

2005

# Collaborate With Whom? Clergy Responses to Psychologist Characteristics (Chapter 2 of Psychology and the Church)

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## Recommended Citation

McMinn, Mark R.; Ammons, Jeff; McLaughlin, Brian R.; Williamson, Colleen; Griffin, Justin W.; Fitzsimmons, C. Richelle; and Spire, Brandi, "Collaborate With Whom? Clergy Responses to Psychologist Characteristics (Chapter 2 of Psychology and the Church)" (2005). *Faculty Publications - Grad School of Clinical Psychology*. Paper 224.

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# COLLABORATE WITH WHOM? CLERGY RESPONSES TO PSYCHOLOGIST CHARACTERISTICS

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*Some clergy and psychologists are willing to collaborate in providing for people under their care and some are reticent. The purpose of this research is to see if clergy are more likely to collaborate with psychologists of a particular sex or training background. Six groups of clergy were given written descriptions of a psychologist that varied on these two dimensions—the institution from which the psychologist received training and sex—and were then asked to rate how likely they would be to participate in 7 collaborative scenarios with the psychologist. No group differences were found. Furthermore, clergy characteristics were not significantly related to their likelihood of collaborating with psychologists. Differences were observed among the 7 collaborative scenarios, suggesting that clergy are more interested in some forms of collaboration than others. It appears that idiographic relational factors are ultimately more important than general demographic categories in establishing clergy-psychologist collaboration.*

Religion plays a vital role in the lives of many Americans. In fact, 3 out of 5 Americans consider religion to be very important to their lives (Gallup and Lindsay, 1999). Not surprisingly then, many individuals, couples, and families are inclined to seek help first from clergy rather than from a professional psychologist.

Clergy are the frontline mental health workers in the United States (Weaver, Flannelly, Garbarino, Figley, and Flannelly, 2003), with somewhere between 25% (“Mental Health Patients,” 2004) and 40% of counseling clients (Meylink and Gorsuch, 1988) seeking help of clergy first when facing troubles. For example, people grieving the death of someone close have reported nearly five times the likelihood of seeking the aid of a clergyperson than all other mental health sources combined (Veroff, Kulka, and Douvan, 1981).

Given the role clergy play in mental health services, collaboration between clergy and clinical psychology is both timely and important. Unfortunately, clergy-psychologist collaboration does not occur at a high rate (McMinn, Chaddock, Edwards, Lim, and Campbell, 1998), and is often plagued by issues of mistrust, poor communication, and a lack of respect from one profession to the other (see McMinn, Aikins, and Lish, 2003). Even when collaboration does occur, it is often a unidirectional relationship in which clergy refer clients to psychologists, but psychologists do not reciprocate by drawing on clergy expertise or by investing their expertise in the well-being of local parishes (Lish, McMinn, Fitzsimmons, and Root, 2003).

Nonetheless, collaboration is occurring and some of it is quite innovative (McMinn and Dominguez, 2003). Recent research suggests that clergy-psychologist collaboration has the potential to expand beyond the basic referral relationship to include activities such as lay counseling training, church personnel decisions, and pastoral care consultation (Lish et al., 2003; McRay, McMinn, Wrightsman, Burnett and Ho, 2001).

Thus far we have argued that collaboration is important to serve clergy and the mental health needs they confront, that some innovative collaboration is occurring between clergy and psychologists, but that the overall rate of collaborative activity is disappointingly low. This, of course, raises the question of clergy-psychologist matching. Which clergy are likely to collaborate with which psychologists, and vice versa? Previous findings suggest factors such as age, level of education, denominational affiliation and congregation size may affect collaboration (Shabazz, 2003). More specifically, clergy age 40 and under were more likely to refer people for counseling problems than clergy over the age of 40. Also, clergy with more education and advanced counseling training were more likely to refer than minimally trained or untrained clergy (Thomas, Quinn, Billingsley, and Caldwell, 1994; Fultz, 2002). It is also interesting to note that conservative clergy are less likely to refer than clergy with liberal denominational affiliations. Additionally, clergy from larger congregations are more likely to refer than clergy from smaller congregations (Mannon, and Crawford, 1996).

