

# spa exchange

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## 2001 Presidential Address The Future of Personality Assessment: Dreams and Realities

by Sandra W. Russ

As I wrestled with this final Presidential Address to SPA, I really thought about what I wanted to say. I decided that I wanted to talk about the future of personality assessment and my dream of what I think the future should be. And I will also discuss what SPA is doing and can do to help make these dreams a reality. So here is my wish list for the field of personality assessment.

### ① Healthy scientific debate about methods of personality assessment.

This issue is at the top of my list because of the raging debate that is occurring at the moment in a number of publications, including *The New York Times*, with a growing amount of acrimony. The debate between supporters of objective and projective tests and between clinical versus actuarial prediction has been going on for a long time. When I was a graduate student, my first course in personality assessment in 1966 consisted of being handed a stack of 67 articles, 65 of which either supported the validity of the MMPI or showed negative findings with the Rorschach. Two studies supported the validity of the Rorschach. At the time, I thought that 65 to 2 was a little one-sided. It took me a long time to be open to learning about the Rorschach after that. The one-sided quality to the debate has continued with projective tests usually being on the defensive.

One exception to this one-sidedness is the series of articles in *Psychological Assessment* edited by Greg Meyer on "The Utility of the Rorschach in Clinical Assessment" in 1999. All points of view were represented with a well-balanced discussion of the issues. My students commented on the civilized tone of that discussion, and they were right. This series met criteria for healthy debate: well balanced, all points of view represented, civilized toned and all evidence presented. Meanwhile, the debate in the field is picking up steam. Lilienfeld, Wood, and Garb (2000) recently took an extreme position and called for clinical psychologists to stop using projective tests or to use them in very narrow ways. They also called for graduate programs to reduce the amount of time in the curriculum spent in teaching projective tests. Let's assume that the field did that and there was a moratorium on using projective tests. What would happen?

Well, in about 15 years, projective tests would be re-invented. Tests like the Rorschach and TAT would be developed and called something else (probably not projective tests). And the reason this would happen is that there are no other tests that do what they do—tap the personality variables that they tap. And these are important personality variables, both for research on personality and for understanding the individual case. How else



would we measure object relations (or interpersonal schema if that is the term you prefer). How else would we measure fantasy, emotion in fantasy, primary process thinking, capacity to resolve conflicts and personal problems, or oral dependency? I think that one of the points that is getting lost in this debate is that personality tests are not only used for understanding the individual case and treatment planning but also are used to learn about personality development and functioning. For example, one of the pressing needs of society right now is to learn how to reduce violence and violent outbursts in children. Learning how children develop attachment to others, good internal representations, investment in other people, and empathy with others is essential in answering this question. Measures of object relations on the Rorschach or TAT are ideal in assessing these variables, so we can learn what kind of childrearing practices predict adaptive functioning in this area and what kind of interventions can improve the individual's

capacity to connect with others as well as how early the intervention needs to occur to make a change. On the other hand, we have to acknowledge the problems that exist with either projective or objective tests. We need to build the empirical base for all tests in terms of treatment planning and outcome assessment. We must have open and healthy scientific debate about the issues. It is this kind of discussion that can move the field ahead.

### How can SPA help with this process?

SPA, through its journal, newsletter, midwinter meeting, and committee structure can provide forums for carrying-on discussions that promote scientific inquiry and move the field ahead. And SPA is forcefully responding to inaccurate and one-sided reviews in the literature. I want to thank Irv Weiner and Greg Meyer for leading this effort. And we have provided funds for projects like the Meyer-Handler meta-analysis project to review and present the current knowledge base in the field. More funds for research projects that build the empirical base for personality tests would be helpful.

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## 2001 Presidential Address

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*This brings us to my second wish...*

### ② Programmatic research in test validation, clinical use, and psychotherapy intervention programs.

So much of the research in the field is piecemeal. A good validity study here or there is carried out with no follow-up. Or there are good validity studies but no effort to develop clinical norms for a variety of different groups. And there is not enough effort to incorporate measures of personality into psychotherapy outcome studies. For research efforts to be *optimal*, they should be systematic and involve different research labs. This problem is true of most areas in psychology, not just personality assessment. For this kind of programmatic research to be carried out, we need a network of researchers and clinicians that work together. We need major funding.

#### *How can SPA help?*

SPA can probably help most with networking. We could develop topic area groups. This happens informally at SPA but maybe we could be more formal about it in some areas. We could provide some seed money for pilot work or position papers. And we could help with providing consultation about funding sources. Some of our members are very knowledgeable about the current funding scene, and we could use their expertise.

### ③ Increased focus on assessing positive features of the personality.

This was the subject of my Presidential Address last year. I'm not going to give that address again, although I was tempted to because I like the topic. The positive psychology movement in psychology, led by Martin Seligman, is a very healthy development for the field. It impacts the field of personality assessment in that we need to develop measures of positive personality characteristics and refine the measures that we have. For example, creativity is one area of adaptive functioning for children and adults. Mumford (in press), in a recent commentary, said that the measures of the processes that underlie creativity have not kept pace with the sophistication of our understanding of the processes involved in creativity. This is really true. We could develop a sophisticated battery of tests of cognitive, affective, and personality variables that would account for a large

portion of the variance in creative functioning. We could do this for adults and for children. And we could do it for other positive characteristics as well—such as resilience. The area of assessment in positive psychology is an exciting new focus that will be good for the field.

SPA does have a Task Force on Assessment in Prevention Programs that is about to begin work in this area. We still have room for another member or two, so if you're interested in working with us, let me know.

### ④ Increase the knowledge base in appropriateness of tests for use with ethnic minority populations.

There is a huge gap in our knowledge base about test validity with different populations and the impact of cultural variables on personality development. There is a need for research and education in this area. There is a growing body of work in the area, such as the major contributions of Richard Dana, who presented a workshop at this meeting, but there needs to be a great deal more.

SPA could be facilitative in this area by providing seed money for research. We need ideas about how to be facilitative of research and education in this area. Please give us your ideas about how to do this.

### ⑤ Recognition of importance of personality assessment by managed care groups.

The recognition not only of the importance of assessment, but also to respect the judgement of the psychologist about what tests need to be given. I do not have anything new to say on this subject that has not been eloquently stated by others such as Steve Finn and Irv Weiner.

SPA is increasingly active in this arena. Irv Weiner has been our Assessment Advocacy Coordinator for the past year, filling this new position in SPA. And the board continues its lobbying efforts with APA and with Congressional representatives and Senators.

### ⑥ Continued vitality in the field of personality assessment.

I think there is great vitality now in the field—it has really been growing for the last 10 years or so. And I hope it continues. SPA has played, and should continue to play, an important role in this vitality.

#### *How is SPA helping?*

SPA has recognized the importance of student involvement. We have a number of initiatives for students. This is so important because students are the future of the field.

So we have travel awards to the mid-winter meeting, a student lunch activity at the meeting, opportunities for students to present dissertation awards, and the Mary Cerney award which is for students. Many of you have contributed to these awards and that is a very important contribution. We are working on getting a listserv up and running which should be attractive to student members. And we are working harder to get student attendance at the meeting.

