



Analyze This!



The Official Newsletter of the San Gabriel Valley Psychological Association

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AN OFFICIAL CHAPTER OF THE CALIFORNIA PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

July/August 2022

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Upcoming Events

Meet the President

On-going

President Wayne Kao, PsyD, will continue to organize informal coffee meet-and-greets to meet or reconnect with our wonderful membership.

All are welcome!

Watch the Listserve posts for times and places

SGVPA Mid-Year Celebration

Date and location TBA

Continuing Education

The Asian American Experience:

Model Minority Stereotype and the Illusion of Inclusion

Presenter: Kris Yi, PsyD., PhD.

July 2022

Online Live!

Date TBA

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SGVPA supports Black Lives Matter and systemic social justice reform. We are making efforts to increase diversity representation in our organization, in our profession, and nationwide.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



I recently came across an article on a Dr. Bernard Wheatley, who in the 1950s, left his medical practice and lived as a hermit in Hawaii *(see link below). It's fascinating reading about a person described as a brilliant student and doctor who decides that his life would be better living in isolation, even in a place that is widely considered a paradise. There are varying accounts as to why he chose this path, from experiencing racism in school despite earning top scores, to a heart attack that made him question his path in life, or to losing his wife and son in an automobile accident. Regardless, I was left pondering what would drive a man into isolation, when he seemingly had the potential to be a leader in his field. This made me think of the current state of our world, our struggle with collective loneliness, made worse by COVID-19, rising expectations of achievement, and aggressive rises in cost of living. I started to wonder if there would ever be a tipping point for me to move off the grid

and live away from the rest of the world...

I know that it would be more likely if I started to feel isolated in my practice, and had only limited interaction with colleagues. I know I could easily lose a sense of connection to the world, if all I had was my work with my clients, and no substantial relationships with friends and family. This would be quite ironic, given that our field is defined by helping people find connection. However, I consistently hear from students and colleagues of a loss of community, and a loss of connection to our worlds, outside of work and productivity.

This makes creating space such as our recent JJ in May all the more important! After such a long time in relative isolation due to Covid, I was excited to see students and colleagues in person again at the USC Pacific Asia Museum—eating delicious food, sipping wine, and reconnecting with one another.

Earlier this year, I was even able to make it to Hawaii to reconnect with family members. While the circumstances were saddening (as we were attending a funeral), it was the first time we were seeing family in over two years! It was important to us to see everyone, to remind ourselves that we are not alone, and to remind ourselves that we must reach out.

After such a wonderful event as our JJ in May, I look forward to continuing to connect with all of you—in person, wherever possible... Otherwise, a Hawaiian cave may start to look more and more enticing, living off fish and taro.

I have to say, I prefer the diversity of friends, family and food.

Respectfully,

Wayne Kao
President

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announcements of times and places.*

Diversity Committee Meetings

If you are interested in being involved
in our Diversity Committee where you
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that are being planned in SGVPA
as well as stay up to date on resources
available to our larger community,
please contact Diversity Chair Amee Velasco
at ameevelasco@gmail.com
for more information.

Voices of Inclusion

Reflections on Fatherhood

By Fernando Villegas, PsyD



In many parts of the world, Father's Day is observed in June. As a Latino father raising two tween daughters, I've often contemplated, what makes a good father? We recently watched a movie where a character said, "It's fascinating, the power that fathers have...present or absent."

Traditionally, most research on parenting and families was dominated by mothers, or viewed through a maternal lens. Moreover, the existing research on fathers focused on negative aspects or outcomes, involving abuse, absence, or non-involvement. Relatively few popular studies focus on the positive impact of fathers.

The idea for this article grew after reviewing the APA Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Boys and Men. The ten guidelines address some of the current trends affecting males, such as toxic masculinity, privilege, relationships, education, and health. Guideline Five highlighted positive father involvement and healthy family relationships, and listed three components: positive engagement, warmth, and control.

