

The Legacy of Lizette Peterson-Homer in Pediatric Psychology (1951–2002)

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Lizette Peterson-Homer was an exceptional clinical researcher, dedicated teacher and mentor, and supportive colleague and friend to many in pediatric psychology. Her innovative applications were coupled with strong methodological standards in creating a superb portfolio of contributions to the field. Lizette's premature death on July 18, 2002, was a loss for the discipline of psychology and particularly for the field of pediatric psychology.

By way of facts on her vita, Lizette received her B.S. degree from Utah State University in 1973, and her M.S. and Ph.D. from the University of Utah working with Donna Gelfand and Don Hartmann. Upon award of her doctorate in 1978, she started as an assistant professor at the University of Missouri–Columbia, where her rise through the professorial ranks culminated in the award of the Byler Endowed Chair in 1998 and Curator's Professor in 2001. Lizette had also received recognition from her university for the excellence of her contributions in 1988 through the Chancellor's Award for Outstanding Research and Creativity in the Behavioral and Social Sciences and the Frederick A. Middlebush Endowed Chair for a five-year appointment.

Over her career she produced an extraordinary number of articles and chapters, and presented at a large number of national and international conferences. In particular, Lizette was an invited plenary speaker at the Florida Conference on Child Health Psychology and the Kansas Conference in Clinical Child Psychology where she presented on her conceptualizations about children's healthy development and effective interventions to enhance the lives of children and their families based on empirically founded clinical research. She was a frequently sought-after consultant on a range of issues, and gra-



viously gave her careful attention to editing and improving others' writings to be as clear as her own.

She received the Significant Research Contribution Award from the Society of Pediatric Psychology in 1988 for her outstanding work in preventing childhood injuries and preparing children for hospitalization and surgery. In 1997, the APA Division of Clinical Psychology also honored her with its award for Distinguished Scientific Contributions to Clinical Psychology. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the Maternal and Child Health Bureau recognized Lizette's innovative and scientifically sound research through

several awards of federal grants to support her programs of study.

A multitude of articles, often authored with graduate students and postdoctoral fellows, was published in the major outlets for the field overlapping pediatric psychology, child development, and behavior analysis and therapy. Additionally, she was frequently invited to contribute chapters to handbooks and edited volumes on issues related to her research. Lizette authored and edited three books: *Prevention of Problems in Childhood: Psychological Research and Applications* (with myself, 1984, Wiley-Interscience), *Child Development and Psychopathology* (with Donna Gelfand, 1985, Sage), and *The Pediatric Psychologist: Issues in Professional Development and Practice* (with Cynthia Harbeck, 1988, Research Press). During her career, she served as editor of *Behavior Therapy* (1989–1992), founding editor of *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice* (1993–1995), and associate editor of the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, *Health Psychology*, and *Behavior Therapy* as well as on numerous editorial boards and frequent guest editing stints. In particular, she served continuously since 1984 as a valued member of the editorial board for the *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*. Her editor's letters were constructive and supportive and were appreciated by the authors even in rejection. She also co-edited a book series for Kluwer/Plenum titled "Issues in Clinical Child Psychology." At the time of her death, Lizette had just started her term as editor of the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, a prestigious appointment acknowledging her editorial skills and breadth of knowledge.

Among her strengths were the orientations she carried into her work, such as a critical founding in child development, behavior analysis, and cognitive behavior therapy, strong standards for research methodology, a practical reliance on theory, and a passion to make a better world for children. As a scientist, she was willing to put cherished notions to the test of empirical investigation and move forward with the results. Lizette did not conduct just one study on a particular topic, she developed a systematic series of investigations in a research program, in which the entire complexity of an issue could be studied. Thus, there are multiple programmatic themes to her work, each of which individually would have been a satisfying career of work for most scientists.

In this brief overview, I want to focus on three areas of work in which I think Lizette's legacy of contributions in pediatric psychology is particularly

significant. These include preparing children for hospitalization and reducing children's distress, the etiology and prevention of childhood injuries, and prevention of child abuse and neglect.

