

# Thesisonderwerpen

## Psychologie

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VRIJE  
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BRUSSEL

*Dit document bevat een overzicht van thesisonderwerpen die nog beschikbaar zijn en een lijst van promotoren die nog de mogelijkheid hebben om studenten met een eigen onderwerp te begeleiden.*

*Voor vragen kan je terecht in de discussies op Canvas  
of via mail ([olivier.mairesse@vub.be](mailto:olivier.mairesse@vub.be); [elke.van.lierde@vub.be](mailto:elke.van.lierde@vub.be); [berenice.delwiche@vub.be](mailto:berenice.delwiche@vub.be)).*

## Beschikbare onderwerpen

In de onderstaande tabel wordt een overzicht gegeven van de thesisonderwerpen die nog beschikbaar zijn. Meer informatie over deze onderwerpen vind je terug in de bundel met thesisonderwerpen

(<https://canvas.vub.be/courses/19312/files?preview=605888>).

Indien je nog geen onderwerp hebt, kun je nu direct contact opnemen met promotoren die nog onderwerpen ter beschikking hebben.

Wanneer je een onderwerp/promotor gevonden hebt, ga je over tot het indienen van het officiële document

([https://canvas.vub.be/courses/19312/discussion\\_topics/87228](https://canvas.vub.be/courses/19312/discussion_topics/87228)).

| Nummer | Titel  | Promotor                       |
|--------|--|--------------------------------|
| #010   | Testing the validity of a network approach to psychological contracts: The effect of strength on breach perceptions  | Prof. Dr. Tim Vantilborgh      |
| #022   | Sociale sequentieverwerking bij autisme, een gedragsstudie   | Dr. Elien Heleven              |
| #023   | Sociale problemen bij cerebellaire patiënten   | Dr. Elien Heleven              |
| #027   | Narratieve coherentie bij autisme  | Dr. Elien Heleven              |
| #038   | De transdiagnostische effectiviteit van de Ronnie Gardiner Methode (RGM) bij geriatrische patiënten.   | Xenia Brancart                 |
| #039   | Validering van de Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale bij Nederlandstalige ouderen   | Xenia Brancart                 |
| #040   | Validering van de Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale bij Geriatrische patiënten   | Xenia Brancart                 |
| #043   | Convergente en divergente validiteit van ICD-11 persoonlijkheidstrekken, -functioneren en borderline patroon met adaptieve trekken en levenskwaliteit bij ouderen. | Prof. Dr. Gina Rossi           |
| #045   | Convergente en divergente validiteit van ICD-11 persoonlijkheidstrekken, -functioneren en borderline patroon met temperament en emotieregulatie bij ouderen.       | Prof. Dr. Gina Rossi           |
| #054   | De ervaringen van ouderen die aan opzettelijke zelfbeschadigende gedragingen doen: Een pilootstudie  | Prof. Dr. Imke Baetens         |
| #059   | Contactregelingen in pleegzorg: Een dossierstudie  | Prof. Dr. Johan Vanderfaeillie |
| #064   | Onderzoek naar compassion fatigue bij pleegzorgers   | Prof. Dr. Johan Vanderfaeillie |
| #082   | Perceptueel sequentieleren   | Prof. Dr. Natacha Deroost      |
| #083   | A cognitive study of the highly sensitive mind using the Attentional Network Task  | Prof. Dr. Natacha Deroost      |
| #085   | Sleep, Pain and Function in People With Chronic Spinal Pain and Comorbid Insomnia Compared to People With Chronic Spinal Pain Without Insomnia.                    | Prof. Dr. Olivier Mairesse     |
| #086   | The cognitive algebra of insomnia  | Prof. Dr. Olivier Mairesse     |