Anecdotally, most men rarely think about what kind of father they want to be until the birth of their first child. Eventually, they parent on one of two simple frameworks: do what my father did, or don't be like my father. While the APA's guidelines provide some foundation, they are limited and only describe the mechanics with no specifics. Engagement, warmth, and control are complex processes defined by one's preconceived notions and experiences.

As a father, I've struggled with fatherhood. Not the identity but the practice. Fatherhood is forever evolving. For instance, just when you get your footing, your child grows another inch or meets another milestone, and you're back a square one.

I've considered how my childhood experiences of engagement, warmth, and control helped shape my fatherhood framework. My father struggled with fatherhood and marriage. My parent's divorced when I was about 10 years old. I was raised in a traditional family where my father worked long hours in a blue-collar job, and my mother stayed at home. Early on, my father's role was uninvolved (which was common of Mexican men at the time). As I grew, the time we spent together usually involved me helping him fix his car or repairing things around the house. His warmth didn't extend beyond the occasional hug or kiss on the head. During adolescence, we grew distant and eventually stopped talking for about a decade. Many variables contributed to our ensuing difficult relationship, but one thing is for certain—his inability to evolve and adapt as a father was a main reason.

Our relationship dramatically changed when I became a

father in my early 30's. By then he was retired and more revealing about his early life. I learned he endured a difficult childhood before he immigrated to the United States. He was raised on a rural farm and grew up in poverty. He endured many traumas. He was separated from his parents for long periods to attend primary school, and lost several siblings. However, I was most affected by the revelations about his marital struggles, the difficulties of divorce, and our strained relationship. These conversations helped me understand his limitations, and his difficulty expressing love. We bonded over our similar challenges. In the end, I empathized with him and ultimately, forgave him for the past hurt.

I never intended to parent differently from my father. Despite a steep learning curve, I easily engaged with my daughters. I was very involved in their caretaking and eventually became a stay-at-home father. However, I also endured many challenges. I never realized how much mood, fatigue, and failure to manage stress affected my ability to be warm and caring. I also had to remind myself of age-appropriate expectations to avoid frustration when my kids weren't "doing what they're supposed to." I've learned a lot goes into the endless learning process of being a good father.

Why did fatherhood turn out so different for my father and me? It wasn't until I worked on my dissertation that I gained answers. My initial interest was education. Latinos have astronomically high dropout rates and low rates of college completion. I wanted to learn more about the relationship between motivation in children, and parental education. Even though I was disappointed that there was no significant relationship between parental education and motivational practices, the findings did suggest that more highly educated parents relied less on rewards and consequences. This underscored the biggest difference between my father and me: income and education. These factors in addition to our different life experiences probably played a huge part. Another meaningful difference was I had opportunities to associate with healthy fathers who helped me appreciate the importance of positive role models, and what it means to be a good father.

For the past five years, I've worked at a community college counseling center helping primarily men of color. A large percentage of them were raised without fathers. This generation of young men often lack a healthy masculine identity. This is gravely important, as these young men will be tomorrow's fathers. This work has helped shape my interests on the topics of Latinos, masculinity, and fatherhood. The male experience is complex, challenging and undergoing tremendous social changes. We must continue to address the beliefs, stereotypes, cultural and social norms that negatively impact men's behavior and well-being. It's clinically important that we consider all the nuances involved in fatherhood and highlight the important role that fathers play.

Dr. Fernando Villegas can be reached at f.villegas@me.com

Practicing with Personality

Using Mortality Awareness as a Motivator in Therapy



By Enrico Gnaulati, PhD

Listening to my clients, mired in the life alterations forced by the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a common theme: *the need to live life with greater existential urgency*. This happens to play right into my therapeutic wheelhouse, as someone who has strong existential leanings. On many occasions during the pandemic, clients have confessed to me that death has been on their minds, e.g., a fear of their own premature demise, or that of a loved one. They cough up this disclosure, half-believing I will automatically assume they are being morbid. It's as if such thoughts are tantamount to being depressed, demoralized, pessimistic, or plain unhappy.

