symptoms and goal rumination. These results provide early evidence that the well-documented relationship between depression and rumination may extend to goal rumination. Our findings encourage further exploration of underlying mechanisms and consequences of goal rumination in depression.