Psychological Science and the European Research Council

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One of the premier funding organizations in Europe, the European Research Council (ERC) encourages the highest quality research with the goal of strengthening the European research system. The ERC's approach is described as "bottom-up" or "investigator-driven," meaning that scientists themselves set research priorities, not the agency or political system. Researchers can propose work in any field as long as it seeks to identify new research directions and opportunities.

Psychological science is well represented at the ERC. Many APS Members hold ERC grants, and a considerable number of authors submitting to APS journals credit ERC support for their research programs. Psychological science is reflected in the ERC leadership, too: APS Fellow Eveline Crone (Leiden University) is a vice president of the organization, overseeing the funding of the behavioral and social sciences and humanities (for more, see "[Frontiers of Psychological Science: An Interview With Eveline Crone](#)" in the January *Observer*).

To highlight the influence of ERC funding on the psychological science research process, APS spoke with APS Members holding different types of ERC grants.

Shaul Shalvi

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Amsterdam School of Economics,

University of Amsterdam

Shaul Shalvi is an associate professor at the Amsterdam School of Economics at the University of Amsterdam. A psychological scientist, his research interests include behavioral ethics, judgment and decision making, behavioral economics, and cooperation. Shalvi relies on an ERC Starting Grant to study the behavioral roots of corruption.

"For many years, human cooperation has been praised as beneficial in organizational and personal settings. Indeed, cooperation allows people to develop trust, build meaningful relationships, achieve mutually beneficial outcomes, and strengthen bonding with one's group members," said Shalvi. "However, while the benefits of cooperation are clear, very little is known about its possible negative aspects. Such negative aspects include the potential emergence of unethical conduct among cooperating partners."

This conduct, known as corrupt collaboration, occurs in business, sports, and other industries when one group bends ethical rules to set the stage for another group to further bend those rules in pursuit of personal profit.

"Our studies revealed corrupt collaborations most commonly occur when all involved parties gain from the corrupt behavior," said Shalvi.

Shalvi also noted that his Starting Grant allowed him to hire a PhD student and two postdoctoral fellows to support his lab's research.

Batja Mesquita

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Center for Social and Cultural

Psychology, University of Leuven

APS Fellow Batja Mesquita is a distinguished professor at the Center for Social and Cultural Psychology at the University of Leuven. Her research interests include culture and ethnicity, emotion, mood, affect, intergroup relations, and more. Mesquita relies on an ERC Advanced Grant to follow emotional acculturation and its impact on social networks longitudinally. Her research project is titled "Emotional Acculturation: Emotions as Gateways to Minority Inclusion."

"There are many reasons immigrants have a hard time—discrimination, low resources, lack of cultural capital. However, one aspect of many immigrant challenges is not feeling or not being perceived as feeling in the 'right' way; the way that is culturally attuned in the majority culture environment," said

Mesquita. "The guiding hypothesis of the current grant is that immigrant minorities who are emotionally attuned will have better immigration outcomes. This is so because normative emotions are rewarded by positive interpersonal outcomes, whereas emotions that violate cultural norms will be sanctioned."

For example, Mesquita said, in a situation where Belgians would feel anger at realizing that their rights were violated, Turkish immigrants are more likely to feel shame at expressing worry. Yet Belgians may misinterpret this shame as a confession of wrongdoing. The shame then weakens the informal bargaining position of the immigrants, generally eliciting disapproval. At this micro level, emotions are key processes of social inclusion and belonging.

Mesquita said her ERC funding supports the investigation of key questions related to emotional acculturation.

"ERC funding allows us to follow emotional acculturation and its impact on social networks longitudinally," she said. "In a large-scale study, we will follow newcomers in different cultural contexts … and observe how emotional acculturation over time impacts minority-majority contact, friendships, and social economic integration, but also minority well-being and health."

"We will also observe emotions in the lab, and examine the role of emotional acculturation in interactions between minority-majority and minority-minority dyads. This study too will be done across minority groups and national contexts," she added.

Mesquita reported that ERC funding has allowed her to extend an existing collaboration with psychological scientists among different institutions.

Ay?e K. Üskül

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School of Psychology,

University of Kent

APS Fellow Ay?e K. Üskül is a professor of social psychology in the School of Psychology at the

University of Kent. She studies interpersonal relationships, how cultural settings shape social cognition, and conceptions of self. An ERC Consolidator Grant supports Üskül's work in researching the role of honor in social interaction and decision-making processes.

Üskül's research is supported by a Consolidator Grant that supports an effort called HONORLOGIC. According to Üskül, this collaboration spans 12 sites and 8 languages around the world, mostly focusing on cultural groups around the Mediterranean. Sites are also located in several other countries outside the Mediterranean, providing a broader comparative perspective and anchoring new findings in the existing comparative literature, which has so far mostly included Western and East Asian participants.

"Through HONORLOGIC, we collectively aim to generate transformative evidence for theories of social interaction and decision making in psychology, economics, and evolutionary science," said Üskül. "We will also contribute to increasing the diversity of the existing evidence pool in psychological research, test established theoretical assumptions in new cultural groups, and hopefully contribute to capacity building in under-researched cultural groups in our field. We will also make study materials in all languages publicly available to stimulate future research in this region."

Üskül reported that ERC funding financially supports a large proportion of her research time, which she sees as essential to managing a large-scale project like HONORLOGIC.

"In a climate where demands on us academics are constantly increasing, at costs including reduced time for our dream research, ERC is one of the few funds in Europe that helps researchers acquire resources (most importantly time) to engage in high-risk, high-gain projects," she said.

ERC Funding Types

Established by the European Commission—the Executive Branch of the European Union—and its Horizon 2020 funding plan, the ERC provides funding through five main types of grant. Their more traditional research project grants offer values of up to €2.5 million and include:

- Starting Grants, available to researchers with 2–7 years of experience since completing their PhD

- Consolidator Grants, for researchers with 7–12 years of experience

- Advanced Grants, for researchers who have shown significant research achievement and leadership over the last 10 years.

The ERC also awards Synergy Grants, which enable groups of scientists to work together, bringing different skills to a research project, and Proof of Concept Grants, which allow researchers to turn their research into commercial or socially valuable products.

For more information on ERC and its funding mechanisms, visit the European Research Councilwebsite or the ERC page of the APS website.