

# spa exchange

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## President's Message Postmodernism Redux and the Personality of the Assessor

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When you think about the task that we set before us, the assessment of another's personality, you'll realize that it is far more daunting than we allow ourselves to realize most of the time. We're not alone in this endeavor; Dostoevsky, Hardy, Tolstoy, Austen—all great and not-so-great novelists—share this effort, but whereas their aim is to create a particular sort of internal



experience in the reader, ours is to capture the person in a way that leads to constructive action. That is, people will move in the world differently depending upon what we write and what we say. But there is another important difference between our task and that of the novelist. The novelist seeks to animate his or her own mental representation to make it as nearly incarnate as possible. If to the reader a character becomes tangible, then the novelist has done his or her job. Our subjects are incarnate already and, consequently, we are tethered in a way that a novelist is not. In fact, the novelist E. M. Forster (1927), who was also a literary analyst, noted that in the writings of certain classical novelists, a character changes over the course of the novel because the novelist becomes enchanted with a somewhat revised conception of that character. For example, if you read Thomas Hardy's (1874/1986) *Far from the Madding Crowd*, you'll find that the protagonist Gabriel Oak begins the novel as a good-hearted but bumbling guy who suffers from his own impetuosity, and as the novel progresses he achieves a kind of restraint, poise, and capacity for penetrating observation that goes beyond mere character development. We don't have the luxury afforded to Hardy, because the assessment participant, and the data he or she has yielded, continually rein us in.

### Reality

In my contrast between the assessor and the novelist, I am skirting around the use of a term that truly belongs in this discussion: *reality*. In writing a novel, a novelist creates a reality; in writing a report, we attempt to capture it. But

*reality* has gotten a very bad rap in recent years. With the advent of postmodernism (Gergen, 1994), the dominant epistemology held that the goal of logical positivism—to capture the truth about some knowable reality—is well-nigh impossible. What we think of as knowledge or truth is merely a personal narrative, and when that knowledge concerns others it is a co-constructed narrative

that reflects the interacting subjectivities of both parties. Most of our research endeavors as personality assessors aim to understand another person better, more accurately. A postmodern epistemology regards this endeavor as groundless. The most we can do is construct a useful narrative for a person. A useful narrative may be one that the person finds organizing in some way. Along this line, one of my former students, Robin Ward (2008), for his dissertation interviewed assessment participants after they had received their assessment feedback. A number of his participants indicated that they appreciated substituting an awareness of having particular difficulties for the global sense of defectiveness they brought to their assessment experience. The postmodern epistemologist would concede certain personality assessments can be helpful in these respects but not because our statements are true. They're not true because there ain't no such thing as "true." Notice that these radical postmodernists counsel us to observe only one aspect of Roy Schafer's (1954) principles of interpretation. For Schafer, the adequacy of any psychological inference is based on two dimensions: (1) accuracy, which he gives us many tools to assess, and (2) usefulness. Without both of them, that inference isn't worth inclusion in our portrait of an assessment participant.

Does accuracy matter? I have never met a postmodern epistemologist who didn't think the truth of the matter was critically important in his or her life outside of theorizing about the truth. Were another motorist to rear-end the car of a postmodernist, it would not be a millisecond before he or she would assert

with some law enforcement officer that it was the other driver's fault. Were that other driver to provide another perspective, a self-exonerating perspective, our postmodernist would not say, "Yes, your expression of subjectivity has equal legitimacy to my own." The postmodernist would say, "That is wrong—*she's* at fault." The point is that I think we need not allow a paradigm that isn't broadly serviceable to challenge either Roy Schafer or our commitment to figuring out with as much accuracy as we can what truly is the case about the person.

Although the most extreme version of postmodern constructivism probably does warrant our dismissal and, for that matter, is something of a strawperson when we consider how psychologists have generally used this paradigm, we might do well to consider how softer versions of this epistemology may benefit personality assessment. Postmodernism calls our attention to aspects of the process that may have been, if not ignored altogether, neglected to a large extent. In its milder form, postmodernism pays respect to the fact that, try though we might, we cannot expunge our own subjectivity within the assessment process. The data we obtain, the inferences we draw, the way in which we convey information, is radically affected by our persons. It's at this juncture that a distinction made by Cynthia Franklin (1995) between

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## Special Topics in Assessment

### The Shut-Down Learner

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Many of us in the personality assessment field travel between different worlds in a typical week. Forensic specialists spend some of their time in court settings and correctional facilities while organizational assessors may be in conference rooms, executive offices, or on factory floors. Each journey requires an adjustment to the language, culture, and demands of the new destination. This is the challenge of consultation.

The world of psychoeducational assessment is a familiar destination for us and, like any complex culture, has a variety of subcultures each with its own language, perspective, and expectations that require a certain deft sensitivity to navigate. Teachers, parents, and, of course, students each demand different ways of communicating.

It is a challenge for us to translate how we as personality assessors can offer understanding to questions that, at times, are seen as out of our purview. In fact, many school settings can be averse to us assessing personality issues, for fear of treading on “sensitive” ground. For many parents, the question of a child having a learning disability or an attentional problem is distinct from their child’s emotional life and personality features. The idea that these two areas of functioning are related, interact, and affect each other, can be not only illuminating but instrumental in helping a child move forward.

With this in mind, this Special Topics in Assessment section focuses on a viewpoint of how learning and personality factors impact each other in the assessment of a particular kind

of learning-disabled child. I recently had the opportunity to sit down with Richard Selznick, PhD, to discuss his conception of how emotional functioning and learning issues interact, which he describes in a new book entitled *The Shut-Down Learner: Helping Your Academically Discouraged Child* (Boulder, CO: Sentient Publications, 2009). Dr. Selznick is the Director of the Cooper Learning Center in the Department of Pediatrics at Cooper University Hospital in Voorhees, New Jersey. Communicating the importance of assessing personality and emotional factors in educational assessments is a key feature of Dr. Selznick’s approach.

## Understanding the “Shut-Down Learner”

### A Discussion with Richard Selznick, PhD

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In the world of learning and educational assessments with children and adolescents, the questions posed to us as psychologists are often unflinchingly direct: “Does he have ADHD?” “Why is she failing?” “Will medication help?” “Does he have a learning disability?” While these calls for help from parents and teachers are valid and important to answer, they also oversimplify and frequently miss some of the most important elements needed to truly be helpful, so that even when they are answered interventions can be prone to failure. In response to problems with academic fluency or attention, many children develop emotional conflicts around their frustrations with school even in the process of their parents or professionals trying to understand what is happening with them. It is no surprise to personality assessors that understanding a child’s emotional complexities, style of relating to the world, and relationship with their own strengths and weaknesses provides invaluable information to answer the question, “How can I help my child?”

Richard Selznick, PhD, has observed this pattern of academic and emotional frustration in countless children and adolescents (and subsequently adults) over his career as a child psychologist and has developed a

framework for assessing, understanding, and helping these children. His recent book, *The Shut-Down Learner: Helping Your Academically Discouraged Child* (2009), describes these principles and his approach and is primarily intended as a guide for parents with children having problems. However, Dr. Selznick’s approach highlights and reinforces some important issues for the assessment professional as well.

Shut-down learners are described by Dr. Selznick as, “Kids who, because their learning style and intellectual strengths are not consistent with the school environment, become sullen, disconnected, discouraged and unmotivated—emotionally shut-down.” These are frequently children with skill weaknesses in language-based areas such as reading, spelling, and writing. The failure experiences which accumulate over the years result in an emotional overload in which little seems to reach them in the school setting. One can then understand how these children are more prone to depression, behavioral dyscontrol, anger, and expressions of frustration at every turn. Yet, these children do have strengths, assets, and talents. “These kids tend to have excellent spatial and visual perceptual skills,” Dr. Selznick describes. “These are the ‘Lego’ kids who love

puzzles, using their hands and doing tasks that are movement-based. They find solace in sports activities. These are the kids that take apart and build computers or the nine-year-old kid who can hook up your entertainment system. These are unique, valuable strengths which don’t lend themselves well to success in school.” These children are adept at developing interests in high-spatial areas such as music, photography, or sports. Interestingly, while issues of attention bring these kids to notice in a school setting, they rarely show these symptoms when engaged in hands-on tasks. “In a school setting, shut-down learners have no other choice than to emotionally disengage, and stop trying to function in an environment that is primarily verbal, that they simply do not understand.” Equally common among girls and boys, Dr. Selznick estimates that as many as 40% of children battle to some extent with these issues.