Other SPA initiatives that contribute to the vitality of the field are advocacy efforts and sponsored research projects. We have tried to experiment with new features at the mid-winter meeting. The town meeting, which was initiated by Steve Finn, was a very important addition to last year's program in that it provided a better dialogue among the membership than we have ever had. Also for the last few years, we have included different types of program events such as the consultation hours and paper discussion formats which are more interactive.

It is essential that SPA stay a vital organization. We now have 2,600 members. A few local chapters have been developed. Sharon Jenkins is chairing a local chapters committee, so please contact her for information about developing local chapters.

For SPA to stay vital, it needs a vital and proactive board. I want to thank the Board of Trustees I have worked with these last two years. They are a wonderful group who work very hard and have initiated many new events and projects. They are very proactive and have built on efforts of previous boards. There is good continuity in the programs and policies that are developed by the Board. I especially want to thank Steve Finn for putting together such a wonderful program this year and last year. Finally I want to thank the membership for being such a dedicated group of people. I have been honored to be your President. As long as we all stay involved in SPA, it will remain a vital organization and will help shape the field of personality assessment.

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# The Teacher's Block

## Developmental Stages of Internalizing an Assessment Model

by Jed Yalof, PsyD

The road that students traverse on their way to developing an internalized model of becoming competent as psychological assessors is fraught with potential detours and divots. During their extended period of assessment apprenticeship there is much that can go awry and veer students off the path of incorporating psychological testing into their psychology practice upon attainment of licensure status. Although not quite of Eco-Challenge stature, there is a significant amount of academic orienteering that requires support and skilled instruction as graduate students progress from the classroom to the training clinic and eventually move into independent psychology practice. Self-doubt, frustration, long hours of mastering scoring and report writing, and concerns about whether their assessment training will pay off, literally, as an income-generating activity, are but a few of the pressure-points that can side-swipe the student's motivation and play devil's advocate against the encouragement of assessment teacher and supervisor.

Indeed, teachers and supervisors are all too familiar with the range of challenging events that mark the student's developmental progression toward the attainment of mastery in assessment. The curriculum itself is somewhat daunting. For instance, students are required to demonstrate a high level of general and specific knowledge and skill, including test and measurement theory; test administration, scoring, interpretation, and report writing; clinical interview and observation skill; normal development and abnormal psychology; and diagnosis and ethics. In the process of learning, students are exposed to teachers and supervisors who have more or less mastered skills to which students aspire and who present an internalized model of how assessment works. A student may approach interpretation somewhat concretely, for example, and have difficulty identifying common themes across different tests, whereas the teacher gravitates to higher-level integration in an almost second-nature way, spotting and synthesizing discrepancies quickly, intuitively, and accurately. Here, the teacher must be careful not to integrate insights too far beyond the student's ability to track the inference process lest the student silently fall victim to the teacher's showmanship. Ideally, students who are exposed to vibrant and thoughtful assessment role

models might embrace every learning opportunity as a chance to move one step closer to competence, but reality is often less kind than aspiration.

Teachers and supervisors who are too quick to explain what to them seems obvious, too hasty with a red pen or lack empathy for normal learning setbacks that occur when teaching assessment skills, run the risk of deterring a student's motivation to forge ahead despite frustration. Consequences of this type of disturbing learning experience are outcomes in which students swear off assessment as part of their professional work upon graduation and who may even feel embittered about the assessment component of their education and training. When "autopsy-ing" these instances in particular, teachers and supervisors need to examine their motives and modify their approach accordingly.

If our goal is to promote assessment as a rewarding and necessary skill, then we need to appreciate that outcomes, evidenced in student attitudes about assessment, will be shaped by the tenor of supervisory interaction. Recent attacks from within the profession against projective testing, for example, remind us of how important it is to treat the supervisory process with sensitivity. It is through both teaching and supervision of assessment that students are exposed to positive role models who provide professional direction around multiple psychological tasks associated with the integration of assessment competencies into a professional identity. Thus, the supervisor wants to set a positive tone that provides students with timely feedback that is responsive, instructive, and attentive to learning needs. Students for whom assessment supervision is particularly noxious will probably linger with unpleasant, intrusive supervisory introjects and become prime candidates for souring on the role of assessment in psychology practice. Conversely, students who have positive assessment supervision experiences are more likely to adopt a respectful tone and attitude toward assessment even if they do not practice it as a primary professional activity upon graduation and communicate this attitude to other professionals with whom they come in contact.

The following developmental markers might prove useful in helping students, teachers, and supervisors distinguish different stages of incorporating assessment knowledge and skill into a professional identity. The model includes both academic courses and student phenomenology related to each stage of training:

### Stage 1

- ◆ Test and measurement theory
- ◆ Developmental theory
- ◆ Abnormal Psychology & diagnosis
- ◆ Professional ethics
- ◆ Foundation course in IQ testing and supplemental measures
- ◆ Writing a basic report that integrates IQ and background data

There may be frustration about the meaning of ascribing IQ scores due to concerns related to test bias; anticipation of testing courses being "over" due to long hours of scoring and writing; and a sense of mastery and, hopefully, decreased resistance to learning more about assessment.

### Stage 2

- ◆ Courses in objective and projective testing
- ◆ Increased appreciation for diversity issues in assessment
- ◆ Integration of different tests and measures into a test battery
- ◆ Integration of diagnosis with report writing
- ◆ Predissertation project in assessment
- ◆ Joining SPA
- ◆ Practicum training
- ◆ Experience giving feedback to clients

This might be the "make-or-break" time for many students in terms of their developing an internalized sense of how assessment can be applied to address many different problems; an appreciation for the overlap between psychotherapy and assessment reasoning skills; and a realization that there are few corners that can be cut when doing high-quality assessment work.

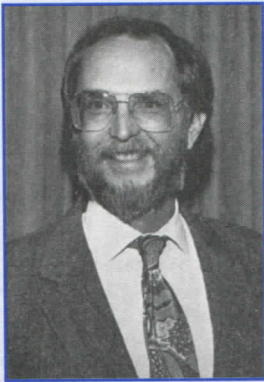
### Stage 3

- ◆ Internship training
- ◆ Possibly serving as a teaching assistant
- ◆ Dissertation in the area of assessment
- ◆ Attending SPA (and possibly presenting a paper)
- ◆ Supervising or providing guidance in assessment to a beginning student

At this stage, if attained, a student has begun to think like his or her teachers and supervisors, is eager to possibly teach assessment upon graduation, and is anticipating making contributions to the literature as a way of furthering personal growth and development and as part of an identification modeled on experiences with teachers and supervisors.

## 2001 Midwinter Meeting Speaker Profiles

**Robert P. Archer, Ph.D., ABPP**  
2001 SPA Midwinter Program  
*A Practical Guide to Using the MMPI-A*

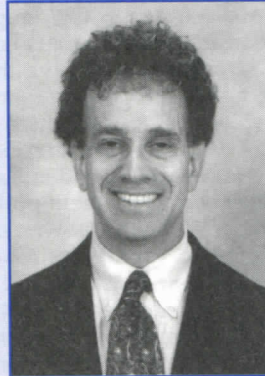


**Dr. Robert P. Archer** is a Professor and Vice-Chair of the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the Eastern Virginia Medical School, Norfolk, VA. Dr. Archer's workshop in the 2001 SPA Midwinter Program was entitled, "A Practical Guide to Using the MMPI-A." Dr. Archer is the author of over 100 articles and book chapters related to psychological assessment. He is also author of the texts, *Using the MMPI With Adolescents* and *MMPI-A: Assessing Adolescent Psychopathology* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1987; 1997) and co-author of the *MMPI-A Casebook* (PAR, 1994) and the forthcoming *Essentials of MMPI-A Assessment* (Wiley, in press).

