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Researcher Profile: Michelle Jeanfreau

Michelle Jeanfreau
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RESEARCHER PROFILE

An Interview with Michelle Jeanfreau, PhD, LMFT

Michelle Jeanfreau received her bachelor's degree in psychology from Wright State University. She continued her education at The University of Southern Mississippi and earned her master's degree in Marriage and Family Therapy. She completed her Doctorate degree at Kansas State University in Human Ecology, also with the Marriage and Family Therapy emphasis. Michelle is also a licensed marriage and family therapist and worked clinically for Gulf Coast Mental Health on the Mississippi Gulf Coast before she began teaching at the University of Southern Mississippi. Michelle is currently an associate professor and has been with the university for 12 years. She spends a lot of her personal time on the soccer field, either coaching or watching her children play.

Q. DEFINE WHAT YOU DO PROFESSIONALLY.

A. As an associate professor in Child and Family Studies, my time is split between teaching, research, and service. I teach a range of courses at the undergraduate level, some include Marriage and the Family, Social Policy, and Children, Families, and Technology. I have also taught graduate level courses including: Intimate Relationships, Adolescence and the Family System, Parenting across the Lifespan, and Couple Therapy. I teach in both traditional and online formats. My research program is characterized by an emphasis on relationships. I am particularly interested in marital relationships, family school relationships, and parenting and sports. I am driven by the desire to examine and better understand how relationships impact who we are.



Q. WHAT ACTIVITIES ENCOMPASS YOUR PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES?

A. On the research side, the activities that I am currently involved in include finishing up several manuscripts related to the following topics: how people choose mental health providers, contributing factors to marital infidelity, teacher-parent communication, and skirting the line between insanity and positive parenting support in youth sports.

Additionally, I have a project that I am collecting qualitative data for related to marriage and family therapist's perceptions of working with couples related to financial issues and financial infidelity.

Q. HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN ENGAGED IN YOUR PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITY?

A. Twelve years.

Q. WHAT LED YOU TO YOUR PROFESSIONAL CALLING?

A. When I started my Doctorate program I always thought I would focus on clinical work with couples. Being a professor was off my radar because, although I liked teaching, I was not as interested in research and the pressure to publish. At USM I started out in an instructor position which fit with my love of teaching, however, as I began to build relationships within academia my interests grew in finding answers to questions related to my areas of interest. Often times these questions grew out of research related to my teaching experiences in class with the students. The rest is history. I became interested in financial infidelity when I redesigned the Family Financial Management course to have more of a focus on family financial issues rather than personal financial planning.

Q. DO YOU WORK ALONE OR DO YOU HAVE A TEAM?

A. I have been fortunate to be trained by, learn from, and work with a diverse and talented group of scholars. These experiences have both helped me to build and sharpen my research skills and better formulate my approach to conducting research. I commonly work with researchers within my department but also work with others across disciplines as well. On the teaching side, our department has a similar approach. We work in teams to develop curriculum. This pedagogical work reflects our commitment to providing the best education possible to students who choose our university.

Q. WHAT THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK GUIDES YOUR WORK WHEN DEALING WITH CLIENTS?

A. I haven't seen clients in a couple of years but the theoretical frameworks that guide my work when I do are the Bioecological Framework and Systems Theory. I also tend to be a little structural and behavioral.

Q. WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN SO THAT 10 YEARS FROM NOW WE CAN SAY THAT FINANCIAL THERAPY IS A RESPECTED FIELD OF STUDY?

A. I already believe the field is gaining respect, however, I think for the field to continue to grow there needs to be a collaboration between counseling programs and finance programs within the university setting. This does pose some challenges since the two fields have been traditionally unrelated.

Q. WHAT BENEFITS CAN THE FINANCIAL THERAPY ASSOCIATION PROVIDE TO OTHERS DOING WORK THAT IS SIMILAR TO YOUR PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES?

A. I think the association is doing a great job of disseminating research and creating a source of education for those interested in this quickly growing field and area of research.

Q. IF YOU HAD UNLIMITED RESOURCES, WHAT WOULD YOUR DREAM FINANCIAL THERAPY RESEARCH PROJECT LOOK LIKE?

A. Wow, I don't think I have thought about this!!! I guess, one of my "soapbox" issues has always been teaching adolescents "real" life skills in high school. Related to finances, I think it would be great to incorporate a personal finance and family finance course for students in their junior and senior years of high school. It would be interesting to measure the students over time against those who did not take the courses to see its impact.

**Q. COULD YOU GIVE ADVICE TO PRACTITIONERS' WANTING TO GET INVOLVED IN DOING THEIR OWN RESEARCH OR WRITING ON FINANCIAL THERAPY?**

A. I think some good advice would be to team up with researchers in a university setting. I think when practitioners' and university researchers can collaborate you are more likely to address real, everyday issues of the populations you are trying to serve.

Q. IF OTHERS ARE INTERESTED IN FINDING OUT MORE ABOUT YOU PERSONALLY AND PROFESSIONALLY, WHERE CAN THEY OBTAIN THIS INFORMATION?

A. I would direct them to the University of Southern Mississippi website. I also have an account with researchgate.com if they would like to follow my research activities.