

Is a Renaissance of Psychological Assessment Here? by Hale Martin, Ph.D. Denver University School of Professional Psychology

Under the rise of managed care, psychological assessment has seen hard times. From what some see as an over-emphasis on assessment in the 1970s and 1980s (e.g., testing indiscriminately), the pendulum swung to under-use of assessment in serving our clients. This swing was accentuated by the forces behind managed care (e.g., trying to responsibly conserve limited funds to aid those in need). However, there are those who persevered in practicing assessment, believing that it offered responsible and effective service to at least some of our clients. Much of their work was done outside the confines of managed care because reimbursement was difficult to arrange and severely limited. Often, the most difficult limitation is the demand for preauthorization of the assessment and the need for it, without which little, if anything, is funded. In reaction to this difficult time for assessment in practice, many training programs around the country de-emphasized education in assessment. This trend in part was exacerbated by the influence of radical behaviorism and others who disagreed with the traditional tenants of assessment (e.g., that traits exist independent of context).

However, recently there have been some developments in assessment that bode well for its future. Research to improve our instruments has continued unabated. For example, new intelligence tests have emerged that attempt to better capture our increasing understanding of the slippery construct of intelligence. In August of this year, the fourth edition of the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale was released. In personality assessment, the Personality Assessment Inventory was published in 1991 to rival the MMPI-2, which was published in 1989. This past summer a new version of the MMPI was released (MMPI-2-RF). It is a shorter test, with a substantial change in structure from the earlier versions. The publisher argues that it has strong psychometric properties. In recent years the Comprehensive System of the Rorschach promulgated by John Exner has demonstrated validity and reliability that has won many converts, including courts of law. The criticisms of the Rorschach Inkblot Method that flared in the late 1990s and early 2000s have been largely addressed head on by Rorschach researchers. The intense research seems to have quieted the major critics that were seemingly intent on banishing this assessment instrument. Finally, a plethora of measures have been developed in recent years. These measures promise better tools to assess attachment, trauma, eating disorders, emotional intelligence, attention deficit disorder, learning disabilities and a myriad of other problems that our clients sometimes face.

One can argue that the most important development in the recent history of assessment is the rise of the collaborative or therapeutic model of assessment. This new approach represents a significant paradigm shift that captures the phenomenological, interpersonal Zeitgeist in psychology. Connie Fischer was the first modern voice to effectively advocate that assessment can be used to directly benefit the client. Her book **Individualizing Assessment** (1985) was ground breaking and caught the wise eye of Steve Finn. It catalyzed much of Finn's thinking, leading to empirical investigations, application of research in social psychology, and ultimately the articulation of what he calls Therapeutic Assessment. This is an approach to assessment that seeks to maximize the substantial therapeutic impact assessment can have. Beginning by focusing on what clients want to know about themselves, the assessment fosters collaborative work to help clients grow from the insight and experience provided by the carefully tailored assessment process. Others, like Len Handler and Caroline Purves, have recognized that their work dovetails with this new paradigm, and clinical assessment is enhanced by new knowledge generated by a burgeoning number of talented researchers and clinicians. Programs at the annual meetings of the Society for Personality Assessment are evidence of increasing study and focus on the collaborative/therapeutic approach to assessment. Steve Finn's new book **In Our Client's Shoes** (2007) is a significant contribution to the evolution of Therapeutic Assessment. Work by Finn, Deborah Tharinger and their students at the University of Texas at Austin researches and establishes the application of therapeutic assessment to children and families, an intervention that is geared to help change the stories families hold about their children so that they are more accurate and offer hope for therapeutic change.

The new paradigm offered by therapeutic assessment is beginning to have an impact in training. While many training programs still lament the lack of focus and opportunity in assessment, others such as the Graduate School of Professional Psychology at Denver University are experiencing an increased interest and emphasis, perhaps even the leading edge of a renaissance of psychological assessment. Fortunately, there are now students coming into the profession who are excited about assessment and

who have a good training foundation for assessment that incorporates the new paradigm but also retains the wisdom and usefulness of traditional assessment.

In conjunction with these revitalizing developments, the Colorado Assessment Society (CAS) is a new organization founded to serve those in the psychological community in the Rocky Mountain area who are interested in psychological assessment, both personality and cognitive. It was formed as a professional non-profit organization earlier this year through the efforts of Hale Martin and his students Lesley Baird, Erin Jacklin, Samantha Monson, and Keren Sofer at Denver University. CAS provides a forum to advance psychological assessment. The goal of CAS is to provide training in new tools and techniques and to give those interested in assessment a community where ideas can be discussed, collaborations can be born, and practitioners can contribute their knowledge and efforts to enhance the practice of assessment. It already boasts a membership of 70 and continues to grow.

CAS holds quarterly luncheons to learn from local experts and to connect with others practicing or researching assessment in the Colorado area. In addition CAS organizes training opportunities to learn from those on the cutting edge. The inaugural CAS workshop last January featured Steve Finn introducing Therapeutic Assessment to Colorado. He is scheduled to return to Denver to offer two workshops in 2009. The first will be another Introduction to Therapeutic Assessment to be held on January 31. The following week, February 6-8, Dr. Finn will offer a Level 2 training in Therapeutic Assessment. This workshop will allow participants to observe and participate in a live assessment conducted by Dr. Finn. In addition to these opportunities, later this year of 2008 there are two more CAS workshops scheduled. On October 6, Amy Gable with Pearson Assessment will present a 3-hour overview of the WAIS-IV that was released in August. On November 21, Yossi Ben-Porath from Kent State University will present a one-day workshop training in the use of the MMPI-2-RF. All these workshops will be held on the Denver University campus. Psychologists with interests in these areas are invited to attend. Additional information and registration can be accessed through <coloradoassessmentsociety.org> or by emailing Hale Martin at halmarti@du.edu or calling him at 303-881-3544.