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Liddle, Howard

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Name

Howard Liddle (1948)

Introduction

Dr. Howard Liddle is a pioneer in the field of substance abuse, delinquency, and family therapy. He is currently a Professor at the University of Miami in the Departments of Public Health Sciences, Psychology and Counseling Psychology, and a board-certified diplomate in Family Psychology (American Board of Professional Psychology, ABPP). He developed Multidimensional Family Therapy (MDFT), a critically acclaimed new generation evidence-based family treatment for substance abusing adolescents more than 30 years ago, and has been a leading figure in the field ever since. Today, MDFT has 150 teams in various sites in 22 countries. Dr. Liddle has published over 200 articles, book chapters, and DVDs demonstrating how to deliver MDFT.

Career Trajectory and Research Contributions

Dr. Liddle's research focuses on the development, testing, implementation, and dissemination of MDFT for youth substance abuse and delinquency. He began his career in 1974, obtaining his doctorate from Northern Illinois University, specializing in marital and family therapy. He was inspired and trained by Drs. Salvador Minuchin, Jay Haley, and Braulio Montalvo at the Philadelphia Child Guidance Clinic from 1975 to 1977, and brought his passion for family therapy to Temple University, where he taught for 12 years. From 1980 to 1982, along with Doug Breunlin and Dick Schwartz, he started the first externships to train family therapy supervisors at the Institute for Juvenile Research in Chicago. His clinical research program began at the University of California, San Francisco, where he was an Associate Professor in Residence. He came to the University of Miami in 1996, where he has continued and grew his research program on MDFT. He has been the Principal Investigator on many NIH grants over the past three decades, including the only two NIH Center grants on adolescent substance abuse treatment research, first at Temple University, and then at the University of Miami. With European colleagues, he collaborated on adapting and testing the MDFT approach in the first multisite, multinational

implementation evaluation in France, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, and The Netherlands. Dr. Liddle is among very few treatment developers and research scientists who can claim 30 years of continuous research grant funding from the National Institutes of Health.

Clinical Contributions

MDFT has been hailed as delivering outcomes “among the best there are for adolescents” by Dr. Lisa Onken, chief of Behavioral and Integrative Branch of NIDA’s Division of Neuroscience and Behavioral Research. MDFT has been acclaimed by many outside of academia. For example, a video showing Dr. Liddle delivering MDFT entitled “A Liddle Therapy goes a Long Way,” describes Dr. Liddle as having a “unique ability to develop relationships with adolescents with substance abuse concerns and their family members and community stakeholders.” Through direct supervision, live trainings, training teams in agencies, videos, and books, Dr. Liddle and his colleagues have done an impressive job of bringing research-based clinical knowledge and skills to therapists around the world.

Mentoring

Dr. Liddle has mentored dozens of individuals over the years, many of whom have won national dissertation awards, secured positions at prestigious institutions, and have made significant contributions in the field. Dr. Dana Mills, director of the Ph.D. program in Educational Research and Evaluation at Nova Southeastern University, states that although Dr. Liddle’s accomplishments are evident from simply glancing at his CV, what is less obvious to those who have not worked with him directly is “the level of creativity and innovation that characterizes his thinking.” Dr. Dana Becker, Clinical Supervisor at the Therapy Center of Philadelphia, and Professor Emeritus in Social Work at Bryn Mawr College, describes Dr. Liddle as an “inspirational teacher” of therapy, and her time learning from him as “the most stimulating

professional experiences” she has known, forever impacting her own teaching and supervision. Dr. Maya Boustani, a postdoctoral fellow at UCLA who started her career as a research assistant with Dr. Liddle, states that his mentoring and support was “pivotal” in her professional trajectory and deeply influenced her own work and conceptualization of evidence-based treatments and clinical research. Dr. Cindy Rowe at the University of Miami shares that she is “unbelievably fortunate” to have Dr. Liddle as her mentor, colleague, and friend. Other mentees that have worked with Dr. Liddle include Drs. Craig Henderson, Guy Diamond, Gary Diamond, and Aaron Hogue.

Conclusion

Clearly, Dr. Liddle’s research, clinical, and mentoring contributions have been invaluable to many. He has been recognized with research and career achievement awards from the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, the American Family Therapy Association, the Hazelden Foundation, and the American Psychological Association. His numerous publications and continuous grant funding further speak to his success. However, it is his direct impact on the lives of his mentees, trainees, and clients and the effect of MDFT to countless families and the futures of numerous youth that are most valuable, yet most difficult to measure. His research has been on the forefront of the evidence-based treatment movement and has inspired young researchers to develop and test new generations of treatment. His mentoring has propelled the careers of influential individuals in the field, who have then made their own contributions. His clinical expertise, training, and supervision have influenced thousands of therapists around the world, who in turn have influenced the lives of tens of thousands of youth and families. These multiple ripple effects in his research, clinical work, and mentoring make it impossible to truly quantify Dr. Liddle’s contribution to the field. A quote from Dr. Cindy Rowe sums up Dr. Liddle’s career perfectly: “He was a great student of the

family therapy masters and systems thinkers in the 70s, a pioneer in the adolescent substance abuse treatment and supervision fields in the 80s, an innovator in treatment development research in the 90s, and a leader in the dissemination of evidence-based treatments since 2000. Beyond his clinical genius and absolutely stunning intellect, his passion is helping adolescents change their lives. He simply cannot rest knowing we can do better for teens and their families.”

Cross-References

- ▶ [Adolescents in Couple and Family Therapy](#)
- ▶ [Substance Use Disorders in Couple and Family Therapy](#)

Key Citations

- Liddle, H. A. (2009). *Multidimensional Family Therapy for adolescent drug abuse: Clinician's manual*. Center City: Hazelden Publishing Co.
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- Liddle, H. A. (2016b). Multidimensional Family Therapy. In T. Sexton & J. Lebow (Eds.), *Handbook of family therapy*. New York: Routledge.
- Rigter, H., Rowe, C. L., Gantner, A., Mos, K., Nielsen, P., Phan, O., . . . Liddle, H. A. (2015). From research to practice: The international implementation of Multidimensional Family Therapy. In N. el-Guebaly, G. Carrà, & M. Galanter (Eds.), *Textbook of addiction treatment: International perspectives*. New York: Springer.
- Dr. Liddle's research and clinical articles, and MDFT training DVD are available at www.mdft.org.