

FAMILY talk

BYU Family Studies Center
Spring/Summer 2003

Martin Hickman Lecture

Fifteen percent of people in the United States have a psychological disorder at a single point in time and 30 percent of people will have a disorder over a life time, according to research by Michael J. Lambert, a professor of psychology at Brigham Young University.

In March, Lambert spoke at the annual Martin Hickman Lecture about "Science in a service of psychotherapy: When Godzilla meets Bambi."

Lambert's research showed that psychological treatments for psych disorders are effective for the majority of patients. However, a sizable minority of patients derive no benefit from treatment and approximately five to 10 percent actually worsen by the end of the treatment.

"There is probably a portion of people who have a psych disorder who are on a declining course," Lambert said. "Their symptoms are increasing in severity over time and the therapy isn't preventing it from occurring."

A significant life event can contribute to a disorder or make circumstances worse. The majority of psych disorders increase in severity because therapy techniques are misapplied or therapists develop judgmental, critical or negative relationships toward a patient.

"When we inform therapists that their patients are getting worse not better, they seem to keep the patients in therapy longer," Lambert said. "Therapists seem to adjust their therapy which leads to a better outcome, and they pay more attention to the cases."

Lambert said therapists are rather optimistic and tend not to be especially vigilant or alert to a patient's worsening problem.

The key objective of Lambert's research team is to statistically derive recovery projectiles they can share with therapists to increase the likelihood of the treatment's success.

If therapists are monitoring the response to treatments, they can modify the treatment when needed, Lambert said.

Lisa Millett

Resolving Conflict in Marriage Through Prayer

When conflict occurs in a marriage, praying together may be one of the last things a couple feels like doing. However, according to recent research by Mark H. Butler of the marriage and family therapy department at Brigham Young University, praying may hold one of the keys for successful conflict resolution.

"During a conflict, prayer helps to facilitate reconciliation and problem solving and is determined to be a softening event," Butler said. "When couples establish prayer with their deity, they can't hold onto anger. Prayer helps to soften them."

Butler's research found that prayer used during conflict helps couples in the following ways:

- Invites God into the system, creating a different, three-person relationship
- De-escalates hostile emotions and emotional reactivity and introduces calming and emotional receptivity
- Enhances commitment to one's partner and to the shared relationship

- Helps partners shift their perspective of the situation and focus more on self-change than on partner change
- Facilitates couple responsibility and working toward their own solutions.

"When couples establish prayer with their deity, they can't hold onto anger. Prayer helps to soften them."

--Mark Butler

His research also indicated that prayer is an overlooked dynamic which marriage, family and clinical researchers have neglected.

"Spiritual practices for religious couples are a dimension of how they attempt to bring about change," Butler said. "It shouldn't be neglected in families."

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Who's WHO

Intending to professionally play classical trumpet, Christopher Layne studied music seriously his first few years of college at St. Cloud State University in Minnesota.

However, he decided to change his major to psychology after working with families in Italy for a few years.

Layne is now an assistant professor of psychology at Brigham Young University and has been a part of the psychology department since 1999. He decided to teach at BYU because he enjoys working with the students and finds BYU a supportive environment to conduct his international service work.

Currently, Layne specializes in the assessment and treatment of adolescents who have been exposed to war and other forms of catastrophic violence, including the September 11 attacks in New York City. He is also analyzing the influence that long-term post-war adjustment has on Bosnia youths and their primary caretakers. His research has taken him to Bosnia 16 times, where he served as field director for a UNICEF-sponsored post-war program for adolescents, and New York City five times as a consultant to government and community agencies.

Layne is affiliated with the National Center for Child Traumatic Stress. As a member of the expert training corps and other task forces, he develops assessment instruments, consults in research design, helps train community clinicians and prepares psycho-educational materials.

As a BYU professor, Layne has taught courses in adolescent development, psychological testing and measurement and provides clinical supervision to doctoral students in clinical psychology.

Layne graduated from the University of Utah in 1989 with a bachelor of arts in psychology. Continuing to study clinical psychology, Layne earned his master's at the University of California, Los Angeles in 1991 and went on to earn his doctorate in 1996.

Layne was born in Redlands, Calif., raised in St. Cloud, Minn. and now lives in Springville, Utah. He served a mission for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Rome, Italy.

Layne enjoys gardening, cooking, music, long-distance running and mountain biking.

