



Attending the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies 52<sup>nd</sup> Annual Convention

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Student Engagement Fund Narrative Report

## **A. Summary**

### **a. Introduction**

I attended the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies (ABCT) Annual Convention in Washington D.C. This conference was a total of four days and I attended for two out of the four, November 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>. My professional goal is to become a licensed marriage and family therapist. Attending a convention of this magnitude as an undergraduate student is a privilege and helped me to develop as a professional in two ways. First, I attended several sessions about innovative research that is relevant to couples and families. I now have a greater understanding of the advanced methods of research in my future field. Secondly, I presented my own research with my faculty mentor at a poster session, which increased my presentation skills.

### **b. Research Sessions Attended**

The first symposium I attended was titled, “Online Relationship Interventions for Low Income Couples: Results from a Nationwide RCT.” The research project was presented by an interdisciplinary team of professors from the University of Miami, Brigham Young University, and University of Denver. These researchers found an effective way of implementing couple therapy through two different online modules. The online therapy, which greatly reduced costs, increased relationship satisfaction and couple communication in over a thousand couples. These researchers also found that couples reported a decrease in maladaptive behaviors related to their mental and physical health (e.g., drinking alcohol). Overall, this was my personal favorite symposium that I attended at ABCT. I now have a greater understanding of the structure and content of empirically-supported online interventions for couples. This research especially interests me because one of my missions



as a professional is to reduce barriers for families to receive therapy. Additionally, I would like to research how family/couple therapy, can not only increase relationship satisfaction, but address other mental and physical health concerns.

I also attended two other large-scale presentations on the first day of the convention. The first was a research symposium titled, “Couples with Marginalized Identities: The Effects of Minority Stressors on Relationship Functioning and How Couples Cope.” This symposium featured several professors explaining their various research projects that focused on marginalized populations. This symposium increased my understanding of the stressors that racial, sexual, and gender minorities face. Additionally, I learned about how these stressors impact couple and family functioning.

I also attended a Panel Discussion titled, “Times up: Strategies to Advance Women to the Top from Women Who’ve Made it There.” This panel featured various women in the field of psychology who have advanced to leadership positions at universities or professional organization. This discussion made me think about how being a woman impacts how I navigate a space and was overall inspiring.

On the second day I attended a Symposium titled, “Promoting Mental Health through Dyadic Functioning in Same-Sex Couples. This symposium reviewed basic and applied research on same-sex dyads to inform tailored couple health interventions. One of the researchers presented on their empirically based intervention that addresses the stressors that lesbian and gay couples face. Throughout the convention I also attended several poster sessions and interacted with professionals from my research lab at NIU and other universities from across the country.



### c. My Research Project

My faculty mentor Dr. David Valentiner and I presented our own research project during a morning poster session on Saturday, November 17. Our poster was titled, “Reassurance Seeking as Mediator Between Memory Confidence and Standardized Test Performance.” This study was based on previous research related to safety behaviors. Test-related safety behaviors, referred to as reassurance seeking, are involved in the underlying processes that maintain test anxiety and associated with lower performance on standardized exams (Knoll et al., 2016). The study examined whether Alcolado & Radomsky’s (2011) implicit model of checking behavior in OCD is applicable to reassurance seeking in test anxiety (see Figure 1). This model of compulsive checking posits that low memory confidence leads to feelings of imperfection (i.e., not just right experiences; NJRE) which in turn leads to checking behavior and then to dysfunction.

Adapting this implicit model to the test anxiety domain, we proposed that low memory confidence contributes to poor test performance through feelings of imperfection (i.e., NJRE) and reassurance seeking (i.e., RSS). This study provided a test of the hypothesized mediation model. Participants ( $N = 154$ ) were undergraduate students in an introductory level psychology course who completed the relevant measures (i.e., RSS and BAMI). The participants also gave permission for researchers to access academic data (e.g., ACT scores) through the University’s Registration and Records. Hayes’ PROCESS macro for SPSS Model 4 was used to examine the proposed mediation model. This analysis found a significant indirect effect from low memory confidence on standardized exam scores through reassurance seeking. The study provides support for the potential applicability of a memory confidence model of compulsive checking behavior to the test anxiety domain.



Having the opportunity to present this project to a variety of professors and graduate students gave me experience presenting to professionals in my field. Prior to this convention, I had only presented to general audiences. Presenting to people familiar with anxiety disorders and the theoretical model utilized, was a different experience. I was challenged by the questions they asked regarding our methodology and was able to elevate my speaking style, since I was talking with experts in the field. Overall, presenting my project at a poster session was a remarkable experience.