Dr. Selznick’s appreciation for the struggles of these types of children has led him to develop a highly individualized approach focused on understanding the particular child and his particular strengths and weaknesses. These techniques, reflective of the broad-based concept of “Assessment” (rather than the narrow band of “Testing”) resonate with the

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## What Does Coefficient Alpha Tell Us About Test Validity?

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My previous column examined a couple “outmoded assumptions” and “old habits” that may be hindering our progress in personality assessment research (Kurtz, 2009). I will take up this theme again by discussing another time-honored custom of assessment that is in need of closer examination. Assigning appropriate meaning to coefficient alpha is important to everyone engaged in personality assessment. Alpha coefficients may be the basis for selecting the measures we will use in our research studies and assessment practices.

In the published literature, authors routinely compute and report coefficient alpha for multi-item scales. If they do not, then you can be sure that editors and reviewers will remind them of the importance of including this information. The proper interpretation of alpha, however, continues to challenge researchers in personality assessment. Consider the scenario in which a researcher proudly reports an alpha coefficient of .93 for a newly developed scale composed of 25 items. Is this sufficient information to infer that the scale is relatively free of measurement error, that it is unidimensional, and that it should predict relevant criteria better than a scale with similar content but lower alpha? Consider the alternate scenario in which a researcher administered an established scale to a large sample of respondents and obtains an alpha coefficient of .63. The standard response to this finding is to conclude that the scale is “unreliable” and that it will have relatively poor validity for prediction. The finding of low alpha can have major implications for research when the low-alpha scale is excluded from further analysis, or when unexpected negative findings from a study are discounted in light of excess measurement error.

Most researchers are familiar with specific benchmark values for the alpha coefficient. The value of .70 is widely recognized as the minimum threshold for alpha coefficients, or the point at which reliability is sufficient for research purposes. Alphas below this threshold have been labeled “unacceptable” (Cicchetti, 1994). For clinical purposes, especially where specific cut scores are used in clinical decisions, it has been stated that .90 is the minimum threshold (e.g., Nunnally, 1978). However, these benchmark values do not square well with several theoretical observations regarding

alpha. More than 50 years ago, Jane Loevinger (1954) identified the “attenuation paradox” in which increases in reliability beyond certain levels can produce decreases in the magnitude of validity correlations. She suggests that the paradox occurs when high alpha indicates an excessively narrow operationalization of the construct that fails to adequately capture the greater breadth of criterion measures. Streiner (2003) has more recently called attention to the likelihood of excess redundancy in scales with very high alpha, and he goes so far as to suggest that alphas of .90 are an “undesirable” property of a scale. Standards for alpha are further complicated by Schmitt (1996) who asserts that the .70 benchmark is “shortsighted” and that alpha coefficients as low as .50 may not seriously attenuate validity coefficients.

So, if high alpha is not a good thing and low alpha is not a bad thing, then does coefficient alpha really matter after all?

High-alpha coefficients are most commonly interpreted as indicating that the total sum of the items in a scale has a single meaning. In other words, the interpretation of the score is reliable in the sense that it does not vary according to which items were endorsed. A corollary inference is that high alpha signifies a unidimensional structure in the scale. Schmitt (1996) demonstrates that this very common assumption is not true of alpha. Two scales of the same length may obtain identical levels of alpha despite different underlying factor structures. Similarly, Cortina (1993) demonstrated that scales with more than 12 items can easily achieve alphas exceeding the .70 benchmark in spite of underlying multidimensionality and low inter-item correlations. If alpha cannot tell us definitively about the structure of a scale or its potential for predicting criteria, then what role does it play in the evaluation of test reliability?

It is important to remember that there are alternative estimates of scale reliability. The test-retest method is widely known, but it has been treated like a second-rate approach to reliability. There are a few reasons for this. First, testing respondents again introduces the potential for practice or carryover effects, and it is unclear how to disentangle measurement error from actual instability at longer intervals between initial and retest administrations. Nunnally (1978)

explicitly discouraged the use of retest data to estimate alpha due to these complications. But, the more likely reason for our preference for the alpha method is that it is simply much easier to obtain. Like any internal structure analysis, all the information you need to compute alpha can be acquired from one administration of the measure. It is much more difficult to bring respondents back for retesting and the resulting samples may suffer from attrition. Watson (2004) has documented the neglect of retest reliability in the personality literature, noting that retest reliability studies typically employ small samples of convenience and arbitrary retest intervals. Moreover, we generally lack the recognized benchmarks for retest correlations that we apply to alpha coefficients. As a result, investigators tend to infer “good reliability” from any statistically significant result.

This difference in status between the alpha and retest methods to evaluate reliability deserves more attention than we have granted. Most basic textbooks in psychological measurement (e.g., Allen & Yen, 1979) allow for either reliability estimate to be used in calculating the standard error of measurement. This implies that the two reliability estimates are interchangeable, but they are clearly distinctive approaches to the concept of reliability. A scale can obtain low internal consistency and high retest reliability, and vice versa. What we really want to know is: *Which estimate has greater impact on the validity of interpretations we make from scale scores?* Much of the critical literature on alpha is purely theoretical or uses data simulation techniques to support various claims about alpha. We need more empirical data from real scales used in real-world assessment scenarios to evaluate the covariation between levels of alpha and the strength of validity correlations. An initial attempt from my research group (Eichler & Kurtz, 2008) found negligible differences in self-other agreement for scales above versus below the .70 benchmark. This work should be extended to compare the alpha and retest methods for their respective prediction of validity correlations. This will not be easy to accomplish, as such an investigation would have to make adjustments for differences in the numbers of items across scales and differences in the relevance of criteria across

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## Informed Consent, Part II: Ideas for Your Informed Consent Agreement

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Recently a colleague called me to ask if she could charge her client \$50.00 for not coming to her appointment or calling to cancel. I immediately asked her if there was anything about charging for missed appointments in her informed consent agreement. I could tell by the long silence at the other end of the phone that not only was this not in my colleague's informed consent agreement, but she probably had never considered putting it there. It is interesting that although a great deal has been written about informed consent, very little has been written about how to construct an informed consent agreement form. Although there is no requirement that a person's informed consent be written, from a risk-management perspective written documentation is preferable.

The informed consent agreement form formalizes the informed consent process and informs your clients of the rules of your practice. For this reason, it is extremely important that the agreement form is written in a way that is easy to understand. There is a large amount of flexibility in the rules you establish about your practice, the key to ethical practices to inform your clients in advance. There are several items that are frequently found in informed consent documents. The most common is the limits of confidentiality. Although most information that is shared with a psychologist is confidential, it is important for clients to know that not everything is confidential. Exceptions include: (1) when the client authorizes a release of information with a signature; (2) when the client's mental condition becomes an issue in a lawsuit; (3) when the client presents a physical danger to self or others; (4) when there is a court order for the release of information; (5) when there is a duty to warn an identified third party; or (6) when child abuse is suspected. In the latter three cases the practitioner is required by law (in most states) to break confidentiality.

There are also a few state-specific laws requiring practitioners to break confidentiality. In Pennsylvania, psychologists are mandated to report impaired drivers to the State Department of Transportation, and in many states psychologists are mandated to report elder abuse.

Two other exceptions to confidentiality have come about following September 11, 2001. The Homeland Security Patriot Act requires practitioners to release information about

their clients if requested, and the practitioner is not allowed to tell the client that this information has been requested. In addition, if a government agency is requesting information for health oversight activities, practitioners may be required to provide it for them. These two exceptions to confidentiality are sometimes, but not always, included on informed consent agreement forms.

If you work with couples, families, or in any situation where more than one client is present, it is helpful to include a statement on the informed consent agreement form that all individuals of the age to consent for treatment must agree (i.e., sign a release-of-information form) to release records of any session in which they were present. This prevents the practitioner from having to block out sections of session notes, or explain the dilemma of partial consent at a later time.

Many practitioners begin their informed consent agreement forms with a paragraph about their treatment philosophy. They may also include an explanation of the therapy or assessment process. Clients may be asked to take an active role in establishing treatment or assessment goals and be reminded that commitment to the therapeutic or assessment process is necessary for the most successful outcome. In addition, some practitioners note that their work may bring up uncomfortable feelings and reactions such as anxiety, sadness, or anger. The practitioner may make a commitment to provide services that are helpful but may include the statement that they make no guarantee about the outcome of treatment or the findings of an assessment.

A paragraph about emergency access or how to contact you is also a good idea. It can include how to reach you between sessions, on weekends, or holidays. It can also include your schedule for checking messages and returning calls. It is important to include what the client should do in case of an emergency (such as going to the emergency room or calling 911).