Lisa Millett

resolving conflict continued from cover

According to his findings, the couple-God relationship fostered through prayer influences the couple's own relationship, neutrality and responsibility. The couple's feelings are softened and the relationship focus shifts from an "I" to a "we" orientation.

"When you feel hurt you're thinking egocentrically, you're thinking of yourself only," one participant said. "But if you pray about the person, about what's right, then we forget ourselves."

Prayer also helps couples change the way they perceive the conflict. Considering God's perspective allows individuals to become more neutral and then to consider their partner's perspective. As a result, they begin to see their own role in the conflict and what they need to do to change.

Although solutions to the problem may not come as a direct result of prayer, couples did report that they experienced step-by-step "process coaching" from God. This coaching process helped couples understand how to move toward a problem resolution while leaving the specific details of the solution to the couple.

"I strongly believe that the Spirit prompts us," one participant commented. "Thoughts will come to your mind that help you in particular situations and that maybe tell you, 'Now, you've said enough,' or 'This is something that you may need to do.'"

Butler concluded from his research that couples who include God in their relationship through prayer experience healing shifts in attitudes and interactions. Their feelings will soften, they will feel validated, there will be a shift in relationship orientation and perspective of the problem and they will experience the step-by-step "coaching" of their interaction.

In addition to Butler's findings regarding the influence prayer has on a couple's interaction, his research also identified three patterns of prayer utilized during conflict:

- **Reparative** or "Band-aid" pattern of prayer is where couples use prayer to repair the relationship only after hostilities have ended and the conflict has been resolved.
- **Extinguishing** or "Stop, drop and pray" pattern of prayer is used by couples during conflict to extinguish feelings of anger and negativity and promote problem solving.
- **Preventative/preemption** or "Inoculation" pattern of prayer is where couples daily reliance on prayer keeps them continually mindful of their relationship with

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Announcements

Smart Marriages

7th Annual Conference

of the coalition for marriage, couples and family education

Date: June 26-29, 2003

Location: John Ascuaga's Nugget in Reno, Nevada

Theme: "Happy Families"

Brent Barlow and Tom Holman will both present at the conference.

Holidays

Memorial Day, May 26

Fourth of July

Pioneer Day, July 24

Spring Term

Class begins: April 29

Last day of class: June 16

Final exams: June 18, 19

Summer Term

Class begins: June 23

Last day of class: August 11

Final exams: August 13, 14

Graduation: August 14, 15

Families & Poverty Conference

The School of Family Life and Family Studies Center has finalized the topic and dates for its research conference. Families & Poverty will be held at the BYU Conference Center March 9-11, 2004.

in the NEWS

LDS Fathers of Children With Special Needs Find Strength and Commitment Through Religious Beliefs and Practices

Parents of approximately 10 million children in the United States find themselves undertaking the increased challenges of raising a child with special needs. While the responsibility may overwhelm a number of fathers, others find that their religious beliefs and practices provide them with the needed strength to remain committed and to focus on the joys.

A new study out of Brigham Young University, published in the current issue of "Review of Religious Research," explores how a group of fathers belonging to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints copes with having children with disabilities or chronic illnesses.

"When considered in light of the increased stress and demands placed on fathers of children with chronic disability of illness and the related higher-than-average father abandonment rate among families with special needs children, religious beliefs that inspire greater paternal commitment may be among the most important contributions of religion to society," said David C. Dollahite,

researcher and professor of family life at BYU.

According to the study, three primary religious beliefs facilitate LDS fathers' ability to raise a child with special needs including: belief in a divine plan, expectation of an eternal relationship and commitment to a sacred responsibility.

Belief in a Divine Plan

The majority of fathers who participated in the study repeatedly referred to aspects of the "divine plan of happiness." As part of that plan, many Latter-day Saints believe that a child born with significant mental or physical challenges may have been divinely assigned to a family to afford both children and parents opportunities for profound spiritual growth.

One father of a six-year-old son with Down syndrome stated, "Jimmy is a child of God, just like all of my other kids. Knowing that he's an extra special child of God has been real helpful. I feel honored to have him in our family. That's probably the thing that makes it easiest to deal with everything else.

I know I'm in the presence of a great spirit, one of the very valiant and true spirits. I don't know whether to feel like I couldn't have made it back to Father without him or just really grateful that I've got that extra help."

