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Research Training in Explicitly Christian Doctoral Programs

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The importance of research training at explicitly Christian doctoral programs is suggested on the basis of four reasons: the need to hold science and practice together, the need for skills to evaluate interventions, the need to serve a society with a growing interest in religion and spirituality, and the need to assess the effectiveness of explicitly Christian doctoral programs. A discussion of these issues serves as an introduction to the rest of this special issue that focuses on research training at seven explicitly Christian programs.

The past three decades have brought rapid growth in the number of doctoral programs in professional psychology. Reporting the number of programs accredited by the American Psychological Association (APA)'s Committee on Accreditation, Peterson (2003) notes an increase from 1 PsyD program in 1973 to 56 programs in 2001, and a surprisingly sharp increase in PhD programs during the same time period, from approximately 100 to almost 300 programs.

Mirroring this larger trend, there has also been an increase in the number of explicitly Christian doctoral programs in clinical psychology. Fuller Theological Seminary began clinical psychology doctoral training in the 1960s, followed shortly thereafter by Rosemead Graduate School of Professional Psychology. Presently there are 9 programs housed in 7 distinctively Christian institutions where faculty must endorse particular faith beliefs as a condition of employment and the integration of psychology and Christianity is an explicit goal of training. These include Azusa Pacific University (PsyD program), Fuller Theological Seminary (PhD and PsyD programs), George Fox University (PsyD program), Regent University (PsyD program), Rosemead School of Psychology at Biola University (PhD and PsyD programs), Seattle Pacific University (PhD program), and Wheaton College (PsyD program). Most of these programs are accredited by the American Psychological Association (APA).

To articulate the niche of explicitly Christian doctoral programs, Johnson, Campbell, and Dykstra (1997) proposed a continuum describing various possible training missions. At one end of the continuum is the Religiously Sensitive Psy-

chologist model in which students are trained to be psychologists with some awareness of religious issues. This training model is primarily psychological in nature, but with the addition of some religious training. At the other end of the continuum is the Psychologically Minded Pastor model, where students are trained to minister to the needs of the church. This training model is primarily religious and theological in nature, but with the addition of some psychological training. In the middle of the continuum is what Johnson et al. (1997) call the Faith Identified Psychologist model. This model calls for a degree of sophistication in both psychology and theology in which graduates are prepared to work within a particular faith context as psychologists, but because they receive adequate breadth and depth of psychological training these graduates should also be competent to work with those who do not share their particular faith values. It is this middle category, the Faith Identified Psychologist model, which best characterizes the training mission of most explicitly Christian doctoral programs.

Graduates of explicitly Christian doctoral programs are trained to identify with both the Christian faith and the guild of psychology and, therefore, it is important that they learn and value the epistemologies of each. The Christian religion emphasizes church history, systematic theological and philosophical reasoning, and divine revelation through scripture. Psychology emphasizes knowledge through scientific methods of systematic research.

The purpose of this special issue of the *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* is to explore the extent to which explicitly Christian doctoral programs are training their students in the scientific research methods of psychology. As an introduction to this special issue, we suggest four reasons that research is important in explicitly Christian

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psychology training programs. These include holding science and practice together, gaining the skills to evaluate interventions, serving a society with growing interests in spirituality, and assessing the effectiveness of explicitly Christian psychology training programs.

Holding Science and Practice Together

A strong conviction that science and practice should be held together in a single discipline has caused some (e.g., Talley, Strupp, & Butler, 1994) to lament the apparent split between practice and science in clinical psychology. The accreditation guidelines of the APA (2002) state:

Science and practice are not opposing poles; rather, together they equally contribute to excellence in training in professional psychology. Therefore, education and training ... should be based on the existing and evolving body of general knowledge and methods in the science and practice of psychology ... All programs should enable their students to understand the value of science for the practice of psychology and the value of practice for the science of psychology, recognizing that the value of science for the practice of psychology requires attention to the empirical basis for all methods involved in psychological practice. (p. 3)

It is noteworthy that these accreditation guidelines apply to all APA-accredited doctoral programs in professional psychology, regardless of whether they are scientist-practitioner programs (Boulder model), practitioner programs (Vail model), or some amalgam of both. Many of the explicitly Christian doctoral programs offer a PsyD degree and are based on a practitioner model of training, but are nonetheless expected to have sufficient training in the science of psychology.

One of the criticisms levied against professional psychology doctoral programs is that they do not compare favorably with traditional university-based PhD programs with regard to faculty research productivity, admissions selectivity, and faculty/student ratios (Maher, 1999; Peterson, 2003). Peterson (2003) ponders, "Are the critics right? Has the practice of psychology slipped its scientific moorings? Has the education of professional psychologists deteriorated as badly as

some say it has?" (p. 793). If these questions are being posed of professional psychology programs in general, they certainly should be asked of explicitly Christian programs as well.

Evaluating Interventions

In recent years, psychologists have emphasized the importance of using interventions that have demonstrated effectiveness through empirical research. To this end, the Society of Clinical Psychology (Division 12 of the APA) commissioned a task force to identify empirically validated treatment procedures, resulting in a list of treatments that are documented to be effective (Chambless et al., 1996, 1998; Chambless & Hollon, 1998; Crits-Christoph, Chambless, Frank, Brody, & Karp, 1995; Task Force, 1995). One psychologist—closely identified with Division 12—observed that, along with managed care, there is "no issue more central to the practice of clinical psychology" than evidence-based practice (Barlow, 2000, p. 24).

