

AREA ONE: HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Four research studies have been funded in the area of other-regarding love and human development. These include: a psychological study of autism aimed at illuminating the process of affiliation as a precursor to love; a psychological study of the mother-child relationship and its effects on the human development of empathy, with special attention to the variable of maternal spirituality; a sociological study of adolescents investigating relational and environmental contexts (including the effects of spiritual resources) and their impact on the development of other-regarding love in this age group; a psychological study examining the potential benefits of spiritual attachments and altruistic behaviors in the general adult population traumatized by the violent tragedy of 9/11/01. Together, these studies will contribute to a better understanding of the development of unselfish love and its relationship to psychological well-being.

Research Area Consultant

Gregory Fricchione, MD, IRUL's research area consultant for Human Development, is a psychiatrist specializing in medical and neuropsychiatry. He is Associate Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and Associate Chief of Psychiatry at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. He is also Director of the Division of Psychiatry and Medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital. His basic research interests have centered on immune cell behavior and nitric oxide effects. His clinical research has focused on the catatonic syndrome and on the interface of psychiatry and medicine in cardiac and other diseases, where attachment behavior in the doctor-patient relationship is of key importance. In the last several years, he has been working on a project that examines the connection between brain evolution and the human spiritual imperative. Before returning to Boston in 2002, he spent 2 years as Director of the Carter Center Mental Health Program in Atlanta, working on domestic and international public mental health projects

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1. The Comprehension of Love and Altruism in Autistic and Normal Children

Jerome Kagan proposes a powerful, creative approach to peeling away the mystery of autism by determining whether the empathic deficits of the child with autism lie in the mind, behavior, or both. Much can be learned about the human development of empathy, altruism, and love from the psychophysiological and behavioral study of those with dysfunctions in these attributes. This project will study children with apparent dysfunction in social affiliation due to autism and those on the normal spectrum in this regard.

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2. Love, Emotion and Empathy: Infancy to Early Childhood

Alan Fogel will examine how the quality of the mother-child relationship at 1, 2, 3 and 5 years is related to empathy development at age 5. The capacity to be attuned to others' emotions begins in relationships marked by secure attachment and co-regulation of feelings. The empathic capacity presupposes the ability to become part of a larger whole. It may be encouraged in families in which spirituality and religion play a larger role. Fogel hypothesizes that empathy at age 5 will correlate with a high stable or a rising pattern of co-regulation and secure attachment between ages 1 and 5. Spiritual and religious well-being and engagement will be entered into the analysis to check for moderating effects. This project will provide much-needed insight into the development of empathy in children, as well as the importance of mother – child attunement and maternal spirituality.

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3. Cultivating Adolescents' Other-Regarding Virtues: The Developmental Pathways to Unlimited Love

This study by Peter Benson seeks to understand the linkages among the ecologies of youth that promote, discourage, or remain silent on altruistic love, other-regarding virtues, and actions that are designed to enhance the welfare of others. The bioecological systems model of Bronfenbrenner forms its theoretical base. Two existing data sets will be used: a cross-sectional data set of 229,000 adolescents, and a longitudinal set of almost 400 adolescents assessed at 3 points in time. Both data sets contain responses to the Profile of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors (PSL-AB), which was designed by the Search Institute to assess developmental assets. This study examines the developmental ecologies of families, religious institutions, schools, neighborhoods, local communities,

and non-parental adults with regard to other-regarding dispositions and helping behaviors. Spiritual and religious assets are important variables to study.

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4. What Love Has To Do With It: Altruism, Generativity and Spirituality in the Aftermath of 9/11/01

The principal investigators of this study will study altruism, generativity, and spirituality in a sample of 3000 respondents to a web-based questionnaire. Quantitative measures include: the 9/11 specific coping questionnaire; Brief COPE; Posttraumatic Growth Inventory; Multidimensional Measure of Religiousness and Spirituality; Scale of Psychological Well-Being; Social Well Being Scale; Brief Symptom Inventory; PTSD Checklist; demographics; exposure extent. Qualitative data for 100 subjects will be gathered for linguistic analysis. The researchers hypothesize that those with higher altruism and generativity, and those who draw upon more spiritual resources at the outset, will have less post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and less general symptom distress at baseline and at follow-up. This study will be a part of a Stanford University 9/11 project being led by David Spiegel MD. Spirituality will be assessed in terms of global religiousness/spirituality, religious coping, and spiritual change. This project hypothesizes a connection between aspects of other-regarding love and human resilience in the face of trauma and tragedy.

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