Dr. Archer served on the advisory committee to the University of Minnesota Press for the development of the MMPI-A and is a co-author of the MMPI-A manual. He is currently working on a series of research projects related to the MMPI-2 and the MMPI-A. Dr. Archer is Editor of *Assessment*, a quarterly journal that began publication in March, 1994, and Associate Editor for the *Journal of Personality Assessment*. He is an Executive Board Member and Diplomate of the American Board of Assessment Psychology.

**Editor's Note:** As a regular feature of the *spa exchange*, we will feature our midwinter workshop presenters.

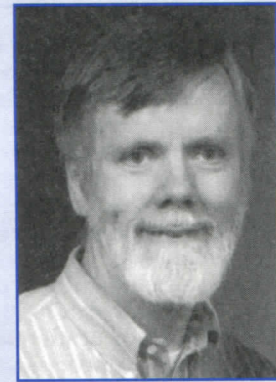
**Robert L. Mapou, Ph.D.**  
Presenter, 2001 SPA Meeting  
*Learning Disabilities and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in Adults: Research, Assessment, Documentation, and Intervention*



**Dr. Robert L. Mapou** received his Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Emory University in Atlanta, GA and completed pre- and postdoctoral training in neuropsychology in Atlanta and in Boston, MA. Currently, he is a clinical neuropsychologist in independent practice with William Stixrud, Ph.D. and Associates, LLC, Silver Spring, MD, where he specializes in the evaluation of adolescents and adults with learning disabilities and ADHD. From 1996 to 1999, Dr. Mapou was Neuropsychology Director for the Centers for Neuro-Rehabilitation, Bethesda, MD. From 1990 to 1996, he conducted neuropsychological research on HIV/AIDS. Dr. Mapou is board-certified in clinical neuropsychology by the American Board of Professional Psychology and holds faculty appointments in the Department of Neurology at Georgetown University School of Medicine and the Departments of Neurology and Psychiatry at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences.

His publications and presentations have focused on adult learning disabilities and ADHD, neuropsychological assessment, cognitive and behavioral effects of traumatic brain injury, neurobehavioral effects of HIV disease, and other neuropsychological issues. He was senior editor of *Clinical Neuropsychological Assessment: A Cognitive Approach*, published in 1995 by Plenum. Dr. Mapou served on the editorial boards of the *Journal of the International Neuropsychological Society* and the *Journal of Head Trauma Rehabilitation*, as well as doing *ad hoc* reviews for other journals.

**Richard Rogers, Ph.D., ABPP**  
Presenter, 2001 SPA Meeting  
*Malingering of Mental Disorders: Conceptual Issues and Clinical Methods*

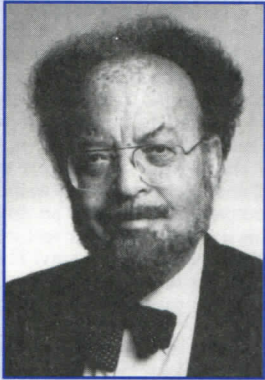


**Dr. Richard Rogers** was graciously invited to present his first SPA workshop for 2001 Midwinter Meeting on "Malingering of Mental Disorders: Conceptual Issues and Clinical Methods." Beginning with theoretical work in the mid-1980s, Dr. Rogers has pursued programmatic research on malingering and other response styles. These studies have included the validation of standardized tests (e.g., MMPI, MMPI-2, and PAI) and the development of specialized measures. The culmination of his latter work was the publication of the Structured Interview of Reported Symptoms (SIRS; see [www.parinc.com](http://www.parinc.com)) widely regarded as the best-validated measure of feigned mental disorders. In addition, Dr. Rogers edited the first comprehensive text, *Clinical Assessment of Malingering and Deception*, which was awarded the Guttmacher Award from the American Psychiatric Association. He substantially expanded and completely revised this book in 1997 (see [www.guilford.com](http://www.guilford.com)).

Beyond malingering, Dr. Rogers has an abiding interest in clinical and forensic assessment. Studies have addressed such diverse clinical issues as MMPI-2 validation, Hispanic versions of psychological tests, and the assessment of command hallucinations. In the forensic evaluations, he has focused on competency assessments, psychopathy, and insanity evaluations. Beyond empirical studies, he authored with Dan Shuman, *Conducting Insanity Evaluations* (see [www.guilford.com](http://www.guilford.com)), which provides extensive coverage of psychological assessments and their forensic applications in light of the Daubert standard.

In the last decade, Dr. Rogers has sought to expand psychological assessments to include a variety of structured interviews. He believes that structured interviews can complement traditional testing and broaden the role of clinical psychologists in addressing complicated diagnostic issues. Building on his 1995 text, Dr. Rogers is about to publish his newest book, *A Handbook of Diagnostic and Structured Interviewing* (scheduled release of July 2001; see [www.guilford.com](http://www.guilford.com)). His strong hope is that SPA members will embrace structured interviews as clinically-useful enhancements of their current evaluations.

**Theodore Millon, Ph.D., DSC**  
 2001 SPA Midwinter Workshop  
*Assessing Personality Factors Among  
 Psychiatric, Adolescent, and Medical Patients*



**Dr. Theodore Millon** was the first President of the International Society for the Study of Personality Disorders (ISSPD), a worldwide association of over 1,000 psychologists and psychiatrists. For the past decade he has been a Professor in Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and a Professor of Psychology at the University of Miami, where he is now emeritus. Most recently, he has become Dean and Scientific Director at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Personology and Psychopathology, a "think tank" for psychological research and scholarly study. He was the inaugural Editor of the *Journal of Personality Disorders*, serving in that post for a decade. In recent years he has been a recipient of several International, National, and State awards for Lifetime Achievements and Distinguished Contributions, including SPA's 2001 Bruno Klopfer honor.

Among his 250 or so publications are several books, notably *Modern Psychopathology* (1969), *Contemporary Directions in Psychopathology* (1986), *Disorders of Personality* (1981, 1996), *Towards a New Personology* (1990), *The Millon Inventories* (1997), *Psychopathy* (1998), *Personality Guided Therapy* (1999), *The Oxford Textbook of Psychopathology* (1999), and *Personality Disorders in Modern Life* (2000). Also notable are his assessment works, specifically the clinical inventories, the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory (MCMI), the Millon Adolescent Clinical Inventory (MACI), and most recently, the Millon Behavioral Medicine Diagnostic (MBMD), as well as the nonclinical Millon Index of Personality Styles (MIPS).

A full 1999 issue of the *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 72, 323-456, was devoted to a "festschrift" of eight articles by Steve Strack, Roger Davis, James Choca, Thomas Widiger, Robert Craig, and Darwin Dorr, commenting on Millon's theoretical and research contributions, including a lengthy paper in which he summarized his effort to build a model for integrating basic science, clinical theory, nosologic classification, diagnostic assessment, and personality-guided psychotherapy.