### **B. Results/Outcomes**

The goal of our research project, “Reassurance Seeking as Mediator Between Memory Confidence and Standardized Test Scores,” was to apply a model of OCD checking to the domain of test anxiety. We found support for the mediation model. There was a significant indirect effect from memory confidence to standardized test scores carried by reassurance seeking. Previous research found that low memory confidence can indirectly effect OCD dysfunction through increased checking (Alcolado & Radomsky, 2011). Reassurance seeking appears to be a more relevant mediator between memory confidence and exam scores than feelings of not just right experiences, since there was not a significant indirect effect carried solely by NJRE. This research project is a pilot study for my current departmental honor’s thesis which addresses some of the limitations of the initial study.

### **C. How SEF Impacted my Academic Experience**

As I explained when I originally applied for the Student Engagement Fund, I have been fortunate to have the opportunity to pursue research in psychology major at NIU. The past two years I have participated in Research Rookies and have presented at Undergraduate Research and

Artistry Day in April of 2017 and April of 2018. Presenting at URAD has helped me to develop the ability to present research clearly and concisely to a variety of people. These experiences have allowed me to develop greatly as a student and given me valuable skills for that I can utilize in graduate school.

Attending the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies (ABCT) Annual Convention further developed my professional skills. Firstly, I learned the about the newest methods of conducting research and therapy in my field. My undergraduate classes have mainly focused on teaching the major theories of psychology and family sciences. Attending several research symposiums at ABCT introduced me to the innovative research with couple and family population happening in the current field.

Presenting my research related to test anxiety with Dr. Valentiner gave me valuable experience presenting to experts in the field. Overall, by attending a convention in my future field, I grew as a researcher and made professional connections with therapists and psychologists from across the nation. In addition, I have a better understanding of research related to couple and family therapy. This convention was a catalyst for me gaining ideas in for potential research project for graduate school.

#### D. Figures & Images

Figure 1 – General Obsessive Compulsive Checking Model

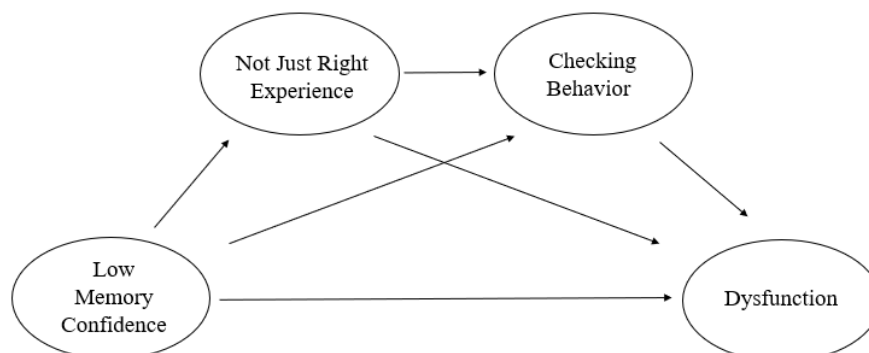
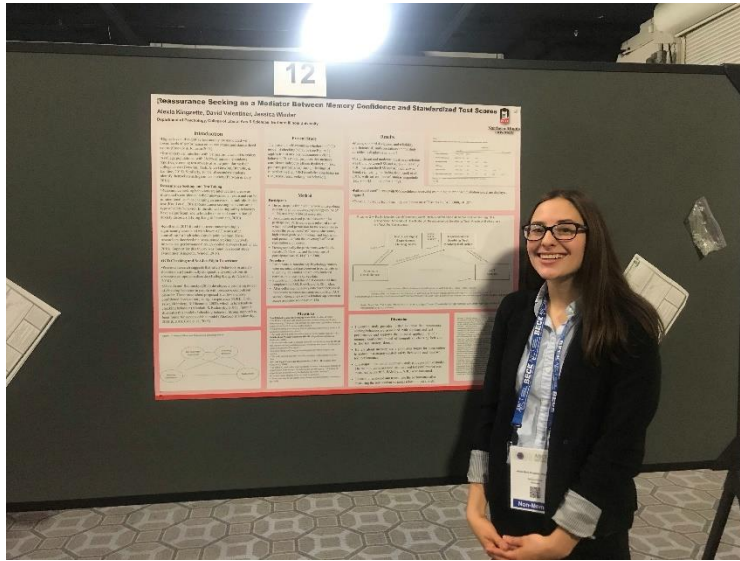


Image 1.





## References

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