

Murrell Lab (UNT Contextual Psychology Group) Mission

Content

This research group will have a specific, twofold focus. First, we will investigate the role of language and cognition in human psychology. This will reflect our efforts to explain how psychopathology and resiliency are developed and maintained. We will do this through the use of basic behavioral research, including but not limited to work on Relational Frame Theory (RFT), as well as through work on broader social-cognitive processes. Second, we will pursue the applied implications of that work. We will do this by conducting research on the development, application, and outcome of behavioral interventions that are influenced by humanistic and existential therapies. We will examine treatments, including Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and others, which utilize behavioral principles along with client-centered ideals and experiential techniques. All of our work will be guided by sensitivity to function and context, as well as the recognition that our mission might change over time.

The work that we do should ultimately be a reflection and scientific evaluation of the idea that human beings have everything that they need to live meaningful lives— that we all are whole, complete, and perfect. In addition, our work should highlight that behaviors are not to be judged as good nor bad, but rather existing to serve a purpose in a context. Simply put— behavior is not good, behavior is not bad— it is what it is.

Process

(Amy's/Dr. Murrell's) Part

I care about humans living well. I value creating space for human beings to live with meaning, integrity, and dignity. I want that space for myself, for the people who do research with me, and for all the people who our work will reach. I am committed to conducting and training research in the context of making a difference. Related to that, I am committed to the comprehensive development of everyone doing research with me. I will support students in living a life that is full- one in which they do not have to disconnect from themselves or their lives outside of psychology. If group members do choose to separate or compartmentalize, I will recognize the importance of that choice and show equal support and respect.

As a researcher and research supervisor, I will stay busy. I will think hard and work hard. I will freely share research advice and ideas. I will listen to others' ideas openly. I will read manuscripts carefully. I will do my best to give timely feedback, positive and negative, with tenderness and clarity. I commit to keep no student project longer than two weeks without any feedback, and I will not keep a draft any longer than a month without returning it to the student with finalized feedback. If feedback is most relevant to individual work, I will give the feedback (either in writing or in a one-on-one meeting) in a confidential manner. If feedback has group relevance, it will be addressed in a group setting. In either case, I will do my best to provide any necessary criticism in a dignified, respectful, and sensitive manner.

I will let you know when the work is overwhelming and when I need extra time to get things done. I will say no when I need to, and I will really mean it when I say yes to things. I will also ask for help when I need it, and take time out. In addition, I give you all my permission to question me about my commitment to self-care.

It should be noted that I intend to fully support all the work done by members of this group. However, it is only fair for me to state ahead of time that my time and efforts will be prioritized. Projects being primarily authored by me or by students who are working on a thesis or dissertation with me as the chair will take precedence over other projects. Projects that will likely result in publication will be reviewed prior to those that will not. Projects with fast-approaching deadlines will be considered before those without deadlines, or with deadlines far in the future. However, things turned in earlier will be reviewed before things turned in later. Papers and presentations that have already been reviewed by another member of this group, or by another faculty member, will take precedence over projects that have not already been reviewed by someone else.

As the leader of this workgroup, I will invite learning at all levels. I will use my knowledge and expertise to guide the work of this team, while all the time recognizing that on many occasions students educate teachers. I will make my supervision open to criticism. I will do my best to listen, carefully and fully, to the ideas of this workgroup. I will use the ideas and opinions of its members to guide decisions. I will listen when there are problems or concerns about how things are going in this research group. I will also recognize that this group, and its functioning and productivity, are ultimately my responsibility, and (even when it is hard for me) I will take the lead. I will do my best, at all times, to lead in a firm, consistent, and gentle way.

In other words, I will foster open communication about group content and process. I will have early and frequent discussions about authorship and workload and make decisions in a fair and open manner. When there are disagreements or concerns, or even potential concerns, I will listen to all sides and carefully consider all the information. I will listen in lab meetings, and will attempt (without promise) to schedule individual meetings if they are needed. I will weigh the opinions of the group prior to making my decisions about lab matters. When I do make my final decisions about lab content or process, I will let the group know that the final decision has been made. If I fail to follow this procedure, I will apologize and recommit. Finally, while I reserve the right to make the ultimate decisions about lab content, process, and membership, I do fully commit to being open about concerns, providing reasonable opportunities for corrective experiences, and maintaining a sense of humanity in doing so.

