AWARD

Psi Chi/APA Edwin B. Newman Graduate Research Award:
Lydia G. Roos

Citation

“For an outstanding research paper that examined how trait suppression and reappraisal interact with stressful life events to affect cortisol reactivity. Suppression, but not reappraisal, was associated with cortisol responses to acute stress for people with more exposure to recent stressful events, particularly when events included a relationship stressor. The paper, titled “Recent Stressful Life Events, Relationship Stressors, and Cortisol Reactivity: The Moderating Role of Suppression,” and coauthored by Drs. Jeannette M. Bennett and Sara M. Levens, was the basis for Lydia G. Roos’s selection as the recipient of the 2019 Psi Chi/APA Edwin B. Newman Graduate Research Award.”

Biography

Lydia G. Roos is a doctoral candidate in the Health Psychology doctoral program at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNC Charlotte). Broadly, she specializes in interdisciplinary stress research with an emphasis on social relationships, integrating multiple domains to understand factors that contribute to worsened psychological and physical health in the face of stress and trauma.

On a basic level, Lydia G. Roos’s research is guided by the notion that the ways in which people psychologically and biologically respond to and recover from stress is a causal mechanism in health and illness. She explores factors that buffer or exacerbate the effects of stressful events and chronic stress on hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis and sympathetic nervous system reactivity (i.e., the “fight-or-flight” response) as well as immune system functioning to potentially drive changes in overall psychological and physical health. For example, she studies how perceptions of potential stressors and management of responses—such as those influenced by social motivations, coping, and emotion regulation strategies—impact stress reactivity and the downstream effects on health.

Research Background

Lydia G. Roos’s research interests originally stem from her experience at the Medical University of South Carolina. After graduating with her Bachelor of Science in Psychology from the College of Charleston in 2012, she was a research coordinator on a project that examined mechanisms of risk (e.g., acute stress reactivity) for the development of alcohol-related problems in trauma-exposed individuals, including those with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Under the guidance of Carla Knett Danielson and Suzanne Thomas, she gained extensive experience in designing and implementing psychological research studies using relevant biomarkers. Further, the experience ignited her passion for research in health psychology, specifically in psychobiological stress reactivity. Lydia G. Roos decided to pursue a doctoral degree that would allow her to ask unique questions that increases knowledge about the complex multidirectional interactions between psychological processes, physiological stress reactivity, and long-term health outcomes.

Research Conducted at UNC Charlotte

In her first year in the Health Psychology doctoral program at UNC Charlotte, Lydia G. Roos received the Herschel and Cornelia Everett Foundation Graduate Fellow-
ship, allowing her to immediately dive into research. Since then, she has trained under the mentorship of Jeanette M. Bennett, her primary advisor, in the theoretical and practical aspects of integrating multiple fields to conduct interdisciplinary research. She aims to synthesize theoretical and methodological approaches from various research domains in her work to improve our understanding of ways to mitigate, or even prevent, the negative effects of stress. Specifically, she draws heavily from the fields of chronic and traumatic stress research as well as relationship science, with a strong basis in stress physiology. Because of her desire to integrate multiple research domains, Lydia G. Roos frequently collaborates with additional mentors, including Amy Canevello, Alyssa K. McGonagle, and Nicolas Rohleder.

The Role of Emotion Regulation in Stress Reactivity

Because individuals encounter stressful situations throughout life, it is important to determine factors that influence the extent to which stressors affect psychological and physical health outcomes; exploring such factors is a major avenue of Lydia G. Roos’s research. In particular, emotion regulation strategies, which are the ways people control which emotions they have, how they are expressed, and when they have them, can play a role in the association between stress and health outcomes. For example, people may suppress the expression of their emotions when physiologically or emotionally aroused. People may also attempt to positively reappraise an event or situation they originally perceived as negative. That is, they may cognitively reinterpret a seemingly negative event or situation in a more positive light to change its emotional impact.

An investigation headed by Lydia G. Roos and published last year in Psychoneuroendocrinology examined how the tendencies to use suppression and reappraisal interact with stressful life events, and relationship stressors, in particular, to affect HPA axis reactivity to an acute stressor in the laboratory. Findings demonstrated that higher trait suppression, but not reappraisal, was associated with cortisol responses to acute stress for people who had more exposure to stressful events in the past 12 months, particularly when those stressful events included a relationship stressor (e.g., ending of a significant friendship or romantic relationship, death of a loved one). This publication was the basis for Lydia G. Roos being awarded with this year’s APA/Psi Chi Edwin B. Newman Graduate Research Award.