Payment information including fees and insurance arrangements is an important category to include on an informed consent agreement form. You may want to suggest that your clients contact their insurance carrier to determine what coverage they have. This is especially important when you are doing assessment because insurance is

highly variable in terms of what is reimbursed regarding assessment. You may want to specify whether you will bill the insurance company or whether that will be your client's responsibility. Some practitioners include that clients are responsible for copayment amounts and deductibles as set by their benefit plan. It is very helpful to state that clients are ultimately responsible for payment, should their insurance company deny any claim.

There are also services that are not covered such as report and letter preparation, completion of disability forms, court-related costs, and telephone consultations. Let clients know that they will be advised of any additional charges prior to the provision of these services. There are also special circumstances such as court appearances, including preparation and transportation time, that usually require additional fees.

If you charge for returned checks, use a collection agency, or charge for missed sessions, it is very helpful to include this information on your informed consent agreement form. This would have helped my colleague mentioned earlier. Clients should also know that insurance companies can not be billed for fees associated with missed or cancelled appointments.

The involvement of third parties (if there are any relevant third parties) should also be noted on the informed consent agreement form. This may include insurance companies, employers, organizations, or legal or other governing authorities (Knauss, 2009). The involvement of third parties often means sending information to them, such as an assessment report. Clients should be told if signing the informed consent agreement form means information can be shared with a third party without a separate release-of-information form. For example, an informed consent agreement form may say: "Your signature authorizes your practitioner to provide to your insurance carrier the information necessary to process claims and to authorize your insurance carrier to directly pay your practitioner."

Some practitioners may use information from their practice for research, publication, or presentation purposes. Even if the material is disguised, clients should have

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## Advocacy Corner

**Bruce L. Smith, PhD**

*Public Affairs Director*



Below are some of the issues the Public Affairs Office has been working on in the past six months

Current Procedural Terminology (CPT)—The Task Force That Never Ends continues, although—thankfully—the phone calls are only occasional now. The main issue that is being dealt with still has to do with specifics of neuropsych practice in which certain kinds of services may not be billed. In addition, we are moving toward trying to get psychology under General Medical Education, so that trainee work in institutions can be billed under Medicare/Medicaid (currently, institutions may not bill for the work of psychology trainees).

Legislative Issues—The usual threat to assessment (counselors without training being allowed to do testing) has come up again in Montana. Barton Evans is coordinating our efforts with the Montana Psychological Association (we sent them our “amicus” paper). In California, a unique threat is coming up. The Governor has proposed eliminating the Board of Psychology and merging its functions into the Board of Behavioral Science (counselors and social workers). The danger is that California will move toward a generic mental health license, which would do the same thing to

assessment (the Governor has already said that “they do precisely the same thing”).

Copyright Issues—Mostly through the International Society we have been monitoring web sites that violate the copyright of the Rorschach plates. So far, Hogrefe Hans Huber has been fairly successful in getting these taken down.

Good News—As you may have read, the privacy provisions under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act that were afforded psychotherapy notes have been extended to assessment data. This is a major victory for assessment psychologists and reflects efforts on the part of the American Psychological Association (APA) Practice Directorate as well as the various assessment organizations including the Society for Personality Assessment (SPA). Of course, the “devil is in the details,” and we will need to watch as the Department of Health and Human Services implements the new regulations.

Bad News—Increasingly, insurers are going back to the bad old days of “Diagnosis Related Groups” when authorizing assessment services. One payer in the Northeast has decided that since only behavioral rating scales have been validated to “diagnose” Attention Deficit

Hyperactivity Disorder, assessment of patients suspected of having the disorder will only be granted one hour. To counteract this, the SPA Board has agreed to develop a new White Paper that will focus on the role of assessment of functioning as opposed to *DSM* diagnosis. It would be helpful if the membership would inform us (through the Central Office) of instances in which this kind of reasoning was applied to deny adequate reimbursement for assessment services.

Great News—As those of you who were able to attend the Annual Meeting know, we are extremely fortunate to have a staunch advocate in the new Executive Director for Practice of APA, Katherine Nordal. Dr. Nordal spoke eloquently about her 30 years as an assessment psychologist and her commitment to assessment remaining a major focus of professional psychology. We are working closely with Dr. Nordal on several initiatives and will be reporting to the membership in coming months.

Proficiency—In my opinion, once assessment is established as a proficiency in psychology, our advocacy task will be made immensely easier.

## Notes From the Foundation

**Bruce L. Smith, PhD**

*President, SPAF*

We are continuing to raise money through the SPA Foundation for a variety of projects, including Student Travel Grants, Dissertation Awards, the Utility of Assessment Project, and the Exner Scholar Fund. As always, contributions are tax-deductible as a charitable contribution, although donors should check with their tax consultants for specifics.

There are two big items of news. In the first place, we are now announcing the competition for the first annual Exner Scholar Award. This award is meant to aid a young researcher in personality assessment and honor the memory of John E. Exner, who devoted his career to the empirical study of personality assessment. Please see the announcement of the award and criteria in this issue of the *SPA Exchange*.

The second item concerns the Utility of Assessment Project. After working diligently at recruitment, the investigators Mark Blais and Caleb Siefert reluctantly decided to terminate

the project. It had proved impossible to recruit subjects for their study, which as you recall was a comparison of personality assessment with standard consultation in resolving psychotherapeutic impasses. In a thoughtful final report, they attributed their difficulties to three factors. In the first place, they had an inordinate difficulty with the Institutional Review Board, resulting in an 11-page informed consent document. Secondly, many practitioners were reluctant to refer patients to a randomized clinical trial, because they specifically wanted personality assessment for their patients. (In this we were, perhaps, victims of our own success!) Finally, it seemed that specifying treatment impasses was a turn-off for many therapists. Although they did not complete the project, they will collect final data from the patients who were seen.

Fortunately, we have been able to fund another project, this led by Steve Smith of the University

of California, Santa Barbara. The project, entitled “An Investigation of Personality Assessment With Challenging Psychotherapies,” shares many of the features of the Blais-Siefert effort, but has a number of additional features that promise to make it more likely that recruitment will be successful. The target will be “difficult” psychotherapies, rather than specifically impasses; the model will be collaborative assessment; and the recruitment will cover a much wider practice network (encompassing two counties). We are confident that this project will be able to be completed in a timely manner and look forward to the results.

As always, we appreciate the contributions of members of the Society. In these difficult economic times, it is always hard to increase one’s charitable donations, but the money raised by the SPA Foundation goes directly to supporting research and teaching in the field we are all committed to advancing.

## Psychological Assessment in The Netherlands About Dark Clouds and Shimmering Horizons in the Cards

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Members of the Society for Personality Assessment who visited the 1999 and 2008 editions of the Congress of the International Society for Rorschach and Projective Methods (ISR) in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, and Leuven, Belgium, may have gotten the impression that personality assessment is a thriving business in these Low Countries. Otherwise, how could these people organize two successful international conferences within less than a decade's time? Of course, I would not want to destroy anybody's perfect illusion, but the truth is that personality assessment, and especially performance-based assessment, is far from thriving in the Dutch-Flemish delta at this moment. It is thanks to the passion and perseverance of a small group of clinical psychologists that assessment is still a substantial part of a number of pre- and postacademic curricula, that initial level Rorschach Comprehensive System (CS) training is offered every Fall, and that symposia and congresses continue to be organized.

As in most other Western countries, psychological assessment was the core business of practicing psychologists in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. With the advent of behavior therapy in the late 1960s and 1970s, more and more clinical psychologists switched to a psychotherapy practice, and a thorough assessment of the patient's personality was deemed less important. In the 1980s, psychological assessment was virtually taken out of the curriculum of Masters programs at Dutch universities. One professor felt that the Rorschach was not suitable for a psychologist's test kit. Psychological assessment was becoming reduced to "taking inventory of psychological problems" at the intake session. Sometimes not even a thorough personal history was taken.

But of course, there were exceptions, those that went against the prevailing tide. Loek Frohn-de Winter, now in her seventies, headed a psychological assessment unit at the University of Amsterdam Department of Psychiatry well into the 1980s. She supervised numerous students and introduced them to the secrets the Rorschach and the TAT could reveal about a person's psyche. Leo Cohen brought the second edition of Exner's

CS, Volume 1, to The Netherlands in 1986, which led to training programs being offered by Anne Andronikof and John Exner in 1987 and 1989. This group of "CS-novices" founded the Dutch Rorschach Society, which organized the two ISR conferences in 1999 and 2008. It is a small professional society, with a steady membership of around 75. During these founding years, several studies of the CS in different patient groups were conducted and summarized by Derksen, Cohen, and de Ruiter (1993).

