

APU has nearly 400 students pursuing degrees in seven doctoral programs. The following are summaries of just a few of these students' dissertation research.



May 2011

Many New Therapists Unprepared to Integrate Spirituality with Therapy; Workbook Created to Help

TITLE:

A Clinician's Manual for Religious and Spiritual Integration: A Guide to Therapeutic Implementation

by Lori N. Lacy, Psy.D.

Religion or spirituality is a significant part of American life. Roughly 78 percent of American adults identify themselves as Christian, and nearly five percent more identify themselves by some other major religion, according to an extensive 2007 survey by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. Eighty-two percent of the more than 35,000 interviewed reported that religion was important in their lives with 56 percent indicating that it was very important.

But whether religious or not, tens of millions of Americans require mental health help each year. And just like cultural and gender issues, spirituality can be a critical aspect of a patient's healing process.

However, according to research done by Lori Lacy (Psy.D., 2011), many new clinical psychologists are "unprepared to address issues of religion and spirituality in therapy with their clients." At the same time, she identified many researchers who found that "integrating spirituality and religion into the therapy process has been shown to be therapeutic and extremely useful to promote mental healing and emotional health during treatment."

Realizing that "there is a significant deficit in counseling training experiences when working with issues of spirituality," Lacy developed a workbook as a "beginning guide" to help clinicians "establish awareness, understanding, and competence in this area."

Lacy submitted the manual to several psychology experts for their review and critique, to help her refine it so that in the end, these reviewers noted that "the workbook is very understandable, accessible, and organized," creating a useful tool for "the education and training of clinicians and clinicians-in-training."

Lacy is completing her internship with Western Youth Services. She has presented her research and manual at several conferences already and plans to prepare a workshop covering the integration of spirituality with the therapeutic process.

Putting the Worship Back in the Worship Service Means Changing the Worshiper, Not Changing the Service

TITLE:

Whole Life Worship: An Integrative Approach to Spiritual Formation through an Expanded Understanding of Worship

by Douglas M. Lee, D.Min.

How do you measure worship at your church? Upbeat songs? Contemporary instruments, modern music? Energy and enthusiasm? Cultural relevance?

Many churches today have opted for Sunday services that are “seeker sensitive.” Those among the unchurched who are seeking God can’t relate to traditional liturgies and worship hymns. So “[b]y utilizing culturally relevant music (rock, jazz, contemporary), thought-provoking dramas, state-of-the-art technology, and contextually practical sermons, they not only attract unevangelized people to church; they also help Christians connect with God through a worship style to which they can relate,” Lee wrote.

But the danger, he warned, is that “cultural relevancy caters to consumerism, a close cousin to narcissism. In their attempts to make worship understandable to people, church leaders can find themselves viewing their congregations or potential congregations as customers they need to satisfy.”

Worshippers who only want a worship service that makes them feel good will not gain the spiritual maturity true worship is meant to provide.

In fact, neither seeker sensitive contemporary worship nor the older, more traditional forms of worship will help mature believers, Lee states.

“Today many Christians limit worship to what happens in a corporate worship service or to the singing of songs to God,” commented Lee. “The Bible saw worship as both an attitude of reverence toward God and the action of living the entirety of life for God and with God in service, what I call ‘Whole Life Worship.’”

Usually a church will try to fix this “crisis of worship,” Lee argues, by changing the worship service.

But the problem is the worshiper, not the worship service. “Helping people become ‘whole life worshippers’ involves taking spiritual disciplines that most are familiar with (Quiet Time, trying to live out our faith, small group community, and corporate worship service) and tweaking them towards a worship relationship with God that is transforming and powerful,” Lee explained.

As believers move from worshipping God as an isolated act in church service to worshipping God with their lives, they are transformed. This leads to their “[becoming] agents of God’s love and power to others, resulting in evangelism, healing, and physical and social needs being met in Jesus’ name.”

Lee is an associate pastor of worship at Community Baptist Church in Rancho Cucamonga. He is preparing a book proposal on Whole Life Worship and he and his senior pastor are planning to use his material for a church campaign in Whole Life Worship.

