

Psychology and Social Connection

LMH Summer Programmes are provided by Lady Margaret Hall, a college in the University of Oxford

Course:	Psychology and Social Connection
Available:	Programme Session 1: 30 th June 2025 to 18 th July 2025
Lectures:	18 Hours
Seminars:	12 Hours
Tutorials:	3 Hours
Independent Study:	Approximately 120 Hours
Recommended Credit:	15 CATS / 7.5 ECTS / 4 US Credits

About this Course:	<p>What is the secret to a life well lived? People may accumulate wealth and success, and yet find themselves feeling lonely and unfulfilled – what’s missing?</p> <p>The empirical evidence is unusually clear: the most significant determinant in how happy, healthy, and long a life we lead is our social connection, that is, how connected we feel to other human beings. In many societies, however, loneliness has been on the rise, attributed variously to pandemic restrictions, an increasing reliance on digital interactions, or an emphasis on individualism over community.</p> <p>This course examines why nurturing supportive relationships matter to mental health and how people create bonds with one another. You will learn about the types of social network, and how different people nurture their networks, especially when entering new social environments or facing a life transition. You will also investigate why people can be naturally suspicious of those who seem at first glance to be ‘different’, and how human beings can nonetheless form successful diverse interconnected communities.</p> <p>This exciting course spans several areas of psychology, including evolutionary, social, and clinical psychology, and the psychology of individual differences, to explore how and why humans choose social connection with others.</p>
Course Overview:	<p><u>Week 1: Reasons for and Mechanisms of Social Connection</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theoretical and Empirical Explanations for Affiliation-Seeking • Benefits of Social Connection • Mechanisms of Social Bonding • Types and Structures of Social Networks <p>The first week of the course investigates how and why we form social bonds. We will begin by exploring the theoretical and empirical explanations for affiliation seeking and maintaining social relationships. We will discuss the benefits of social connection and shows how most major life outcomes can be predicted by the</p>

