

COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY NEWSLETTER

Department of Psychology & Counseling

In This Issue

Student Research Spotlight

In this issue, the research spotlight shines bright on Ph.D. graduate students Allen Thomas, Cory Cobb, and Nick Mitrani! Read on to learn about each of their research interests and their unique insights into the research process!

UCA Takes SWPA by Storm

The UCA Psychology & Counseling Department was well represented at the Southwestern Psychological Association Spring research conference this year! There was a ton of involvement in this year's conference from both the undergraduate and graduate programs. Our very own Tiffany Wierzbicki and Danielle Umland were both finalists in the Graduate Research Competition. Tiffany also won a Psi Chi Regional Research award. Congrats to both Tiffany and Danielle!!



Student Research Spotlight

This issue of the Counseling Psychology Research Newsletter puts three students in our doctoral program front and center! Allen Thomas, Cory Cobb, and Nick Mitrani were each asked questions about their research interests and each offered unique perspectives of the research process. This was not only a great opportunity to learn more about each students' research interests, but also a wonderful opportunity to highlight the variety and diverse range of research areas within our program. Read on to see what Allen, Cory, and Nick had to say!





Allen Thomas, M.S.

Allen Thomas is in his 5th year in the doctoral Counseling Psychology program who hopes to make a great impact in the field as a Counseling Psychologist:

"I hope to essentially be a Counseling Psychology Maverick: I want my career to be a mix of academics, research, clinical work, and consultation. I want to continue to do studies like this and expand them, but also inspire future generations of psychologists to do work in this area and others that aren't covered in the current body of literature. One day, I hope to help take a group of students to present their nerdy psychological interests at major conventions like San Diego Comic-Con and New York Comic-Con, just as I have had the wonderful opportunity to do over the past three years."

What is the focus of your research?

My most recent project is related to LGBTQ people and comic books. I am conducting a qualitative study assessing what people in this population find therapeutic about comic books. I want to use it to inform my practice in the future, but also develop the groundwork for using comics in therapy, particularly with marginalized populations.

How is your research related to Counseling Psychology?

This research has bearing on the tools we use in therapy. Comic books are en vogue (again) due to blockbuster comic book films, but they have provided value for many years and for many people. This will help us bridge the gap in treatment for LGBTQ people (who often have high rates of help-seeking but issues regarding counselor competence), as well as infuse a creative medium in therapy.

How did you first get involved/interested in research in the area?

I've been doing comics-related research throughout the program with Mara Wood (School Psychology doctoral student). Much of our research has focused on how representation is affected by reader and character demographics, which is the foundation of our hope to spread awareness of these issues in comics and create a message to expand diversity within them. From there, I created this study to be used in a similar vein by providing narratives supporting how comic books help our queer clients.

What are your hopes for the outcomes of your research/what are the broader implications of your research?

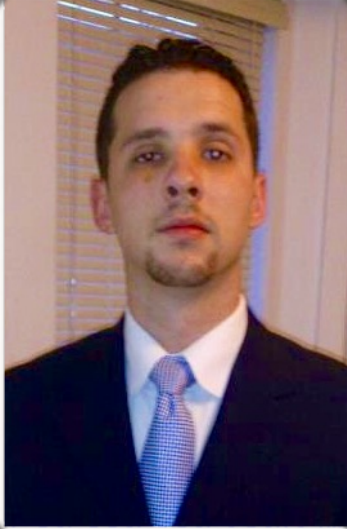
I want this research to spread and help to enhance competence and treatment for LGBTQ clients, but also to expand our knowledge on using materials in therapy. Comics have been around for over 75 years and they can be a rich way to connect with clients. The implications of my research have bearing not only on therapy, but media in general, and may provide a way to say, "Comics need to better reflect the totality of people, rather than just White, heterosexual, cisgender, able-bodied, etc. individuals."

How do you believe your research impacts society as a whole?

I think this research will show people that queer people actually read comics, first and foremost. Then it will help society step away from the notion that comics are only for kids and have no other value beyond entertainment.

What advice would you give to someone interested in pursuing research in the same area as you?

Definitely don't be afraid to do the research. Even if professors don't do this exact type of research, they are often supportive of innovative studies. Also, get hooked up with people who do research like this (such as Dr. Josue Cardona of Geek Therapy, Dr. Patrick O'Connor of Comicspedia, and Henderson professor and author of Batman and Psychology Dr. Travis Langley). Search for organizations or groups that focus on your research and network with them. These people are often supportive and willing to offer suggestions, help, and potentially research opportunities.



