



Cardiff University  
School of Psychology

<b>Studentship Title:</b>	Autistica/ Cardiff University Studentship
<b>Research Area/ Project Title:</b>	Towards a Successful Treatment of Anorexia Nervosa in Autistic Women.
<b>Location:</b>	Cardiff
<b>Expected Start Date:</b>	January 2018
<b>Duration:</b>	36 months
<b>Deadline for Application:</b>	17 <sup>th</sup> November 2017

#### **Description of Research Opportunity:**

This PhD studentship, as a part of joint initiative with UCL in London, has been designed to look at the various barriers in providing effective treatment for autistic women with Anorexia Nervosa (AN). Supervision for this studentship will be provided by Dr. John Fox (clinical psychology) and Dr. Catherine Jones, School of Psychology/ Wales Autism Research Centre (WARC) <http://sites.cardiff.ac.uk/warc/>

It is clear that that both treatment needs and theoretical sufficiency for this specific client group have not been adequately addressed in the literature, as most psychological treatments target weight and shape concerns. Our pilot work suggests that for many autistic women, their severe restrictive eating and weight loss is not primarily driven by weight and shape concerns. Further, services tend to use interventions that are not autistic friendly and may actually exacerbate current eating difficulties and behaviour (e.g. sitting under bright lights during observation). This studentship will focus on the following issues:

#### *Issue 1 – Lack of theoretical understanding of AN in autism*

Our work to date has suggested that sensory aversion to food smell and texture; a tendency to inflexibly follow strict rules (e.g., 'Each day, I must run 3 miles and eat 1500 calories'); dieting as a concrete strategy to win social acceptance; and interoceptive difficulties sensing hunger and thirst may all play a part in the development and maintenance of AN in autism. These possibilities will be explored, elaborated and tested in the proposed project. Importantly, consultation with experts (autistic people, their families, clinicians) will enable us to generate other novel ideas, to be tested empirically.

#### *Barrier 2 – Practical impediments to successful treatment*

AN services usually lack specialist knowledge of autism. As a result they can unwittingly create barriers to engaging and treating their autistic patients. For example, one autistic woman we consulted recounted that her in-patient treatment for AN included a re-feeding

programme that took place in a noisy room, lit by fluorescent strip lighting. In this environment she experienced sensory overload that made it impossible for her to eat. Others recalled group sessions that required extensive discussion of their own and others' feelings, which they found stressful and unhelpful. Importantly, autistic women with AN sometimes reported that they were labelled 'manipulative' or lacking in motivation when their autistic characteristics interfered with standard treatments. We encountered instances when a service's failure to adapt to accommodate a woman's autism directly led to her dropping out of AN treatment. The proposed project would, for the first time, take a systematic, empirical approach to identifying the practical barriers to successfully helping autistic women with AN. It would also identify ways in which these can be overcome, yielding immediate practical recommendations on how eating disorder services can become more autism friendly.

**Award:**

The studentships will commence in January 2018 and will cover your tuition fees (at UK/EU level) as well as a maintenance grant. In 2017-18 the maintenance grant for full-time students was £14,553 per annum. As well as tuition fees and maintenance grant, all School of Psychology students receive conference and participant money (approx. £2250 for the duration of the studentship). They also receive a computer and office space, additional funding for their research, and access to courses offered by the University's Doctoral Academy and become members of the University Doctoral Academy.

**Eligibility:**

Full awards (fees plus maintenance stipend) are open to UK Nationals, and EU students who can satisfy UK residency requirements. To be eligible for the full award, EU Nationals must have been in the UK for at least 3 years prior to the start of the course for which they are seeking funding, including for the purposes of full-time education.

As only one studentship is available and a very high standard of applications is typically received, the successful applicant is likely to have a very good first degree (a First or Upper Second class BSc Honours or equivalent) and/or be distinguished by having relevant research experience.

**How to apply:**

You can apply online - consideration is automatic on applying for a PhD in Psychology, with a January 2018 start date (programme code RFPDPSYB).

Please use our online application service at [www.cf.ac.uk/regis/general/applyonline/index.html](http://www.cf.ac.uk/regis/general/applyonline/index.html)

and specify in the funding section that you wish to be considered for School funding.

Please specify that you are applying for this particular project.

**Application deadline:** 17th November and interviews (either in person or by Skype) on the 28th November 2017 and decisions being made by 8<sup>th</sup> December 2017

**General Information:**

The School of Psychology is one of the largest and most successful in the UK (<http://www.cf.ac.uk/psych/>). The School's excellent standard of research and teaching has been recognised in every Research Assessment Exercise. It has its own brain-imaging centre (<http://www.cf.ac.uk/psych/cubric/>), enhancing the international-leading research in behavioural neuroscience, cognitive ergonomics, forensic, social and developmental psychology.

Cardiff is the youngest capital city in Europe and the fastest growing in the UK. It plays host to many national and international sporting events at the Millennium Stadium (<http://www.millenniumstadium.com/>). Culturally, the city is thriving, with the Wales Millennium Centre (<http://www.wmc.org.uk/>) in Cardiff Bay. Cardiff is in very close proximity to the beautiful Welsh countryside (<http://www.breconbeacons.org/>), has a two hour rail link to London and a (cheap) one hour air link to Paris and Amsterdam (<http://www.cardiffairportonline.com/>)

Please address any informal enquiries to:

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**For further information please contact:**

**Postgraduate Research Enquires**

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