| Nummer | Titel  | Promotor                      |
|--------|--|-------------------------------|
| #087   | Title: Comparative sensitivity of psychomotor vigilance and sleep resistance tests in good sleepers and sleep-disturbed patients pre- and post-treatment | Prof. Dr. Olivier Mairesse    |
| #088   | Spectral analysis of slow wave sleep in fatigue-related conditions   | Prof. Dr. Olivier Mairesse    |
| #093   | MSLT 2.0: an update of scoring thresholds after 3 decades of sleepiness assessment   | Prof. Dr. Olivier Mairesse    |
| #095   | There is more to chronotypes than larks and owls: a multi-center, large-scale visuo-verbal assessment of chronotype                                      | Prof. Dr. Olivier Mairesse    |
| #097   | Circaflex: circadian flexibility and the resistance to sleep deprivation   | Prof. Dr. Olivier Mairesse    |
| #098   | Self-anchoring scales to overcome response shift in longitudinal studies   | Prof. Dr. Peter Theuns        |
| #099   | A functional measurement analysis of the development of dimensional coordination in children: a replication study  | Prof. Dr. Peter Theuns        |
| #106   | Klank-klaar voor de leesstart! Welk effect heeft deze taaldidactiek op de voorbereidende technische leesvaardigheden van (kansarme) kleuters?            | Prof. Dr. Wim Van den Broeck  |
| #110   | Nupraatikerover.be: Behoeftonderzoek bij bezoekers van de chatbox voor kindermishandeling en seksueel geweld.  | Prof. Dr. Johan Vanderfaillie |

Bijkomend werden nog enkele thesisonderwerpen onder begeleiding van Prof. Dr. Marie Vandekerckhove ter beschikking gesteld. Indien je interesse hebt in een of meerdere van deze onderwerpen, kan je rechtstreeks contact opnemen via mail ([Marie.Vandekerckhove@vub.be](mailto:Marie.Vandekerckhove@vub.be)).

### **THEMA 1: Bottom up versus top down emotion regulation**

#### ***Bottom up Experiential versus Cognitive top down Emotion regulation***

The purpose of this study is to elucidate some mechanisms of bottom-up and top-down emotion regulation. Currently, there is abundant research demonstrating the adaptivity of cognitive top-down emotion regulation strategies involving reinterpretation of the stressor in order to feel better (Gross, 1998). Furthermore, despite the great amount of research on mindfulness in which the scope is broader, including sensorial, affective as well as cognitive 'here and now processes', only recently, research started to demonstrate that a bottom-up experiential 'affective processing' approach or emotion regulation can be adaptive in recovering from painful life events, relative to using a cognitive analytical emotion regulation style (Greenberg & Vandekerckhove, 2008; Hunt, 1998; Moberly & Watkins, 2006; Stanton et al., 2000; Teasdale, 1993; Van Tieghem, Mairesse, Vandekerckhove, 2016; Vandekerckhove et al., 2012; Watkins & Moulds, 2005; Watkins & Teasdale, 2001, 2004; Watkins et al., 2013). Therefore, more insight into the effectiveness of bottom-up experiential ER in the recovery from affective painful events is desirable.

### ***Dynamics of emotion and Emotion regulation in Daily life***

Despite the evidence that the temporal dynamics of emotional processes is one of the most crucial dimensions of emotional processes (Kuppens, Oravek, & Tuerlinckx, 2010), only recently close attention has been given to this process (Verduyn, Van Mechelen, Tuerlinckx, Meers, & Van Coillie, 2009). Individuals show not only changes in their momentary experience and expression of basic emotions in daily life (see Boker & Wenger, 2007; Guastello, Koopmans, & Pincus, 2009; Lewis, 2005; Thagard, & Nerb, 2002; Vallacher, Read, & Nowack, 2002; van Montfort, Oud, & Satorra, 2007; Witherton, & Chrichton, 2007), but also in their affect trajectories during the life span (Carsten, Pasupathi, Mayr, & Nesselrode, 2000). Although awareness of the importance of temporal dynamics of emotion is increasing, especially in the field of emotion regulation, there is a need to consider affective dynamics on a larger time-scale in the life span. To capture the emotion regulation dynamics of healthy participants, we will conduct an 'Experience Sampling Method' study. Our main goal is to outline the frequency and intensity of positive and negative experienced emotions, which emotion regulation strategies are spontaneously selected in daily situations and how they are related with positive and negative affect. Aside from the assessment of the dynamic expression of emotion, the aim of this study is to compare experiential emotion regulation with the more cognitive approach of reappraisal.

