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Thesis Review: Creating Appreciation
and Community Support for Mothers
Caring for a Child with Anxiety Disorder
by Kristi Shaw

Reviewed by
David McNabb and
David Kenkel



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Contact:

epress@unitec.ac.nz
www.unitec.ac.nz/epress/

Unitec New Zealand
Private Bag 92025, Victoria Street West
Auckland 1142
New Zealand

Thesis Review: Creating Appreciation and Community Support for Mothers Caring for a Child with Anxiety Disorder by Kristi Shaw

David McNabb and David Kenkel

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Applied Social Practice (Social Practice), Unitec New Zealand, 2021

Kristi Shaw has completed an exceptional piece of research, providing critical analysis and originality in her dissertation *Creating appreciation and community support for mothers caring for a child with anxiety disorder*. She has completed a substantial dissertation that would achieve the goal of a thesis at a higher credit level.

Shaw's inside knowledge of caring for a child with anxiety disorder has been applied to this project. The research involves an ambitious application of appreciative inquiry to the task of supporting a group of mothers to take action on the needs of their children with high anxiety. She has made a strong case for addressing the problem of people globally experiencing increasing levels of anxiety and targeting the unique challenges for parents who have children living with the 'invisible' impairment of anxiety.

What a superb literature review. It seems worth publishing simply as an information guide to the current state of thinking. The critique of an individualised pathologising approach is gentle yet sustained through the literature review, and extremely persuasive in the depth of analysis revealed.

Shaw has comprehensively outlined her appreciative inquiry methodology and the opportunity it affords participants to act on their collective problem, which in turn connects back to the social-identity model of anxiety she has used. This reinforces the case for undertaking research that also offers a process for creating positive change for participants. Shaw has detailed the

relationship between appreciative inquiry and social constructionist theory, alongside the axiology of Kaupapa Māori research principles. This is based on the argument that even when research is not specifically targeting Māori participants it should engage with Kaupapa Māori principles within the Aotearoa context.

Shaw's appreciative-inquiry approach includes the four phases of Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny, and is aligned to the use of focus groups. She argues for the additional value of semi-structured interviews and a small questionnaire to provide the benefit of a mixed-methods approach. She has reviewed all the narrative data and analysed it using Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines and steps for conducting thematic analysis.

The findings section is poignant and thorough; of particular note is the well-selected use of respondent quotes to accentuate the findings. The findings seem to thoroughly link back to the literature. The scaffolding and staged approach is very useful. It seems clear that rather than just being simple data collection, the research operates as a tool for empowerment in connection for these mothers.

Shaw has developed four themes related to the mothers: navigating the quagmire; coping by creating calm in the home; Mother as Advocate; and the freedom arising from sharing together. There is a detailed application to practice and a set of recommendations, along with personal and professional critical reflections. She has provided a deep analysis and reporting of her data, which leads to a rich discussion.

This is an exceptional thesis. Shaw's demonstration of academic literacy is excellent, with meticulous reporting. Because the thesis takes a radically different approach to how anxiety is considered, it warrants a broader readership. As mentioned above, the literature review alone could be of enormous use to the many parents struggling with anxiety in their families' lives. The discussion and recommendations also canvass material that would be of great use to many parents and young people.

REFERENCE

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2) 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>

AUTHORS

Dr David McNabb is a Senior Lecturer in Social Practice at the School of Healthcare and Social Practice, Unitec New Zealand.

David Kenkel is a Senior Lecturer in Social Practice at the School of Healthcare and Social Practice, Unitec New Zealand.