

## **2016 Research Week Proposal**

### **Proposal**

**Title** – Males With Eating Disorders: Understanding, Supporting, and Treating a Unique Population

**Program of Study** – Clinical Mental Health Counseling

**Presentation Type** – PowerPoint

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**Category** – Experimental (Theoretical)

### **Abstract example:**

This presentation stems from a literature review conducted in order to better understand and convey the unique experiences of males with eating disorders and related signs and symptomology. Due to limited information in the DSM and educational texts regarding differentiations between male and female etiology and male-specific psychopathology, prognosis, and therapeutic considerations. It seemed necessary to invest in future male clients by conducting research on their behalf. Research indicates that the DSM may underestimate the male percentage of the overall population dealing with eating disorders by 15 to 30 percent depending on the specific feeding/eating disorder. Four male-specific factors related to eating disorders emerged in the literature, as well as a number of barriers that are making it more difficult for males to receive the help they need. These include internal, historical, societal barriers, as well as barriers related to clinician attitude and belief systems. Research indicates that these barriers can be lifted by treatment teamwork, establishment of rapport founded in an understanding of the male-specific, and family-specific experience of different forms of eating

disorders, careful assessment with screening questions and tools tailored for the male population, and the utilization of theoretical frameworks that emphasize empowerment and the reinstatement of healthy forms of distress tolerance and control. The implications for this research include heightened awareness and preparedness of counselors and treatment teams regarding the specific needs of males that could lead to better therapeutic interventions, and improved accommodations available to males in need of treatment. This research can also serve as a base for development of evidence-based protocol that can lead to further research in order to better understand the needs of specific, understudied groups within the male population experiencing eating disorders.

**Christian worldview integration:**

This research was informed by the Christian worldview, in hopes that it would lead to better understanding of and care for those dealing with the complex effects of sin fleshed out in an eating disorder. Research revealed that males with eating disorders are often dealing with profound amounts of fear, shame, and pride that influence them on the biological, psychological, social, and spiritual level, and that these intermix to make it a very difficult issue to treat without a deep understanding of the nature of eating disorders and the roots of sin therein. The effects of sin may be seen in what one holding the Christian worldview would perhaps call idolatry upon observing the cognitive and behavioral nature of eating disorders, but research reveals the roots of sin go deeper than the elevation of the body over God. Factors such as generational discord and trauma, verbal and sexual abuse, unrelenting and unrealistic standards placed on males, and ruptures in attachment create a net of distress that captures those dealing with eating disorders, leading to profound distress, distortions in reality and loss of control. Eating disorders become a reality that can be controlled; a pseudo-life that confuses the heart and brain to think that control

of food intake, shape, exercise and weight lead to an ability to “be ok” as it were, rather than feeling and addressing real pain, shame and the problem of Sin in one’s life. Due to the unprecedented amount of men and women experiencing body dissatisfaction and showing symptoms of eating disorders, and the culture’s glorification of the body, it may be that eating disorders are a trending form of control that poses as a lifeboat that soothes the pain of reality on the biological, psychological and social levels. This research could impact culture at large by serving as a form of psychoeducation regarding the severity and complexity of eating disorders and how they affect males specifically, cheapening the value of the relief they provide, while also promoting patience and understanding of professional and non-professional members of support systems built around males dealing with this painful issue.