### ***The impact of Experiential versus Cognitive reappraisal emotion regulation strategies as trained Variable on the dynamics of emotions: pre- and post fMRI and DTI***

A challenging research question here is not just 'how can we help to get insight in how people recover from stressful experiences and life events?', but also, 'how can we make them more resilient in the future by helping them to regulate their emotions?'. Based on acquired insights, a further important step in future research is training emotion regulation strategies to recover from negative emotional stress, and to modulate the experience of positive emotion. The purpose of this research is to validate the neuronal mechanisms of trained experiential and more executive top-down methods and modes in emotion regulation within the processing and regulation of arousing scenes on the behavioral and neuronal level. Although gray matter components of the limbic system have been studied using MR imaging, the connecting white matter bundles have recently become a focus of interest. In order to attain a deeper understanding of emotional functioning and the brain, techniques such as DTI (diffusion tensor imaging) where large white-matter tracts such as the fornix and cingulum are studied, will be used. On the neuronal level we will not only look at the functional dimension, using fMRI, but also at neurostructural changes in white matter tracts as well as the temporal evolution of emotion regulation training using DTI.

### ***Emotion regulation, Glucose control in diabetes***

Effective emotion regulation is necessary for physical and mental health (Gross, 1998). There is also evidence that psychosocial stress is associated with worse glycemic control among those who do not cope effectively with it; however findings are unclear. Research findings show, for instance, that avoidance coping of emotional stress has been found to predict poor self-care behavior but is unrelated to metabolic control (Strandberg et al., 2014). On the other hand, relationships between higher levels of avoidance in coping with emotional stress and poor metabolic control have been reported (Linn et al., 1985; Reid et al., 1994; Seiffge-Krenke & Stemmler, 2003). Still another study shows that emotion regulation modes such as preoccupation with the problem, wishful thinking and expression of the problem, have been associated with stress-reactivity and lower metabolic outcomes in persons with diabetes (Peyrot

& McMurry, 1992; Strandberg et al., 2014). Other findings show that instead of avoidance, the repeated experiential focus, complementary to a cognitive focus on upsetting and emotional events, can produce long-term improvements in mental and physical health, as well as reductions in negative mood or depressive symptoms. This study will be an attempt to investigate the relationship between emotion regulation, glycemic variations in diabetes and wellbeing in adolescents. Effectively coping with emotional stress can protect the individuals with diabetes from the deleterious effects of stress. In future projects we will investigate these questions related to affective wellbeing and variations in glycemia and energy in healthy individuals.

### ***Validation of an emotion regulation questionnaire***

#### ***On the impact of positive emotion training in adolescents on the brain***

Lastly, emotion regulation research has primarily focused on negative emotions and our ability to recover from such negative events. However, the absence of negative emotions does not predict levels of subjective well-being (Fredrickson & Kurtz, 2011). Furthermore, positive emotions have been linked to health benefits and to an increased quality of life. Interventions targeted at positive emotions showed the ability to adapt one's emotional life and thereby acquire the benefits from positive emotions (Garland et al., 2010; Kok et al., 2013). Research has shown the positive impact of positive emotions on cognitive flexibility, social relationships and overall well-being (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002). The amount of positive emotions one experiences during daily life correlates with adaptive coping strategies and resilience to negative events ([Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002](#)). However, these steadfast findings in the domain of positive emotions mostly rely on the amount or intensity of positive emotions that a person encounters during one's daily life. *How* these emotion regulation strategies relate to one's overall preference in emotion regulation styles or negative emotion regulation strategies is not yet clear. In future research I intend to explore how the experience and dynamics of positive emotion relates to the use of emotion regulation strategies during the life span.