A few years after the CS made its way across the Atlantic, Jan Derksen and Hedwig Sloore translated the MMPI-2 into Dutch and provided the instrument with a Dutch manual and normative data around 1993. Just like Exner's work on the CS revived the Rorschach in the Low Countries, Jim Butcher's work on the MMPI-2 led to a renewed interest in this assessment method. Nevertheless, the absolute number of psychologists who were willing to invest the time and effort to develop from novice to expert in these assessment instruments remained small.

The way clinical psychologists are trained in The Netherlands is very different from the educational system in the United States. Although European universities adopted the Bachelor-Master system with the signing of the Bologna declaration by the Ministers of Education from 29 European countries in 1999, this system is still quite far removed from the Anglo-Saxon model of a liberal arts and sciences education. For instance, in The Netherlands, all Bachelor programs in Psychology are of three years' duration, and most Master programs are one year. After obtaining their Master's degree, psychology students in The Netherlands are more or less forced to choose between a professional career (entering a two-year postgraduate program to become a "mental health psychologist," followed by a four-year program to become a licensed clinical psychologist) and a research career (resulting in a PhD degree after three to four years of research work and four or five international publications). Few psychologists are able and/or willing to devote so much time to these pursuits, and that is one of the reasons I think that true scientist-practitioners are relatively rare

here. In Europe, it has been my experience that few psychologists combine research and clinical practice in their work; this is much more common for American psychologists. I believe the way the educational system is set up facilitates this development: PhD programs in clinical psychology include both research and practice. Personally, I think this is the only road to quality work. In the two-year Master program in Forensic Psychology that we recently developed at Maastricht University, we have made an attempt to create a fertile mix of knowledge acquisition in forensic psychological research and skills training in forensic assessment and therapy. The program was recently accredited by the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organization and will become operational starting September 2010.

What is the current situation in terms of training in psychological assessment in The Netherlands? Bachelor and Master programs offer basis assessment courses, but these tend to stay at the level of symptom inquiry and *DSM-IV* classification. Neither the MMPI-2 nor the Rorschach are taught in these programs. The postgraduate professional programs, necessary to obtain a mental health psychologist or clinical psychologist degree, teach students the basics of personality and neuropsychological assessment. They are introduced to the MMPI-2, the MCMI, and other self-report instruments, but performance-based instruments are rarely taught. I think this is unfortunate, because in my opinion a true understanding of the individual only arises through the joint use of multiple methods, as was so elegantly elucidated in the *American Psychologist* article by Greg Meyer et al. (2001). To illustrate the value of multimethod assessment of personality, I coedited a Dutch book on personality assessment together with Martin Hildebrand, published in 2006. The book is divided into two parts. In the first part, the scoring and interpretation of the most important psychological tests are described in the context of their research base. The second part includes chapters on the different contexts in which psychological assessment can be employed to answer evaluative questions,

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## State of the SPAGS: 2009

**Christopher J. Hopwood, PhD**  
*SPAGS President*



I am pleased to represent SPAGS in the *SPA Exchange* for the first time as President. I would like to begin by acknowledging the many people who laid the solid foundation on which our group rests, including Rob Janner, Mark Peacock, Elise Simonds, Kathleen Tillman, Gale Utzinger, Carlo Veltri, Joyce Williams, Dustin Wygant, and many others. I would also like to thank the Society for Personality Assessment (SPA) board, faculty, and professional members, and many students who have served on committees and contributed in a variety of other ways to our development. Finally, I would like to introduce the new board: I will serve as President, Martin Sellbom as past-President, Elizabeth Koonce as President-elect, Joyce Williams as Secretary, and Danielle Burchett, Sandra Horn, and Pilar Sumalpong as Representatives-at-large.

Under Martin Sellbom's stellar leadership over the course of the last year and a half, SPAGS has been a joy to live and work in, and developments during this time have led to its increasing value for members. However, this value will not be fully achieved until more students become more involved. As Martin reported in the Winter 2008 issue of the *SPA Exchange*, we decided early on that a major goal of SPAGS would be to improve retention of SPA members who graduate and begin professional careers. In order to do this, we feel it is critical that we get students more engaged in SPAGS. This year's election results reminded us how much work we have to do on that front: only about 20% of SPAGS members voted, suggesting that we have not fully demonstrated how we can be relevant and helpful to students interested in personality assessment. At the same time, personality assessors continue to face many challenges involving our status in the larger scientific community, our value for clinical practice, and recognition of our value among those who regulate proficiency in clinical work and pay for clinical services. We will need all the help we can get, now and in the future, to continue fighting the good fight for personality assessment. I see SPAGS's role in this fight as building support for and skill in personality assessment practice, research, and advocacy through student development. In this context, finding ways to increase the involvement of SPAGS members will be the

major focus of our group during the next year.

My view is that the most important things we can do at this time to increase involvement include facilitating member communication and continuing to fulfill the missions of the SPAGS committees. Thanks to Martin and Steve Toepfer for setting up the listserv—this represents an excellent avenue for member communication and a platform for carrying out committee work. But it is only a first step. Accomplishing committee goals and more actively engaging members will be critical.

The Elections Committee, under past-President Gale Utzinger, made the election process more efficient and effective. Part of this process involves candidate submissions of proposals that detail what they would like to accomplish as SPAGS board members; these proposals have the potential to increase the enthusiasm among those who could contribute to and benefit from the group, as they are full of great ideas for how we can better serve student needs. Past-President Martin Sellbom, the new chair of this committee, will continue to oversee this process, and if the past is any indicator of future behavior, he will likely find novel and creative ways to improve it.

Carlo Veltri has been repeatedly willing to serve our group in various capacities since its inception. He chaired the Education Committee for the past year despite not being on the SPAGS board, and we greatly appreciate his valuable service. Under new chair Sandra Horn, this committee will continue to play an important role in connecting students to educative experiences that they may have difficulties obtaining through their graduate programs for various reasons, as well as identifying internship and post-graduate training sites that emphasize personality assessment. We regard awareness and access to such information as an important benefit of SPAGS membership, and hope to make these potential experiences more visible to members.

Elise Simonds, past Representative-at-large, did an admirable job as chair of the Programming Committee for the last year, including organizing a social event last March in Chicago. We believe that this event

will continue to play an important role in facilitating new relationships and connections among graduate students from various schools and labs, in generating feedback and ideas for the board, and more generally in helping students feel more comfortable at SPA. Danielle Burchett, the current chair of this committee, has several excellent ideas to improve this particular event, including finding a time and place to meet that will be most convenient for members.

We have changed the name and mission of the former Social Responsibility Committee, chaired during the last year by Elizabeth Koonce, to enhance our emphasis on diversity. New Representative-at-large Pilar Sumalpong will chair the Diversity Committee in the coming year, and is committed to assessing how SPA is doing with regards to diversity of student membership, and how we could help the society improve in this regard. We all look forward to learning more about these issues and better understanding what we can do to become a more diverse group.

I have been chairing the Research Enhancement Committee for the past year, and will continue to do so during the next term. One major goal of this committee involves recognizing student achievements by listing them on the website. I have already asked SPAGS listserv members to send references for any journal articles they have authored; please send them to me so that you can be recognized. A second major goal is to identify student funding opportunities for personality assessment research. Finding money for research is certainly challenging; in many ways and for many reasons personality assessment funding is particularly difficult to come by. However, I believe that such research has "immeasurable" value and that we will all benefit from attacking this problem collectively and collaboratively. I have also asked student members on the SPAGS listserv to send me any personality assessment funding opportunities they might be aware of, and look forward to disseminating this information to the membership.

Elizabeth Koonce, President-elect and Technology Committee chair, will post results of these solicitations on the SPAGS tab of the SPA website. She also has many other

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## SPA Annual Meeting

March 24–28, 2010

The Fairmont Hotel  
San Jose, CA

The March 4–8, 2009, Society for Personality Assessment Annual Meeting, in Chicago, IL, had a very encouraging turnout: 437 for the Annual Meeting and 361 for the workshops.

The 2010 meeting is scheduled for March 24–28, at The Fairmont Hotel, San Jose, CA. With the growth of the computer industry, Silicon Valley has become one of the world's busiest hubs, and the capital of this high-tech mecca is San Jose. The Fairmont San Jose hotel combines technological innovation with timeless elegance. If you are combining business with a family

vacation, the hotel offers day spa services to relieve stress, and a short drive can take you to 30 wineries, to the Monterey Peninsula golf courses, to San Francisco, and to the Santa Cruz beach and boardwalk. For your dining pleasure, there are 150 restaurants within a five-block radius of the hotel—everything from sandwich shops to fine dining. Attractions within walking distance include the San Jose Convention Center, Museum of Art, The Tech Museum of Innovation, live theater, symphony, opera and ballet.