## Personal Column

by Joan Weltzien, Ed.D.

At the most recent commencement exercises at the Illinois School of Professional Psychology, Chicago, **Robert J. Craig, ABPP**, was given an "Outstanding Faculty Recognition Award." This is quite an honor since he only teaches there part-time.

**Clifford DeCato** won the award for Outstanding Mentor from the 2001 Graduating Class of the Institute for Graduate Clinical Psychology of Widener University.

**Len Handler** won the Chancellor's Senior Research and Creative Achievement Award last year at the University of Tennessee. This year Len won the College of Arts & Sciences Senior Research and Creative Achievement Award. Len was elected an APA Fellow (through Division 12) and was appointed to the APA Committee on Tests and Assessment as well.

**Mark Hilsenroth** has joined the faculty of Adelphia University.

**David Ingle** received his Doctorate in May 2001. He was recently hired by the Ann Klein Forensic Hospital in New Jersey to serve as a clinician on the sexually violent perpetrator detention unit, where he will engage in forensic evaluations, treatment of sexually violent predators, pedophiles, and will assist in the design of release criteria. David also plans on engaging in research to further understand sex offender's personality characteristics.

**Alan Schwartz's** review of Irvin Yalom's "Understanding Group Psychotherapy" (Inpatient Video) recently appeared in the *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy*. He also has an upcoming book chapter on Supportive-Expressive Psychotherapy, co-authored with Kathy Crits-Cristoph, which will appear in the book *Comparative Treatment of Anxiety Disorders* (in press).

**Eric A. Zillmer** has recently published a textbook entitled *Principles of Neuropsychology* with Wadsworth Publishers. He has also been awarded an endowed named professorship at Drexel University and is now the Pacifico Professor of Neuropsychology. He currently is the Athletic Director of Drexel's 18 Division I intercollegiate programs and can be reached at zillmer@drexel.edu

### The Playback Theatre Midwinter Meeting 2001





## The Rorschach in Britain

by Kari Carstairs



Here I am in Philadelphia at my first SPA midwinter meeting. It's proving to be a wonderful way of updating my skills in personality assessment. I trained here over 10 years ago, graduating from Widener University where Virginia Brabender is now the Director. When she and I met up to review a Rorschach case, she suggested that I write an article for this newsletter giving my personal reflections on the use of the Rorschach in Britain, where I have been in private practice since 1993. So here are a few comments, jotted down in a somewhat haphazard fashion after a full day of workshops, presentations, and discussions with colleagues.

Dr. Brabender tells me that I am the only SPA member from Britain. I am not surprised. Recently, I was at a meeting of forensic psychologists in London where a group of us were discussing the sorts of assessments we conduct for the courts. I said I routinely used the Rorschach. There was a shocked silence, followed by some very critical remarks to the effect that "those inkblots are a load of rubbish." I asked if my learned friends had ever heard of Exner. They had not. This level of ignorance is, unfortunately, very common.

Why is this so? I can only speculate here. I think there may be at least three factors. The first is that Hans Eysenck has had a profound impact on several generations of clinical psychologists.

When he criticized the Rorschach in the 1970s for lack of psychometric rigor, it fell out of favor. Once it was no longer taught in the training programs, clinicians lost touch with the literature and therefore are ignorant of the development of the Comprehensive System.



The second factor, I believe, is that most clinical psychologists practice with the National Health Service (NHS). Resources are scarce and waiting lists for psychological services are very long. Often, there is little choice for individual patients regarding the type of treatment offered. This means that the sort of detailed understanding of a patient's presentation, which is so useful in treatment planning where choices need to be made, becomes an unnecessary luxury.

The third factor has to do with the split between psychodynamic and cognitive-behavioral psychologists. In Britain, the Rorschach is usually thought of as a psychoanalytic method. This means that cognitive-behavioral psychologists dismiss it. On the other hand, those who are more psychodynamic tend to be quite hostile to psychometric approaches to assessment, preferring instead to rely on an understanding of the transference and countertransference as they unfold in a clinical interview.

However, I have had some positive experiences when presenting my work with the Rorschach

in Britain. I do a lot of Court reports now, and I find that the lawyers and the judges appreciate the findings from the Rorschach and are respectful of them when I explain how the data have been gathered. I recall the first time I testified in a criminal case at the Old Bailey. The barrister who was cross-examining me was going on a fishing expedition to try and discredit the Rorschach data. In desperation, he asked if I could explain what the inkblots were. So I described how they were made. Then he asked me if I could please show them to the court. As I paused to consider how I might word my refusal of this request (not wanting to reveal the cards in public), the Judge intervened and said very sternly to the barrister, "Surely you can imagine what an inkblot looks like!" It was ironic to hear our text instructions to examinees reversed in this way! The barrister dropped that line of questioning and the judge later decided the case in my favor.

About five years ago, I gave an introductory workshop on the Rorschach to 12 psychologists. Three of them went on to complete a more in-depth training with me, and one of those has now trained with Rorschach workshops. Curiously, she is Australian and not British!

I have also found that students who have attended my introductory lectures on assessment are interested to learn more about the Rorschach. The next step would be to generate more interest by publishing in British psychological journals and to offer more training. This is on my "to do" list but it will have to wait for a while. At the moment, I have my hands full with my two sons, ages 3½ and 14 months! Once they're in school, I'm keen to show British psychologists what a powerful and fascinating test the Rorschach really is. Then we may have more than one British member of the SPA!

## The Changing of the Guard: The SPA Board Selects the Next Editor

by Len Handler, *University of Tennessee*

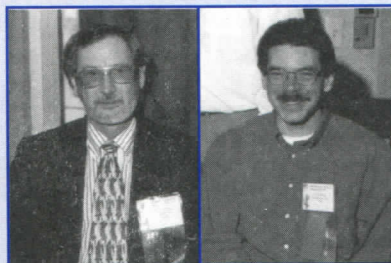
Good editors, as the old saying goes, "don't grow on trees." Well, we already had a "dam good" editor, but his term, even after an extension, was coming to an end. It was now time to choose another "dam good" editor, a monumental task for us to undertake. So, at the Fall SPA Board Meeting a committee was appointed, consisting of Judy Armstrong, Len Handler (chair), Radhika Krisnamurthy, Dave Nichols, and Charlie Peterson.

The Committee was given certain guidelines by the Board and also roughly outlined an evaluation procedure. The Board wanted us to focus on both objective and subjective data, with an emphasis on quantification of the data. Also, the data were to be derived from several different sources. Well, after all, we are all assessment psychologists, and nobody suggested we have just a single measure. Therefore, the Committee generated a list of seven questions we would ask each candidate, and we also agreed to rate each candidate concerning his/her vision of the future of our journal.

It took this group of assessment experts several months to finally settle on the questions to be asked, the method by which they would be asked, and how they would be scored. Sometimes we thought we probably felt like John Exner did when he was in the process of integrating the various Rorschach systems.

Although we at first considered having conference calls with each candidate, the vision of coordinating such telephone calls with people in so many different time zones led us to another method. We asked each candidate to

respond to the questions and to e-mail or fax them to each member of the committee. The committee members would then independently rate them.