#### ***Bottom-up emotion regulation in clients who committed sexual offenses***

An emergent issue in the field of sex offender theory is that emotions are functionally important as antecedents for offending. Moreover, there is considerable evidence that people who committed sexual offenses demonstrate heightened levels of negative emotions, traumatic experiences, mental health issues, and emotion dysregulation. Only recently, attention has been given to the problem of overregulation (Gunst, Watson, Desmet & Willemsen, 2017). Forensic treatments have been strongly influenced by etiological models that see emotions as problems that need to be controlled and managed, due to their potential for disrupting prosocial motivations and actions, and for biasing problem-solving (Ward, 2017). Emotional regulation training in forensic program consequently focus solely on top-down strategies. From the perspective of general emotion theory and experiential theory, emotional awareness is a condition for successful emotion regulation and mental health. In addition, clients' emotional processing and depth of experiencing have been found to be important change mechanisms and are significant predictors of outcomes in different therapeutic approaches (Castonguay, Goldfried, Wiser, Raue, & Hayes, 1996; Greenberg & Pascual-Leone, 2006; Watson, Greenberg, & Lietaer, 2010; Watson, McMullen, Meghan, Prosser, & Bedard, 2011; Whelton, 2004). In this study, we will investigate the change process of an intervention that aims to increase affect

regulation in individuals who committed sexual offenses. In Experiential Group Psychotherapy, emotional awareness and meaning making is stimulated through the use of specific focusing interventions and by inciting clients to go through iterative circles of approaching, (re-)experiencing, labeling, and expressing and reflecting on emotions. This study will investigate if deepening of experience and emotional change is possible in forensic clients who are obliged to follow treatment. This study will provide insight in the emotional processing of people who committed sexual offenses and it has the potential to open new venues for treatment of this population. We hypothesize that depth of in-session experiencing is associated with positive change in emotion regulation and mental health.

## **THEMA 2: Well being**

### ***Well being, quality of life and positive health***

The World Health Organization (2018) defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” In line with this definition, the goal of healthcare today is increasingly to improve patients’ quality of life, in addition to decreasing symptoms and recovery from psychopathology. Quality of life is increasingly viewed as an essential healthcare outcome, which is just as or even more important than the symptomatic status in evaluating the effectiveness of any healthcare intervention. Criteria for physical and mental health and adjustment become increasingly broadened, including personal happiness, existential meaning of life and well being. As a consequence, the question of empirical validation of the concept of ‘existential- meaning and well being’ in life as crucial in global well being and health, has recently become a target of our interest (e.g. Baumeister & Vohs, 2002; Wong, 2012; King, Hicks, Krull, & Del Gaiso, 2006; Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006; Heintzelman & King, 2014).

### ***The role of search and presence for meaning in life in identity formation in youth at risk of eating disorders development***

Research indicates that hampered self-concept clarity may be associated with the development of eating disorders in young adulthood. Conversely, a recent longitudinal study also reported the inverse association, in which eating disorder symptoms hindered identity development over time (Verschueren et al., 2018). Given the importance of searching for and acquiring meaning for the identity formation in adolescence (Oana Negru-Subtirica et al., 2016), with this study we aim to elucidate the role of identity formation in subclinical youth at risk for eating disorders by also taking into account the presence and search for meaning in life.

### ***Bottom-up meaning in life in adolescents***

What makes life meaningful for young adults? This diary study is based on experience sampling in an adolescent sample including social anxiety and life domains that, daily meaning scale, daily affect, daily emotion regulation. What makes day-to-day life for adolescents? Provided that the experience of meaning fluctuates within a person, to validate and gain a more in depth and ecological understanding, this project aims to assess dynamic meaning processes in daily life and how specific actions and daily affective experiences, or bottom-up elemental or ‘situational’ meaning giving are integrated into a coherent experience of meaning at a more global level of life as a whole. This project zooms in on the ecological experience of existential meaning in this group, because this life stage is theoretically important for identity formation, a developmental process closely connected to existential meaning in life Whereas

lifespan EM research has shown increased searching for meaning in emerging adulthood, little is known about the bottom-up dynamic processes of EM in young adults

