Mike Best awarded prestigious Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship

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By Queen’s Psychology
Photo by Eric Brousseau

Queen’s Psychology PhD student Mike Best has been awarded the prestigious Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship for his study “Social Exclusion of Individuals with Psychosis: Predictors and Neurobiological Consequences.”

“I feel incredibly honoured to have received the Vanier Scholarship. With the support of this award I will have more freedom to focus on conducting my research examining the social exclusion of people with psychosis and disseminating the results to a broader audience.” Mike said. “Social exclusion can be devastating for people with psychosis and it is nice to see the importance of this issue being recognized by prominent funding agencies. With the support of this award I can continue to expand my research to a larger scale to help reduce the exclusion that people with psychosis face.”

Mike completed his Master’s and is currently in the second year of his PhD under the supervision of Dr. Christopher Bowie. Mike credits Dr. Bowie for supporting and inspiring him along the way. “Since the second year of my Bachelor’s degree, Chris has been an integral mentor for me to have.” said Mike. “He inspired me to pursue a doctorate in clinical psychology and has supported me in pursuing novel lines of inquiry. His support and guidance have been essential to my development as a researcher.”

Mike’s current research uses electroencephalography (EEG) to examine the neurophysiological responses of people with psychosis to experiences of inclusion and exclusion. People with psychosis face social exclusion regularly in their everyday lives and this may impact their neurophysiological response to exclusion, resulting in hypersensitivity to exclusionary experiences. This hypersensitivity may then result in withdrawal from daily activities, exacerbated symptoms, and result in poorer community functioning. Similarly, being over-included may also place undue stress on individuals with psychosis and lead to similar outcomes as being excluded. Understanding the effects that exclusion and inclusion have on people with schizophrenia at the neurophysiological level is an important step to increasing people’s resilience and helping people achieve functional recovery.
“My ultimate goal is to develop a line of research investigating the interaction between psychosocial factors and neurophysiology and how these factors impact community functioning for people with psychosis. Receiving an award as competitive as the Vanier scholarship provides a solid foundation upon which to build this line of inquiry and develop my career in psychosis research.”

The Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarships program is valued at $50,000 per year for three years and is administered by Canada's three research granting agencies (the Canadian Institutes for Health Research, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada). The Vanier CGS program aims to attract and retain world-class doctoral students by supporting students who demonstrate both leadership skills and a high standard of scholarly achievement in graduate studies in the natural sciences and engineering, social sciences and humanities, or health sciences. Both Canadian and international students are eligible to be nominated for a Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship.

For more details, please visit the Vanier CGS website.