Bill Kinder  
Departing Editor, JPA

Greg Meyer  
Incoming Editor, JPA

The e-mail/fax ratings were combined with the remainder of the ratings, were summarized, and e-mailed to all committee members. We then scheduled a 5-way conference call with all the committee members to discuss each candidate. After some discussion we found there was quite a bit of agreement among us. The names of the top three candidates were then communicated to the Board, along with the data.

The Board devoted an entire three hour meeting on the evening before the convention for final discussion and choice. This was a truly gut-wrenching experience for all of us because, unfortunately, there could only be one person chosen, and the pool of candidates was truly outstanding. Our unanimous choice, however, was

Greg Meyer, University of Alaska, Anchorage, who will assume the duties of Editor, JPA, on April 1, 2002.

We were impressed by the very high quality of the Journal under Bill Kinder's tenure as Editor. It is the only journal among those I read whose arrival I anticipate with eagerness. It is a journal of high quality and contains broadly based assessment information, so that members with diverse interests in the very broad field of personality assessment will find it informative. I feel certain that Greg Meyer will uphold that tradition. Many, many thanks to Bill Kinder for an outstanding job. Many, many thanks to Greg Meyer for his willingness to "pick up the torch."

# Assessment Advocacy—Report of the SPA Coordinator

by Irving B. Weiner

As I reported to the membership at the SPA meeting in Philadelphia, much of the attention of our advocacy efforts in the past year has been captured by the so-called Rorschach controversy. So-called, because what we are dealing with are aspersions on the utility of projective testing being cast by a small but determined cadre of critics on one side, versus on the other side an enormous body of validating research and dedicated practitioners who have found these instruments of inestimable value in delivering mental health services as diagnostic consultants. Truly a horse-and-rabbit stew, but not one that we can ignore, because this small cadre has managed to generate some highly visible publications and to attract support from academic psychologists who have little knowledge of or investment in assessment psychology but are only too eager to applaud denigration of what they regard as soft science. We have responded by preparing and orchestrating numerous rebuttals, some published or in press and others undergoing editorial review.

It has become apparent, however, that such rebuttals, although necessary, have minimal impact. Those who have it fixed in their minds that the Rorschach and other projective methods are without value seem neither to read or be influenced by such rebuttals, no matter what weight of substantial positive evidence they muster. At the same time, there is little indication that researchers and practitioners who understand, use, and study these instruments have been discouraged from continuing to do so by the unwarranted attacks on them—which have gone so far as to call for a moratorium on their use until they are fully validated. Just think where we would be if health care providers, including our family doctors, were constrained from continuing to employ all procedures that were not fully validated!

An irony in this situation is the fact that contemporary Rorschach critics, while waving the banner of scientific legitimacy, are pursuing slash-and-burn tactics that have far more in common with advocacy than with science. Scientific inquiry consists of weighing all available evidence, discriminating between compelling and questionable research findings, and drawing conclusions on the basis of a balanced and open-minded determination

of where the facts lie. Advocacy, on the other hand, consists of having a point to make or a cause to justify and proceeding to adduce any information that appears to support this point or cause, regardless of how undependable this information may be, while ignoring information to the contrary, no matter how reliable it may be. This is exactly the tack being taken by our present-day critics, whose stance in this regard is appropriate in politics or in the adversarial arena of the courtroom but has no place of respect in scientific inquiry.

Nevertheless, most would agree that it is much easier to be convincing when presenting an attack than when mounting a response to the attack. Accordingly, one of our goals for the coming year is to replace rebuttals with positive elaborations of what Rorschach and projective assessment can contribute to psychological practice. In addition to published articles of this kind, these positive statements will include information sheets provided to SPA members and designed public consumption as well that will indicate succinctly the benefits and psychometric foundations of good psychodiagnostic assessment, including use of projective methods. Our agenda for the coming year also includes (a) broadening the focus of our attention to include advocacy for self-report as well as performance-based measures of personality functioning; (b) becoming more actively engaged in working constructively with groups within APA whose concerns touch on personality assessment; and (c) generating broader involvement of the SPA membership in our advocacy efforts.

Regarding the second of the preceding goals, members should be aware that our voice within APA has already become more clearly heard than before through the extremely effective participation of Len Handler in the APA Committee on Tests and Assessment, to which he was elected last fall. Regarding the third goal, I encourage members to contact me concerning any ideas they have about ways in which we can advance the cause of personality assessment and about their availability to take on assignments related to this purpose. Finally, with respect to positive statements that members might find useful in this work, I reported at the Philadelphia meeting that, subsequent to the lead article in *The New York Times* Science Section, in

which I was featured along with Scott Lilienfeld. He and I were invited to be interviewed live on "On the Line," a regular program on WNYC, the PBS station in New York City. Following a litany of largely unwarranted criticisms of Rorschach assessment recited by Dr. Lilienfeld, I was asked by the announcer, "What's your response to that?" The transcript shows that I responded as follows:

Well, I have a different view of all that. The Rorschach is a wonderful old test. It's been around for 80 years or so now, used by generations of psychologists, all around the world, who found it pretty useful, and you can ask, why might it still be around? We're not all fools. We wouldn't continue to use something if it wasn't helpful for us. And in fact, there's an enormous literature of research studies that confirm its validity for a great many purposes, widely published in leading scientific journals. But we've got a problem now. We've got some people who have come along and are raising criticisms, and these are people who have never published any Rorschach research of their own and know very little about how to use the Rorschach in practice. They seem to be on some kind of crusade to bad-mouth the instrument. They publish literature which involves . . . very selective attention to the literature. If there are very good studies—of which there are a great many, published in leading journals—these they ignore. And what they emphasize and summarize are any studies they can find that seem to suggest something negative about the instrument. It appears very convincing, but a number of well-known researchers have published other articles indicating that the coverage [these critics] rely on does not give anything close to a balanced view of what the literature actually shows.

As the interview was ending, following two call-ins from listeners, both of whom called to praise not bury the Rorschach, the announcer asked me, "Should we conclude that the value of the Rorschach test depends on what you see in it?" To this I responded, "Absolutely not! The value of the Rorschach test is the kind of information it provides that a well-trained and experienced clinician can use to evaluate the way people are functioning."

## Starting SPA Regional Chapters Organizing Across Constituencies

by Sharon Rae Jenkins, Ph.D.

"Think globally, act locally" is a good motto for SPA members at this moment in history. Even as we expand our international connections and broaden the generalizability of our work across cultures, assessment psychologists (in the United States, at least) are under growing pressure from academic scientists and from third-party payers to justify the scientific soundness and practical usefulness of what we do. These daunting challenges are often difficult to meet alone. One constructive response is to start a local SPA chapter and work together. Chapters can provide meeting places for interested colleagues to share ideas and perspectives, coordinate their professional efforts, generate research, have fun trading Rorschach jokes, and can act as conduits for bringing global information into our local professional communities.

Organizing a regional chapter can have several direct and immediate benefits for the organizer(s), as I found in starting North Texas SPA. First, you get an excuse to have interesting conversations about assessment with people you might never talk to otherwise. Second, you might be able to see assessment presentations by folks you couldn't see otherwise. Third, you and others may be able to work together for mutual professional support, identifying common interests across the boundaries of institutions that more often separate you and divide your energies. Fourth,—who knows? What is most needed in your community?