The Fairmont Hotel:  
www.fairmont.com/sanjose  
170 South Market Street  
San Jose, CA  
Telephone: 408-998-1900

Room Rate: \$189/single; \$199/double  
Additional person: \$25.00  
Children to 18 years old: no charge if in room w/parents

## 2009 Annual Meeting Poster Session Winners

### Poster Session I:

**First Place:** *Pathological Gambling Subtypes*, David D. Vachon, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN; R. Michael Bagby, Center for Addiction and Mental Health, Toronto, ON, Canada

**Honorable Mention:** *Comparing Projective Measures: A Case Study Using the Wartegg and the Rorschach*, Alessandro Crisi, Istituto Italiano Wartegg, Università Di Roma, Roma, Italy; Hal S. Shorey, Widener University, Chester, PA

**Honorable Mention:** *Rorschach Assessment of Affect-Regulation in Children and Adolescents Who Self-Injure*, Jaclyn E. Shapiro, The Derner Institute, Adelphi University, Garden City, NY; Kate Szymanski, The Derner Institute, Adelphi University, Garden City, NY; James McCarthy, Queens Children's Psychiatric Center, NY; Carolyn Springer, The Derner Institute, Adelphi University, Garden City, NY



Dr. Robert Erard, SPA President-Elect, (left) presenting a special recognition award to Dr. Carl Eric Mattler (right).

### Poster Session II:

**First Place:** *Affect Regulation and Depressive Personality Disorder*, Yung-Tsen Chen, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI; Wei-Cheng Hsiao, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI; Jennifer Nerbonne, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI; Chelsea D. Cawood, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI; Max Butterfield, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI; Steven K. Huprich, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI

**Honorable Mention:** *The Development and Construct Validation of the MMPI-2 RF Personality Disorder Scales*, Lindsay E. Ayearst, York University, Toronto, ON, Canada; R. Michael Bagby, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Toronto, ON, Canada.

**Honorable Mention:** *Pathological Narcissism Predicts Stalking Behavior*, David P. Marino, Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA; Aaron L. Pincus, Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA; Kim S. Menard, Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA

## SPA Website

Please visit the SPA website at [www.personality.org](http://www.personality.org) for information about all of SPA's happenings. Among its many items, the website includes PDF links to back issues of the *SPA Exchange*.



Dr. Tim Dao (right) is presented with the Walter G. Klopfer Award by Dr. Gregory Meyer (left), Editor of the *Journal of Personality Assessment*.



Dr. Robert McGrath, winner of the Martin Mayman Award.

# spa exchange

## International Notes

Jane Sachs, JD, PhD  
*Private Practice*

At the 2009 Annual March Meeting, about 25 people attended the second meeting of those members of the Society for Personality Assessment (SPA) who live outside the United States and/or have international interests. The first order of business was to report updates on the status of three projects proposed by attendees at last year's international meeting. Those included creation of a listserv, with space for discussions within this group. Although we succeeded in establishing such a listserv on Google Groups, it is not yet fully operational. Paula Garber will advise us as soon as it is.

Another requested project was the identification of "mentors": i.e., SPA members who volunteer to offer consultation to any other SPA member who might seek guidance about getting papers accepted for publication by *Journal of Personality Assessment*. We have collected several names, so please contact me at jsachs@fred.net if you would like to work with such a volunteer "mentor" or if you would like to volunteer your own "mentoring" services.

The third project involved the exploration of new media that could offer access to SPA

meetings and workshops to members who do not attend these events. Regarding videocasts of workshops, we did extensive research on the varieties, the feasibility, and the costs of this technology. At the group's meeting in March, the consensus was that the cost would be prohibitive. Instead, attendees preferred the DVDs recorded by Dr. Gene Nebel every year or audiocasts coupled with PowerPoint presentations that could be available on the website. Some members suggested other technologies, such as blogs.

Following the updates, we turned to a proposal to create structure for the group. The centerpiece was the creation of a "Director" position. As conceived in this proposal, the Director would run the international meetings, manage the activity of the group, and work with the Board liaison and Advisory Committee to select and shape projects for presentation to the Board. The aim of this proposal was to strengthen the international group within SPA and offer more stability through the periodic changes in the leadership of the Society. At least for the near future, however, the group preferred not to be so

structured and instead to spend meeting time informally mixing with other attendees.

Other topics of discussion included the cost of membership: Some proposed graded fee levels, like those offered by the American Psychological Association. Others expressed disappointment that no SPA member from outside the United States had been invited to offer remembrances of John Exner at the Hertz Memorial Presentation. And Dr. Shira Tibon has developed an idea for a workshop on the international norms. She, as well as anyone else who has a workshop proposal of course, is encouraged to submit any such ideas to the Board for consideration for the 2010 Annual Meeting.

Lastly, I want to note that my term on the Board, as Representative at Large, will end in August of this year. Come September, a new Board member will be working with you. Please know that I have learned from you and enjoyed getting to know those of you whom I did get to know. I look forward to getting better acquainted in the future. You have my best wishes and hopes for ever more fulfillment as integral members of SPA.

## Invitation to the Next 20th International Society for Rorschach and Projective Methods (ISR) Congress in Tokyo, Japan

We are honored to invite members of the Society for Personality Assessment to the next ISR congress, to be held for the first time in Asia. We are planning a stimulating Congress in Tokyo on the future of psychological assessment, with several international speakers. Find out about Japan's long history with the Rorschach and enjoy meeting new professional colleagues.

Coming to Japan will not burn a hole in your pocket! Thanks to the current economic climate, many discount flights are now available. Tokyo offers a wide range of hotels to choose from, and

there is no tipping for services.

We look forward to seeing you in Tokyo in 2011!

ISR 20th Congress in Tokyo

Date: Last week of July 2011

Venue: Tokyo, Japan

Theme: Multiple-personality assessment

Hotels: \$70-\$200 (Japanese style-Western style)

Secretariat email: isr2011@convention.co.jp



Dr. Martin Sellbom (*right*) is presented with the Samuel J. & Anne G. Beck Award by Dr. Ginger Calloway (*left*), SPA Member-at-Large.

## 2009 Dissertation Grants

- \$1,000 budgeted
- 5 applicants
- 4 funded applicants

\$500

Justin D. Smith, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

\$200

Jenss Chang, University of California, Santa Barbara

\$200

Roxanna Rahban, University of California, Santa Barbara

\$90

Katrina Schnoebelen, University of California, Santa Barbara

## Announcing the First Annual John E. Exner Scholar Award

The **John E. Exner Scholar Award** honors the memory of John E. Exner, PhD, a pioneer in personality assessment, by supporting the research of a young personality assessor. Dr. Exner was committed to advancing the science of personality assessment by empirical research in the development and application of assessment instruments. This award honors that commitment by recognizing and supporting a young investigator examining any method of personality assessment.

Each year, the Society for Personality Assessment (SPA) designates a **John E. Exner Scholar**. In addition to the designation, the recipient will receive an honorarium (currently set at \$500) to help defray the expenses of her or his research. The following criteria shall be used to select the honoree:

1. The award is meant for young investigators at the beginning of their career. Accordingly, nominees must be no

more than 5 (five) years past the receipt of their doctoral degree.

2. Individuals must be nominated by SPA members. Self-nominations will be accepted, provided the individual is a member of SPA.
3. Nominees will be asked to submit a Curriculum Vitae and a brief description of ongoing research. (*Note: This is not meant to be a grant application; a narrative description of the nominee's ongoing research program will be sufficient.*)
4. Nominees will be judged on the following criteria:
  - a. Past research accomplishments as demonstrated by publication record.
  - b. Evidence of an ongoing research program that, in the eyes of the selection committee, merits support at this time.

c. There is no preference for research topic, selection of assessment instrument, etc., but nominees are expected to be conducting quantitative research on some area of personality assessment.

5. The award may be used for any legitimate research expenses such as reimbursement of participants, supplies, consultation, etc., but is not meant as a supplement to the Scholar's income.

Applicants may be nominated by others or self-nominate. Please direct nominations to Paula Garber, SPA Administrative Director, at [manager@spaonline.org](mailto:manager@spaonline.org) or 703-534-4772.