	<p>quality of our social connections and how these can act as a stress buffer. We will look at the mechanisms of social bonding: how and what types of physical and psychological attraction determine who connects with whom and how individual differences influence social bonding choices. Finally we will turn to the types and structures of social networks, illustrating how an individual's relationships and whole communities self-organise into structured ego and cohort networks.</p> <p><u>Week 2: Social Connection at Risk – Instability, Exclusion, and Isolation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Investment Model and Relationship Instability • Social Network Change Theories • Risk Factors of Different Types of Social Exclusion and Isolation • Consequences of a Lack of Social Connectedness <p>The second week of the course investigates changes and risks to social connections, as well the various types and consequences of social exclusion and isolation. We will examine the investment model and relationship instability, first by considering how we can predict relationship stability, and then by considering relationship decay in romantic partnerships as well as platonic relationships. We will explore social network change theories, considering longer-term changes observed across a lifespan, as well as shorter-term dynamics in relation to more specific life events. We shall investigate the risk factors of different types of social exclusion and isolation, and discuss the consequences of a lack of social connectedness on mental and physical health, mood, and well-being.</p> <p><u>Week 3: Social Group Processes – Intergroup Conflict and Contact</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intergroup Biases and their Causes • Social Identity and Realistic Group Conflict Theory • Intergroup Contact Theory and Promises • Methods and Results of Investigating Intergroup Contact <p>The final week of the course moves beyond individual connections by considering social group processes, understanding the courses and mechanisms of conflict between different groups and how trust and cooperation can be promoted through contact. We will consider intergroup biases and their causes from different perspectives. We will explore Social Identity and Realistic Group Conflict Theory, Intergroup Contact Theory, and the methods and results of investigating intergroup contact. Finally, we shall consider the implications of a modern society in which the possibility of social connection online is increasingly important.</p>
Key Texts:	<p>Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R., "The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation", <i>Psychological Bulletin</i> 117(3): 497–529, 1995.</p> <p>Cacioppo, J. T., & Cacioppo, S., "Social relationships and health: The toxic effects of perceived social isolation", <i>Social and Personality Psychology Compass</i> 8(2): 58– 72, 2014.</p> <p>McPherson, M., Smith-Lovin, L., & Cook, J. M., "Birds of a feather: Homophily in social networks", <i>Annual Review of Sociology</i> 27(1): 415–444, 2001.</p> <p>Pettigrew, T. F., "Intergroup contact theory", <i>Annual Review of Psychology</i> 49: 65–85, 1998.</p> <p>Wrzus, C., Hänel, M., Wagner, J., & Neyer, F. J., "Social network changes and life 309 events across the life span: A meta-analysis", <i>Psychological Bulletin</i> 139(1): 53–80, 2013.</p>
Learning Outcomes:	<p>By the end of this course, you will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be able to examine critically the role of nurturing supportive relationship on mental health and wellbeing.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be able to demonstrate knowledge of different types of social networks and how people navigate them. • Be able to demonstrate awareness of research into wellbeing, individual differences, and social psychology. • Be able to evaluate critically empirical findings from psychological research.
Admissions Requirements:	<p>LMH Summer Programmes are designed for students who want to gain and develop knowledge in their chosen subject area. LMH Summer Programmes are intensive courses of study aimed at undergraduates who have completed one, two, or three years of their degree, or entry level postgraduate students.</p> <p>We will consider each applicant's academic ability and expect successful applicants to have a minimum grade point average equivalent to 2:1 level on the British grading scale. For example, this would mean at least a 3.2 GPA on the 4.0 grading scale in the United States, and 80% in China.</p> <p>This course would suit students from a range of disciplines, including not only students with prior experience of Psychology interested in a modern area of research, but also students without formal academic experience in the subject but who are interested in a scientific study of social relationships.</p> <p>To participate fully in the programme all students will need to have proficiency in English.</p> <p>English language requirements for students who are not native English speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TOEFL iBT score of 98 • IELTS score of 7.0 (no less than 6.5 in each component) • Duolingo English Test score of 125 (no less than 115 in each section) • Cambridge English Scale score of 185 <p>If the language of instruction in your home institution is English you do not need to provide evidence of your English proficiency.</p>
Teaching Methods:	<p>Core syllabus material will be covered in lectures. Students attend four lectures each week and each lecture lasts 90 minutes. Seminars in smaller groups offer students space to discuss and debate, to dig deeper into difficult concepts, and to explore their own ideas. Student contribution to seminars is vital, and tutors will ensure everyone takes part in discussions. Seminars last 1 hour and students will take part in four seminars each week.</p> <p>Independent study is a crucial part of an LMH Summer Programme and of the Oxford teaching model. Tutors will recommend important reading to do between lectures and seminars that will enable students to come to class equipped to understand the information presented and prepared to take part in discussion and debate. Each week students will have an assignment of independent work to complete and submit in advance of the tutorial. There is an appropriate amount of space in the timetable to complete the necessary reading, preparation, and assignments. Students should expect to do around 40 hours of independent study each week.</p> <p>The final class each week is a tutorial, a very small class typically including only 2-4 students and central to the teaching methods used by the University of Oxford and on LMH Summer Programmes. Guided by their tutor, students will receive feedback on their assignments and be challenged to defend, justify, or even rethink their work and ideas. These rigorous academic discussions help develop and facilitate learning in a way that cannot be done with lectures and seminars alone.</p>
Assessment:	<p>On a three-week LMH Summer Programme students produce one piece of assessed work every week, which is submitted to the tutor and then discussed in a tutorial. At</p>

	the end of each week students will receive a percentage grade for their submitted work. Each week's work counts for a third of the final percentage grade, so the final grade is an average of the mark received for each piece of work. Students who stay for six or nine weeks will receive a separate grade for each 3-week course.
Academic Credit:	Lady Margaret Hall will provide a transcript of students' assessed work, and can send this directly to your home institution if required. LMH Summer Programmes are designed to be eligible for academic credit, and we will communicate with home institution to facilitate this as needed. As a guide, we recommend the award of 15 CATS / 7.5 ECTS / 4 US Credits for each 3-week course.