What I've found most interesting in my own organizing work is the importance of thinking about different assessment constituencies and how to bring them together. What can a regional chapter do that I couldn't do by inviting a group of interesting friends to dinner? Many folks who have discussed chapter organizing with me begin from the group-of-friends model. They think about chapter organizing as a way to formalize their case conference group that is already in progress, or to start one. This is a good place to begin because it means that several people who already know that they are compatible can share the work, and no one has to go it alone. It provides a place to start brainstorming and planning, with the immediate rewards of ongoing assessment-focused discussions already built into a comfortable atmosphere. The main drawback is that after a while, everyone becomes familiar, and unless there is a steady flow of new perspectives and challenges from somewhere, such as in the range of cases presented, habituation can set in and things can begin to feel stale.

Thinking about a chapter as an organization rather than a group helped me approach things in several beneficial ways. In this first article of

what I hope to make an occasional series, I focus on thinking about assessment constituencies as a basis for organizing regional chapters. This approach has helped me by a) giving me excuses for conversations I couldn't have otherwise, b) providing a rationale for bringing people together who might not come together otherwise, and c) enlisting institutional support that would not otherwise be available to the chapter.

When I first decided to organize NTSPA, inspired by a lunch meeting about chapter organizing that Barry Ritzler held during his SPA presidency, I needed an excuse to have lunch with colleagues in North Texas. The focused effort required to get tenure had raised my lambda and suppressed WSumC, leaving me pervasively introverted and socially isolated. So I sent out a mailing to SPA members in North Texas (mailing labels available from Niki Badzik in the SPA Central Office, sample mailings available from me at the address below), and invited to lunch those who indicated interest in helping organize the chapter.

I was fortunate with those respondents. As I talked with them about what a chapter could contribute to their work, I quickly learned that assessment psychologists often organize their careers around their practice contexts more than their topics of interest. For example, many individuals practicing in schools talk more to the nonassessing therapists connected with schools than they do to assessment psychologists in nonschool settings; individuals practicing in hospitals more to other hospital personnel than to forensic or school assessors; and those solely in private practice may have to go out of their way to talk to anyone at all. Certainly as an academic, I talk primarily to other academics unless I make a concerted effort. This meant to me that there was a gap in all of our professional lives that a chapter could fill.

I began to think of chapter organizing as a matter of building a steering committee made up of representatives from each of the practice constituencies that I could identify in North Texas. Thus, in forming the NTSPA Steering Committee I invited individuals who could speak to the assessment-related needs of internship settings, forensic work, child-oriented assessment, public school settings, the local medical school's psychiatry department, private practice, and the Dallas Society for Psychoanalytic Psychology, one of the most active local psychologists' organizations. I covered the academic base myself and also invited one of my students to serve as the first student representative.

Because of the breadth of professional practice settings represented, and because the group's work would reach many alumni of my

department who have settled in North Texas, I was able to enlist the support of my Department Chair at UNT, Ernest Harrell, who has provided for the Department to co-sponsor my chapter development work. This has included paying for my phone calls, printing and postage costs for our mailings, staff support for preparation of mailings, and inviting John Exner to give the Department's Bonney Lecture in the chapter's first year so as to fuel local interest in the chapter's activities. I can only wish for all of you to have such a supportive department chair!

Thinking in terms of constituencies whose best interests they represent has helped Steering Committee members define the organization's most useful priorities. This thinking has guided our decisions about which presenters to invite to give continuing education workshops, our main source of funding. It has also helped us to define new projects, informing us about other constituencies' needs so that we may make new connections around our common interests. For just a few examples, Gordon Sauer brings in presenters representing managed care companies to teach us how they make judgments in funding assessments. This helps private practitioners get assessments approved as well as letting educators know better how to prepare students for private practice work and suggests that we should all be thinking about how we can inform this corporate decision-making process. Tom Boyle and Yolanda Kraynick formulated a joint case conference series that brings together interns from the several local psychology internships, which supports their assessment training program as well as providing interesting case discussions for our members who are able to attend. Ann Rich, our school psychologist, connected us with the activities of the Regional Association of School Psychologists and with the Dallas County Juvenile Justice Department. Veronica Navarrete-Vivero and Lisa Black, our student representatives, remind us of students' needs, interests, and potential contributions as well as coordinating student volunteers to help with our programs. We begin our series of summer planning meetings with the question, "What can we do together that we can't do separately?"

Think about it. Think about doing it. You are looking at TAT card 16. What do you see?

For further information about chapter organizing, write to:

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## Chesapeake Society of Personality Assessment

We are pleased to announce a new regional chapter for the Society for Personality Assessment covering Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. SPA members in the region will be receiving a mailing shortly on the Chesapeake Chapter of SPA (CSPA). It is our hope and plan to provide a forum for psychologists in the region interested in personality assessment as well as between the local chapter and national and international organizations.

The goals of the CSPA are:

1. to offer opportunities for psychologists interested in personality assessment to meet and discuss concerns;
2. to provide continuing education workshops, seminars, and meetings on important developments in personality assessment;
3. to develop on-going study groups on specific topics of member interest;
4. to network with universities and colleges within the region to promote and support teaching and research in personality assessment methods; and
5. to provide support to SPA for advocacy efforts in personality assessment on both the national and local levels.

We have already received commitments from Dr. Steve Finn to present on Therapeutic Assessment and Dr. Jim Kleiger to present on thought disorder and the Rorschach. The regional chapter has been formed with the start-up support from SPA and has received much organizational assistance from Dr. Sharon Rae Jenkins, SPA Coordinator for Regional Chapters.

At present the CSPA Steering Committee consists of Dr. Barton Evans, Dr. Jim Gormally, Dr. Jim Kleiger, Dr. Mary Jo Peebles-Kleiger, and Dr. Rebecca Rieger. Individuals interested in contacting CSPA are invited to call:

**Barton Evans** at 301-986-9669

**Jim Gormally** at 301-587-6205

**Jim Kleiger** at 301-493-6237

## SPA Town Meeting

by Martin Leichtman



Among the innovations introduced at the recent Midwinter Meetings was the inauguration of the SPA Town Meeting, an open forum at which members can share with the Board of Trustees and each other their views of critical issues facing the Society. The well-attended meetings have highlighted broad areas of consensus among SPA members and some differences.

Participants at the meetings expressed satisfaction with SPA in its present form, as a learned society that provides opportunities to exchange ideas, provides continuing education, and fosters research. A number of recommendations were made to enhance these functions, such as expanding overseas membership, fostering local chapters, considering regional meetings, and increasing CE offerings at the annual meeting.

Noting challenges to assessment by groups funding mental health care and the lack of serious attention to training in personality assessment in many universities, members strongly endorsed the Society's advocacy efforts. They urged lobbying not only with managed care firms and governmental bodies but also with APA. Irving Weiner, the SPA Advocacy Coordinator, described initiatives that have been undertaken and members offered suggestions from broadening these efforts and enlisting grassroots support.

Another area of consensus was on maintaining a cohesive organization. Although meetings and workshops devoted to specialized topics and formation of informal interest groups were supported, members generally opposed setting up divisions or special sections. In addition, graduate students rejected suggestions that a separate group be formed for them. While appreciating special activities, such as lunches with distinguished clinicians and researchers, a number spoke eloquently of the value they placed on feeling accepted as full members of the Society and mixing freely at meetings.

