

THE AMPLIFIER

MEDIA PSYCHOLOGY
DIVISION 46 OF THE AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION



FALL/WINTER 2007

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Remembering the Past—Conceptualizing the Future

Rochelle Balter, PhD, JD
Rbalt@aol.com

At this past APA Convention in San Francisco, Division 46 celebrated its 20th year. The program chair, Dr. Lilli Friedland, designed our offerings to reflect both our past and our expanding purview. We had a party at our Social Hour, but very few of our members came. What does this say about member involvement or our future?

Division 46 was founded in 1987 by a group of psychologists who often did radio, television and print work. Their interests were unique within Psychology. Drs. Lawrence Balter, Michael Broder, Irene Deitch, Edward Donnerstein, Albert Ellis, Frank Farley, Stuart Fischhoff, Lilli Friedland, Roger Klein, Fred Koenig, Kate Wachs, and Lenore Walker were among the early members and many of them are still active in the division today. Part of the original focus of the division was working with APA and doing media training.

APA has taken over the media training. The Public Information Committee, which helped APA with media and communications and on which many of our members served, has been sun-setted, and not as many of our members are media names who appear regularly.

The media now includes both Internet and telecommunications. MySpace and YouTube were not even imagined when the division was founded, yet they are the reality of today's media. Virtual Reality, and many of the other technologies that have become second nature to us, were not even dreamed of by visionaries in the Arts or the Sciences. Laptop computers were unheard of and many of us were becoming acclimated to rather clumsy, large desktops. E-mail, what was e-mail? Blackberries, in 1987, were fruit.

There is an old curse that says, "May you live in interesting times." If this is true, we are all under that spell. Media and new and different forms of communication are marching forward at a fast and steady pace. Where does that leave Division 46?

Do we move forward with the trends, even ahead of them, or do we stand in place and remain adamant about keeping our universe where it was in 1987?

My vision for Division 46 has been to move forward with or even ahead of the technological revolution and to happily embrace the changes that are coming.

What will our role be? We are still the experts. We need to incorporate the new technologies and share with others how these advances can be used to advance the science of psychology. We also need to use our communications expertise to help spread the message of psychology to the world using the new advances.

I hope that you, our members will happily join us in this journey. As part of our image update (not change) we have periodically discussed a name change, and our newly instituted Strategic Planning Committee is having such discussions now. Many of our pioneers don't believe a name change is necessary because "we know who we are." Do we? Who are we? What are our interests? What do we see as the future of the division?

On page 14 of this issue is a brief survey asking you these questions and I hope you will answer them and get your responses back to me by fax 212-472-2249, by e-mail, or by an address, which is provided.

We may know who we are, but do other members of APA know who we are? Does the rest of APA know that our mission statement includes using and studying interactive and new technologies? Are they aware that our members are involved in Internet research and in the communications and technological issues that interest them?

What will many of us be doing when we reach our 25th anniversary? Let's hope we will be exploring new advances in technology and the media together and celebrating.

(See Member Survey on p. 14)



Rochelle Balter, PhD, JD

President-Elect's Column

Internet Psychology

Frank Farley, PhD
frank.farley@comcast.net



Frank Farley, PhD

The Internet and cyber worlds are changing psychology in profound and often unpredictable ways, in part, I believe, because the world and people we study and try to help are being so much changed. How much of the canon of psychology will need to be revised in the light of Internet life? Think of the thousands of studies of social behavior, dating and mating behavior, relationship patterns, consumer behavior, library use and information search and retrieval, laboratory-based information processing studies, game behavior, gambling behavior, non-verbal behavior, social isolation, shyness studies, to mention but a few that might well need major redesign, revision, update or abandonment in the face of the Internet revolution.

I believe a deep shift in our society is underway with significant consequences for psychology. Young people used to be *consumers* of the media. You know—watching television, listening to the radio. Consuming the media—that’s disappearing. Young people are increasingly “inhabiting” the media, living inside it, incorporating it into the very essence of their lives. Everyone is on MySpace, Facebook, YouTube or other comparable sites and check and change their profiles constantly. These are personal designer media. They talk on cell phones or instant message others constantly. They get their knowledge of the world and their relationships increasingly from the Internet. They attribute no special characteristics to the Internet. It is now entirely common, entirely ordinary, as waking and sleeping. Children often are surprised to learn that all phones used to be attached to the wall! Living inside cyber is becoming the new “natural” order. If you’re not living there, you’re an outlier and outsider. And this involvement is not restricted to children and adolescents. World renowned psychiatrist, originator of cognitive therapy Dr. Aaron T. Beck, age 86, was telling me recently about his time on Second Life, and his avatar! Which reminds me, the cognitive revolution of the last few decades in its many facets, particularly on the theory side, has, I believe, been a significant influence over the Internet and cyber world. That cognitive revolution spread throughout psychology and the social sciences, from basic science to the practice of therapy and to public discourse. Its powerful emphasis on mental life, that profound world between the ears, played well with a new technology so attuned to mental life. William James with his concepts of consciousness and the stream of mental life would have loved the Internet. He could have given his famous talks to teachers globally, interactively! The late guru of consciousness and the expansion of mind, psychologist Timothy Leary, allegedly wanted to die on the Internet! I don’t know if he did! I’d like to hear. He thought it represented an emerging form of global consciousness. Marshal McLuhan was more prescient than most of an earlier generation when he predicted that telecommunication technologies would ultimately create a totally interconnected world, his famous “global village.” Thomas Friedman’s “flat earth” is about interconnectedness and a global, level, playing field

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through digital tech. You can just as easily be on the worldwide web in Walla Walla Washington or Wallabe Walkaround Wales (New South, that is) Australia. New realities in cyberspace and parallel universes are being constructed. We need to study these, and incorporate our findings into a 21st century psychology.

I’ve sometimes felt that James would have thought early psychology was left up the stream of mental life without a paddle; there were none or few technologies capable of reflecting the on-going stream of cognition, but the Internet could tackle that with its incredible record of on-going verbal interactions, utterances, writing, interests, the relentless intercorrelations and records of everything one does on the Internet, etc. It’s a research frontier. It’s a therapy frontier. It’s an education frontier. It’s also an ethics frontier. There are incredible problems of anonymity, intrusion, security, personal revelation and so on.

The theme of my Division 46 Presidency will be “Humanizing an Inhumane World,” using our communication and media skills and great psychological concepts to help diminish the horrors of our times and add some humanity to the many equations of this life. Internet psychology can help in such an effort—its reach is universal; its extent is everywhere. Let’s get inside it and help shape a better world. See you there!

Join Division 46 Today!

You can find the online membership application form at our site (www.apa.org/divisions/div46/). There is a PDF download on the main page. Please fill out the form and mail it to Division 46, Administrative Office, 750 First Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002-4242.

From the Executive Editor

Sharon Lamb, EdD
slamb@smcvt.edu



Sharon Lamb, EdD

I'd like to bid a fond farewell to this interesting position as editor and hope that in the future I can serve my new division in some other capacity. It's been a fun year and I encourage other newer members (I only joined in March of 2006!) to get involved in this informative way. Many thanks to Micheline Meyers at APA who has been a real pleasure to work with. I also want to heartily thank Jenny Whitmore Fremlin, my assistant editor and virtual friend. We never have met but I asked her to be my assistant after reading her well-written and impressive comments on the listserv. She's been a phenomenal editor and assistant—I guess one can tell a lot about a person from a few listserv remarks! I also would like to encourage other new members to find a niche they are interested in and to get involved.

With regard to the current issue, I am so very pleased that so many of those who presented at APA were able to get their abstracts to *The Amplifier*. Some members are not able to attend the convention but want to keep up with the latest research and thinking in our very diverse field. I had wanted to have a minor focus on violence for this issue after the Virginia Tech shootings (which now seem like long ago) and after reading the wonderful listserv discussion that ensued. To that end I requested a couple of longer articles and a book review that related to this theme.