Cory Cobb

Though Cory is only in his 1st year of the doctoral program, he is no stranger to research. He has research in all phases of publication and shows no signs of slowing down! Cory's publication and other research articles include:

Published: Structure of the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support. (Hispanic Journal of the Behavioral Sciences).

Revise and Resubmit: Coping Styles and Depression among Undocumented Hispanic Immigrants (Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health).

Under Review: Acculturation/Enculturation, Discrimination, and Depression among Undocumented Hispanic Immigrants (Journal of Intercultural Relations).

What is the focus of your research?

My research interests include cultural disparities among ethnic minorities (especially Hispanic populations), acculturation/enculturation, and coping.

How is your research related to Counseling Psychology?

The country is becoming more diverse each year. With such an influx of diversity in the US, a better understanding of ethnic subgroups is necessary to provide both culture-specific interventions and the highest quality counseling possible.

How did you first get involved/interested in research in the area?

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of my research is the opportunity to interact with diverse communities. Growing up, I spent much time around Hispanic populations, especially undocumented Hispanics. I watched first-hand how this population faced unique acculturative stressors, and yet, a dearth of literature exists on how they might be affected psychologically. While it is difficult to pinpoint any specific moment that led me to this concentration, such experiences certainly had an impact on my decision.

What are your hopes for the outcomes of your research/what are the broader implications of your research?

Overall, I hope that my research will provide a foundational framework by which other research can build on. Conceptualization of this population's unique experiences and how such experiences affect their mental health will have implications for both practitioners in the field and legislators in office.

How do you believe your research impacts society as a whole?

I do not yet know how my research will affect society as a whole. However, I do think it will provide a framework for legislation regarding Hispanic immigrant populations and foundation for clinicians to develop and administer appropriate mental health services.

What advice would you give to someone interested in pursuing research in the same area as you?

Be proactive. Most of the opportunities afforded me came from a proactive pursuit of research in the field. Talking to professors, networking with other experts, and developing a strong willingness to do the work are all good starting points. Begin with a research focus, read the literature, develop an idea, go collect data, write the paper, and send it out. It takes work!



Nick Mitrani, M.S.

Nick, a 4th year student in our program, always brings an interesting perspective to the table! He has a knack for walking the fine line of idealism and realism. When asked about his goals as a future psychologist, Nick stated:

"Ideally, [I would like] to create the 5th wave of psychology. Realistically, [I want] to find a balance in my work where I can counsel, assess, consult with other professionals to provide better care for individuals and families, and to conduct research....and to pay off my student loans in a reasonable time."

What is the focus of your research?

To make money and/or to advance human knowledge and to make someone's life better. Seriously, its to look at how important a child's direct and indirect victimization history impacts their development, strengths, and presenting symptoms. Ultimately, I hope it encourages others how to properly assess for these issues when seeing children in a clinically setting and helps inform appropriate interventions

How is your research related to Counseling Psychology?

What is this quals? :) I feel its related because I am looking at three aspects of a child as they enter treatment: their own individual assessment of their victimization experiences, resiliency factors, and negative symptomatology. It looks at how their environment may have had a negative impact on their development, as well as what strengths the child possesses that could be used to remediate the current issues, and to minimize risk in the future.

How did you first get involved/interested in research in the area?

Probably the fact that children are now more likely to experience some sort of negative event in a given year. When I first heard this at a conference I was floored and saddened. I then immediately changed the assessment battery and interview questions I use at work to address a greater range of violent events. My interest in the area came about out of necessity to be honest. I wasn't looking for a Master's internship working with abused children, but I came to find it rewarding and fulfilling in a lot of ways. Additionally, looking at the research, how relatively new it is, and how we still have a ways to go, I felt like I could contribute in a positive way.

What are your hopes for the outcomes of your research/what are the broader implications of your research?

I hope that it shows that children and youth are important informants and their interview and assessment data shouldn't be neglected in any clinical setting. I know of some clinical settings that tend to only focus on what the parent is reporting, while important, overlooks the fact children can be accurate reporters as well given the right situations, assessments, or settings. As for the broader implications, I hope it shows individual clinicians, faculty, and students that just because a child comes for a specific trauma, you could miss a lot of vital information about the child, their environment, and worldview.

How do you believe your research impacts society as a whole?

I believe it impacts society in that it shows violence and trauma are not singular, discrete events, but can be a child's "way of life" and have cumulative and significant life-long impact.

What advice would you give to someone interested in pursuing research in the same area as you?

Asking a child or a parent about sexual abuse, domestic violence, etc., isn't as bad as you think. As long as they don't sense you're scared of the topics, you'll be fine. Plus, there are some great assessment measures to administer to help with some of the more sensitive topics you can ask or treat.