Lydia G. Roos continued this line of research during her research practicum experience with Nicolas Rohleder at the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg in Nuremberg, Germany. Predicated on the assumption that effective physiological adaptation to stress includes HPA axis habituation, the collaborative team investigated whether the tendency to use (i.e., trait) reappraisal and suppression influence HPA axis habituation to a repeated acute stressor in healthy adults. They also examined whether nonmanipulated state emotion regulation strategies (i.e., those used by the participant specifically in response to the stressor on the first day) modulated HPA axis habituation over and above trait use.

Trait reappraisal, but not suppression, appeared to promote HPA axis habituation; however, neither state reappraisal nor suppression seemed to have an impact. In other words, the results suggest that people who typically try to reframe situations to be less stressful show greater physiological adaptation to stress. Lydia G. Roos’s work on this collaborative project was partially funded by the 2017 Health and Behavior International Collaborative Award from the Society for Health Psychology and the 2018 Health Psychology Summer Research Fellowship from UNC Charlotte. Findings were published in Psychoneuroendocrinology.

Stressful Events in Relationships

In addition to investigating effects of emotion regulation on stress reactivity, Lydia G. Roos is also interested in the psychological and physical health effects of interpersonally stressful life events (e.g., romantic breakups and divorce, infidelity). Guided by the view that social relationships are imperative for well-being from both a modern and evolutionary perspective, stressful relationship events or situations that threaten or dissolve close social bonds can have detrimental impacts on psychological and physical health.

Lydia G. Roos’s master’s thesis, completed in 2018, expanded her work in emotion regulation and relationship stressors to explore whether the tendency to avoid negative emotions or to ruminate on them after experiencing a recent (<1 year) breakup leads to greater distress and physiological dysregulation. Her thesis found that emotional avoidance was linked with higher diastolic blood pressure in people who had experienced a recent breakup but not for people who had not experienced a breakup. The results suggest that the tendency to avoid emotions following a relationship stressor may place strain on the cardiovascular system, even in healthy young adults. Additionally, although rumination was not associated with physical health outcomes, it was associated with higher levels of distress related to the breakup.

Another line of Lydia G. Roos’s research focuses on infidelity-related posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Infidelity occurs in roughly one-fourth of romantic relationships, and clinical observations have led to the conceptualization of infidelity as a traumatic event. Nonetheless, because infidelity does not involve actual or threatened death, injury, or threat to physical integrity, little empirical research has examined the potential for PTSD to occur following infidelity in a relationship. An investigation led by Lydia G. Roos found that among 73 unmarried young adults that experienced infidelity in com-
mitted relationship in the past 5 years, nearly half (45%) had posttraumatic stress symptoms above the clinical cutoff for PTSD. The results were recently published in *Stress & Health*. Currently, Lydia G. Roos is expanding her research in this area with additional projects exploring predictors and outcomes of infidelity-related PTSD. Her goal is to elevate awareness about and propel investigations into the serious psychological and physiological consequences of interpersonal events that may not directly involve physical harm or death but that may be perceived as traumatic (e.g., infidelity, divorce, abandonment, discovery of psychological abuse or manipulation).

**Future Professional Plans**

Lydia G. Roos is currently beginning her dissertation project. After graduating from UNC Charlotte, she aims to continue expanding her knowledge and skills through a postdoctoral fellowship. Ultimately, she will pursue a career in research investigating interpersonal stress and health through a psychoneuroendocrinological lens. Her work will use an evolutionary approach and transcend traditional boundaries of health sciences research by synthesizing theory and methodology in health, stress, social, and trauma psychology. Lydia G. Roos’s overarching goal is to improve the well-being of others by increasing fundamental knowledge through basic and applied research as well as designing interventions to ameliorate, or even prevent, the harmful effects of chronic and traumatic stress.

**Selected Bibliography**


The Edwin B. Newman Graduate Research Award is sponsored jointly by Psi Chi, the national honor society in psychology, and the APA. The award is presented annually to the psychology graduate student who submits the best research paper that was published or presented at a national, regional, or state psychological association conference during the past calendar year.

The Edwin B. Newman Graduate Research Award was established in 1979. The award was established to recognize young researchers at the beginning of their professional lives and to commemorate both the 50th anniversary of Psi Chi and the 100th anniversary of psychology as a science (dating from the founding of Wundt’s laboratory). It was named for Dr. Edwin B. Newman, the first national president of Psi Chi (1929) and one of its founders. He was a prolific researcher and a long-time chair of the Department of Psychology at Harvard University. Newman was a member of APA’s Board of Directors, served as recording secretary of the board from 1962 to 1967, and was parliamentarian for the APA Council of Representatives for many years. He served both Psi Chi and APA in a distinguished manner for half a century.

The Edwin B. Newman Graduate Research Award is given jointly by Psi Chi and APA. Members of the 2019 Edwin B. Newman Award Committee were Susan Whitbourne, PhD, Pamela Scott-Johnson, PhD, APA Representative; and Regan Gurung, PhD, and Anushree Karkhanis, PhD, Psi Chi Representatives.

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