During my sabbatical from teaching this year, I plan to continue my work with the Anti-Violence Partnership and the Sexual Violence Prevention Plan (The Vermont Approach) by organizing a committee to examine media representations of sexual violence in the state. I would be grateful for any information, references, or contacts with regard to this topic. I'll also be working on a sequel to *Packaging Girlhood: Rescuing Our Daughters from Marketers' Schemes*—yes, *Packaging Boyhood* with Lyn Mikel Brown and Mark Tappan. If any of you can help with our boy research, by sending boys of all ages to our survey at www.packagingboyhood.com, I'd be very pleased. If you ever see marketing to boys that is particularly stereotypical or offensive, don't hesitate to email me (e.g., I think Disney is coming out with a cologne for 4–11-year olds!). I also received a mid-career grant to work on a Sexual Ethics curriculum for high schoolers, which will include units on advertising, objectification, and media representations of teen sexuality.

Thanks again for this amazing opportunity. I hope to continue to write for the new column "Sightings" and to find other ways to be a part of the division.

From the Associate Editor

Jenny Whitmore Fremlin, MA
jenny@metapaint.com



Jenny Whitmore Fremlin, MA

Over the summer I took the time to explore literature on the technical aspects of some media psychology topics. In particular, I explored the potential of online social networking and gaming in relation to physical communities. In addition to learning how to manipulate various proprietary software avatars and networks, I looked into the technical side of an evolving journalism aiming to incorporate new methods of reporting and gathering news. Through this exploration I have become even more convinced of the importance of media psychology. Mark Briggs, author of *Journalism 2.0*, summarizes the need to look beyond specifics of technology (despite the need to understand them) in his introduction:

Sure, there's a lot of technology in the pages to follow, but if you boil it all down to its core, its essence, you'll find people trying to extend a noble and grounded craft into a new and unpredictable landscape. And it's the people who matter, not the latest software or Web site. If the people in this equation learn how make technology work for them, the rest is just details. (Briggs, 2007, p. 8)

This concept carries over to media psychology as well—it's not about the technology, it's about the people. In the news, in research, and in everyday conversations we surround ourselves with company names and acronyms. In the end though, it's not really about Second Life or MySpace, RSS or MMORPGs, iPhones or OnDemand TV. It's about the people interacting with these offerings, the people who create them, and the cultures that spring up around them. This is why increasing research on how people use these technologies to integrate online and physical communities is so exciting, and why as researchers and practitioners of media psychology we should not only understand the technology but be able to look beyond it.

I look forward to following the research and accomplishments of members in future issues of *The Amplifier* and have enjoyed the experience of acting as the associate editor. Working with Editor Sharon Lamb and Micheline Meyers, APA Division Services Coordinator, on each issue has been a fun and educational experience, based entirely on technology. As this issue wraps up, I am turning my attention to beginning my dissertation and getting settled in my new hometown, Portland, OR.

Reference

Briggs, Mark. (2007). *Journalism 2.0: How to survive and thrive*. Retrieved August 25, 2007, from http://www.j-lab.org/Journalism_20.pdf

New Media Psychology Journal

The Media Psychology Research Center announced a new journal, the *Media Psychology Review*, showcasing Media Psychology research and applications across multiple disciplines. Details about the submission and review process are available at www.mprcenter.org/journal.html.

Reports

Summary of Council of Representatives Meeting

Lenore Walker, EdD
Division 46 Council Representative



Lenore Walker, EdD

The business agenda at the summer council meeting was overshadowed by the resolution that APA Council once again passed banning torture and other forms of cruel or degrading treatment from use by psychologists. In this resolution, however, COR went further and defined a number of methods to be considered torture when conducting an interrogation. The resolution, passed by a large majority of the council, reaffirms APA's unequivocal condemnation of torture and for the first time specified the interrogation techniques—including water boarding, sexual humiliation, the use of dogs, and exploitation of phobias or psychopathology—as torture and, therefore, strictly prohibited.

In passing the resolution (full text available at www.apa.org/releases/councilres0807.html), APA called on the U.S. government, including the Congress, Department of Defense, and the Central Intelligence Agency, to ban the use of the prohibited techniques. The resolution furthermore calls upon U.S. legal systems to reject testimony that results from torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.

It was a victory for the various groups that make up COR and the APA in that military psychologists as well as those who belong to the social justice groups were able to agree on strong language leaving no loopholes in what the APA policy is on torture. Unfortunately, the media listened to a small group of critics who wanted the representatives to go further and also condemn any psychologist who worked in a setting where the “civil rights of detainees” were not respected. While it is admirable to aspire to work only in settings where all people are treated equal and fairly according to psychological principles, in fact, passing the amendment as it was crafted would have put most psychologists out of work. Those who work for the military, in departments of corrections, VA Hospitals, and other federal agencies with detainees who have lost their civil rights, in anything other than health care activities, would have had to leave their jobs had that resolution passed.

As the makers of that amendment appear to be aiming to remove psychologists from the military, they may try again at next February's meeting when one-third of the COR members will be new. As your council representative, I voted for the first resolution but against the second one requiring psychologists not to work in these settings. I agree with the argument that psychologists can help protect detainees with their presence there.

Another item of interest to our members included a request from CEO, Norman Anderson, PhD, to take \$7.5 million out of our

reserves and spend it putting in a whole new information system including new websites. As media psychologists, we know that our information system is an important part of our communication with members and the public. However, at present, other than COR and the Board of Directors, there is no oversight policy making body supervising the spending of this money. Several members of Division 46 who sit on council with me have agreed to co-sponsor an agenda item for February's meeting to form such an oversight committee, perhaps similar to the former Public Information Committee. Perhaps, we would not have ignored the aging system for so long had we had oversight from specialists.

Several long term APA Staffers announced their retirement at this meeting and their years of service were celebrated. Jack McKay, the CFO, is leaving at the end of the year. So is Russ Newman, the Director of the Practice Directorate. Both of them were given a rousing send off, Jack to retirement and Russ to head up CSPP at Alliant University in San Diego.

In addition, a number of other actions were taken during the 1 ½ days of meetings that occurred during the annual APA convention.

- Approved in principle the 2007 revisions to the Recommended Postdoctoral Education and Training Program in Psychopharmacology for Prescription Privileges and the Model Legislation for Prescriptive Authority. These proposed revisions of the 1996 policies retain the model as a postdoctoral program. The 2007 revisions are not yet APA policy, pending future Council action on a proposed designation program to ensure program quality—an important, new element of the 2007 Model Training Program. I intend to submit a new agenda item at the February 2008 meeting to ask the APA President to put together another Task Force to develop a model training program for predoctoral students in psychopharmacology.
- Elected 145 new Fellows of the Association (see announcement ad in this issue).
- Adopted a policy statement condemning academic boycotts as a violation of academic freedom and a disruption of the exchange of scientific and scholarly ideas.
- Voted to create four new seats on council for representatives of the Asian American Psychological Association, the Association of Black Psychologists, the National Latina/o Psychological Association and the Society of Indian Psychologists. This action requires a change to the Bylaws and will therefore be up for a vote by the full membership later this year.
- Approved the draft 2008 preliminary budget including a \$9 increase in the APA base member dues and a \$1 increase in the

graduate student affiliate fee. Annual dues increases are tied to the cost of living index. The 2008 preliminary budget has a projected surplus of \$381,200. However, you might remember that this year's budget was originally projected to have over \$1 million surplus so the projections are not yet perfect.

- Approved the establishment of a Task Force on Council Representation whose mission is to examine the current apportionment system to determine if changes are needed.

- Approved APA Principles for Health Care Reform that promote health-care services for everyone.

