

**Southeastern Psychological Association  
2009 Convention—New Orleans, LA  
Counseling Psychology: What defines this area of study and practice?**

Panel Chair: Michael P. Moore, M.A., University of Southern Mississippi  
Panel Members: Emily E. Bullock, Ph.D., Michael B. Madson, Ph.D., Bonnie, C. Nicholson,  
Ph.D., University of Southern Mississippi  
<http://www.usm.edu/counselingpsy/>

Summary of Panel Content

This panel focused on how counseling psychology is similar to and different from other sub-disciplines of psychology. Panelists gave specific information on their areas of research and practice expertise. This panel was meant to be particularly informative for those interested in pursuing graduate training in counseling psychology.

Counseling psychology is similar to other sub-disciplines of psychology, such as clinical psychology, but also has some unique aspects that differentiate it from other sub-disciplines. For instance, an emphasis on multiculturalism and vocational issues are historical features exclusive to counseling psychology. Individuals with graduate degrees in counseling psychology are involved in a variety of areas of practice and research that fall within and outside the traditional counseling psychology focus. To highlight this point Drs. Nicholson and Madson discussed their expertise areas, parent training and motivational interviewing, which are not solely associated with counseling psychology. Dr. Bullock discussed her expertise in vocational psychology, an often referred to cornerstone of counseling psychology.

Michael P. Moore, M.A.

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- Mr. Moore provided a brief overview of the characteristics that distinguish counseling psychology from other related disciplines. He addressed counseling psychology's focus on client strengths, adoption of a lifespan development approach to problem behavior, and adaptation from its traditional roots to address the changes in the practice of applied psychology.

Emily E. Bullock, Ph.D.-Vocational Psychology

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- Vocational psychology is one of the areas of research and practice that helps to distinguish counseling psychology from the other sub-disciplines of psychology. Typically, vocational psychology research informs individual career development, career assessments, and the practice of career counseling. Dr. Bullock provided an overview of the types of issues that are generally researched and understood through vocational psychology. This was followed by a discussion of her own line of research which concentrates in career interest profiles, specific approaches to career decision making, the career development of underserved populations, and career assessment.

Michael B. Madson, Ph.D.-Motivational Interviewing

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Counseling processes and learning how to provide counseling are areas of great interest in counseling psychology. As a result many counseling psychologists examine various counseling approaches to attempt to answer the question “how does psychotherapy work.” Similarly, an emphasis area in counseling psychology is trying to determine how best to train individuals to provide counseling services. One unique adaptation of these two areas of study is how what has been learned from counseling process and training research can be applied outside psychology to areas such as medicine and allied health care. One counseling approach Motivational Interviewing (MI) has become quite popular across various disciplines. MI is a counseling style that has accrued much evidence of its efficacy in helping a wide variety of behavior problems from alcohol use problems to adhering to exercise or medication regimens. The basic foundation of MI and its application within and outside of psychology will be discussed. Dr. Madson provided a brief overview of MI followed by the research support for the use of MI.

Bonnie C. Nicholson, Ph.D.-Parenting Training

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- Prevention is one defining area of Counseling Psychology. Much of the prevention work in the field is focused on the prevention of adult psychopathology through universal or targeted approaches aimed at youth, particularly at-risk youth. One such approach includes parent training. Parent training programs, both universal and targeted, rely on behavioral principles designed to create change in parenting behaviors with the goal of ultimately reducing (targeted and indicated prevention) or preventing (universal prevention) behavioral problems in children. Such prevention is likely to effect functioning into adulthood. The Parenting Young Children approach will be presented as one model of parent training used both universally and in targeted/indicated prevention programs. As an evidenced-based approach, the basic tenets of the PYC program was followed by a discussion of the research support for this approach. Supplemental research in protective factors related to parenting, including hope, optimism, spirituality and resilience will also be discussed.