Latter-day Saints also believe this life is filled with challenging but growth-producing experiences. This belief helps fathers deal with "the why question" that nearly every parent of a child with a significant disability must address at some point.

A father whose daughter died of a chronic illness said, "We did our best to make sure that we got through it well. We weren't going to say, 'Why me?' and that is something I spent very little time on. I still wonder from time to time why she had to go through this, but I didn't spend any time being mad at God. I decided early on that we were going to tackle this with faith and determination, and we were going to make it. We were going to come out being in love with God and not hating Him."

Expectation of an Eternal Relationship

The belief in the divine plan of happiness held by these Latter-day Saint fathers created an expectation of an eternal relationship with their child free from the limitations of illness or disability experienced in this life. Latter-day Saints believe in a literal bodily resurrection in which the immortal spirit will be inseparably connected to a perfect, glorified body of flesh and bones.

Another father whose daughter died of leukemia before the age of five said, "The most important thing in the universe, really, is your family, because it's the only thing that goes on past this life, meaning the relationships we develop. Megan knew about death. She knew about bodies and spirits. We had another talk with her the night before she died. When we knew it was coming we talked with her. She was prepared. One of the deepest insights that I think I got through this

media highlights

Deseret News April 10, 2003 Susan Whitney "Marriage & Commitment"

A news study from Rutgers University in New Jersey finds young men are showing reluctance to marry.

"Brigham Young University's Thomas Holman believes men want to get married as much as women do, but he agrees they are waiting longer. He sees BYU students putting off marriage while they get more education. Holman can understand it in one sense. A bachelor's degree does not guarantee a family-supporting wage. Not any more.

"And yet, Holman worries about the level of commitment of the nation's youths. Holman, who is associate director in the School of Family Life, talks about the research of Norval Glenn. Glenn, of the University of Texas, asked young married people if they would take a better job, even if it meant time away from their families. More than one-third of those interviewed would definitely sacrifice family time for more pay -- even for more prestige without more pay. Another third said they were 'somewhat' likely to make the sacrifice.

"They list marriage and family as a high priority," says Holman, "but when push comes to shove..."

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whole experience is that we sent her off into the next world. I was so happy for her because she was going to go on and get a perfect body. That body will never hurt her again and betray her, never fail her. No broken bones, no shingles, no leukemia..."

Commitment to a Sacred Responsibility

These fathers' beliefs and expectations inspired them to make and keep a commitment to a sacred responsibility of loving, serving and caring for their children with special needs. This responsibility typically was not spoken of as a burden but rather as a freely chosen sacred obligation that provided meaning and identity.

A father of two sons with autism stated, "I felt like I had a special calling when they were born. I don't think that calling ends when they turn thirty. I think a father's calling is always a father's calling. So whether

you're fathering a 45-year-old man or a two-year-old son, it's a very special calling. It means Heavenly Father has entrusted me with these (boys) to help them grow and teach them the things that he thinks I need to teach them..."

The study included 35 randomly selected LDS fathers of children with the following special needs: moderate to severe physical and cognitive delays, serious chronic and terminal conditions and illnesses (e.g., leukemia), autism, Down syndrome, Tourette's Syndrome, blindness and deafness, heart disease and severe scoliosis.

After completing the study, Dollahite said, "I am willing to venture the thesis that there is a special power in religion's appeal to the supernatural that strengthens commitments and enhances the fathering of children with special needs.

Tonya Fischio

their deity and their spiritual and relationship ideals. It also effectively operates to prevent destructive conflict and couples remain softened toward each other and are able to resolve disagreements without becoming disagreeable.

The participants involved in the study included 13 religious Christian couples from the Western United States married for at least seven years. Each participant was interviewed separately allowing the spouses to share their thoughts about prayer and conflict resolution. Butler's research was published in volume 30 of the American Journal of Family Therapy.

Lisa Millett

**Family Studies Center
School of Family Life
Brigham Young University**

**350 Spencer W. Kimball Tower
Provo, UT 84602
(801) 378-2948**

<http://familycenter.byu.edu>

**FSC Director D. Russell Crane
Editor-in-Chief Tonya Fischio
Managing Editor Lisa Millett**

**To receive the newsletter electronically, log-on to our Web site or contact
Tonya Fischio at tonya_fischio@byu.edu.**

Family Studies Center
Brigham Young University
350 SWKT
PO BOX 25516
Provo, UT 84602-5516