- Adopted the following resolutions as APA policy: Resolution in Support of Education for Sustainable Development; Resolution on Religious, Religion-Related and/or Religion-Derived Prejudice; and the APA Commission on Ethnic Minority Recruitment, Retention and Training in Psychology 2 Task Force Proposed Resolution to Enhance Ethnic Minority Recruitment, Retention and Training in Psychology.

Division 46 Strategic Planning Group Report

Rochelle Balter, PhD, JD
rbalt@aol.com

The group met for the first time on July 24, 2007 by teleconference and consists of Frank Farley (president-elect), Lenore Walker (council representative), Danny Wedding (president-elect elect), Lillian Comas Diaz (member-at-large), and Rochelle Balter (president). Our purpose is to examine the potential and challenges for the division in order to expand our membership and bring Division 46 into a position of prominence within APA. As this is our 20th year, it seemed like a very appropriate time to look ahead at where the division should most favorably be heading in the next 20 years.

We broke down the steps we need to take to revitalize the division into immediate, short term, and long term. The group decided to take the immediate step of establishing an overarching committee to look at Internet Psychology. The following assignments were made:

- Internet Theory and Research: Frank Farley
- Students and the Internet: Frank Farley
- Internet Teaching: Lenore Walker
- Internet Psychological Practice: Lenore Walker and Danny Wedding
- Cultural Trends in Internet Use and Infusing Multiculturalism: Lillian Comas Diaz

The group also decided to look at Communications research on the Internet; I will head that group. The group will teleconference again a couple of times this fall.

Fellows Committee Report

Alan D. Entin, PhD, ABPP, Fellows Chair
adentin@earthlink.net

Funny thing about statistics, they can be read many ways—something we all learned early in our careers as students in statistics courses, nothing new there. Well, the good news is over an 11-year span, according to APA research, 100% of the individuals that Division 46 has nominated for initial Fellowship in APA have been elected to Fellowship. Eighteen other divisions share that distinction. However, over that period, we have only submitted three individuals for fellow, and two were in 1995 and 1 in 2006! In contrast, Division 3, Experimental, has submitted and gotten approved 82 individuals in that same time span, Health 70 and Clinical Neurology 58. I/O has an election rate of 99% with 75 elected to Fellowship.

While we have a number of Fellows in our division, most of them have been elected to Fellowship by virtue of being elected Fellow in another division first, and then elected by applying for Fellow as a “Current Fellow” in our division, where their application does not have to undergo review by the APA Membership/Fellows Committee.

I think we are in a stage of our development as a division and as a discipline where we can define the criteria for “significant and enduring contributions” to the field of Media Psychology for our members who have been members for at least 2 years to apply for Initial Fellowship in our division. I hope you will consider it for yourselves and for your colleagues. Please contact me and we will mentor you through the process. As always, if you are a member of our division, and a Fellow in another division, please let me know so that we can discuss your becoming a “Current Fellow” in our division.

Call for Fellow Nominations

Please submit nominations for Initial and Current Fellows to Alan Entin at adentin@earthlink.net or 804-359-0109.

Interactive Media Committee Report

Elizabeth Carll, PhD, Chair

ecarll@optonline.net

The mission of the Interactive Media Committee is to facilitate the recommendations contained in the APA Resolution on Violence in Video Games and Interactive Media which was passed by council in August 2005, with a specific focus on educating the public about the effects of violence and negative stereotypes in video games on children. Since 2006, the committee has been dialoguing with the Electronic Software Rating Board (ESRB), which has developed the rating system for video games and interactive media, concerning improvements in the rating system to be more informative for consumers.

In view of the importance of disseminating accurate information concerning research on interactive media, the members of the committee collaborated on writing a counterpoint op-ed article,

“Violent Video Games: Rehearsing Aggression,” which was published in the July 13, 2007 issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. The article was in response to an editorial about video games which was misleading and contained numerous inaccuracies.

The members of the committee participated in a comprehensive symposium at the 2007 APA Convention in San Francisco on *Evolution of Interactive Media: Video Games, Science and Advocacy*, which was organized by Elizabeth Carll. The abstracts can be found later in this newsletter. I would like to thank the members of the Interactive Media Committee Brad Bushman, Karen Dill, Jeanne Funk, and Dorothy Singer for their ongoing work and contributions to the committee.

APA Convention Highlights

Abstracts from APA 2007 in San Francisco

These are only some of the abstracts, in original and expanded form, from the convention.

SYMPOSIUM: Virtual Reality—PTSD Exposure Therapy

Presenters: Albert A. Rizzo, PhD; Ken Graap, PhD; Barbara O. Rothbaum, PhD; Jeff Pyne, MD; Thomas D. Parsons, PhD, MA; Jarrell Pair, MS

The presenters at this symposium detailed their work in development and application VR for PTSD with veterans of combat (Vietnam and Iraq) and persons with PTSD following the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. The following talks were presented at the APA2007 convention:

Treatment of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder with Virtual Reality Exposure Therapy
Barbara Rothbaum, Emory University, brothba@emory.edu

Virtual Reality Exposure Therapy for PTSD following Terrorism, Natural Disasters, and Fire

JoAnn Difede, jdifede@med.cornell.edu

Development and Initial Results from a Virtual Reality Iraq Scenario for PTSD Exposure Therapy

Albert Rizzo, arizzo@usc.edu

War is perhaps one of the most challenging situations that a human being can experience. The physical, emotional, cognitive and psychological demands of a combat environment place enormous stress on even the best-prepared military personnel. Such stressful experiences that are characteristic of war-fighting environments have a high likelihood for producing significant numbers of returning soldiers at risk for developing PTSD. In the first systematic study of mental health

problems due to the Iraq/Afghanistan conflicts, the results indicated that “...the percentage of study subjects whose responses met the screening criteria for major depression, generalized anxiety, or PTSD was significantly higher after duty in Iraq (15.6 to 17.1%) than after duty in Afghanistan (11.2%) or before deployment to Iraq (9.3 %)” (Hoge et al., 2004).

Among the many approaches that have been used to treat persons with PTSD, graduated exposure therapy appears to have the best-documented therapeutic efficacy (Rothbaum, 2001; Bryant et al., 2005). Such treatment typically involves the graded and repeated imaginal reliving of the traumatic event within the therapeutic setting. This approach is believed to provide a low-threat context where the patient can begin to therapeutically process the emotional memories that are relevant to the traumatic event as well as de-condition the learning cycle of the disorder via a habituation/extinction process. While the efficacy of *imaginal* exposure has been well established in multiple studies with diverse trauma populations (Rothbaum, et al., 2000, 2001, 2002), many patients are unwilling or unable to effectively visualize the traumatic event. In fact, avoidance of reminders of the trauma is inherent in PTSD and is one of the cardinal symptoms of the disorder. To address this problem, researchers have recently turned to the use of Virtual Reality (VR) to deliver exposure therapy by immersing clients in simulations of trauma-relevant environments that allow for precise control of stimulus conditions. This idea has been supported by three studies in which patients with PTSD were unresponsive to previous *imaginal* exposure treatments, but went on to respond successfully to VR exposure therapy (Difede & Hoffman, 2002; Difede et al, 2006; Rothbaum, Hodges, Ready, Graap & Alarcon, 2001). As well, VR provides an objective and consistent format for documenting the sensory stimuli that the patient is exposed to that is not possible when operating within the unseen world of the patient’s imagination. Based on this, we have developed a “Virtual Iraq” simulation and have commenced an open clinical trial to evaluate its efficacy for treatment of PTSD in military personnel returning from Iraq.