But what characteristics do clergy look for in psychologists when considering collaboration? Previous studies have suggested that shared values (Chaddock and McMinn, 1999) and use of a common language of spirituality are important (McMinn, Aikins, and Lish, 2003), but little research has been conducted regarding basic demographic and educational variables clergy view as important in psychologists. Accordingly, the present study attempts to uncover possible factors that moderate clergy willingness to collaborate with psychologists. We expected to find that clergy would be more interested in collaborating with a male psychologist than a female psychologist, and would give preference to a psychologist trained at a Christian institution (seminary or Christian college) rather than a secular university.

## METHOD

### Participants

Five hundred clergy were randomly selected from churches listed at [www.christianitytoday.com](http://www.christianitytoday.com). In order to produce a diverse national sample, we used a quota

sampling method, randomly selecting 10 churches from each state in the United States of America.

Questionnaires were mailed to respondents in January of 2004 along with a \$2 incentive to express appreciation for their participation. Participants were randomly assigned to 1 of 6 variations of the questionnaire. Of the 500 who were sent questionnaires, 31 were undeliverable or returned to sender. Of the 469 possible respondents, 226 provided responses, yielding a 48% response rate.

Of the 226 respondents, 96% were male, and 4% female. Respondent ethnicity was predominantly of European descent (93%). An additional 2% were of African descent, 1% of Asian descent, 1% of Hispanic descent, 1% Native American, and 3% reported being of other descent. Respondents' ages ranged from 28 to 73 years, with an average age of 50. They had been in ministry an average of 23 years, ranging from 1 to 54. Reported church attendance ranged from 8 parishioners to 6000 with the average being 443. In terms of highest earned degree, the greatest number held a Master of Divinity (31%), 22% another type of masters, 17% an undergraduate degree, 13% a Doctor of Ministry, 11% other doctoral degrees, and 5% did not hold a college degree. Most (92%) reported being the senior or solo pastor, 4% were associate or assistant pastor, 1% pastoral care, and 2% other.

## INSTRUMENT

One side of the questionnaire included information about a hypothetical psychologist, Dr. Pat Johnson, using the following narrative:

Assume that Dr. Pat Johnson is a local Christian psychologist interested in collaborating with you as you do pastoral ministry. Collaboration might involve accepting referrals for counseling and/or participating in the life of your congregation. Here are some details about Dr. Johnson:

Education: *Pat received a Ph.D. in clinical psychology from a prominent [public university/Christian college/Protestant seminary].* Dr. Johnson belongs to the Christian Association for Psychological Studies.

Experience: After completing the Ph.D. degree and being licensed as a psychologist Pat went immediately into counseling practice and now has 8 years of experience working with adolescents, adults, couples, and families.

Faith Values: An active member of a Protestant church, Pat believes that a Christian worldview provides the best understanding of the human condition and how to find healing.

Reputation: Pat has a good reputation in the community, both among other health care professionals and among Christian leaders.

There were six variations of this questionnaire. Each questionnaire had a picture of Pat Johnson in the upper left corner. In three conditions the picture was of a woman, and in three conditions it was a picture of a man. A pilot study revealed no significant differences in perceived attractiveness or age between the male and female Pat Johnsons. The other independent variable in the 2 x 3 factorial design was the institution at which Dr. Johnson received his or her training. Two questionnaires had Dr. Johnson trained at a public university, two at a Christian college, and two at a Protestant seminary.

The other side of the questionnaire included seven possible ways that Dr. Johnson might be able to collaborate with the pastor in ministry. These included accepting therapy referrals, training a group of lay counselors, helping in a time of personal crisis, assessing a pastoral staff applicant, consulting with the pastor regarding pastoral counseling work, conducting an organization assessment, and helping with a church conflict. Pastors were asked to rate how interested they would be in collaborating with Dr. Johnson for each of these scenarios on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (a great deal). In addition to the rating scales, pastors were also asked demographic information. Finally, space was provided for any additional comments.