Method/Your Part

Choosing to be in this workgroup means that you accept responsibility for your own professional development. In addition, it signifies that you are committed to the professional development of the group. In both cases, your responsibility is two-pronged; there are content and process pieces involved in this commitment. You are expected to push yourself to learn new things, and to discuss and ask for help when there are things that you do not understand. In saying yes to membership in this workgroup, you agree to

patiently teach others who do not yet know what you already do. You are expected to brainstorm and problem-solve as a group and support each other as you all advance to the next level of training. Each of us, at all our levels of training and career, has something to teach. Choosing this group means stepping up to that responsibility as well as to being teachable. Don't say yes to this choice if it isn't freely chosen, or if you feel pressured. Don't say yes if you don't mean it and intend to follow through on commitments, and recognize that you may mess-up and that (either way, whether you mess up or not) you may have to choose over and over again.

Discuss research ideas freely. Do not hold back because you think that the idea is not good enough. Do not hold back because you think that you have a great idea and are worried that someone might steal it from you. Listen to others' ideas openly. Read each other's work and let your work be read. Give your work to a colleague to review before giving it to me. Share your feedback about ideas and writing in an honest but gentle way.

Be generous-with your intellect and your time, and with authorship. We should all play some role in planning, running, reading, writing, and editing on everything thing that we do as a group. People will take the lead on certain projects, but we will all help each other. Authorship will be earned based on degree of contribution. You will have to make commitments to various people and projects, and authorship will be reflective of such. Not all names will be on all presentations and publications, but please be assured that if you play a role in producing a product, your name will be included. It should be noted that each "project" produces (at least, potentially) several products. Authorship will be reflective of work at each level. For example, you would be listed on a presentation but not a publication if you discussed the project, ran participants, entered data, analyzed data, etc. but did not work on the interpretation or write-up. I want to make clear that it is expected that you "step-up" at varying levels and that the workgroup will reward you appropriately. Whether you are an undergraduate, a post-baccalaureate, a graduate student, or a professor- you have the right to earn first authorship. You must recognize, however, that I will have the final word on order of authorship. You must also recognize that publications take precedence over presentations and that no presentations will be allowed to move forward unless a solid draft of a publishable form is complete.

Saying yes to this group means that you are committed to protecting the integrity of this workgroup and the work that we collectively do. And, I am the leader of this group. Therefore, before you talk to anyone outside of our lab group about our current findings, possible new directions of our work, recruiting participants, doing collaborations or related matters, you must talk to me. Stop and think before you speak: if what you are thinking involves practical or intellectual contributions, or resources, required of this group, don't say anything until you have talked to me and I have given you an okay to speak to someone from outside of our workgroup.

Make the research count, for you and for something. Work so that class projects and your thesis/dissertation (or other lab projects) overlap. Do work in this lab that relates to what you are doing in other settings. Do something that you care about, that will make a difference.

Attend to the relationships of members in this workgroup. The academic world can be a cold one, but it does not have to be. We will create a little community. This group should be a place where people are free to speak their thoughts and their feelings. You will not be expected or demanded to share, or to like everyone, but you are expected to fully support each other's development. In addition, you are expected to allow others to share- without condemning them for sharing, without rescuing them from feeling bad, and without talking to others about it without permission.

Related to that, you are also being asked to recognize when your own emotional struggles and others' emotional struggles impede the progress of this workgroup or the work that we do- and to take action to help us be more effective. Consistent with this mission, there are three caveats about that. First, give it a little time. People have bad days and it appears, for example, as if their stress levels or fears of inadequacies are holding them back or keeping them from upholding their commitments to this group. It very likely might pass. Wait and see. We will only encourage action if there is a recurring or long-standing pattern. When you see that lab productivity or functioning is being affected, it is time to speak up. Simply being quiet or going away when you do recognize that there is a problem will not work and will not be tolerated. If you see this going away behavior in others, you should discuss it with them and with me. Likewise, if someone asks you to take sides, this should be discussed with them and with me. It is not good for the lab to leave issues unresolved. Sometimes (in order to make this a more effective workgroup) painful things might need to be pointed out, either to you or to others. This can be done in an honest and gentle way, and that is what we will expect from anyone who says yes to being in this workgroup.

Having said that, some times "problems" look very different from what they actually are. It is our responsibility, provided you choose this group, to examine the big picture- what is going on, what are the reasons that it might be going on-what can we as a group do to make it "better". These pieces of the mission are tough, and we will make mistakes. It is my hope that we all recognize that, make allowances for that, and work for something that is bigger than that. In saying yes to this group, you acknowledge that this process is consistent with your goals for professional development.

Finally...you must, if you choose this group, recognize that I have the final word on matters of this workgroup and the work that we do. You agree, in saying yes to this workgroup, to openly share your thoughts about our work. You also agree that my decision (once made) is not up for debate. Being a member of this group includes recognition that this is a "benevolent dictatorship" lead by me- this is not a "democracy" but rather a place where all are heard, all opinions are considered, and one has the authority.