The treatment environment is based on a creative approach to recycling virtual art assets that were initially built for the commercially successful X-Box game and tactical-simulation training tool, *Full Spectrum Warrior*. This consists of a series of virtual scenarios designed to represent relevant contexts for VR exposure therapy, including city and desert road environments. In addition to the visual stimuli presented in the VR head mounted display, directional 3D audio, vibrotactile and olfactory stimuli of relevance can be delivered. Stimulus presentation is controlled by the clinician via a separate “wizard of oz” interface, with the clinician in full audio contact with the patient. User-centered tests with the application were conducted at the Naval Medical Center–San Diego and within an Army Combat Stress Control Team in Iraq. This feedback from non-diagnosed personnel provided information on the content and usability of our application that fed an iterative design process leading to the creation of the current clinical scenarios. The system built from this process is currently being tested with PTSD-diagnosed personnel at Camp Pendleton and at the Naval Medical Center San Diego in an open clinical trial. The treatment protocol consists of 2X weekly 1.5-hour sessions over 5 weeks. Initial analyses of single cases have produced a positive outcome on standard PTSD assessment measures with a female patient and a male who was treated with a variation of the protocol (Rizzo, Rothbaum, Difede, et al., 2007). In addition, new cases with positive outcomes have been documented since the initial submission of this abstract and those results will be presented at the APA convention in August 2007. These initial results are encouraging for our continued efforts in this clinical direction.

One of the more foreboding findings in the Hoge et al., (2004) report, was the observation that among Iraq/Afghanistan War veterans, “...those whose responses were positive for a mental disorder, only 23 to 40 percent sought mental health care. Those whose responses were positive for a mental disorder were twice as likely as those whose responses were negative to report concern about possible stigmatization and other barriers to seeking mental health care” (p. 13). While military training methodology has better prepared soldiers for combat in recent years, such hesitancy to seek treatment for difficulties that emerge upon return from combat, especially by those who may need it most, suggests an area of military mental healthcare that is in need of attention. In this regard, VR PTSD therapy may promote treatment seeking by certain demographic groups in need of care. The current generation of young military personnel, having grown up with digital gaming technology, may actually be more attracted to and comfortable with participation in a VR application approach as an alternative to what is viewed as traditional “talk therapy” (even though such talk therapy would obviously occur in the course of a recommended multi-component approach for this disorder). Such reduction in the hesitancy to seek treatment and perceived stigma surrounding therapy has been anecdotally reported by practitioners who use VR to treat civilians with simple phobias. As important, one of the guiding principles in our development work concerns how VR can extend the skills of a well-trained clinician. This VR approach is not intended to be an automated treatment protocol that could be administered in a “self-help” format. The presentation of such emotionally evocative VR combat-related scenarios, while providing treatment options not possible until recently, will most likely produce therapeutic benefits when administered within the context of appropriate care via a thoughtful professional appreciation of the complexity and impact of this disorder.

SYMPOSIUM: Communicating Psychological Science through the Media

Chair: James H. Bray, PhD **Discussant:** Steven J. Breckler, PhD

The Science of Psychology, and Public Education

Steven Breckler, Executive Director for Science, APA, sbreckler@apa.org

Advancing the science of psychology is achieved through research, publishing, convening, training, and advocacy. In this talk, I suggested that the lay public is often overlooked as an important audience in these efforts, and outlined reasons why this audience is an important one to address. The concept of public education as a means of connecting with diverse, lay audiences was developed. Examples of public education were examined, with special emphasis on the approaches of other scientific disciplines. Although quality public education requires significant investment, it can help achieve desired results for the advancement of psychological science.

SYMPOSIUM: Media and Crisis Coverage—Effects on Viewers and Journalists

Chair: Stuart Fischhoff, PhD **Presenters:** Lawrence Balter, PhD, Robert Simmermon, EdD

Media Crisis Coverage: When Less is More and More is Less

Stuart Fischhoff, PhD, sfisco@exchange.calstatela.edu

Presentation looks at how various information media, from TV to the Internet, can provide a cornucopia of information, misinformation and redundant information to media consumers. This exposure can aid and abet such reactions as elevated anxiety and/or depression and either exaggerate the implications of the crisis or generate psychic numbing to ward off traumatic reverberations. The presentation explores a typology of media consumers who are more likely to be affected by media crisis coverage and experience “media enabled trauma” and looks at what both media producers and consumers can do to “detoxify” crisis news consumption.

The Impact of Sustained Crisis Viewing on Children

Lawrence Balter, PhD, lawrence.balter@nyu.edu

Included as a full article in this issue on page 12.

Phantom News, Media Crises, and Hyper Exhaustion

Robert Simmermon EdD, rdsatl@aol.com

This program explored the concept of “Phantom News” and the psychological and social impact of this phenomenon on consumers of news and information. Simply stated, when it comes to media crisis coverage there is less there than meets the eye. Born from the advent of the 24-Hour News cycle, “Phantom News” creates a perpetual loop of exaggerated anxiety, fear and apprehension among viewers, which ultimately contributes to an emerging epidemic of exhaustion in America. This “Hyper Exhaustion” is a behavioral “virus” which, like a biological virus, is perpetuated by susceptibility and prolonged exposure.

INVITED ADDRESS: Transformational Impact of Virtual Reality: Latest Research and Implications

Jeremy Bailenson, PhD

Over time, our mode of remote communication has evolved from written letters to telephones, e-mail, Internet chat rooms, and video conferences. Similarly, collaborative virtual environments (CVEs) promise to further change the nature of remote interaction. CVEs are systems which track verbal and nonverbal signals of multiple interactants and render those signals onto avatars, three-dimensional, digital representations of people in a shared digital space. In this talk, I describe a series of projects that explore the manners in which CVEs qualitatively change the nature of remote communication. Unlike telephone conversations and video conferences, interactants in CVEs have the ability to systematically filter

(continued on p. 8)

Abstracts

(continued from p. 7)

the physical appearance and behavioral actions of their avatars in the eyes of their conversational partners, amplifying or suppressing features and nonverbal signals in real-time for strategic purposes. These transformations have a drastic impact on interactants' persuasive and instructional abilities. Furthermore, using CVEs, behavioral researchers can use this mismatch between performed and perceived behavior as a tool to examine complex patterns of nonverbal behavior with nearly perfect experimental control and great precision. Implications for communications systems and social interaction were discussed.

SYMPOSIUM: Evolution of Interactive Media: Video Games, Science and Advocacy

Chair: Elizabeth K. Carll **Participants:** Brad J. Bushman, Karen E. Dill, Dorothy G. Singer, Jeanne B. Funk, Elizabeth K. Carll **Discussant:** Charles D. Spielberger

Does Video Game Violence Desensitize Players to Real World Violence? *Brad J. Bushman, PhD, bbushman@umich.edu*

Desensitization to violence has significant social consequences. People normally have strong inhibitions against behaving aggressively. If people become desensitized to violence from seeing so much of it in the mass media, their inhibitions against behaving aggressively may be reduced. In addition, they may be less responsive to victims of violence in the real world. The presentation examined three studies that tested the desensitizing effect of violent video games.

In Study 1, participants were randomly assigned to play either a violent or nonviolent video game for 20 minutes. Next, they saw filmed segments of real violence, such as prison fights. These were actual violent episodes (not Hollywood reproductions). The results showed that violent game players showed lower physiological arousal (heart rate, skin conductance) to the real violence than did nonviolent game players.

In Study 2, participants were randomly assigned to play a violent or nonviolent game for 20 minutes. After playing the game, participants heard a staged fight outside their door in which a victim fell to the ground, injured and groaning in pain. Violent game players were less likely to offer the victim help, took longer to help, and judged the fight as less serious than did nonviolent game players.

In Study 3, violent game players showed less brain activity and were more aggressive towards an ostensible partner than were nonviolent game players.

The results from the three studies indicating that violent video games can desensitize players to real world violence were discussed.