**DEADLINE: July 1**

**SCHOLAR CHOSEN: September Board Meeting**

**AWARD CHECK GRANTED: January 1**

## SPA Interest Groups

### Psychoanalytic Interest Group

**Marshall Silverstein, PhD, and Charles Peterson, PhD (in the absence of Bert Karon, PhD)**

*Cofacilitators*

A small group of zealous partisans met to discuss and work on behalf of the promotion of the contributions of psychoanalysis to personality assessment. After secret rings were consecrated and distributed, the small but mighty "Committee" proposed a variety of ideas to recognize and promote the contributions of psychoanalysis to personality assessment:

- Construct and promote a "psychoanalytic" listserv on the SPA webpage.
- Identify those members of the Society interested in psychoanalytic psychodiagnosis with a "P-A" designation adjacent to their name in the SPA Directory.
- The SPA directory could identify those members of the Society willing to serve as an "idea-mentor-across-the-miles" for those graduate students needing psychoanalytic sustenance not offered in their graduate programs, using a designation such as "P-A-m."
- Compose a member-friendly (evolving) bibliography of essential readings in psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic psychodiagnosis.

- Promote a reasonable representation of psychoanalytic interest and expertise in Associate and Consulting Editors of *Journal of Personality Assessment*.
- The listserv might publish a list of psychoanalytic books available for review in the *Journal*.
- Encourage (invite) more psychoanalytic articles in the *Journal*. Both empirical studies and case studies welcome. These articles should champion the integration of theory and research.
- Encourage one psychoanalysis-friendly Master Lecture at each SPA annual meeting.
- Specific content ideas were generated: Paul Lerner's presence is deeply missed. Both students and licensed psychologists were interested in seeing more symposia/workshops along the lines of topics that Paul Lerner used to present (e.g., Lerner's borderline defenses; Wechsler scales used psychodynamically; revisiting Rapaport, Gill, & Schafer; topics in scoring systems other than Exner, such as Klopfer's Fc and k scores; more case presentations, particularly addressing thematic content analysis in addition to Comprehensive

System workups; influences of theorists such as Sullivan and Winnicott; traditional approaches to feedback as well as therapeutic assessment).

- Another interest group next year in San Jose.
- Much like the Beck and Klopfer and Cerney awards, begin fundraising for the Paul Lerner prize for the best psychoanalytic article in the *Journal* each year.

### Collaborative Therapy Connie Fischer, PhD, and Steve Finn, PhD *Cofacilitators*

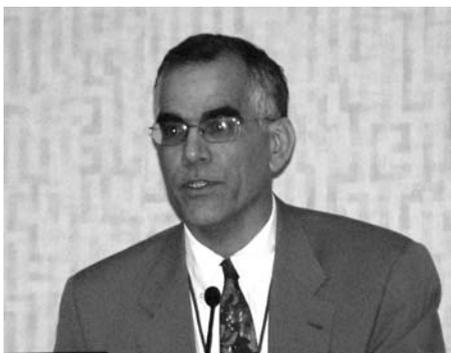
About 40 members of the Society for Personality Assessment (SPA) attended the Collaborative/Therapeutic Assessment (CTA) Interest Group. At least five countries were represented. Following introductions, participants responded to one another's questions, sharing a broad range of experience. We discussed successes with insurance billing for CTA, markets that had been accessed, client satisfaction, CTA in university clinics and agencies as well as in private practice, literature resources, and more. This year's gathering reflected the rapid growth in CTA practices among SPA members. We collected names of participants and email addresses, in order to continue our exchange. Enthusiasm, helpfulness, creativity, and collegiality abounded.

## President's Message

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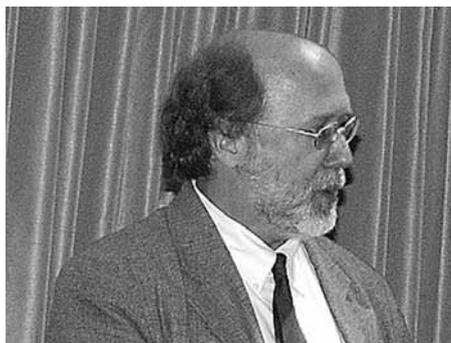
Dr. James Hoelzle, winner of the Mary Cerney Student Award.



Dr. Donald Viglione speaking at the Marguerite R. Hertz Memorial Award in memory of Dr. John E. Exner, Jr.



Dr. John R. Graham, Master Lecturer.



Dr. Thomas Widiger, Master Lecturer.

*postmodern constructivism* and *social constructionism* becomes informative and heuristic. According to Franklin, social constructionism pertains to contextual aspects of our understanding of the world—for example, how culture affects our ways of researching personality assessment. The need for greater cultural breadth was driven home in a recent article in the *American Psychologist* by Jeffrey Arnett (2008) in which he pointed out that whereas less than 5% of the people who dwell on this planet live in the United States, much of the psychological research conducted has focused on Americans. I doubt whether the research in personality assessment bucks this trend.

### Constructivism

However, what I want to focus on more is constructivism, which pertains more to cognitive structures and processes. Constructivism holds that our way of construing the world is critically tied to our cognitive structures and processes. Although at a very global level, these structures and processes are universal and to an extent define our species, how we use them carries a distinctive aspect. As processors of information we vary greatly. When I do supervision, I notice that I have some supervisees who are absolutely meticulous in comprehensively surveying all of the data and developing hypotheses that are very close to the data. At the same time, they may struggle to discern the kinds of relationship among various aspects of personality functioning that are so useful to clients as they seek greater self-awareness. This difficulty relates to Schafer's distinction between chain-like interpretations, in which each personality trend is examined in isolation, versus hierarchical interpretation, in which each trend is examined in terms of its position in the overall personality hierarchy. Schafer (1954) writes very specifically about the demands that this latter, more optimal form of interpretation makes on the personality of the assessor. He lists a number of characteristics that are required, such as "his self-awareness, sensitivity and perceptiveness, tolerance for the error and ambiguity that so often and inescapably permeate clinical thought, and wit, verbal facility and imaginativeness on the one hand" balanced by a "skeptical demand for solid evidence on the other" (p. 156). Other supervisees have a much stronger predisposition to move to abstract preconceptualizations, and I find that my work as supervisor is to help them to slow down, take in more information before they come

up with overarching conceptualizations, and avoid such a romance with their formulation that they are able to question it when some new piece of data emerges.

Another phenomenon I notice when I do supervision is the presence of disturbing inconsistencies in the protocols that a given student garners. That is, I sometimes become aware of the fact that across assessment participants, a given supervisee will tend to get a curiously high number of vistas. And I go back and I scrutinize the inquiry, the coding—everything looks fine. Another student gets an unusually large number of cooperative responses or texture responses. Again, the enigma is not solved by finding administration or scoring errors...or even by the nature of the setting in which protocols are garnered. So I wonder to myself, "Does the personality of the assessor—no matter how we seek to standardize the behavior of the assessor—create an atmosphere in which the test stimuli are regarded?" When the question is posed this way, it's hard not to answer, "Probably."

Throughout the history of our development of assessments, we have been blind to one simple truth: The personality assessor has a personality, and this personality makes a difference in how he or she assesses others.

Last year, in my presidential address, I identified what I thought were blind spots in our advancement of personality assessment: blind spots such as our failure to look at the pedagogy of personality assessment. What I am doing this year is identifying another blind spot, and it is very much consistent with my point last year. Just as has been done in recent years vis-à-vis psychotherapy, it is time to explore the role of the personality assessor him or herself, or more specifically, the influence of personality, the assessor's personality, on the personality assessment process. How does the organizational activity, the degree of incorporation of information, the extent to which affect enters into decision making, the degree to which the individual is rooted in the conventional, or takes more license, and a host of aspects of personality on different aspects of the case formulation and feedback? And although I have chosen variables from the Comprehensive System, all of our major instruments offer information on personality style and could potentially be fruitfully explored. The respect in which this assertion is consistent with my point last year is that in both addresses, I have been talking about what I see as a pervasive, collective

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## President's Message

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neglect of the role of the assessor. Last year, I talked about one manifestation of this neglect: the almost total inattention to pedagogy...as if somehow magically teachers should be able to teach and students to learn without any benefit of science. This year, I am focusing on another manifestation: the neglect of the influence of the assessor's perceptual, cognitive, affective, and conative processes on each stage of the assessment.

Underlying this neglect, I believe, is a defensiveness that is very understandably borne out of the unrelenting attacks on personality assessment. We have been besieged and at times we assume a bunker mentality. To acknowledge that the personality of the assessor could make a difference in various aspects of the assessment would, we believe, undermine our credibility. And yet, if we bring the same scientific attitude to understanding the contribution of the therapist him or herself, we are likely only to strengthen the empirical foundation of our work.