As an existentially-leaning therapist, I actually view mortality awareness—recurring daily thoughts of my own premature death or that of a loved one—not as a morbid preoccupation, but as a salutary reminder to live more in the moment, let go of petty grievances, pursue sources of life enjoyment more vigorously, not let dormant creative projects go untapped and unfinished, and be the most loving version of myself I can be with those that matter to me. There is an ancient tradition undergirding this mortality-awareness-motivational-mindset. The Roman Emperor and stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius once remarked: “You may leave this life at any moment: have this possibility in your mind in all that you do, or say, or think.”

I have found that using clients' thoughts about death can be a therapeutic inroad to coax them to zero in on and actualize the life issues that matter most to them. As corny as it sounds, when the time is right, I am not shy about posing some version of the following question to them: “Fast forward to your final days, what will make you feel you have lived a good life, where you can die proud that you have achieved what you set out to do?” Holding clients' feet to the fire about changes they know in their heart of hearts need to be made if they are to attain deeper fulfillment—personally, relationally, and professionally—can be galvanized in the dialogue about anticipating their own death. For many of my clients, this sort of therapeutic conversation spurs them to look more deeply at their work-home-life balance: dormant passion projects that need to be revived; urgent diet and health issues that get perennially ignored; social justice concerns that need to move from the back burner to the front burner; friendships where they are being exploited due to over-giving and under-receiving; over-reactivity in their dealing with their children; and core

problems with their intimate partners/spouses that can no longer be sidestepped. Existentially-oriented therapists see deep, agentic engagement in issues like these as the *real* antidote to anxious and depressive mindsets.

In mid-life, the shrinking window of earthly time becomes more pronounced. Israeli psychologist, Carlo Strenger, sees this as a pivotal period in which people are driven to resort their priorities: “Life needs to be pared down to the essentials.” The unfortunate temptation is to manage the dawning death anxiety with hedonistic pursuits, going for broke amusing ourselves to death with sex, drugs, or fancy material purchases. Ernest Becker, in his Pulitzer-Prize winning book, *The Denial of Death*, would say this life trajectory reflects mid-lifers managing their death anxiety by “tranquilizing themselves with the trivial.” Ultimately, a more fulfilling way of dealing with death anxiety is to engage in what he calls “immortality projects”—meaningful pursuits that leave a lasting legacy to the special people in your life, and society as a whole. One such legacy is to exit the world leaving loved ones knowing they were loved, not in the abstract, but in the down-to-earth ways we treated them, day in and day out.

At the end of the day, nothing matters more than cultivating the most loving bond possible with those we love. It's deeply unpleasant to contemplate “death regrets” regarding our beloved friends, or family members, who may die in the midst of our holding a grudge or nursing a petty grievance. But such unpleasant thoughts can help us get ahead of these death regrets and see the tragedy and ridiculousness in holding grudges and nursing grievances, goading us to mend our ways. Yale University scholar Martin Hagglund weighs in here: “The key to breaking habits is to recall that we can lose what we love.” Befriending death reminds us to love our loved ones in practice as well as principle, as if our relationship with them will not last. That makes us chase the profound consolation associated with knowing that when the dreaded, but inescapable, day arrives (assuming we don't go belly up first!), we can derive solace from the fact that we strove to love at our best, with our beloved dying, yet knowing with confidence he or she was truly loved.

As therapists, perhaps one of the greatest overlooked sources of countertransference is letting our own death anxiety prevent us from constructively engaging clients with their death anxiety. For me, that means accepting death as a part of life, and being on an agentic path to living a life well-lived—spurred on by the constant background awareness that my existence can be over at any time. That's not a downbeat, but an upbeat mindset that can inform our work with clients experiencing existential urgency.

Dr. Enrico Gnaulati can be reached at egnaulatiphd@gmail.com.

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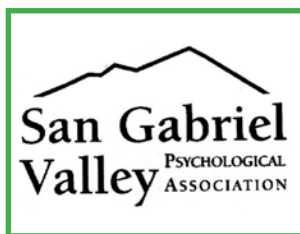
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