Killers and Sexpots: Do Gender Stereotypes in Video Games Matter? *Karen E. Dill, PhD, dillk@jrc.edu*

Ask an adult what a video game character looks and acts like, and you might hear about Pac Man, Mario, or Donkey Kong. Adults may even say, "What characters?" thinking of Asteroids or Pong. Ask a teen or young adult and you will get definite opinions about today's extreme gender-stereotypical characters. Teens will tell you that female video game characters are sexy, slutty, busty and nearly naked. Male characters are muscular, and violent: powerful with a belligerent attitude.

If you really want to step into the young interactive media culture, browse through a video game magazine, and you will see what the teens are talking about. Scientists have documented the unsubtle gender stereotyping and the prevalence of violence in video games as well as the recurrent theme of eroticized violence. These sex role stereotypes interact with racial stereotypes, which are also prevalent in gaming. For example, games under-represent Black women, portray Asian women as visions of beauty, and Middle Eastern men as targets of violence.

Research has also shown that gamers tend to hold negative and anti-social attitudes towards women, including accepting the Rape Myth (the premise that women want to be raped) and endorsing negative attitudes towards women. Gamers also believe that both violence and stereotypes in video games do not negatively influence their behavior, classifying both violence and gender stereotyping as "harmless entertainment."

While scientists desire to inform the public about the implications of video game research, gamers do not appear receptive to messages that violence and stereotyping in games can have negative outcomes for young people. Implications of gender and racial stereotyping in video games and their effect on youth were discussed.

Beyond Violence and Aggression: Video Games and Future Research Areas

Dorothy G. Singer, EdD, dorothy.singer@yale.edu

Although there is a significant body of research which shows that playing violent video games leads to aggressive behavior in youth, there are many other important areas to consider which affect children's learning. Video games may impact on a variety of important skills and behaviors, including imagination, social development, attention and concentration, moral development and values, abstract thinking and reflective thought, identification with the characters in the games, and negative stereotyping of social and ethnic groups and minorities.

For example, with regard to imagination, does playing video games blur the boundaries between fantasy and reality? Do games help to expand or impede one's imagination?

Researchers have found that heavy players of violent video games are less likely to be helpful and empathic. Can video games be designed to teach empathy?

How do video games impact on moral development, values and ethics? Many violent video games contain antisocial and criminal behavior, which goes unpunished and is sometimes rewarded. How does this affect children?

What is the effect of playing games with fantasy figures and realistic violent figures? Do players identify with characters they see in these video games. Research on avatars created by players suggests there may be some blurring of reality. Can violent behavior become part of a child's repertoire from the practice and rehearsal that occurs in video games?

Women are presented in demeaning roles in many games and minorities and various ethnic groups are portrayed in a negative manner. How will repeated playing of these types of games affect a child's perception of others?

Can video games be designed to teach socially desirable behavior, personal responsibility, and skills which can enhance learning?

The presentation examined these important areas for future research and the implications for the development of children and youth.

Do Parents Understand and Use Video Game Ratings Effectively? *Jeanne B. Funk, PhD*

The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) has established an age-based ratings system with content descriptors to help parents decide if a specific game is appropriate for their child to play. However, past research suggests two problems with the ESRB ratings: parents lack familiarity with the ratings; and, when they are asked to specifically comment on a particular rating for a particular game, they often disagree. These disagreements typically occur for ratings of games with some, but not extreme, violence.

This presentation described how ratings are assigned, according to information published by ESRB, and discusses recent findings on how parents use the ESRB ratings. Many parents, especially parents of young children, choose not to

use the ESRB ratings, or use them incorrectly. The implications of these problems were examined. The APA Media Division's Interactive Media Committee, as well as professionals in other disciplines, have recommended working to improve the video game ratings and make them more accessible to parents. Possible ways to improve the ratings process, outcome, and visibility were discussed.

Children, Violent Video Games, and Advocacy: Influencing Public Policy
Elizabeth K. Carll, PhD, ecarll@optonline.net

Psychologists, as experts in human behavior, are in a unique position to use research and knowledge to influence public policy and promote social change. Legislative focus, on the effects of violence in video games and interactive media on children, has grown in the past seven years.

The evolution of psychologists' participation in a variety of forums, including U.S. Congressional hearings, state and regional hearings, and community forums and town hall meetings will be discussed. These venues provide psychologists opportunities for networking with legislators and policy makers and opportunities to translate scientific research into social policy to benefit children, families, and the community.

Strategies to develop a long-term effective advocacy plan and the experiences of this psychologist in various types of governmental hearings, community meetings, and media interviews were discussed. The importance of developing position papers and resolutions, such as the APA Resolution on Violence in Video Games and Interactive Media spearheaded by the Media Division of APA were highlighted.

SYMPOSIUM: Trends in Hollywood's Portrayal of Psychologists and Patients—Thumbs Up?

Chair: Harriet T. Schultz, PhD **Participants:** Mary Gregerson, PhD, Danny Wedding, PhD, MPH **Discussant:** Nadine J. Kaslow, PhD

Trends in Hollywood's Portrayals of Psychologists and Patients: Thumbs Up?
Harriet T. Schultz

Division 46's Media Watch Committee has been examining fictional portrayals of mental health professionals in movies and TV, concerned about the extent to which psychologists are shown as unethical. Our annual award, the Golden Psi, acknowledges producers who exhibit excellence in the responsible portrayal of professional standards. Although empirical evidence is scant regarding how these depictions impact the public, the constant negative images could reinforce people's skepticism or fearfulness about therapy.

Might lawyers and medical doctors also need a Media Watch Committee? Possibly—although the issue may not be as serious for them, despite Hollywood's array of arrogant physicians and satanic lawyers. The public is more likely to have direct experience with a range of professionals other than therapists, and this contact, if positive, could help neutralize negative screen stereotypes. For many, the silver screen is the primary source of information about psychology.

The continuing fascination between psychotherapy and the movies since the inception of both around the turn of the last century has led to untold numbers of film psychologists as well as patients. Psychologists are typically shown as evil, crazy, or unethical. Patients are ridiculed as dangerous, unpredictable, or possessed by demons.

This symposium will examine trends over time. Are the depictions improving, with increasing numbers of competent psychologists and/or a more realistic appraisal of patients? Overall, the picture looks bleak. Media Watch has not identified an award-worthy show for the last two years. The most recent movie example is *Running With Scissors*, where a psychiatrist adopts a patient's son. The

TV therapist on *Let Me Help You* is nearly as troubled as his patients. On the TV series *The New Adventures of Old Christine* a therapist is having an affair with the ex-husband of an ex-couple she treated.

The reasons for these trends will be explored. The few bright spots will be discussed.

MIA: Media Portrayals of Excellence in Psychology
Mary Banks Gregerson, PhD

Recently excellent screen portrayals of psychology are 'missing-in-action.' Small (television) and big (film) screen portrayals of psychology too rarely convey standards of psychology worthy of emulation. Furthermore, the budgetary windfalls of blockbuster action genre films, at first blush, appear to diametrically invalidate the monetary value of the relationship and dialogue dimensions that visions of portrayals of psychology typically evoke. Yet, contrary to this media misconception, popular excellent portrayals in psychology-in-action are possible.

Law and Order: Special Victims Unit (1999-2006) provides one role as the sole shining exception that depicts excellence in a psychology-in-action portrayal. In 2004 an APA Division 46 Golden Psi specifically highlighted the role of Dr. George Huang, FBI forensic psychiatrist, which ascended in status from a 2001 guest appearance to recurring role to contract by 2003. The Golden Psi Award recognizes excellence in the portrayal of psychology. In the opening credit scene, Dr. Huang now strides within the ranks of the series' stars. This series is very action oriented, with the relationships and dialogue creating tension, drama, and popularity. Dr. Huang is centrally involved in furthering the crime based plots and character development.

Psychology-in-action can occur. Excellence in a psychology portrayal can buoy. An in-depth analysis of this role's competence, credibility, and appeal throws a gauntlet for future excellent portrayals of psychology on any screen.