### Practical Implications

If the personality of the assessor makes a difference in personality assessment, then several implications follow:

#### Research

One major consequence of what I'm saying is that we need to conduct programs of research on the personality assessor him or herself and the activities of the personality assessor, external and internal. In this regard, three directions are important. First, we have a need for research to identify which personality variables have the most critical bearing on an assessor's work at different stages of the process. We could imagine that those personality features that exert influence, for example, at the data integration stage would be different from those engaged at the feedback stage. If certain personality features are so conspicuous within the assessment situation that they constitute part of the stimulus field to which the participant responds, it would be critically important for us to know about this fact and identify the training implications of it. In order to identify relevant individual variables we need to do something else. Much effort has been expended on the response process of the perceiver, the assessment participant. But it's high time that we've achieved a better handle on the sophisticated concatenation of cognitive processes through which the assessor proceeds in the unfolding of a personality assessment. Within each of these processes, individual differences are likely to be present.

Finally, in order to see the effects of assessor personality variables on the assessor's ability to perform each of the tasks within a psychological assessment, we need *standards of performance for each of those tasks*. For some stages of the process, we have such standards. For example, last year, I talked about the study by the Hilsenroth research group (Hilsenroth, Charnas, & Zodan, 2007), where they looked at the level of success of training technique for producing reliable scoring. They could conduct such an informative study because when it comes to scoring, we have standards and methods of achieving the standards. Another very recent example was found in a study by Wolfe-Christensen and Callahan (2008), who looked at the assessment skill of adherence to standardized procedures in a group of participants who identified themselves as having an assessment specialty. We all know that variability exists among assessors on the extent to which they carefully adhere to standard procedures versus going rogue. However, Wolfe-Christensen and Callahan sought to capture this variability. They developed a survey in which they asked respondents various questions about the standard procedure administering various psychological tests such as the WAIS-III and the WRAT-III. For example, they asked: When administering Symbol Search from the WAIS-III, how many pages of stimuli do you present at once? Of course, with a survey we have the obvious problem that a respondent may know the right thing to do but not do it in practice. Yet, if they don't know what the right thing to do is, they surely are unlikely to do it. These investigators found that participants achieved an average adherence score of 70% for tests they administer. They also found huge variability among respondents in their knowledge of standard procedures, and this variability was unrelated to experience. That finding doesn't particularly surprise me—when I think of my students or assessors I know, adherence to a standardized procedure and even degree of interest in remembering what the standardized procedure is, are related to something else that we call personality. If I think of assessors I know, I can identify certain assessors who would be positively, perhaps annoyingly, scrupulous in their attendance to standard procedures, and others who would zestfully—and to me, dismayingly—flaunt them. The difference resides in personality. Yet, if we are going to look at the effects of assessor personality or any other potential variance source, we need to have ways of assessing each of the assessment tasks that are entailed in a personality assessment. We have only scratched the surface in this grand endeavor.

#### Use of personality assessment in training

With the benefit of knowledge derived from research, we must afford students striving to achieve assessment competence with opportunities for self-knowledge. Now as I say that, maybe many of you are anticipating my next thought. What better route to self-knowledge could we provide our trainees than participation in a personality assessment? Such an opportunity would not only provide critical information about the trainee's assessment-related personality style but also would offer the trainee an experiential grasp of what it is like to be an assessment participant. The concept of the training personality assessment would be something akin to a training analysis: an opportunity for self-exploration for the explicit purpose of enhancing one's capacity to engage in a professional activity. I have had many students long to participate in a personality assessment but lament that such an enterprise would be unaffordable. I believe that the Society for Personality Assessment should develop means to make such an option feasible and encourage the use of this option. To me, in the best of all possible worlds, it would be a standard component of the training of all personality assessors.

#### Supervision

Third, such information would be a resource in the conduct of assessment supervision. Assessment supervisors might establish the goal not merely of helping the student on a given report but also to undertake a process of addressing perceptual-cognitive biases that may hinder them from performing as competently as they might certain of the sequence of tasks necessary to render a useful report or feedback. Such an undertaking would speak to the broader structure of the student's supervisory situation. It is not unusual for students to move from supervisor to supervisor without ever developing a relationship of substance with anyone. What I feel is optimal is a long-term relationship in which the supervisor truly attends to the subtleties in the student's information-processing activities and helps the student make particular changes that would benefit their assessment work. Some changes can be made relatively easily. For example, helping a student slow down and take in more information before he or she conceptualizes is a manageable task. More difficult is helping a student to recognize relationships in the data, the kinds of relationship whose delineation are so important in writing for therapists. Yet

we also know that there are many different types of assessment, with each placing different demands upon the assessor. Once we have a cognizance of match between the perceptual and cognitive features of the assessor and the demands of a given type of assessment task, we will be in a position to counsel students on the areas of assessment they might most productively pursue.

In our last conference, we celebrated our 70 years of existence and the enormity of our progress during this period. We can be confident in our assessment tools and the products they ultimately allow us to render. At the same time, we the assessors are the ones who establish rapport, administer the tests, make observations, code the data, make inferences, test the inferences, and so on. What postmodernism in its very best form teaches us is that only until we reckon with the fact that the knower—in this case, the assessor—has everything to do with the knowing and the known, will our grasp of the assessment process be complete.

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## Understanding the “Shut-Down Learner”

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experience-near work of Fischer (1994) and Finn (2007). Developing a connection in the initial moments of an assessment is crucial: “‘Tell me about yourself’ is how I like to start. These kids need to hear that we are listening to them and they are valued.” As such, Dr. Selznick uses a touch of irreverence to connect with clients. He feels that many of the pretenses of the professional façade often are obstacles to assessing clients that are shut-down. This extends to the framework for the assessment session as well. Dr. Selznick prioritizes clinical data—observations, testing of limits—in trying to make sense of standardized testing. “While I understand the impulse to do 15 hours of testing over three days—I’ve done that myself—I do most assessments in one session. More testing is not necessarily better.” His batteries include important anchors for assessing the spatial abilities of his clients (WISC-IV, WAIS-IV) as well as their academic potential—with some important caveats: “Most of the existing standardized tests for reading or writing don’t test more involved reading or writing, just the component skills.” Dr. Selznick uses informal reading inventories which have extended reading passages and enable assessors to truly hear how children read *in vivo*. Similarly, asking children to do an open-ended task—writing a brief short story about an experience they have had—will yield data akin to real-life assignments. Shut-down learners tend to find these tasks “painful.” When asked about the requirements that educational institutions have around certain tests, measures, or scores which his individualized approach may not include, Dr. Selznick is characteristically candid: “I am not testing for the schools. This is a clinical assessment for the parent to understand their child and why he or she has shut down or is struggling. I will passionately make the argument to the school or the parent if the assessment supports it, even if important data isn’t in a score by formulating my clinical impressions of the child along with the data.” Psychological test reports for Dr. Selznick are frequently drafted in the form of a letter that eschews the lengthy and sterile quality of typical reports: “I wish the report could encapsulate the experience of the assessment—a tall order.” At the very least, the report can “paint the picture” of the strengths and struggles of the child in a manner that is digestible, understandable, and meaningful for the parents.

To approach some of the personality features of the shut-down learner, Dr. Selznick finds sentence-completion tests, human-figure drawings, and the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) particularly helpful: “The TAT, and in particular Card I (usually seen as a boy pondering a violin) taps into these kids’ issues around achievement, not only reflecting the obstacles in the way of progress, but also the potential. It is not uncommon for shut-down kids to see the violin as an opportunity to learn something that resonates for themselves, that won’t lead to disappointment or frustration. Sometimes, though, they want to break the violin to pieces.”

As in most therapeutic assessment, feedback for Dr. Selznick (often taking place the same day as the testing), is key to making the assessment process positive and meaningful for the child and their parents. “I talk straight to the kids and parents about strengths and weaknesses, but in a way that protects or builds their self-esteem,” explains Dr. Selznick. “I want even kids who have profound difficulties, to walk out valuing something about them.” For shut-down learners, he describes how the “reading brain” has a difficult time, though their “puzzle brain” or “music brain” works much better for them. Parents also respond, he believes, to a professional that speaks naturally, without jargon. In many cases, some of the raw data—such as the TAT stories—cut through the morass of numerical data and speak volumes to parents and kids about what is happening: “When you read a violin story to some parents, they get it immediately, no interpretation is needed.” Dr. Selznick is proud of his successes with shut-down learners, some of whom he has interviewed and included in *The Shut-Down Learner*. The book also provides resources such as educational interventions for these children and notable programs around the country.

