

Dissertation Abstracts

Congratulations and best wishes to Kimberly Adams, Margaret Arnd-Caddigan, Gina Bogan, Dan Grohens, Kay Levin, and Marie Opatrny. The dissertation topics continue to represent the diversity of interests and the commitment of clinical practice of our Ph.D. students. Dissertations are available on the 8th floor of Loyola's Lewis Library, 25 E. Pearson.

Influences of Childhood/Adolescence Paternal Relationships on African American Women's Expectation and Needs for Adult Emotional (Heterosexual) Intimacy

Kimberly Rene Adams, Ph.D.

This study examined the influence of childhood/adolescence father/daughter relationships on African American women's expectations and needs for adult emotional (heterosexual) intimate relationships. A qualitative case study research method was used as the framework for this study. Sixteen African American women completed qualitative survey questionnaires, providing rich data on their relationships with their fathers. Four major themes emerged from this study: (a) endless search for lost father; (b) building defense mechanisms against intimacy; (c) reframing negative childhood/adolescent father/daughter experiences and processing these experiences to serve functional purposes in women's lives; and (d) experiencing emotionally healthy, nurturing childhood/adolescence father/daughter relationships while maintaining healthy, satisfying adult emotional (heterosexual) intimacy.

What was learned from this study included that a father's presence during childhood/adolescence does not guarantee outcomes for a woman's adult emotional (heterosexual) intimacy. Social workers can benefit from this research by understanding that some assumptions from family research literature are not supported by this study. Additional research can extend findings of this multiple case study to a larger group of women, and incorporate a broader continuum in terms of age, socioeconomic status, educational level, and geographic location.

Tell Me Where it Hurts: An Exploratory Study of Abuse, Somatoform Disorder, and the Elaboration of Meaning

Margaret Arnd-Caddigan, Ph.D.

Tell Me Where it Hurts . . . is a qualitative study in which eight adult female survivors of childhood abuse who have a somatoform disorder discussed their experiences of abuse and their experiences around the issue of their somatic symptoms. The research question was whether or not significant deficits in meaning attached to their abuse and/or somatic symptoms would be apparent. Specifically, the researcher was looking for deficits in meaning on the interpersonal, individual, and/or cultural levels.

While there was some evidence of deficits in meaning on the interpersonal and individual levels for both abuse and somatic symptoms, conflicts in meaning between levels arose as the more prominent phenomenon. Of perhaps even greater interest is the degree to which conflicts in meaning elaborated around the issue of somatic symptoms mirrored the conflicts in meaning elaborated in relation to the subjects' abuse. This finding has implications for the treatment of adult survivors of abuse who have a somatoform disorder.

Snips and Snails and Puppy Dog Tails: An Exploration Into the Factors Impacting the Awareness of Male Sexual Victimization

Gina Yellin Bogan, Ph.D.

Although research studies vary on the prevalence of the victimization of men, various research studies all report considerable numbers of men who have been victims of sexual aggression. Young men in high school and college are the group most at risk for being sexually assaulted outside of a prison system (Isely, 1998). This study was designed to explore whether public high school social workers are aware of male student victims of sexual aggression, and if the social worker feels confident that they can meet these students' therapeutic needs. Respondents' age, gender, race/ethnicity, experience, and personal knowledge of victims were examined to see if they were related to awareness level, confidence in working with victims, and assessment practices when working with male students. Quantitative methodology using a research survey design was used. The research sample consisted of all public high school social workers in Illinois. The results of the research indicated that the main factor in awareness of sexual victimization is the number of male victims the social worker has worked with. Work with male victims increases awareness of male victimization and female victimization; however, work with female victims does not increase awareness of male victimization. Respondents were more confident working with female than male victims and more likely to ask females than males about sexual victimization during an assessment.

Involuntary Clients in Groups: An Examination of Factors that Influence Engagement

Kay Goler Levin, Ph.D.

This exploratory case study examined the factors which influence the engagement of involuntary clients in groups from the perspectives of group leaders, as well as group members. This study introduced the practice wisdom of seasoned group leaders, and provided amplification of the voice of an often marginalized population - individuals involuntarily mandated into group treatment. The methodology used in this study involved the triangulation of three data points in order to understand the engagement process: the individual group leader's perception of the actual engagement of the group members, the group member's perception of the factors which fostered his/her engagement with the group, and an objective measure, the Group Engagement Measure (Macgowan, 1997).

This study applied individual relational theories to understand the research question. These theories include: affect attunement (Stern, 1985), the holding environment (Winnicott, 1965), and the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Results indicate that there existed a relationship between the perceptions of both group leaders and group members. There was a concordance between group leaders' purposeful behaviors in group, and group members' attribution of meaning to those behaviors.

Non-Standard Dialectical Behavior Therapy: Effects on Hospital Measures of Symptom Severity

Daniel Grohens, Ph.D.

This study investigates the effects of extensions of the standard model of Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) under three conditions (Waves) of its application within a public psychiatric hospital. As part of a State Department of Mental Health initiative, select State Hospitals and community clinics were trained in DBT and programs were developed at these sites. This study examines the relative effectiveness of DBT for hospitalized borderline patients on hospital measures of symptom severity: Total Admissions, Total Days of Stay, Days of Seclusion and Restraint, comparisons of Self Injury, and a combined measure of Observational Intensity. The Waves include varying treatment components of DBT and treatment-as-usual. It was hypothesized that patients with more treatment components of DBT would have better outcomes than would patients with less. The aim of the study was to measure the effectiveness of treatments for this clinically challenging patient group, especially the use of an extension of a standard model in a “real world,” State Hospital application.

Results did not significantly differ from the treatment-as-usual groups. Various findings of significant effect were attenuated by failure to identify significant variances among groups in post hoc analyses for unequal groups. Results tended to indicate the inverse of the hypotheses for Total Admissions and Total Days of Stay, such that the Waves with more DBT had worse or equivalent but not better outcomes. Extensions of DBT for inpatient treatment may require more of the complex of elements of the standard version if they are to be significantly better than other inpatient treatments-as-usual for patients with borderline personality disorder. The research reports the beneficial influence of the DBT model on the clinical thinking among staff and upon therapeutic communications with patients with BPD. Both staff and patients appreciated having the set of DBT concepts and skills with which to engage in the work of therapy. Having commonly understood clinical tools and skills to use, teach, reference and practice, enriched the clinical quality of treatment.

Use of Identity Complexity and Evaluative Narrative Endpoints to Understand the Meaning Systems of Individuals Receiving Atypical Neuroleptic Medication for Schizophrenia

Marie Opatrny, Ph.D.

Individuals receiving atypical neuroleptic medication for schizophrenia often experience a reduction in negative symptoms. This qualitative study explored the needs of this rapidly growing population through a framework of Identity Complexity and evaluative narrative endpoints. Such a framework provides flexibility for understanding individual needs, and considers the meaning of actions within the context of a situation and the individual’s environment. It is also consistent with the perspective of personal identity as a continual, evolving process. Information contained in narrative responses to the researcher’s open-ended questions revealed the presence of positive indicators for identity complexity in many of the interviews. A number of the individuals interviewed were able to create coherent narratives, however, they often experienced difficulty maintaining the narrative cohesion. Research findings are discussed, and the use of Identity Complexity and narrative evaluations for psychotherapeutic interventions with individuals receiving atypical neuroleptic medications are examined. Recommendations for possible future studies with additional populations are suggested.