### ***Cultural differences in existential well being during the COVID-19 pandemic: USA vs India***

“Culture is important as it provides an overarching guide about how people make sense of their life and derive meaning from events (Beosch, 1991; Mascaro & Rosen, 2008; Stroink & De Ciccio, 2011).” In this study we question how do different value and belief systems and existential meaning moderate coping with the effects of the pandemic and associated lockdown on emotional health, sleep, and life satisfaction?

### **THEMA 3: Anoetic experiential consciousness**

This study addresses some open questions about consciousness and memory and is meant to make an attempt to clarify these phenomena in a descriptive manner, and especially the relationship between them. In particular, child development of memory and current theorizing on bottom up and top down processing, memory and related developmental states of consciousness teaches us to see how different levels of development of the self, identity and memory relate to the ontogenetic development of different stages of consciousness of being in the world. Based on Vandekerckhove (2008), a gradual distinction becomes outlined: from a rudimentary state of autonomic awareness or unknowing consciousness as a biological adaptive function with a first sort of “self-experience” already apparent at an anoetic level of consciousness, relying on implicit experiential and procedural memory, towards higher levels of consciousness such as noetic and auto-noetic consciousness, based on semantic and episodic memory systems.

### **THEMA 4: Euthanasia in case of psychological suffering**

The ethical dimension of euthanasia for severe physical suffering is one of the most problematic issues in society. Still more controversial is euthanasia for cases of mental suffering. In this study the aim is to investigate ethical aspects of mental unbearable suffering as a possible indication for euthanasia, based on the actual state of the art and single case studies.

### **THEMA 5: Sleep & fatigue**

#### ***Emotion regulation, sleep and health***

Several studies have confirmed the impact of pre-sleep cognitive and emotional activity, such as worry and negative affect, on subsequent sleep. Though alterations in sleep can be related to the state of individuals during the day, research findings on these effects are still contradictory, and possible moderating variables have received almost no consideration (Vandekerckhove et al., 2011, 2012; Van Tieghem, Mairesse, & Vandekerckhove, 2016). Moderating factors of the emotional state during the day, such as emotion regulation, may help the individual to regain emotional balance that might influence quality of sleep. Specifically, we want to pursue the following research on: (1) the moderating role of dispositional emotion regulation or the training of ‘experiential emotion regulation’ in the recovery from the effects of daily emotional stress, (2) its subsequent effects on sleep, (3) ecological validation in ‘less and more’ stressful life periods and the amelioration of sleep disturbances after an emotional life event in children, adolescents and adults.

### ***Emotion, Emotion regulation & Fatigue***

Recently, an increase of stress-related problems has been observed. One of the most severe forms, sometimes called burnout syndrome, is characterized by decline in not only cognitive functioning, but also emotional functioning. The question we pose is how the use of specific emotion regulation strategies relates to the dynamics of negative effects of chronic occupational stress and related emotions. To address this, participants suffering from burnout will be tested by the use of an experiencing sampling method in order to assess daily dynamics of stress, emotion and emotion regulation.

## **Eigen onderwerp**

Hieronder vind je een overzicht van promotoren die aangegeven hebben dat ze nog de mogelijkheid hebben om studenten met een eigen onderwerp te begeleiden.

Indien je rond een eigen onderwerp wil werken, is het belangrijk dat je een concreet voorstel uitwerkt en dat het thema van jouw onderzoeksvoorstel aansluit bij de expertise of interesse van de promotor. Wanneer je een promotor gevonden hebt voor jouw onderzoeksvoorstel, ga je over tot het indienen van het officiële document

([https://canvas.vub.be/courses/19312/discussion\\_topics/87228](https://canvas.vub.be/courses/19312/discussion_topics/87228)).

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