## RESULTS

Table 1 displays the number of respondents in each of the 6 conditions. A chi square for independence did not reveal any systematic differences in response rates.

**Table 1. Number of respondents for each of the six conditions**

Sex	Training of Psychologist		
	Public University	Christian College	Protestant Seminary
Male	42	35	34
Female	35	46	34

Note. No differences in response rate were found,  $\chi^2(2) = 2.1$ .

We then computed a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA), with the sex of the psychologist and the type of training as independent variables and the seven rating scales as dependent variables. No main effects or interaction effects were found. The scores on the 7 rating scales are reported in Table 2.

In the absence of any between-group differences, we turned our attention toward within-group differences on the various rating scales. Lish et al. (2003) reported significant differences in clergy's interest in collaboration depending on the sort of collaborative activity being posed. Similarly, a repeated-measures MANOVA revealed differences among our respondents, Wilks'  $\lambda(6, 215) = .482, p < .001$ . Post-hoc profile analyses using pair-sample *t*-tests revealed differences between some of the adjacent means. The rating scale scores and differences are shown in Table 3.

We were also interested in seeing if the data we collected about our pastor respondents could be used to predict their overall openness to collaborating with psychologists. As a dependent variable we used the sum of the 7 rating scales, and we selected various predictor variables based on past research. The predictor variables included the age of the pastor, educational level, the theological conservatism of the pastor's denomination (determined by criteria reported by Smith, 1990), and the size of the congregation. None of these independent variables had a significant predictive effect on the overall collaboration ratings of respondents. A post-hoc inspection of the correlation matrix revealed that age is inversely related to collaboration ratings,  $r(219) = -.17, p < .05$ .

**Table 2. Ratings on likelihood of collaboration**

Sex	Training of Psychologist					
	Public University		Christian College		Protestant Seminary	
Male	Referral	3.8 (1.2)	Referral	3.4 (1.4)	Referral	3.9 (1.1)
	Lay Counsel	3.4 (1.3)	Lay Counsel	3.4 (1.5)	Lay Counsel	3.3 (1.1)
	Hiring	3.1 (1.3)	Hiring	3.0 (1.5)	Hiring	3.0 (1.4)
	Personal	3.1	Personal	2.9 (1.5)	Personal	2.9 (1.2)
	Organization	(1.4)	Organization	2.8 (1.4)	Organization	2.6 (1.2)
	Conflict	2.8 (1.3)	Conflict	2.5 (1.2)	Conflict	2.7 (1.1)
	Consult	2.6 (1.2)	Consult	3.3 (1.4)	Consult	3.4 (1.3)
Female		3.5 (1.4)				
	Referral	3.7 (1.2)	Referral	4.0 (1.2)	Referral	3.6 (1.0)
	Lay Counsel	3.4 (1.5)	Lay Counsel	3.2 (1.1)	Lay Counsel	3.1 (1.3)
	Hiring	3.0 (1.5)	Hiring	2.9 (1.2)	Hiring	2.9 (1.2)
	Personal	2.8 (1.2)	Personal	3.0 (1.2)	Personal	2.8 (1.3)
	Organization	2.5 (1.2)	Organization	2.7 (1.1)	Organization	2.7 (1.2)
	Conflict	2.5 (1.1)	Conflict	2.8 (1.2)	Conflict	2.6 (1.1)
Consult	3.5 (1.2)	Consult	3.8 (1.1)	Consult	3.3 (1.4)	

Notes. Ratings are reported as means (standard deviations). Referral = Responses on item, "Refer one of your parishioners to Dr. Johnson for further counseling." Lay Counsel = Responses on item, "Bring in Dr. Johnson to train a group of lay counselors for a church-based caregiving ministry." Hiring = Responses on item, "Have Dr. Johnson administer strength-based personality assessments to aid in the hiring of ministerial staff." Personal = Responses on item, "Receive personal support from Dr. Johnson during stressful times in your ministry." Organization = Responses on item, "Work with Dr. Johnson to conduct an organizational assessment (to better understand your congregation)." Conflict = Responses on item, "Ask Dr. Johnson to mediate between differing groups in a time of conflict." Consult = Responses on item, "Consult with Dr. Johnson regarding any questions or concerns that arise as you counsel parishioners." No main effects or interaction effects were found with MANOVA.