A Way to Feel Free and Whole: Study Shows Disabled Children Benefit in Several Ways from Water Activity

TITLE:

Professional Specialists’ Perception of the Benefits of Water Activity for Children with Disabilities
by Patricia Lee Schellbach, Ed.D.

She drew her inspiration for her dissertation study from John, now a young man, profoundly disabled, who had benefited in his early years by water activities that helped him breathe better, move better, learn more, socialize more, and just simply have some fun – and feel more *normal*.

“I saw John’s person, his personality, his family, and his surroundings in front of me, in my mind’s eye, while I did this research project,” commented Patty Schellbach (Ed.D., 2011). The facility that provided John with free water therapy had closed, she explained, but the family had seen the benefits, and so they took him to another facility 60 miles away three times a week - and paid for it themselves.

Schellbach wanted to research whether water activities were, in fact, of benefit to other disabled children, and to what degree. So she decided to “investigate the perceptions of 20 professional specialists who work with disabled children in the water about the intended benefits or outcomes of various water activities for [disabled] children.”

Those she interviewed included a range of specialists from water therapists to teacher’s assistants. She said she hoped to gain more information about “the effects of various water activities on these children’s affect, behavior, activity level, compliance with adults, focus on academic learning, communication efforts, and social interactions.”

But she found more than an affirmation of these benefits; she found a devoted advocacy: “The true stories that these 20 participants shared were not dry or sterile, but were clothed with the eyes of observation, experience, compassion, care, wisdom and insight...Their individual stories made up a collective story: true, honest, powerful, and convincing of the benefits of water activity.”

Water is a unique medium, she explained. It is less restrictive than land, is physically therapeutic in a number of ways, and can be psychologically liberating, enhancing socialization and bonding.

However, she cautioned, water therapy can be

dangerous for some and counter-productive for others. “We need to advocate for water activity when it is the right thing to do. We also need to advocate for caution and prohibition when it is the wrong thing to do.”

More research is needed, too, she said, in terms of quantitatively measuring the benefits of water activity.

Schellbach is a school psychologist. She hopes to publish the results of her dissertation study.

Who’s Responsible? Schools Can Teach Personal Responsibility to Teens Even When Mom and Dad Don’t

TITLE:

Adolescent Perceptions of the Meaning and Development of Personal Responsibility: A Phenomenological Study

by Eric John Schessler, Ed.D.

Why do some students do their homework and take responsibility for their actions and others exhibit little or no personal responsibility at all? This question intrigued Eric Schessler (Ed.D., 2011) almost from the time he began his teaching career.

More importantly, Schessler wanted to know, how can teachers and schools help their students develop personal responsibility?

Here in California, by state law, schools have a legal obligation to provide character education, Schessler explained, and the federal government as well invests in student character development through U.S. Department of Education grants.

To uncover data on how students thought about personal responsibility, Schessler interviewed 19 “highly responsible” high school juniors and seniors about “what they believe about personal responsibility in self-managing their behavior and what they believe schools can do to impact this.” In addition, 105 juniors and seniors at the same high school were surveyed on the topic.

Perhaps not surprisingly, those interviewed said that their parents and families were the most responsible for their developing a sense of responsibility.

Conversely, Schessler said, his research also revealed that “many young people do not have parents who expect them to be responsible.” Thus,

he suggests that part of the solution to schools providing more character education is to partner more with parents.

“Many parents...are well aware of their impact on personal responsibility. Sadly, however, many other parents do not seem to understand their role in developing this trait; and it would benefit schools to spend some time conveying the strategies identified by the participants in this study to parents.”

More importantly, his study showed that “the vast majority of students interviewed...reported that teachers and school programs can help teenagers develop a sense of personal responsibility. The results are applicable to parents, to schools, and to school administrators.”

Currently, Schessler teaches at a Rialto, CA, high school. He wants to continue researching this topic, to hear more “student voices” on what teachers and schools are doing that helps them develop personal responsibility - and from that data, strategize more effective ways for schools to help students develop personal responsibility.