Hospital Preparation and Reducing Children's Distress

Concerned by the needs of children undergoing hospitalization and medical procedures, Lizette systematically set out to examine whether children could be better prepared to reduce their psychological stress and pain. In an initial set of studies, she tested whether coping strategies could be taught to children undergoing surgery and if modeling procedures could be effectively developed in a cost-efficient intervention. These procedures were also applied to dental procedures. Lizette and her research team then turned their attention to aspects of stressful medical procedures such as the role of family, the contributions of information-seeking dispositions to the reduction of distress, and ways to prepare well children in order to reduce general medical fears. These studies and the guiding conceptualizations represented the single largest set of research on the topic that she summarized in chapters and monographs (e.g., Peterson & Brownlee-Duffeck, 1984; Peterson & Mori, 1988; Peterson, Oliver, & Saldana, 1997). Her work in this area established Lizette as a dynamic advocate for prevention based on an empirical approach.

Childhood Injuries: Understanding Characteristics, Etiology, and Interventions

Impressed by the fact that more children die from injuries than from other leading causes, Lizette developed a program of research to investigate the nature of children's injuries and ways to prevent them. In characteristic style, she systematically examined the conditions under which injuries occur. Consistent with her strong emphasis on methodology, her research team searched for better ways to accurately record injuries so that their circumstances could be appropriately studied. In particular, Lizette was interested in the roles that parental supervision, rules, and beliefs played in children's safety. Consequently, she and her students and postdoctoral fellows comprehensively interviewed and assessed what children

and parents perceived were the rules governing safety. As the first of several innovative contributions to the injuries research field, she reasoned that near injuries and minor injuries provided useful situations to analyze for injury etiology and possible prevention points. A second innovation came when she conceptualized an application of behavior analysis to injuries in what she called “process analysis” as a method for examining the antecedents, behaviors, and consequences of injury and near-injury situations. This approach was aimed at garnering greater detail about the circumstances surrounding injuries than traditional epidemiological methods (Peterson, Farmer, & Mori, 1987). Although this type of conceptualization had been applied to other realms of children’s behavior, it had not been fully applied to the field of injury control. A third innovation was made by her extremely active and creative research team when it designed a simulated analogue of bicycle riding to assess behavior in hazardous situations, using stationary bikes and video media presentations. Her research and writings provide an exceptional set of resources charting the contribution of psychology to injury control (summarized in, for example, Peterson, Gable, Doyle, & Ewigman, 1997; Peterson & Oliver, 1995; Saldana & Peterson, 1998; Tremblay & Peterson, 1999).

Lizette was a passionate advocate for children’s safety, taking all opportunities as they came in her personal life and in professional writing to educate about safety. She railed against “complacency and misdirection” of parents, educators, researchers, and especially policy-makers who impeded effective prevention (Peterson & Roberts, 1992, p. 375). Over time, she became even more passionate about the need for better parental supervision of children and for improved ways to assist parents in reducing risks to their children.

Child Maltreatment Interventions and Prevention

Lizette’s work with children’s unintentional injuries moved her directly to concerns over “intentional” injuries to children, namely, child abuse and neglect. In an article in *Psychological Bulletin*, she and her co-author reviewed the history of intentional and unintentional injuries in terms of their separated lines of research and intervention/prevention efforts (Peterson & Brown, 1994). They noted the inherent difficulties in discriminating intention, i.e., in sepa-

rating injuries and injuries related to child abuse. The argument was presented that both have common outcomes (viz., injury to the child) and some evidence was described suggesting common etiologies that would be difficult to separate meaningfully (e.g., parental supervision and parental beliefs about child development and behavior; Peterson, 1994). Given the results of several studies cited, this argument came to the conclusion that:

Our ultimate message is that theoretical and empirical gains will be made from placing childhood injuries on the continuum of parent beliefs, behaviors, and intentions rather than considering injuries as a dichotomy. We suggest that effective interventions will enhance parents’ knowledge and understanding of child development, encourage parental use of more effective and positive methods of child discipline, reduce parents’ negative affect, and facilitate effective anger management. Such interventions will have the maximum likelihood of keeping children safe from all forms of traumatic injury. (Peterson & Gable, 1998, p. 314)

An integrated approach to research and interventions to prevent injuries was outlined. Much of her latest writing related to child abuse and neglect coupled with injury prevention (DiLillo, Tremblay, & Peterson, 2000; Peterson, Gable, et al., 1997). Lizette’s most recent clinical research applications targeted child maltreatment, primarily by intervening with such issues as erroneous parental beliefs and abusive discipline behaviors. These projects work with mothers who have risk factors for potential abuse. Posthumous publications will likely come from her collaborators, honoring her science, creativity, passion, and commitment up to the day of her unexpected death.

Scholarship and Passion

The entire set of articles and chapters related to these three topics alone take up many pages in a variety of publication outlets. There were also other topics of interest throughout her career, including theory and research into childhood depression, the impact of televised advertising to children in promoting unhealthy lifestyles, psychosocial development among children of alcoholic parents, gaining an understanding of children’s altruism and moral judgments, and topics related to children’s chronic ill-

nesses such as treatment adherence, health beliefs, and family variables. Additionally, while her publications inherently modeled methodological soundness, she also wrote extensively about research issues such as subject (participant) selection, multi-modal measurement, and the integrity of independent variables. In her off hours, Lizette wrote poetry, short stories and vignettes, and two unpublished mystery novels. Her extraordinary volume of writing, translated into print, covers the wide theoretical, empirical, and clinical realms of psychology and her own personal experiences of a humane life. Lizette's contributions and importance of her work to numerous areas of psychology have had and will continue to have wide-ranging and enduring influence. Her caring and commitment to the improvement of human lives was evident in all her publications, teaching, research, and clinical activities.

It was an important facet of Lizette that she truly integrated her multiple roles reflecting strongly held values in her professional and personal life. Her work which targeted preventing harm and injury, enhancing children's development and securing their safe futures, and helping mothers achieve parenting goals was continuous with her personal roles as mother, daughter, wife, and sister. Lizette successfully melded aspects of her professional and personal life into a meaningful congruency of passion and compassion.

Indeed, Lizette was passionate about her work and the realities of life for the people she was trying to understand and help. In 1997, for example, while trading ideas on injury control, she whipped off an e-mail about parental supervision and reducing injuries: "I think you know all of my pet peeves here—we don't know what constitutes adequate supervision, we don't support parents in providing it, we act like barriers will save the world and they won't, plus we can't even effectively legislate for them when we know they work (just read Peterson and Roberts, *American Psychologist*, 1992, article)!" This type of passion permeated her work to find more effective prevention and intervention programs to benefit children and families.

With her husband, psychologist Andrew Homer, whom she met in graduate school, they collaborated on multiple projects including co-authored articles, a loving marriage, and two children, Kestrel and Geddes. Kes is an undergraduate at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and Ged is a high school student in Columbia, Missouri. Fascinated by their develop-

mental progressions, she was as proud of their accomplishments as she was of her own.

As I close this tribute to the life of Lizette Peterson-Homer, as a friend and fellow pediatric psychologist, I recall what she wrote with her co-author in the Epilogue of their book.

There are over 20 times more individuals currently specializing in pediatric medicine than in pediatric psychology, and the field still has many battles to win in the areas of training credentials and recognition as a necessary part of the medical team rather than as a luxury found only in select university medical centers. Still, like other pediatric psychologists (e.g., Varni & Wallander, 1984), we can foresee a time when every ill or injured child will receive holistic care from a unified force of medical specialists, including pediatricians, nurses, child-life workers, social workers, and pediatric psychologists. Focus on the child's developing cognitive, social, and affective needs as well as physical condition will be routine, and the child's long-term welfare will be the goal for intervention. Is such a view realistic? Not without continued work in clinical practice and research, as well as political efforts. And is such a view adaptive? We believe it is. It keeps us and many of our colleagues invested in attempting to actualize the future for the field. (Peterson & Harbeck, 1988, pp. 131–132)

Lizette leaves a legacy of significant research that did, indeed, move toward such actualization for pediatric psychology that will endure. Her legacy will also be sustained by her numerous students, friends, and colleagues who cherish their memories of this multi-faceted person. She was a caring person with a sense of humor and dedication that carried everybody through stressful times.

The Department of Psychological Sciences at the University of Missouri–Columbia has established the Lizette Peterson-Homer Graduate Fellowship Fund to honor her devotion to teaching and mentoring (Department of Psychological Sciences, 210 McAlester Hall, University of Missouri–Columbia, Columbia, Missouri 65211). The memorial fund will assist graduate students in the department with their research activities, specialty training at other institutions, and travel to professional conferences. Emphasis will be given to study in pediatric psychology and especially to research in child injury prevention. In an organizational memorial to her legacy, the So-

ciety of Pediatric Psychology has set up the Lizette Peterson-Homer Injury Research Grant with donations made through the American Psychological Foundation (750 First Street, NE, Washington, DC

20002). The grant fund will be administered to nationwide applications by the Society to increase work into injury control from a psychological perspective.

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