Finally, we evaluated the written comments offered by respondents at the end of the questionnaire. These comments were entered into a qualitative data analysis program to aid us in coding and sorting responses. The vast majority of written comments could be categorized as either 1) identifying obstacles to clergy-psychologist collaboration, or 2) affirming the importance of collaboration.

Among the obstacles identified many responses pertained to potential value difference between psychologists and clergy. For example, "We believe in nouthetic counseling and do not agree with the psychology view." Another person wrote, "After a number of years of study and a good number of years in the ministry, I came to the conclusion that Christianity and psychology are on different pages. I cannot blend the two together." Other respondents were cautious about collaborating with a psychologist, noting that they would want to get to know the psychologist first before forming any opinions about collaborative possibilities. For example, "I would want to know more about Dr. Johnson's 'Christian worldview' and her understanding of the nature of the Bible. I would not refer people to her or consult with her if she taught a patriarchal view of marriage or insisted mental/emotional problems were the result of personal sin."

**Table 3. Overall ratings on each of the 7 collaboration activities**

Activity	Interest Rating	Percentage Interested	Lish et al.
Refer one of your parishioners to Dr. Johnson for further counseling.	3.7 (1.2)	70%	N/A
Consult with Dr. Johnson regarding any questions or concerns that arise as you counsel parishioners.	3.5 (1.3) <sup>a</sup>	62%	77%
Bring in Dr. Johnson to train a group of lay counselors for a church-based caregiving ministry.	3.3 (1.3) <sup>a</sup>	48%	63%
Receive personal support from Dr. Johnson during stressful times in your ministry.	2.9 (1.3) <sup>a</sup>	37%	57%
Have Dr. Johnson administer strength-based personality assessments to aid in the hiring of ministerial staff.	2.9 (1.3)	34%	52%
Work with Dr. Johnson to conduct an organizational assessment (to better understand your congregation).	2.7 (1.2) <sup>a</sup>	27%	36%
Ask Dr. Johnson to mediate between differing groups in a time of conflict.	2.6 (1.2)	24%	26%

Notes. Interest ratings are reported as means (standard deviations). Percentage interested = the percentage of respondents endorsing a 4 or 5 on the 5-point Likert scale. Lish et al. = percentage of respondents interested in similar collaboration in Lish et al. study (this volume).  
<sup>a</sup> = Ratings on this item are significantly lower than ratings on the previous item,  $p < .01$ .

Other respondents were more amenable to collaborating with psychologists and offered comments about their positive experiences. For example, "The longer I minister, the more I look for qualified, dependable help for professional counseling. In a large congregation the needs are multiple—many problems require far more help than the average minister is trained to treat or help. Dr. Johnson would be a great resource and blessing." Another respondent wrote, "A person with Dr. Johnson's qualifications could be a very important partner in ministry."

## DISCUSSION

We expected that particular psychologist demographics would affect our respondents' willingness to collaborate with the psychologist. Specifically, we anticipated that clergy would show a preference for a male psychologist trained at a Christian institution. Our findings did not support this hypothesis. Both the quantitative findings and the qualitative analysis reveal a substantial amount of variance in how clergy perceive psychologists, but this variance was not systematically related to the sex or training institution of the psychologist.

Neither did clergy demographics affect likelihood to collaborate. Though previous studies have indicated that the age and education of the pastor, size of the congregation, and theological conservatism of the pastor's denomination affect willingness to collaborate with psychologists, none of these variables were significant predictors of collaboration in this study.

