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Professor Uses NSF Grant to Study Interpersonal Communications

Graham Bodie and colleagues study conversations about everyday stressors, levels of support

 AUGUST 9, 2018 BY **CHRISTINA STEUBE**

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Graham Bodie

OXFORD, Miss. – Graham Bodie believes that if people can feel that they're being heard during times of stress, their lives will improve. With that in mind, he is working to find the best way to teach critical listening skills that could enhance lives.

A visiting professor of **integrated marketing communications** at the **University of Mississippi**, Bodie is conducting his research through a three year-grant from the National Science Foundation.

UM received the grant from the NSF's Division of Behavioral and Cognitive Sciences as part of a collaborative effort to study what happens during conversations about everyday problems. Penn State University and the University of Minnesota also were awarded grants in support of the collaboration, which seeks to clarify how discussing everyday stressors with others conveys support and leads to different emotional outcomes.

Bodie's work will look at how a listener's supportive comments influence the way a person talks about their stressful experience.

"My academic background is in how humans process information and how they behave as listeners, particularly within the context of talking about stressful events," Bodie said. "What do we say that allows others to better understand their unique stressors and ultimately to cope with those events?"

"How should we best train people in this capacity? What can listening to others teach us about ourselves, our society and our world?"

Bodie previously conducted research on listening and the social cognitive foundation of human communicative behavior. This project will expand on the nuances of what people do when they offer support to others, a facet that he said has not been thoroughly explored.

"Although there is work on specific features of supportive messages, it tends to be hypothetical, asking participants to imagine they receive support," Bodie said. "Likewise, although there is work that pairs people together to talk through stressful events, most of this work explores general impressions of the conversation – how supported they felt after the conversation."

This grant will allow Bodie to work with data from four previous studies, which includes more than 450 videotaped conversations of a person describing a stressor to another, while the listener provides support.

The research conducted with this grant fits in with the university's Community Wellbeing Flagship Constellation research initiative, where researchers identify factors that impair the well-being of individuals and work to implement programs to build stronger, more vibrant communities.

"Dr. Bodie and his team's recent National Science Foundation grant award demonstrates the opportunities we have to increase knowledge and improve practice and policy through cutting-edge research," said John Green, constellation team leader and director of the **UM Center for Population Studies**. "As an active part of the Community Wellbeing Flagship Constellation and a committed member of the steering committee, Dr. Bodie is contributing to the University of Mississippi's leadership in scholarly endeavors that will improve people's lives."

The research will examine how variations in these particular types of interactions result in differences in how the distressed person continues to express their thoughts and feelings throughout the interaction.

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OXFORD, Miss. – The University of Mississippi is asking the community to help spread a little joy this holiday season by donating to the 25th annual Books and Bears program. Donations such as toys, books, dolls, bicycles and other children's play items are being accepted through Dec. 14. All donations will be collected and sorted

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Mississippi Excellence in Coaching Fellowship Aims to Build Leaders

OXFORD, Miss. – Twenty-five inaugural recipients of the Mississippi Excellence in Coaching Fellowship – a program hosted by the University of Mississippi School of Education in partnership with the Mississippi Association of Coaches and the Mississippi High School Activities Association – are expected to increase their impact on student-athletes and their communities. The coaching fellowship

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Clarion-Ledger: New Essay Collection Tells the Story of Meredith's Enrollment

Essays celebrate 60th anniversary of James Meredith's enrollment at University of Mississippi By Lauren Rhoades Oct. 1 marks the 60th anniversary of James Meredith's 1962 enrollment at the University of Mississippi as the school's first African-American student.

"What is missing is an understanding of how messages unfold over the course of a conversation to regulate the emotions of a person in distress," said Denise Solomon, principal investigator and professor of communication arts and sciences at Penn State. "Our project will focus on studying the conversation linkages between one person's supportive messages and the other person's cognitive and emotional responses in an effort to map those dynamic patterns."

The investigators will analyze every element of these conversations and develop strategies to show how emotion and cognitive processing are affected during the course of an interaction. The researchers have predicted that distressed individuals who are responsive to high-quality supportive messages during an interaction leave the conversation with an improved emotional state and a new understanding of their issue.

"The main prediction is the interaction between support quality and how disclosers talk about their event," Bodie said. "I feel like if people can feel heard in times of stress, their lives will improve, and I want to know how we can best teach these skills toward bettering our lives."

The researchers hope their findings will ultimately be able to assist support providers and counselors, while also leading to additional research to determine why some individuals or relationships show different levels of responsiveness during supportive conversations.

"The novelty in this research is mapping responsiveness within interactions onto important conversational outcomes, which opens the door to new questions about why those patterns differ between people and between relationships," Solomon said.

"We also envision that the tool kit we develop can be used to illuminate the dynamics of other types of consequential conversations, such as in conflict negotiations or attempts to influence a partner's health behavior."

Other investigators on the project include Susanne Jones, associate professor of communication studies at the University of Minnesota, and Nilam Ram, professor of human development, family studies and psychology at Penn State.

Funding for this research was provided through grant no. 1749474 from the NSF Division of Behavioral and Cognitive Sciences.



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