

I am currently an existential psychotherapist and for professional and personal reasons, I am ready to pursue a career in academia. My application for this PhD is one step towards that goal. As demonstrated below, I have always had academic interests alongside my day jobs; research has remained an important part of my life and it feels like now is the right time to focus on a project of my own.

I have 16 years of work experience across three main areas. With hindsight, the parts that I have enjoyed most about each of them have led me to this point.

When I was 19, I met a lecturer from the University of Oxford who was looking for someone to help out on his psychology of religion research team. I ended up becoming an active part of the team, including going on research trips, analysing data and contributing to papers. We went on pilgrimages alongside groups of Catholics and groups of Pagans, discussing their experiences of being in sacred spaces and looking at the similarities and differences between them. Along the way, we met a large number of people who identified as atheist or agnostic, and we ended up adding a strand to our research which looked at some of the reasons why non-religious people are being drawn to traditionally spiritual walking routes (Farias et al., 2019). Being part of this project gave me a strong academic research grounding and an understanding of how to balance the requirements of academic study with the real-world interests of funding bodies. I have been engaged with academic research in one way or another since then.

Alongside the Oxford project I worked as a copywriter, proofreader and translator for a variety of clients outside of the academy. In addition to a strong theoretical and philosophical interest, therefore, I have experience of the writing process and especially the need for timely and accessible written communication. Having spent the majority of my adult life working for myself, I am well-versed in project and time management.

My current work as an existential psychotherapist involves working phenomenologically with clients. What drew me to this modality in the first place was its strong grounding in existential philosophy, particularly Heidegger and Kierkegaard. I also find that my work as a therapist influences my philosophical writing. Spending time with clients, exploring what it means to be them, enriches my appreciation for the complexity of subjective experience and provides important additional perspectives on being human.

To date, I have one published article in a peer reviewed journal (Andekalithan, 2022); I have submitted another to *Feminism and Psychology*, which is under review; and I am currently working on a third on the embodied experience of subjectivity in disability.

My first paper was based on a piece of work from the second year of my psychotherapy MA, in which I phenomenologically explored my relationship with eyeliner (Andekalithan, 2022). During a period of illness that year I found myself unable to wear my usual style of eyeliner, and I decided to use this experience to explore Sartrean and Kierkegaardian views of the self, outlining how sometimes illness can throw up a self-alienation which simultaneously makes us more and less aware of ourselves as embodied subjects. The paper was published in *Existential Analysis* in 2022.

My final piece for my MA was a precursor to my proposed PhD project: a phenomenological exploration of my experience of miscarriage, with reference to Heidegger's concept of Being-towards-death. I have recently submitted this to *Feminism and Psychology* (currently under review).

I am now completing my psychotherapy studies with a Post-Graduate Certificate in Existential Psychotherapy. My main piece of writing for this year has the working title 'I'd give my left arm: Disability as intrasubjective negotiation' and will explore similar themes to my eyeliner paper, specifically how living with an ongoing health problem entails a constant process of negotiation with myself, which is simultaneously deeply introspective and self-alienating.

The specific PhD topic I am proposing, which has developed from some of this work, continues to look at the question of subjectivity in pregnancy and what this can tell us about Dasein. This will build on my own personal and professional experience. I am hopeful that a book contract might be developed alongside my PhD so that it can be published thereafter.

I have been disabled all my life, although in recent years my disability has become increasingly visible to others. Although my state of health is not without its challenges, I find myself grateful for these, because

they allow me to engage with embodied phenomenology in a way that might have been less immediately accessible to me had I not been so obviously in constant negotiation with my body. I tend to view personal challenges as an opportunity to learn, and particularly to engage with existential questions around embodiment, health, and what it means to be a person.

I have considered where to study very carefully. I have chosen Southampton because I believe the university would fit with both my project and my general ethos. I like, for example, that there are so many different research centres with which to engage; my project spans multiple areas of philosophy and also has potential links with medicine and psychology, so it feels important to be at a university where interdisciplinary collaboration is particularly strong.

For example, I feel that engaging with initiatives such as the Centre for Research on Self & Identity and the Developmental Biology group will enrich the project and allow me to gain a broader understanding of the themes I am exploring. Given the wide-ranging nature of Southampton's course offerings I am also keen to explore the library which I imagine will provide access to a plethora of useful resources for my project.

The department itself attracts me due to its high quality of research nationally and internationally. I am enthusiastic about doing my doctoral studies where there are so many overlapping and shared intellectual interests. I am also keen to work in a department which openly encourages dialogue between students through its focused research seminars; this is something I have hugely benefited from during my MA and I look forward to continuing to engaging in dialogue with my peers as my career progresses.

During my MA I learned of Professor Woollard's (2020; 2022) work on the phenomenology of pregnancy and felt that we would be a good fit, not only for the specific project I am proposing but also because of our overlapping academic interests more widely. Within the department I am keen to explore other options for discussion as well. For example, Professor McManus' work on Heidegger (2017) and being-a-whole (2016) feels like it would be relevant to my project; and Doctor Browning's work on subjectivity (2023) and sentience (Browning & Birch, 2022; Browning & Veit, 2022) in non-human animals could help to inform the part of my project which focuses on the necessity of consciousness for subjectivity.

It would mean a great deal to me to be admitted onto the PhD. I have fought hard to get to where I am today and I am fully committed to completing the work on time and to a high standard. I am the first in my family to have gone to university and grew up in a religious cult in which education was strongly discouraged. My ethnic background (Roma) is also underrepresented at university level. My application is perhaps a little unorthodox due to my lack of a philosophy undergraduate degree, but I am hopeful that I might be considered on the strength of my academic and professional history. I fully anticipate applying for lectureships, postdoctoral and early career fellowships following the doctoral period of study to pursue a career in academia. In short, I would greatly welcome the opportunity to continue my academic journey at Southampton.