L&O: SVU Executive Producer Neal Baer comments that perhaps the stigma attached to seeking psychotherapy may make psychology and psychologists easy targets of that ambivalence. According to Dr. Baer's correspondence with Media Watch Chair Dr. Harriet T. Schultz, the upcoming season features "a psychiatrist, played by Elizabeth McGovern, who teaches military personnel torture techniques. Unfortunately, this is not flattering to this psychiatrist..." This topic has recently riveted APA attention and concern as well.

The challenge for media leaders like Dr. Baer is to bring action and psychology together into the most satisfying venues while also considering societal consequences and value. If a portrayal is unfavorable, then producers have an obligation to clearly show professional sanctions against the violator and corrections of the violation to the preferred standard. Then, even untoward portrayals are Golden Psi-like.

No movie portrayal has riveted such attention since 1997's *Good Will Hunting* compromised psychotherapist role nevertheless won an Academy Award. In 2006 the art-house autobiographical feature *Running with Scissors* dispensed self-serving psychology. The small screen still depicts stumbling yet well-intentioned, good-natured mental health professionals like the 1970s' *The Bob Newhart Show* and 1990s' multi-E Emmy winner *Frasier*. The APA Division 46 Media Watch bestowed one of the first Golden Psi Awards upon HBO's *The Sopranos*, which subsequently shoved its psychiatrist down an icy precipice into depths of difficulties, if not ignominy.

On both screens the impaired practitioner seems a favored, if trite, "dramedy" twist. Especially in films psychotherapists have become dramatic foils or buffoons. There is no ambivalence here. The little screen—except for *L&O: SVU*'s Dr. Huang, who even appears dimming in strength at the moment—fares hardly better.

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Abstracts

(continued from p. 9)

Scant empirical evidence examines these portrayals' effect(s) upon public opinion and psychology enterprises. For instance, my 1998 archival analysis of professional and lay reviewers' comments on *Good Will Hunting* revealed that both types of reviewers astutely separated a flawed practitioner from a robust healing process. In this paper, the current review of empirical research, or lack thereof, focuses upon method, findings, and directions for the future. A cursory bibliographic search for psychology and media images reveals a range of targeted professions, problems/diseases, groups, situations, and locales. Interest is high, therefore in this topic, even if excellence is invisible.

For over 60 years social scientists have studied the influence of media images on audiences. Marketers call "branding" the media truism that media persuasion and influence affects consumption, use, and emulation. Most laudably, recent studies examined the use of storytelling to build brand loyalty.

But, today the media brands psychology negatively as "betrayals" rather than portrayals. Future research might uncover perhaps how a societal undermining occurs from such negative branding. Disparaging branding may unconsciously diminish the good that psychological enterprises like psychotherapy and public policy consultation can produce.

So pervasive is the disaffection with psychology that a negative portrayal of psychology is running with the herd to jump on the proverbial band wagon. An opportunity for media and societal value—and bank-ability—is being missed here. The most successful new media programs have stood directly in contrast to the media zeitgeist, like *Survivor* which in an audience frenzy established the then novel reality programming trend. A portrayal of an excellent psychology "crime" fighter or cultural adventurer might take the audience by storm.

A future media vision should look for the contrast, or "what's missing" in current programming to capture a wide American audience, who inclines toward the novel. A positive view of psychology-in-action as a central force certainly is missing, and would be novel. When finding positive psychology, media images need not lose the benefits of the action genre. Positive psychology-in-action has and could happen.

And, there are those in the media that materialize such challenges into popular and bankable real portrayals!

Trends in the Cinematic Portrayal of Mental Illness: 1941–2000
 Danny Wedding, Danny.Wedding@mimh.edu

People with mental illness are frequently portrayed in movies as dangerous and unpredictable; this is the primary myth associated with cinematic portrayals of individuals coping with diseases like schizophrenia, major depression or bipolar disorder. Examples of this misleading and inaccurate stereotype abound; recent exemplars include *Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Clean, Shaven*.

This presentation showed brief clips from classic films representing four discrete periods in American history as examples of how mental illness has been represented in films. The first film discussed was *The Wolfman* (1941) starring Lon Chaney, Jr. This film includes an elaborate discussion of the syndrome of "lycanthropy" by a physician who identifies the disorder as "a form of schizophrenia." Clips from the film illustrated our limited understanding of schizophrenia in the 1940s.

The movie classic *Psycho* (1960) illustrated the myth that even seemingly ordinary people like Norman Bates can in fact be unpredictable murderers, and that the symptoms of mental illness can be easily disguised. The role of the psychiatrist who treats Bates was highlighted, along with the facile psychoanalytic explanation he offers for Bates' "split personality."

A 1973 film, *The Exorcist*, was used to demonstrate the rarely stated but surprisingly widespread belief that serious mental illness is linked with possession by demons, and that spiritual leaders may have more to offer people with mental illness than mental health professionals. Clips were used to illustrate how the mother successively visits a pediatrician, a neurologist, and a psychiatrist—all who offer platitudes but no real answers to her daughter's dilemma.

Finally, a Jim Carey film, *Me, Myself and Irene* (2000) was used to illustrate the ways in which contemporary films often ridicule people with mental illness and the challenges their illnesses present.

POSTER SESSION: Media Psychology Awareness Project

Erik Gregory, PhD; Jonathan Cabiria, MS, MA; Jerri Lynn Hogg, MA; Pamela Rutledge, MBA, MA; Timothy D. Wells, MBA, MS

Phase II of Fielding Graduate University's study on Media Psychology Awareness: APA Division 46

Interest in the field of Media Psychology increases, yet there is no consensus on definition. Current understanding of the Media Psychology profession is essential to promoting the valuable work of our field.

Analysis reveals consistent recognition of the human factor in Media Psychology with emphasis on the impact on individuals and groups rather than on technology. Most references to types of media named traditional media even when also mentioning new media. Additionally, perceptions of media differ with age and gender, as do indications of active or passive media use. Perceptions of what Media Psychologists do changed relative to the Luskin & Friedland (1998) study of Media Psychology applications. For example, in 1998, "Studying sociological and psychological media effects," was ranked #7; in 2007, it was ranked #1.

Media Effects is perceived as a primary application and area for research, particularly in violence, behavior and news/agenda setting/responsibility. The integrity of psychological expertise being represented in media continues as an active interest, particularly among respondents skewing to an older demographic.

Respondents' definitions of the terms "media" and "media effects" were not conclusive. An updated Division 46 Task Force Study may be indicated. In addition, study of positive, socially constructive media effects is needed.

POSTER SESSION: Media Psychology Journal: A Content Analysis of the First Eight Years

Ellen Derwin, Janet de Merode, JoAnne Shayne

A content analysis of the journal *Media Psychology* was conducted for the eight-year period from its inception to the present (1999-2006), during which time the journal was under a single editorship. The abstracts of all 123 articles were analyzed using SPSS Text Analysis for Surveys 2.0* and grounded theory. The goal was to determine what topics have been the primary focus of research published in the journal, what authors have been most influential, and what academic and non-academic institutions have been most often represented. The results showed that television was the focus of more articles than was any other form of media. In contrast, the computer (web) and radio had surprisingly little representation. Young children received more attention than any other age group. Ethnicity and socio-economic status in relation to the media received almost no coverage. Contributions indicate a strong international presence and a number of non-academic sources in the journal. From within academia, communications departments contributed far more research than did psychology departments.

* For additional information from the manufacturer of this software, see http://www.spss.com/textanalysis_surveys

News Media Recognition Award

In recognition of the importance and influence of news reporting, the News Media Recognition Award for excellence in the reporting of psychological information and research was launched in 2002 by the News Media, Public Education, Public Policy Committee. Sue Shellenbarger, columnist for *The Wall Street Journal* and writer of the "Work & Family" column was selected as the 2007 News Media Recognition Award. Her thought provoking articles, covering a diversity of topics including the impact of work demands and traveling on marriage, the emotional impact of high turnover of teachers on preschoolers, and the impact of day care on children, have highlighted the importance of psychological and social issues for the business world.