The greatest difference of opinion concerned the issue of credentialing. Stressing the importance of improving the quality of personality assessment nationally, some members favored SPA offering a Diplomate. Others expressed ambivalence about the idea, noting that other organizations are already involved with certification. They suggested that SPA should offer support to these groups but remain a collegial group devoted to the exchange of ideas.

Describing the Town Meetings as an invaluable addition to the Midwinter Meeting, Sandra Russ, SPA President, observed: "They provide a means of increasing the dialogue between members and enable the Board of Trustees to be more responsive to the wishes of the membership."

Discussion of a detailed report of the Town Meeting is now a standard agenda item at Trustees meetings. Among other effects, these discussions have contributed to decisions to increase support for advocacy efforts, expand CE offerings at the Annual Meeting, and provide seed money for the formation of local chapters.

## Seeking Articles!

Dr. Gacono is seeking article authors for a journal series on psychological assessment with offenders. Considered will be 15-20 page manuscripts on individual tests, as well as manuscripts dealing with special populations. The thrust is screening, treatment planning, and treatment monitoring rather than forensic applications. Manuscripts may include case reports. Please contact Dr. Gacono at 512-278-0198 or P.O. Box 140633, Austin, TX 78714

## Forensic Psychology and Gender-Based Claims in Immigration Court

by F. Barton Evans III, Ph.D. and Lory Diana Rosenberg, J.D.

The United States recognizes that freedom from persecution or torture is a fundamental human right. The domestic statute and regulations that govern eligibility for asylum in the United States were enacted and promulgated to conform to these international treaty obligations. The fundamental principle underlying these provisions is that a signatory nation must provide protection when a foreign state is unable or unwilling to protect its own citizens and nationals from such persecution.

Under our laws, a refugee is any person who is unable or unwilling to return to her country of nationality or last residence because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. However, making refugee determinations may be easier said than done.

It has come to be accepted that persecutors rarely provide their victims with evidence of persecution. An asylum claim by an individual seeking refugee status in the United States relies in large part on an assessment of the information provided by the claimant herself. This information is measured against standards that have been established by Congress, implemented by the Attorney General, and interpreted by the Board of Immigration Appeals and the federal courts.

These standards, which are subject to ongoing interpretation, can be confounding to the adjudicator and the applicant alike. The practical and psychological realities of persecution are demanding and converge to make the imposition of uniform standards for proof of an asylum claim elusive at best.

Not only are such claims dominated by highly individual factors affecting the applicant, but the evaluation that must be made requires the adjudicator to make judgments that go well beyond the foundation provided by traditional legal training. Complicating the adjudication even further, is the fact that the application of these fluid evidentiary principles to gender-based persecution claims requires recognition of a special relationship between the nature of the trauma itself and the effect on the victim's ability to relate the traumatic experience. Forensic psycholo-

gists can greatly assist the court in providing expert knowledge about these factors.

In 1995, the Department of Justice adopted gender guidelines intended to assist INS asylum officers in the adjudication of asylum claims brought by women. These guidelines recognize the importance of considering gender-based claims in light of international human rights instruments and the framework they provide. In 1998, the INS issued additional guidelines addressing asylum claims brought by minors.

The legal treatment of gender-based persecution has been the subject of much recent and long-needed discussion. The critical focus of this discussion has been whether the reasons for mistreatment may be characterized and proven to be on account of either the victim's political opinion or her membership in a particular social group, that is persecution on account of being a woman within a particular societal context. For example, recent well-publicized cases have involved women, or their daughters, seeking asylum to escape female genital mutilation. Increasingly, however, the need to consider special factors affecting the evidentiary sufficiency of such claims has become more widely recognized. The United States, like many countries obligated to provide protection to refugees, is still developing a workable framework for interpretation and application of the particular social group category. "Particular social group" is the predominant context in which persecution claims made on gender-related grounds are coming to be recognized. Increasingly, this category is being invoked to address women's claims based on political, social, and religious repression, as well as to address claims involving domestic violence, homosexual persecution, transsexual persecution, and persecution of children.

Forensic psychologists can play an increasingly important role in documenting the severe trauma and persecution experienced by women. Forensic psychological assessment procedures can powerfully integrate the needs of the woman seeking asylum, through a deep sensitivity to the impact of gender-based psychological trauma on the woman seeking relief, and the needs of the Court, by addressing the relevant psycholegal

questions in a neutral and objective fashion which is sensitive to the Court's needs for verification and assessment of credibility.

The use of forensic psychological assessment of gender-based claims for the immigration courts rests on two overlaying general principles: an in-depth knowledge of the psychological impact of gender-based traumatic events and a clear understanding of the way in which such information is germane within the legal context (see Evans, 2000). The in-depth psychological knowledge required in gender-based claims encompasses psychological expertise in three distinct areas. First and foremost the forensic examiner should know the extensive clinical and research literature on the impact of the particular gender-based trauma (e.g. rape, torture, and other forms of interpersonal violence of men toward women), including PTSD and the long-term sequelae of the experiences, such as complex PTSD.

The second area of expertise involves familiarity with personality assessment of psychological trauma. Such assessment includes understanding which of the various empirically derived psychological assessment instruments and structured and semi-structured interviews are likely to be useful. Assessment techniques provide a sound description of the impact of the particular trauma evaluated, including its etiology, dynamics, and, because the courts often desire, the diagnosis. For example, it is important to consider that some psychological instruments are normed for victims of rape and sexual assault, while others can be highly useful in documenting the types and degree of interpersonal violence of men toward women. Assessment methods can also address issues of malingering and deception. Such objective data is especially valuable to the immigration court judge, who has the unenviable task of sifting through information that is, as a matter of course, quite difficult to corroborate.

Third, the expert must possess knowledge of how personality assessment operates in the context of cross-cultural issues (see Suzuki et al. eds., 1996, especially chapters by Zalewski, Greene, & Ritzler), as well as cultural definitions of traumatic events. For example, the forensic examiner will need to understand how rape is perceived within the woman's culture. In many countries from which raped women flee, rape was

## Issues of Rorschach Coding Competency

by Radhika Krishnamurthy, Psy.D.

seen as the fault of the woman and a woman who was raped for any reason is shunned and ostracized for not having died in trying to protect her virginity. Comprehension of such cultural and psychological pressures can be invaluable in addressing the immigration court judge's concerns about the credibility of the woman during testimony. For example, knowledge that rape in general, and in certain cultures especially, is experienced as deeply shameful may help explain why the woman continually looks away during testimony, a demeanor factor which is often interpreted in the courtroom situation to mean that the woman is hiding something. In fact the woman is hiding something in this situation; she is hiding her shame, not hiding from the truth. Further the presenting reality of the woman's deep shame may assist the court in reconciling inconsistencies such as why the woman seeking asylum failed to provide disclosure of her rape on her initial INS affidavit but later claimed to have been raped during her appeal. Again the woman may have attempted to protect herself from unwanted public exposure, hoping to escape anticipated humiliation with a partial rendition of her experiences. The woman may have been forced to disclose only later because the reality of not getting asylum was worse than dreaded humiliation.