It should be noted that this movement toward empirically validated treatment procedures has engendered controversy, in part because the rigid scientific constraints required by the Division 12 task force may render research laboratory interventions irrelevant for "real-life" clinical practice (Garfield, 1996; Havik & VandenBos, 1996; Silverman, 1996). Some have offered persuasive research-based arguments that dispute the research-based findings of the task force (Norcross, 2002; Westen & Morrison, 2001). Clearly, sorting through a complex issue such as this requires some sophistication in scientific methods which, in turn, obliges doctoral programs in clinical psychology to provide effective research training.

The controversy surrounding empirically supported treatments raises an important tension: How do clinical psychologists root their interventions in methods demonstrated to be effective while remaining open to the creativity and relational sensitivity required to work with human individuals? If the empirically supported treatment movement errs too far in the rigors of science, there are no shortages of examples at the other extreme. Creative approaches to clinical work quickly become controversial when practice patterns outpace research advances. Controversial topics of recent years include therapies that attempt to recover repressed memories (Knapp & VandeCreek, 2000), eye-movement desensitization and reprocessing (Shapiro, 2001),

and thought field therapy (Diepold, 2002), among others. In addition to controversial therapeutic interventions, psychologists have also developed assessment methods that have engendered fierce debate. Chief among these are projective methods, such as the Rorschach Inkblot Method (Exner, 2002).

Beyond these controversial topics within mainstream psychology, faith informed psychologists are faced with an array of other controversies. These include theophostic ministry and other healing of memory approaches (see Garzon & Burkett, 2002), allegations of satanic ritual abuse (Rogers, 1992), spiritual direction combined with psychotherapy (Cook, 2004), and differing views of how best to integrate faith into practice (Johnson & Jones, 2000).

In the midst of all these controversies and potential fads, how does one evaluate the credibility of creative clinical interventions? For most faith informed psychologists, the answer is found in a combination of theological evaluation and rigorous research. Thus, effective doctoral training should equip students with the research skills to participate in science and critically evaluate scientific conclusions offered by other researchers.

Serving Society

Psychology has noted society's growing interest in spirituality and religion. Since 1996, several books have been published by the American Psychological Association (Miller, 1999; Richards & Bergin, 1997, 2000, 2004; Shafranske, 1996) with the most recent (Miller & Delaney, 2005) being perhaps the most explicit in terms of acknowledging the possible veracity of religious worldviews. It would appear that graduates of explicitly Christian doctoral programs are in the unique position of contributing to this growing literature. Few others with a high level of research sophistication also have the spiritual sensitivities that are required for a deep understanding of a substantive religious and spiritual experience, particularly if such experience occurs within the Christian religious tradition as it does for so many.

Conceptualizing and measuring both the content and the function of religious experience is crucial to a scientific understanding. Fortunately, psychologists of religion have long been working—albeit in relative obscurity—developing theoretical models and measurement instruments of greater substance and quantity than many would

predict (Hill, in press; Hill & Hood, 1999). Hill and Pargament (2003) note that, for example, in the literature on religion and health, we are no longer asking if, but rather why, a connection exists. That is, researchers are beginning “to get closer to religious and spiritual life, articulating dimensions and measures of religion and spirituality that are linked theoretically and functionally to physical and mental health” (pp. 71-72). The importance of religion and spirituality is not limited to their connection with health and, as research on religion and spirituality continues to grow, explicitly Christian programs have the opportunity, but also the responsibility, to impact the field.

Assess Effectiveness of Training Programs

Though each of the explicitly Christian doctoral programs has a unique mission statement, the commonality is found in their desire to prepare psychologists to address the psychology and spiritual needs of people—including those of Christian faith, other faiths, or no religious faith. Johnson et al. (1997) refer to the gap between psychologists' religious values and the more devout religious beliefs of the general public, demonstrating a need for psychologists who understand and value religious faith commitments.

Each of the explicitly Christian doctoral programs engages in a self-study process required for APA-accreditation, but it also seems wise to engage in meta-study—looking at how these programs are functioning collectively (Johnson & McMinn, 2003). It seems reasonable that integrative training ought to make some sort of difference in the way a psychologist functions after graduation. Measuring these differences is a research task, which again highlights the importance of training students in research methods.

Some of the dissertation research emerging from explicitly Christian doctoral programs has demonstrated that graduates are reasonably satisfied with their training experiences (Fallow & Johnson, 2000), and that students experience faculty to be supportive and encouraging (Meek & McMinn, 1999). A good deal more research could be done to assess how explicitly Christian doctoral programs are doing. The dissertation requirement of these programs provides an excellent opportunity for doing some of this research, which again speaks to the importance of providing effective research training to students in explicitly Christian doctoral programs.

Conclusion

As the name of the organization that sponsors this publication (the Christian Association for Psychological Studies, or CAPS) implies, the discipline of psychology and particularly a Christian approach, demands the very best of our intellectual resources as we attempt to further understand human complexity. Thus, while many are quick to identify the key role of explicitly Christian doctoral programs in making a difference in the applied clinical setting, we ask to what extent should these programs also identify their mission in terms of producing outstanding researchers as well. In making a case for the need for a strong research component, we recognize that excellent training can be provided through a number of different modalities. To this end, representatives of each of the seven explicitly Christian programs will later in this issue describe their efforts in training researchers as well as competent clinicians.

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