Shellenbarger is the former chief of the *Journal's* Chicago news bureau, and started the column in 1991 to provide the nation's first regular coverage of the growing conflict between work and family and its implications for the workplace and society. Her column has been nominated for the Pulitzer Prize and has received six major national awards, including "Best General Interest Column" from the National Society of Newspaper Columnists. Shellenbarger has been named by *Working Woman* magazine to the "Working Woman 25," honoring the 25 people who have done the most to help women in the workplace in the past 25 years and has received numerous other awards for her work.

As Sue Shellenbarger was unable to attend the convention due to a family commitment, she sent her comments which follow: "I wish I could be present at the Convention. However, I would be grateful if you would tell them that this honor has great meaning to me. One of my personal missions has been to elevate coverage of psychological issues in the work-and-family realm. My hope has been that the readers of *The Wall Street Journal* would begin to look to us for insights and guidance on some of the nettlesome problems, stresses and anxieties they face every day. To that end, APA members have been immensely helpful, generous and wise in providing studies and interviews on my topics....Receiving this award has been more inspiring to me than most of the past awards I've gotten. The recognition of your group gives me new energy to try to attain greater clarity and insight in my coverage...So again, thank you. My heartfelt thanks to all your members, and my admiration, too, for the good work that you do to advance people's health and well-being."

(Members of the News Media Recognition Award Committee: Elizabeth Carll, Joanne Cantor, Alan Entin, Helen Friedman, Steve Hampe, Roger Klein, Linda Sapadin, and Dorothy Singer)

Division 46 Awards Presented at APA

The division presented awards at the APA Convention in San Francisco. The first award was presented to Florence Kaslow, PhD, ABPP, for her Distinguished Lifetime Contributions to Media Psychology. Dr. Kaslow is a charter member of Division 46 and served as our first secretary. She also served as division president, and was subsequently elected for a number of terms as a member-at-large of the division board, serving continuously through 2006. A prolific author and editor, Dr. Kaslow has published 30

books, and more than 200 book chapters and articles. She was an active participant in the media training programs sponsored by APA and Division 52, and has appeared on the Phil Donahue and Oprah Winfrey shows and numerous nationally televised programs in the U.S. and other countries.

Dr. Alan Entin, PhD, ABPP received a Division 46 award for his Distinguished Professional Contributions. Dr. Entin is also a charter member of the division. He has served for three terms as division treasurer, and chaired



Charlie Spielberger (left) presenting Alan Entin with the Distinguished Contribution to Media Psychology Award

the Fellows Committee for the past 10 years. He is a founder of the field of phototherapy, the use of photographs in psychotherapy to understand family relationships. His photographs have frequently appeared in the

division's newsletter, and on the cover of the January 2006 *American Psychologist*. In addition to his many contributions to our division, Dr. Entin was recognized in 2001 as the Distinguished Psychologist of the Year by the Division of Independent Practice.

The Distinguished Dissertation Award was presented to Dr. Stephen Hampe. Dr. Hampe received the Division's Dissertation Award for his study of "A Comparison of Personality Traits to Expression of Online Disinhibition." He completed his doctorate in December 2006 at Capella University, and is currently an Adjunct Assistant Professor at the Center for Distance Learning of the Empire State College, State University of New York.

Congratulations to the recipients of the division's 2007 Distinguished Awards, and best wishes to them for continued productivity in their research and professional work. We congratulate them for their previous achievements and look forward to their continued contributions to research, professional practice, and Division 46.



The Presidents cutting the cake at the 20th Anniversary happy hour. From left to right: Frank Farley, PhD; Florence Kaslow, PhD; Lilli Friedland, PhD; Larry Balter, PhD; Stuart Fischhoff, PhD; Irene Deitch, PhD; Alan Entin, PhD; and Charlie Spielberger, PhD

Articles of Interest

The Impact of Sustained Crisis Viewing on Children

Lawrence Balter, PhD

When something cataclysmic happens, we find ourselves glued to the TV and combing the print media for details. There are many kinds of calamitous news events comprising both *human-made* and *natural* disasters. In the past several years, we have witnessed a variety of images of numerous devastating events. There were the widely covered natural disasters (although it could be argued that these might have been averted or significantly minimized by timely and proper human intervention) of Hurricane Katrina and the tsunami. And, more recently we have seen repeated slow motion images on TV of the bridge collapse in Minneapolis. (Questions are being raised about the human factor here, too.) Then, of course, there were also indisputably *human instigations* such as the various school shootings. The country's worst mass murder occurred on a college campus in April of this year. Virginia Tech suffered the loss of 33 people. Five professors and 27 students were killed by a lone gunman, a student at the school, who also took his own life. There is the seemingly unending genocide in Darfur. And, of course, there is the war in Iraq. An interesting media sidebar that is relevant to this discussion is the appearance on TV, as well all over the print media, of photos of Saddam Hussein's execution! Earlier, in 2001, we had the paradigm-shifting World Trade Center and Pentagon-shattering atrocity that is now known by its shorthand name of "9-11." Before that, there was the Oklahoma City bombing. Even earlier (1986), there was the space shuttle Challenger disaster. To add to the list of crisis coverage in the media, during this past year there were also a sprinkling of news reports about various kidnappings (a boy was held for four years), a girl was abducted and found a year later, and on it goes.

I offer this highly abridged list of horrors to provide some context for the questions that are raised in connection with the effects of media coverage on young viewers and readers. Don DeLillo, one of our country's foremost contemporary novelists said, through one of his characters, that terrorists have taken over imagination that once was the province of our novelists. He says, "the news of disaster is the only narrative people need... the darker the news, the grander the narrative."¹

Catastrophes are routinely covered in the broadcast, electronic, and print media. A good deal of interest has been paid to the effect such exposure has on children. I reviewed the literature concerning the impact on children of exposure to media coverage of disasters and found that not all disasters receive equal treatment in the media. Moreover, the preponderance of research is conducted on disasters that are perpetrated by humans as compared to natural disasters. Published reports tend to promulgate the credence of an association between media exposure and posttraumatic stress disorder in children. The prevailing theme is of a positive association between exposure to television coverage of tragedy

and symptoms of PTSD. Claims include differential effects of TV, print, and internet exposure, gender and age differences, geographic and temporal proximity to the disaster, and degree of exposure to media coverage in relation to PTSD in children. However, close inspection of the research methods revealed serious limitations. Among the deficiencies are: small and non-representative research samples, instruments lacking validity and reliability, outcome measures limited to PTSD, reliance on retrospective and self-report data, parental perceptions and recall of children's exposure rather than direct evidence, a lack of competing hypotheses, and an absence of control groups. There was virtually no inclusion of mediating and moderating variables in the studies reviewed. More specifically, one of the questions raised in this review is whether the highly circumscribed and selected outcome measures might not be providing us with an inaccurate picture of the consequences of viewing cataclysmic events in the media. That is, do the outcome variables actually skew the findings? Is it fair to assume that outcomes must always be negative? Are there ameliorating factors? For example, do kids whose parents and teachers offer activities and practical actions fare better than those who don't? Where are the studies that address outcomes such as greater sensitivity to the plight of victims, or increased empathy concerning hardships in third world countries, or augmented activism, or an examination of political forces that impede positive outcomes, or increased aid provided by caring children, teachers, parents, community leaders, or an outpouring of letters, food, volunteer services, etc.