In closing, forensic psychological assessment of gender-based claims and issues in Immigration Court is an important and developing area for psychologists interested in personality assessment. It combines complex personality assessment issues with equally challenging issues of making the psychological findings relevant to the Court. It is an area of practice in which the assessment psychologist interested in issues of human rights can provide critical assistance to a very underserved group of women. For the women this assistance can mean the difference between life and death.

### Author Biographies

**Barton Evans, Ph.D.** is a Clinical & Forensic Psychologist in Bethesda, MD and Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at George Washington University Medical School. He specializes in forensic psychology in Immigration Court.

**Lory Diana Rosenberg, J.D.** is Judge for the Board of Immigration Appeals. The views expressed in the legal discussion in this article are those of Lory Rosenberg alone and do not represent a position or policy of the Board of Immigration Appeals, the Executive Office for Immigration Review, or the Department of Justice. An extended list of references and legal citations are available from Dr. Evans at 4833 Bethesda Ave, Suite 204, Bethesda, MD 20814 or bevans@his.com

One of the interesting symposia at the midwinter meeting in Philadelphia this year, titled *Exploring the Implications of a Rorschach Coding "Gold Standard,"* grappled with the issue of ways to ensure accuracy of coding (in contrast to intercoder agreement) among Rorschach Com-prehensive System (CS) users. The symposium had its genesis in questions raised by Steve Hickman on the Rorschach Discussion and Information Group, a listserv exchange that several SPA members and nonmembers participate in regularly. Based on the diverse (and heated) reactions provoked by this topic, Steve felt that the subject warranted further discussion at SPA and enlisted Nancy Kaser-Boyd, Radhika Krishnamurthy, and Robert McGrath to present papers addressing various facets of the issue, with Bruce Smith as discussant.

Steve opened the symposium by noting that CS coding competence is not just a matter of consensual agreement but that there is a correct way of coding (invoking statements to that effect made by Don Viglione in his teaching seminars). He had, however, observed that even relatively straightforward Rorschach responses presented on the listserv often generated widely varying coding responses, suggestive of coder drift and increased idiosyncrasy over time. He proposed a method of systematic recalibration consisting of having Rorschach users take a coding exam and achieve a criterion score of 85% or 90% accuracy. In this scenario, Rorschach experts' coding of the responses would represent the coding Gold Standard or accuracy criterion. Steve further suggested that this procedure could be formalized by a certification process.

The first presentation by Robert McGrath ("Research Implications and Issues of a Gold Standard") supported the idea of a Gold Standard for CS research based on the premise that coding errors of even single items can, in some cases, result in substantive shifts in interpretation. He noted that stylistic inconsistencies in coding guidelines across different types of codes, and the fact that Rorschach coding addresses unique rather than convergent response patterns, contributes to coding inaccuracies. Among the research implications discussed by Bob were problems in cross validation related to increased error variance which ultimately affect the future development of the CS. Bob proposed two solutions that approximated Steve's examination idea, involving (a) having data-collection sites exchange Rorschach protocols for cross-checking coding accuracy, and (b) establishing a credentialing program based on periodic examination. He suggested that such mechanisms could even be extended to Rorschach interpretation in the future and that there is much to be gained by making an already existing implicit Gold Standard explicit.

Nancy Kaser-Boyd ("Clinical and Forensic Issues Related to a Gold Standard") emphasized the importance of coding accuracy in forensic

evaluations where issues of the admissibility of Rorschach-based testimony in court and the potential harm of inaccurate interpretation are crucial considerations. She illuminated these points with two case examples from high-profile criminal cases that demonstrated how coding errors produced substantial changes in the CS Structural Summary and the eventual conclusions that were drawn. Nancy gave an emphatic "yes" to the idea of a CS coding Gold Standard, observing that erosions in assessment training in graduate programs make this even more of a necessity. Her recommendations included attending an advanced Rorschach Workshops seminar, administering/coding 50 Rorschach protocols and achieving an 85% accuracy rate, and being able to cite relevant CS research as requirements above and beyond graduate training in Rorschach administration and coding.

Radhika Krishnamurthy's presentation ("Practical Issues and Logistics of Having a Gold Standard") injected a pragmatic tone concerning various constraints and implications of a Gold Standard and cautioned against a premature examination and credentialing process. She discussed six issues in this regard, including noting that the ongoing evolution of the CS would necessitate frequent re-examination for Gold Standard competency which creates logistical complications. She also observed that a Gold Standard credential poses a burden to CS users in excess of state licensure requirements, potentially disconnects the Rorschach even further from other personality and psychological tests, may have the adverse impact of managed care provider panels denying authorization and reimbursement for Rorschach assessment to non-certified users, and could promote further reduction in Rorschach training in graduate programs when graduate training is deemed insufficient. Radhika also reminded the audience that currently there is no empirical evidence of substantial or systematic coding errors by Rorschach clinicians and researchers and suggested the need for further study before formal standards are established.

Bruce Smith pulled it all together in a thoughtful summary and overview of the issues that highlighted the professional climate within which Rorschach assessment is conducted while noting the problems around standardized Rorschach coding created by differences in local practice patterns. Applying a clever analogy that distinguished between "plumbers," "mechanics," and "artists," Bruce observed that Rorschach "plumbers" could be trained to become skilled "mechanics" but neither group could successfully achieve Rorschach artistry. Additional remarks from distinguished members in the audience including John Exner and Richard Dana, and commentary by our international member from Finland, Carl-Erik Mattlar, enlivened the discussion following the presentations, underscored the complicated and multifaceted issues raised in this symposium, and made clear that the discussion had just begun.

...continued on page 12

## From the Editor...

When I remember that only three years ago we did not have local chapters of SPA, it is really hard to believe. I recall Stephen Finn and others suggesting this idea several years ago at a Fall Board meeting. While the possibility was certainly greeted with enthusiasm, I don't think Board members could have anticipated the interest that was generated in this idea. Notice in this issue that the activities of North Texas and Chesapeake Chapters are described.

Local chapters could not come at a better time. Academic programs throughout the country are continuing to de-emphasize training in personality assessment. Frequently, program directors lament that certain instruments such as the Rorschach or the TAT have to be included at all. Their only reason for permitting any minimal course time on these instruments is that students applying for internship fare better having mastered a full battery than having a more limited exposure. Perhaps we can look to our local chapters to pick up the slack. Initially, many of our chapters may be focused on continuing education activities for members. In the future, these chapters may be able to organize basic training for graduate students who are not obtaining it in their formal programs (or the

graduates of these programs who recognize the lacunae in their training). In the meantime, it is jolly good that SPA has such a welcoming attitude toward students and allocates resources to enabling their participation in our annual meetings.

And speaking of resources, thank you to all of you who contributed to this year's auction for our student funds. Whether you donated an item or made a successful bid, you contributed to the vitality of the organization by nurturing the next generation of assessors.

### **Issues of Rorschach Coding Competency** *continued from page 11...*

This symposium served to alert CS users of the importance of achieving and maintaining coding accuracy and offered an important direction for proper use of the CS. We hope this discussion will continue in subsequent midwinter meetings and that the ideas extended in this symposium get incorporated into practical mechanisms that ensure effective Rorschach coding and interpretation. Steve welcomes additional feedback and comments on this issue and can be contacted at [shickman@san.rr.com](mailto:shickman@san.rr.com).

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