From a research methodology perspective, the lack of differences in psychologist variables might be explained by asserting that our sample was too heterogeneous—and indeed it is true that a replication with pastors of a single denomination might be more inclined to reveal differences based on psychologist demographics. However, our heterogeneous sample should have been a benefit in predicting the effects of clergy demographics on likelihood of collaboration. Heterogeneity is ideal for multiple regression methodologies because it limits attenuation effects. So it seems unlikely that our lack of findings can be attributed solely to sample selection methods.

Thus, we are inclined to conclude that likelihood of collaboration in this study was related to matters of personal preference, past experiences, measurement error, and other factors that we did not assess rather than the sex or training of the psychologist or particular clergy demographics. There may be little point in future research trying to identify global characteristics that promote collaboration. Rather, collaboration may result from personal and relational factors that are not easily reduced to independent variables or demographic categories on a questionnaire.

A more productive line of future research is related to the particular types of collaborative activities that clergy find interesting. As was found by Lish et al. (2003), clergy expressed more interest in some forms of collaborating with psychologists than others. Lish et al. (2003) had clergy rate their interest in six forms of innovative collaboration, none of which included the most typical form of collaboration—referring a parishioner to a psychologist for treatment of a psychological disorder. Because many of the respondents in the Lish et al. study offered comments about referring to psychologists, in this study we added clinical referral to the six scenarios used by Lish et al. Not surprisingly, this newly added scenario—clergy referring a parishioner to a psychologist—received the highest ratings among clergy. Referral continues to be the most recognized form of collaboration between clergy and psychologists, though some have questioned whether referral is truly collaborative because of its unidirectional nature (McMinn et al., 1998).

The rank order of the remaining six collaborative scenarios in this study is identical to the order found by Lish et al. (2003). Clergy appear somewhat open to a consultative relationship where a psychologist is available to offer guidance for the clergy person's pastoral counseling (see Benes, Walsh, McMinn, Dominguez, and Aikins, 2000, for an example of this). They are also somewhat open to involving psychologists in lay counselor training—an activity that has gained attention through the work of Tan (1991, 2002) and others. Some clergy are also open to receiving personal care in times of need and working with a psychologist in church staff hiring decisions, but there is reticence to get psychologists involved with the larger church community. In both this study and the Lish et al. (2003) study, having a psychologist involved in organizational assessment or helping resolve a church conflict is an unlikely form of collaboration. This may reflect a measure of uncertainty or distrust, as if clergy are saying, "Stay away from my parish!" Despite the resistance clergy express in organizational forms of collaboration with psychologists, some have bridged this gap successfully and engaged in

collaborative organizational consultation work (see Dominguez and McMinn, 2003; Savage, 2003).

Finally, it is noteworthy that the overall interest ratings for the various collaborative scenarios in this study are lower than the interest ratings reported by Lish et al. (2003). Presumably, this is related to the differences in the two studies. Lish et al. asked in generic terms whether clergy might be interested in collaborating with a psychologist. In this study we put a face to the psychologist—literally, in the form a picture, and also by describing the psychologist's training background and professional experience. In other words, we were more particular and specific in introducing a psychologist. Based on the written comments we received, it appears that many clergy would want to know more details about Dr. Johnson before making a decision about collaborating. So clergy may be open to the idea of collaborating in general (as revealed in the Lish et al. study), but when a particular psychologist is presented they experience more caution until they have a chance to develop a relationship with the psychologist. This is consistent with the findings of McMinn, Aikins, and Lish (2003) who emphasized the importance of relationship in collaborative work, and the findings of Chaddock and McMinn (1999) who reported that shared values are vital to clergy considering a collaborative relationship with a psychologist.

Based on the findings of this study and the others we have reviewed, clergy seem to be equally open to collaborating with male and female psychologists and to collaborating with psychologists trained at various sorts of institutions. Overall, clergy vary greatly in their willingness to work with psychologists, but this variation is not systematically related to the particular clergy or psychologist demographics studied here. Perhaps clergy who are willing to consider collaborating with psychologists are not looking for demographic categories as much as relationships characterized by effective communication, shared values, and mutual respect.

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