

Dr. Clare Cassidy (1968-2008)

To inexpressible grief Dr. Clare Cassidy died on the 16th September 2008. Clare was awarded a First Class Honours degree in Psychology in 1993 by Queens University Belfast. Quietly determined, her thoroughness and attention to detail brought further academic success. Dr. Cassidy completed her PhD (QUB) in 1998. Her thesis, a longitudinal analysis of identity change in those moving from segregated schools in Northern Ireland to desegregated University settings was one of very few longitudinal studies examining naturally occurring changes along a number of identity dimensions across a range of identities. As well as contributing to the understanding of socio-political identity change in Northern Ireland, this research made a major contribution to models of long-term identity change when it demonstrated that it is possible to feel a sense of identity which is enduring even when major life transitions occur. At the same time, variability across identities indicated the importance of taking account of identity categories in any analysis of identity change.

Subsequent to her PhD, Dr. Cassidy moved to post-doctoral positions in Psychology at Lancaster and then Strathclyde. In both departments Dr. Cassidy inspired both respect and affection. Her contributions were always thoughtful and more often than not thought provoking. Her post-doctoral work also resulted in theoretically insightful and informative publications. Dr. Cassidy took up a permanent academic post in Psychology at St. Andrews in 2003. While there, she developed research examining the impact of stereotypes on the elderly and of collective participation on well-being. She won large grants in both areas. Dr. Cassidy examined the way that minorities experience prejudice. For instance, while there is much work on stereotypes of the elderly, she considered how old people are affected by stereotypes. Both in the content, the professionalism, and in the spirit of her work, Dr. Cassidy represented the very best of social psychology: a psychology committed not only to understanding human social behaviour but to changing things for the better. She was at the forefront of those trying to connect social psychology—to the more general analysis of physical and mental well-being. Her death is an incredible loss to the discipline.

Indicative of her career long compassion for others, during her time as a student Clare was a faithful volunteer for the Nightline student counselling service. Clare was clever, warm, principled and particular. Over several years, she contributed to teaching workshops in India. Cultural differences dissolved in the face of the obvious care that Clare had for students. Clare fundamentally cared about others—especially the more vulnerable, she endeavoured to look at the world through their eyes. Such a combination of intellectual clarity and personal connection made Clare an extraordinary teacher. She had a close bond to her students. She treated them with respect and was uncommonly generous with her time.

Despite her achievements and obvious abilities, Clare was always self-effacing. Time in her presence, her friendship, her loyalty, instilled confidence. She made life more interesting, savouring the experiences life had to offer. She found humour in a situation and her quick wit was wonderfully entertaining. Those of us, who were lucky enough to have known her, were privileged.

A memorial fund has been set up under the auspices of ISPP to support disadvantaged students, particularly those from the developing world, interested in pursuing research with a social change agenda. If you wish to make a contribution please contact ISPP, Steve Reicher at sdr@st-andrews.ac.uk or me, Orla Muldoon at orla.muldoon@ul.ie

—Professor Orla Muldoon
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