As his own experiences as a teacher proved, “a teacher addressing character traits in the classroom can have an effect, and this effect can be seen at home even when the parents have not changed their practices. Classroom teachers can, in fact, influence character development.”

Despite Better Treatments, Death Rate from Heart Failure Remains High; Study Identifies Factors that Influence Successful Self-care

TITLE:

A Model Predicting Self-care among Patients with Heart Failure

by Khaled M. Alomari, Ph.D. in Nursing

More than five million Americans are living with heart failure and the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute estimates that one in five of those over 40 will develop this debilitating and complex cardiovascular disorder. After diagnosis, 50 percent will die within eight years, despite numerous advances in treatment and care.

Within the care and management guidelines from both the American College of Cardiology and the American Heart Association, “self-care is advocated as a promising strategy of improving the current poor outcomes of heart failure management,”

explained Khaled Alomari (Ph.D. in Nursing, 2011). “A growing body of evidence suggests that heart failure self-care is crucial for better heart failure prognosis.”

But “self-care is a complex process influenced by numerous factors,” he wrote. “Understanding the influences of these factors...is imperative to promoting self-practice.”

Alomari, whose three grandparents all died from heart failure, surveyed 391 heart failure patients “to identify and predict factors influencing self-care.”

Some factors are unchangeable. For example, younger patients do better than older patients. Factors that can be altered are the support received from family members and healthcare providers and the patient’s own sense of resilience.

Identifying which factors help and which ones hinder an individual patient can help improve the practice of self-care and “should enhance the outcomes of heart failure treatment,” concluded Alomari.

A full time professor at APU’s San Bernardino Regional Center, Alomari plans to publish the results of his dissertation study. “Nurse clinicians and practitioners can use the findings in this study to tailor specific self-care programs based on a patient’s conditioning factors. These programs can maximize the benefits of self-care and therefore improve heart failure outcomes.”

Each Year More Than 300 College Presidents Are New on the Job; Study Asks, What Do They Need to Be Prepared Today?

TITLE:

The Preparation and Challenges of a New College or University President

by E. Wayne Scott, Ed.D. in Higher Education

There are more than 4,300 colleges and universities in the United States. Each year, more than 300 will have to hire a new president; thus, in a decade, perhaps more than half of the nation’s top educational leaders will be relatively new on the job.

“Assuming that the average president serves seven years...there would be 6,528 persons serving as college and university presidents this decade,” wrote E. Wayne Scott (Ed.D. in Higher Education, 2011). “This intensifies the need for qualified persons to serve as leaders of these institutions of higher learning.”

When a new president comes on board, no matter how positive the circumstances, there is stress for everyone involved. “The number of constituents that a college or university president must manage can be overwhelming,” he explained. These include the trustees, the students, their parents, the alumni, donors, the community at large, faculty, staff, and a myriad of special interest groups.

At the same time, the issues the new president must take on immediately are often large, numerous, and complex, while attitudes can be volatile. New presidents represent change, but “change is not quickly embraced in most higher education institutions and can cause great problems if not handled correctly...the expectation for action, decision, and vision is immediate. Constituents expect the new president to have new answers for old problems.”

Because the challenges are uniquely fresh to new presidents, Scott studied the perceptions of nine new college presidents, asking them to identify their most significant challenges, what in their careers best prepared them for their new role, and what they believe would best prepare today’s higher education leaders to assume the presidency.

Scott’s overall finding from these nine new college presidents is that “going into the role with as much information as possible can translate into success for the new president.”

“New presidents should ask as many questions as possible to understand the culture of their potential institution.” Ideally, this should include spending time being mentored by a current president.

New presidents also should have as much academic experience as possible, both in teaching and administration, and understand risk and conflict management.

It is also critical that the president understand the finances of the institution and be a capable fundraiser.

On the other end, Scott recommends that colleges and institutions have a transition plan when hiring a new president. “The biggest surprise was the fact that few schools have a transition plan in place when bringing in a new president. The pressure of the role seems to indicate that a transition plan would make for a smoother transition.”

Currently vice president for student services at Freed-Hardeman University in Henderson, TN, Scott plans to continue his research in this area.

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