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## What Does Coefficient Alpha Tell Us About Test Validity?

...continued from page 3

the trait concepts employed. Nonetheless, more empirical evidence regarding the relationship between different reliability estimates and valid interpretation of test scores would be informative for both researchers and practitioners of personality assessment.

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## Informed Consent, Part II: Ideas for Your Informed Consent Agreement

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the opportunity to make a decision about whether or not to be included through the informed consent agreement.

An important question to consider if your practice includes both therapy and assessment is whether to use one informed consent agreement for both purposes, or whether to have separate agreement forms for each purpose. There is no universally agreed upon answer to this question. It is up to the practitioner. If you do decide to have a separate assessment consent form, it should include most of the previous information such as exceptions to confidentiality, payment information, and involvement of third parties.

In addition, an assessment informed consent form may include a paragraph about the nature and purpose of psychological assessment, a checklist of various assessment measures, information about feedback, and whether a report will be generated. During the initial session, the practitioner can check off the assessment measures that will be used.

Finally, the informed consent form should have a place for the client's signature and date indicating that he or she has read, understood, and agrees to the provisions of the informed consent agreement. There should also be a place for the signature of a parent or guardian in the event that the client is a minor. Some practitioners also include the statement that signing the informed

consent form acknowledges that the client (or legal guardian) has received a copy of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act Privacy Notice, rather than having a separate signature form for this purpose.

Informed consent agreements often include a great deal of important information. The original signed copy goes into the client's file. It is recommended that the client be offered a xeroxed copy of the signed, original consent form because it includes important information, such as phone number, billing practices, and cancellation policy. Should the client decline a copy, it is recommended that the clinician note this in the client's record, and also have the client initial and date that they declined a copy on the original form. An electronic copy of the unsigned form may be provided at the client's request. In the future, clinical records will be increasingly converted into an electronic format.

I am interested in the information you have found useful to include in your informed consent agreement forms. If you have additional suggestions, please contact me at lknauss@widener.edu. I will include your ideas in a future column.

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## Psychological Assessment in The Netherlands

...continued from page 6

such as general psychiatry, civil litigation, forensic psychiatry, and rehabilitation. Finally, chapters on professional ethics, assessment reporting, and therapeutic assessment complete the book. Each chapter of the book includes a case that illustrates the value of psychological assessment to the question at hand. In all modesty, I hope the book provides Dutch students at least with a shimmer of the rewards that lie ahead when they devote themselves to the study of personality assessment.

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Dr. Lew Goldberg, winner of the Walter G. Klopfer Award.

## State of the SPAGS: 2009

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ideas for improving the website and using the newly developed listserv to facilitate communication among members. If you haven't already, I strongly encourage you to join SPAGS, check out the website, log on to the listserv, and get some dialogue going around issues that are important to all of us.

SPAGS has a great deal to offer students interested in personality assessment. Over the course of the next year, with the help of all of those I have mentioned and the increased participation of many more students, we will continue to demonstrate why it benefits all of us to assure the strength of SPAGS. SPA models an excellent combination of warm collegiality, compassionate clinical concern, and rigorous science, and we have tried to use this template in developing our group. I am a much better colleague, clinician, and researcher because of the many affiliations I have made at our annual conference, but they have been most meaningful because of my work with SPAGS, where I feel that I have a voice that is heard and where I have been able to comfortably interact with people at similar stages of career development. I therefore invite and encourage students who have not yet joined and become active to do so, and assure you that the professional and personal benefits will be substantial. If you have any suggestions, comments, or questions, please feel free to contact me at hopwood2@msu.edu.

### New SPA Fellows

Congratulations to new SPA fellows Dr. Katherine C. Nordal and Dr. Steven Smith.



**Katherine C. Nordal, PhD**, is the American Psychological Association's (APA) Executive Director for Professional Practice. Dr. Nordal received her

PhD in psychology from the University of Mississippi in 1976. She has maintained a full-time private practice in Mississippi since 1980. Dr. Nordal's clinical interests

included learning, behavioral, and emotional disorders in children and adolescents; neuropsychological assessment; brain injury in children and adults; and civil forensic psychology.

Dr. Nordal is a fellow of the APA and the Mississippi Psychological Association (MPA). She was the Chair of the Committee for the Advancement of Professional Practice (CAPP) from 2005–2007 and a Trustee of the American Psychological Association Insurance Trust from 2005–2007. Dr. Nordal served on the APA's Board of Directors (2001–2003) and was the Board's liaison to the APA's Ethics Office, Committee on Legal Issues, the APA/American Bar Association Task Force, and the Public Interest Directorate. Dr. Nordal is a fellow of APA Divs. 42 (Independent Practice), 31 (State Associations), and 35 (Women), and a member of Div. 41 (American Psychology Law Society). She previously represented Mississippi on the APA's Council of Representatives. Dr. Nordal has also served as chairperson of the APA's Committee on Rural Health, as treasurer of the Division of State Psychological Associations, and as Finance Chair for the Division of Independent Practice. She is a past president of the Brain Injury Association of Mississippi and currently serves on its board of directors.

Dr. Nordal is a recipient of the APA's Karl F. Heiser Presidential Award for advocacy on behalf of Psychology. She was an APA/American Association for the Advancement of Science Congressional Science Fellow (1990–1991) and served as a legislative assistant in the U.S. House of Representatives and with the House Select Committee on Hunger.

Dr. Nordal is a past president of the Mississippi Psychological Association and has served on the MPA, which licenses psychologists for practice in Mississippi. She is a recipient of the Mississippi Psychological Association's Kinlock Gill Outstanding Professional Psychologist Award and in 1997 was presented with the association's Distinguished Practitioner Award. In 2003 she was recognized with the MPA's Distinguished Fellow Award.



**Steve Smith, PhD**, is an associate professor of clinical psychology and director of clinical training at UC Santa Barbara. His research interests

lie in the areas of therapeutic personality and neuropsychological assessment, multicultural assessment, and the neurocognitive

correlates of the Rorschach response process. He is current president of APA Division 12, Section IX (Assessment).

### SPA Members Honored

The following SPA Members were honored by the American Psychological Association:

**Raymond D. Fowler, PhD**, La Jolla, CA, The Gold Medal Award for Life Achievement in the Application of Psychology.

**Leonard Handler, PhD**, University of Tennessee, Division 12 (Clinical), The Outstanding Educator Award.

**Scott S. Meit, PsyD**, The Cleveland Clinic, Timothy B. Jeffery Memorial Award for Outstanding Contributions to Clinical Health Psychology (presented in conjunction with the American Psychological Foundation).

**A. Rodney Nurse, PhD**, Orinda, CA, APA Division 43 (Society for Family Psychology), Category I: Certificate of Appreciation.

**Richard Rogers, PhD**, University of North Texas, APA Award for Distinguished Professional Contributions to Applied Research.

### SPA Personals

**Jean Jadot, PhD**, psychologist from Belgium, wrote an article entitled, "Incapacite de travail temporaire et troubles anxio-depressifs" [Incapacity to work and anxiety-depression disorders] in Volume 20, Number 5, pp. 455–464 of *Sante Publique* (French Society for Public Health). The article is based on the observation that an increasing number of people in Belgium are unable to work for reasons related to mental disorders. This article addresses medical, psychological, and demographic characteristics of a small of 262 persons who find themselves in this situation. This outpatient community is characterized by high prevalence of depression, anxiety, and psychosomatic disorders of many forms. The article discusses and questions the polymorphism of these disorders with regard to sociodemographic characteristics of the sample population and clinical concepts of this macropsychic syndrome and demoralization. This article comes within the framework of the social disparities (inequalities) control in French-speaking world and a better comprehension for actions in Public Health.

# spa exchange

## From the Editor...

Jed A. Yalof, PsyD, ABPP, ABSNP



This issue of the *Exchange* offers some excellent contributions, including Virginia Brabender's President's Message, John Kurtz's discussion of coefficient alpha and test validity, Linda Knauss's discussion of contents of informed consent protocols for psychological assessment, and Alan Schwartz's book review in which he covers the interface between personality and learning disability. Additionally, Christopher Hopwood updates us on SPAGS happenings.

Corine de Rooter shares an enlightening perspective on assessment practice in The Netherlands. Jane Sachs (International Notes) and Bruce Smith (SPAF, Exner Memorial, UAP update) keep members apprised of important SPA happenings. Other items of interest are within the pages. Until next time...

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