



## Award for Outstanding Dissertation in the Field of Trauma Psychology

This award recognizes the most outstanding dissertation defended in the prior academic year on a topic in the field of trauma psychology.

*The 2014 Award goes to Darryl Etter.*

Darryl is a doctoral Student in Clinical Psychology at the APA-accredited PGSP-Stanford Consortium composed of the Stanford University School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences and Palo Alto University.

According to his dissertation chair, Cheryl Gore-Felton, Ph.D. *Professor & Associate Chairman PSYCHIATRY AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES* at STANFORD Darryl defended his dissertation May 30, 2013 with the title *“Modern warfare: Video game playing and posttraumatic symptoms in Veterans*. The dissertation examined the impact of video games on combat veterans exposed to trauma. Video game playing was common and substantial in duration and frequency in this sample, and participants indicated that some games, particularly military first-person shooter games, reminded them of traumatic experiences. Players of trauma-congruent video games reported higher levels of PTSD symptoms in this study.

Despite this finding, these results did not indicate that video game playing contributed to PTSD symptoms beyond the effects associated with personality, combat exposure, and social support. The relative prevalence of video game play and its ties to psychopathology indicate that clinicians should assess the video game playing behavior of their patients, including veterans, with a particular eye to the duration of play sessions. Additionally, because these results suggest that video game playing is not necessarily harmful and that military first-person shooter games are reminiscent of trauma, this study suggests that video game-based exposure therapy is theoretically feasible. Much lower cost than virtual reality exposure therapy systems, video game-based exposure therapy could represent a means to increase access and utilization of trauma therapy among veterans broadly, especially among younger and more symptomatic cohorts that are less likely to engage with traditional talk therapies.

Professor Gore-Felton notes that the study extends what we know about the potential impact of video game playing on mental health and informs innovative treatment that leverages technology. Later she notes that in addition to the science, his “. . . research has clinical implications which will undoubtedly contribute to our understanding of coping, exposure, and avoidance in the context of combat trauma.” In this way, Dr. Etter embodies the practitioner–researcher as his program of study had a strong emphasis on clinical demands, including his year-long experience working at a VA hospital, where his patients with TBI and PTSD informed his hypotheses for this study. Based on her experiences as his dissertation committee chair and as a mentor on multiple other projects, she notes that, ranked with his peers, “. . . he would be in the top 1% without fail—he is just that talented.”

As an emerging prominent young scholar, in addition to his dissertation research Dr. Etter has five peer-reviewed manuscript submissions (three of which have been published and two are under review) and six peer-reviewed abstracts approved as research poster presentations.

In closing, Dr. Gore-Felton notes that Etter:

He brings poise, confidence, wisdom, and a fierce work ethic to everything he engages in, which results in the production of the highest quality work that increases our collective knowledge and will benefit the communities he serves. Indeed, he embodies the mission of APA and will make substantial contributions to the field of trauma psychology for many years to come.

The Awards Committee agreed. Congratulations Darryl.

Charles R. Figley, PhD, Chair, 2014 Division 56 Awards Committee  
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