Project Title: Using Physiological measures to examine the strength and reliability of religious intergroup attitudes

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Background to the project:
Researchers studying ethnic prejudice have postulated that it is not as simple as an overtly negative reaction to, or opinion of, a different societal group. Instead they have suggested that it must be split into two categories: Implicit (subtle) and Explicit (overt) prejudice (Pettigrew and Meertens' 1995). Dovidio, Kawakami & Gaertner (2002) postulate that explicit measures are useful at predicting considered behaviours, while implicit measures are essential for the prediction of spontaneous behaviours. An alternative approach which has gained popularity in social psychology is the use of physiological measures more traditionally associated with experimental and biopsychology. For example Galvanic Skin Response (GSR) has long been established as an effective means to test physiological arousal and anxiety. Also eye tracking methodology has been used to investigate visual attention to anxiety provoking cues. Guglielmi (1999) believes that there is value in using physiological probes to examine peoples responses to target stimuli, in our case it would be their physiological responses to members of an outgroup. The aim of this Phd would be to explore physiological methodologies that could be combined with more traditional measures of prejudice within the Northern Ireland context.

Methods to be used:
The research will combine Implicit, Explicit and Physiological measures to examine inter-group attitudes. The scales to be used are derived from: the intergroup anxiety scale, the thermometer scale of attitudes, the social dominance orientation scale 6 (SD06) and a series of items designed to measure both quantity and quality of intergroup contact. Implicit measures will be collected through the use of an implicit associations test (IAT). The physiological data will be recorded by the NeXus 10 and the Biopac. These are units designed to monitor and feedback physiological parameters. Eye tracking equipment will be used to examine visual attention to anxiety provoking cues.

Objectives of the Research:
The objective of this study is to design and implement a series of experiments that combine Implicit, Explicit and Physiological measures to examine the strength and reliability of inter-group attitudes, specifically in relation to the differing religious traditions in Northern Ireland.

Skills required of applicant:
Training will be offered in physiological measurement techniques, the position would suit a psychologist with an interest in social psychology or the application of experimental psychology to social psychological functioning.

References: