



## The Young Clinician of the Year: An Interview with Anthony Tanona

**ANTHONY TANONA** is the recipient of the Broward County Psychological Association 2002 Young Clinician Award. Each year the award goes to an outstanding doctoral student at the Nova Southeastern University Center for Psychological Studies. The award was created in 1997 to “articulate and promote a specific model of clinical life,” that model being a clinician who is actively involved in the community.

Transplanted from the Midwest, Anthony came to Nova from Michigan where he earned his undergraduate degree at Michigan State University. Still two years away from his doctorate, he exemplifies the Young Clinician model, volunteering his services whenever and wherever he can. One such place is the Covenant House in Fort Lauderdale, what he describes as a “throwaway/runaway shelter” for young people up to the age of 21. He spends time there each week, serving in whatever capacity is needed.

Community service seems to be something Anthony Tanona does not think about – it obviously is just a natural part of who he is. The interview that follows shows that the 2002 Young Clinician Award was given to a most deserving person.

**Q** The Broward County Psychological Association Young Clinician Award espouses a philosophy which believes that constructing a career of sustainable growth asks the clinician to become conscious of his/her calling. What do you see as your calling?

**A** I have always endeavored to pursue a career in which I can affect change and work with other people on an interpersonal level. Psychology provides a forum where I can combine these two pursuits, whether it is in an individual or small group format. I feel like my “calling” is to help people in need by utilizing my ability to relate to and interact with others, in conjunction with the clinical knowledge and expertise obtained through education and experience.

**Q** The award recognizes community activism. How has your “calling” translated into community activism?

**A** I have always attempted to be involved with my community, which goes back to my undergraduate career at Michigan State University. I was a mentor for an

underprivileged youth in Lansing, Michigan and a member of the MSU student government. I have also been an advocate for the Association for Children’s Mental Health (ACMH); a counselor in a middle school in the Bronx; a therapist for youths with ADHD and ODD in Lauderhill, Florida; and a volunteer at the Plantation Police Department. I have tried to gain experience with different aged populations by being a pre-school teacher at the University of Michigan Hospital Child Care Center, along with being a volleyball and soccer coach for children of various ages. I am currently supplementing my graduate experience by volunteering at the Covenant House in Fort Lauderdale; being active in the student government at Nova Southeastern University; and continuing the tradition of the Young Clinician by being an advocate between NSU and the community and serving on the Broward County Psychological Association (BCPA) Board.

**Q** Dr. A. Eugene Shapiro of Nova University serves as the Honorary Patron for this award because his career has been a distinguished example of how activism for the profession of psychology and moral passion can result in political change. How do you see yourself as an activist for the profession of psychology? How do you think you can affect political change as a professional psychologist?

**A** Being an advocate to me means not only becoming involved in various roles in the community, but also by being a source of information about causes in the community and generating interest and support for these causes. As the Young Clinician, I will be in a position to become affiliated with the community in a large scale and systemic manner, which will enable me to conduct a needs assessment. I will then bring this information back to NSU and present it to the graduate students. I will be able to disseminate information and encourage students to volunteer, while leading by example and donating my time and resources to these causes. This proactive community involvement will distribute help where it is needed, while enriching students’ graduate experiences and augmenting their clinical and personal skills. I will utilize my experience as the Young Clinician, along with my positions in the BCPA and NSU student government, to cultivate my social and political knowledge and skills. Following graduation, I would like ►

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to remain active in psychological and community organizations, build upon my experiences, and follow in the footsteps of Dr. Shapiro and the Dirty Dozen.

**Q** What do you see as being the primary role of a psychologist in the community?

**A** This is a difficult question to answer, because I feel that every psychologist can have a different role, and they can all be effective. The type of psychologist somebody becomes seems to be connected to their type of personality, and where one person would feel comfortable being very active in the community – giving speeches, advocating for underprivileged groups, and having a more public presence – another may feel more comfortable being more passive – seeing clients that come to them, and affecting change one person at a time. Both of these methods can be successful, and each has a place in the community. In terms of suggesting a primary role for psychologists, it would seem to be to practice with the client's best interest in mind, while maintaining an ethical integrity, governed by the APA code of ethics.

**Q** What is it that has drawn you to the profession of psychology, and to being a clinical psychologist in particular?

**A** I have always enjoyed interacting with other people and listening to what and how they communicate. I originally enrolled in the Ph.D. program in Applied Developmental Psychology at Fordham University, but found it too research oriented and too focused on the organizations, as opposed to individuals. I enjoy the interpersonal aspect of clinical psychology, so I transferred to the Psy.D. clinical program at Nova Southeastern University. I am drawn to the dynamic developed in individual therapy; the systemic organization of groups and families; and the intricacies that develop in these relationships.

**Q** How has your experience at Nova, in particular, shaped you as a clinical psychologist?

**A** My experience at Nova has been a journey of introspection, coupled with academic exploration. I feel that to be an effective psychologist, you must first learn to examine your own feelings and thoughts, in order to monitor not only the countertransference that develops during therapy, but also your own progress as a thera-

pist. My self-exploration, which is nowhere near complete, has assisted my progression towards becoming an effective psychologist as much, if not more, than the academic aspect of my education.

**Q** Has any one particular person or event in your academic life had special significance in your decision to become a clinical psychologist?

**A** I cannot identify a specific incident or person in academia that drew me toward a path in psychology. Through some introspection, I would have to identify the way my parents raised me as an early factor that led me to become a psychologist. Without a formal psychological education, my parents provided me with love, empathy, and warmth, along with exposing me to behavioral interventions designed to motivate me to succeed. They are both teachers, so I feel that through them I inherited a natural inclination toward working with children. I also feel I have been able to incorporate some of the creativity and ingenuity of my mother, and the structure and perseverance of my father. These traits have kept my motivation and interest high in the pursuit of becoming a psychologist.

**Q** With the Young Clinician Award comes a bit of responsibility and expectation for your future development as a clinician. What type of clinician do you want to be, and what do you think will help you achieve your goal?

**A** I see myself as becoming a clinician who is warm and caring, and utilizes not only the pertinent theories and orientations, but also the relationship fostered within therapy. I endeavor to establish positive interactions and utilize my personality, while maintaining a therapeutic frame. This will make therapy a comfortable, unthreatening haven for change to occur. Achieving this goal will require additional study and knowledge of specific orientations, experience, and continued introspection.

**Q** Do you have anything you would like to add?

**A** I would like to thank Dr. Dominic Callahan and the Broward County Psychological Association for offering this award to NSU students. It is a testament to their foresight and interest in the pursuit of psychology that they recognize current students and set high standards for psychologists in the future. ■