I concluded that assertions about the deleterious effects of the media on children's mental health are not warranted despite the intuitive potency of such beliefs. While they might prove to be correct someday, there is reasonable doubt because of the seriously flawed methodologies that have been employed in arriving at the current conclusions. The empirical methods were not rigorous enough to be taken as support of an association between media exposure and children's mental status. I recommend that future researchers address the following questions:

- Are sample sizes sufficient?
- Are the research participants representative?
- Are alternative hypotheses being tested?
- Are statistical or experimental controls employed (or efforts at any type of control even base-line measurement against which to compare findings)?
- Are the measures valid and reliable (i.e., versus a few questions set on a Likert-type scale)?
- Are direct measures possible (i.e., versus reliance on retrospective recall)?

- Are the statistical treatments of the data sufficiently sophisticated since correlational methods do not allow for determination of direction of the relationship or causality?
- Are a variety of outcome measures being considered? For example, might there be counter-intuitive effects such as positive outcomes?
- Are mediating and moderating variables built into the design?

Footnote

'Bill Gray, the reclusive, Pynchonesque writer at the center of "*Mao II*," laments that terrorists, the bomb makers and gunmen, have annexed the territory that once belonged to the novelist: the ability to "alter the inner life of the culture." As he sees it, the "news of disaster is the only narrative people need," and "the darker the news, the grander the narrative." This is from Frank Rich's review of *Falling Man* "The Clear Blue Sky," on May 27, 2007, in *The New York Times*.

From *The New York Review*, June 28, 2007 Andrew O'Hagan's review of *Falling Man* contains the following dialogue from DeLillo's earlier, prescient book, *White Noise* (1985):

"Why is it, Alfonse, that decent, well-meaning and responsible people find themselves intrigued by catastrophe when they see it on television?"

I told him about the recent evening of lava, mud and raging water that the children and I had found so entertaining.

"We wanted more, more."

"It's natural, it's normal," he said, with a reassuring nod. "It happens to everybody."

"Why?"

"Because we're suffering from brain fade. We need an occasional catastrophe to break up the incessant bombardment of information.... The cameras are right there. They're standing by. Nothing terrible escapes their scrutiny."

"You're saying it's more or less universal, to be fascinated by TV disasters?"

"For most people there are only two places in the world. Where they live and their TV set. If a thing happens on television, we have every right to find it fascinating, whatever it is."

"I don't know whether to feel good or bad about learning that my experience is widely shared."

"Feel bad," he said.

DeLillo wrote these lines in the year Mohamed Atta turned fifteen—though at that time Atta may have called himself Mohamed El Sayed and his telegenic flight into the World Trade Center was half a life away." (p. 4)

Virginia Tech and the Media

Susan Lipkins

susanlipkins@aol.com

As a psychologist and expert in conflict and violence on high school and college campuses, I was primed to respond to the media's request when the tragedy at Virginia Tech rocked our nation. I had already experienced a week of national news coverage that was fast paced and never ending, and therefore I was calm and familiar with the territory. I felt secure in the subject matter and in my message. I looked at this situation as an opportunity to emphasize my perceptions, which were as follows:

- Cho could have been helped with appropriate psychological interventions.
- There were, as usual, many warning signs but they were not heeded.
- This is a wake-up call for us to recognize the many underserved children and adults who need psychological services.
- Campuses are inadequate in their security systems and in their counseling services.
- Most importantly, our **mental health system is broken**.

I cannot measure if my intentions were met, although I assume that they were. I would have liked the last point to be used as a spark to open an ongoing and serious discussion about our mental health system. I do not believe that this has yet been accomplished.

Child Psychologist vs. Forensic Psychiatrist

My viewpoint, that Cho suffered from a psychotic disorder and that he could have been helped via medicine and therapy was juxtaposed in one important media outlet to Dr. Michael Wellner's belief that we have to weed out born killers. I stated that there were many students such as Cho, who are not given the appropriate psychological support. He stated that he was working on a "depravity scale" and thought that the Homeland Security staff should be used to find those who are likely to commit violent acts. I believe that most people who watched us on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* had no idea what he was talking about and did not understand why we were arguing. The live audience responded well to me and hopefully, my message was understood.

I must admit that the media did respond to Dr. Wellner's direct and firm direction to stop using the violent images that were made available by Cho's tape. I agree that this statement was important and useful. However, I wanted to use the moment for the country to reflect on the various issues relating to mental health, and to perhaps have a national conversation about it. I believe that the potential for such a conversation was cut short by Wellner's directions. The media reported it as: stop talking about this entire subject, right now.

I was concerned that the media's attention to such events inevitably stimulates others to commit violent acts as we have seen when we spotlight the issue of suicide. This is a double edged sword that plagues all of us in the field. It is important to educate and warn

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VA Tech and the Media

(continued from p. 13)

and yet, the very attention to these issues can become a blueprint for the next event. Regardless of the media coverage, I believe that these events will continue to occur and to escalate in frequency and degree of violence. I do not think this wake-up call has been sufficiently heeded.

One of the concerns that I had was that the event would encourage schools to become more physically secure without addressing the deeper root of the issue, improving our mental health system, especially in schools and colleges. The reaction to Virginia Tech went underground for some months. In September Governor Kaine's

scathing report was released. Unfortunately, there has not been much attention to the findings on television or on the radio. The print media has attended to both issues, security and counseling. However, in-depth coverage of the report and its implications has not occurred.

I hoped that we could use this event as a turning point, to make mental health a national priority. As I write, I realize that we should not wait for the media to become interested, or for the government to act. We as psychologists should lead the way by creating the national conversation.

Div. 46 Member Survey

1. What does Media Psychology mean to you?
2. Please list your areas of interest in media?
3. What kind of work do you do?
4. What do you see as the future scope of Media Psychology?
5. What types of expertise should Division 46 attract?
6. What type of Div 46 programming or media programming would you attend, if offered at the convention?

Please fax your responses to me at 212-472-2249 or e-mail them to rbalt@aol.com. or mail them to:

Rochelle Balter, PhD, JD
Psychology Department
John Jay College of Criminal Justice
445 West 59th Street- Room 2100 N.
New York, NY 10019

Characteristics of Social Interaction in Cyberspace

Gerald A. Mendelsohn
jermend@berkeley.edu

I presented a series of studies concerned in one way or another with the question of how the medium of communication affects social interaction. All focused on dyads in which the partners were meeting for the first time. In the first three studies, participants were instructed to become acquainted prior to meeting as members of a group. Participants were run in one of four media: face to face, telephone, chat line or videopresence. After each conversation they described their own and their partner's behavior and/or personality as well as other aspects of their experience, e.g., liking for their partner. Results of the first study indicated that participants saw each other as most talkative and were least nervous on the chat line. There were no differences among the media on warmth, but women reported being, and were seen as, least warm face to face.

Content analysis revealed greater use of emotion words, both positive and negative, online than in the other media. Whether this was due to disinhibition or an attempt to compensate for the absence of expressive cues is uncertain. In the second study, participants played a trust game after the conversation. Contrary to prior results, generally from group studies, there was no behavioral evidence of greater trust face to face than in the other media. Partners were, however, rated as more trustworthy face to face.

In the third study, a role-playing study, unbeknownst to their partners, some participants were instructed to act as extroverted or as introverted as they could. Introverts were just as successful at appearing extroverted as extroverts were at appearing introverted, though it was also the case

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Sightings

Hot Married Sex and Mad Men

Seen by Harriet Schultz, Chair of the Media Watch Committee: There's a new HBO show out there called *Tell Me You Love Me*, starring the wonderful Jane Alexander as a 60- or even 70-something couples therapist. The advance publicity seemed to focus on the three couples she is, or will be, seeing as patients and the explicit sex they engage in. That should be enough to capture many people's attention, but the focus of our committee is how well fictional mental health professionals are portrayed. There is some positive news: Ms. Alexander is shown enjoying a healthy sex life with her equally senior citizen husband. No ageism there. She projects warmth and empathy toward her patients. And she seems experienced enough to eventually be able to see through their lies/exaggerations. This show may be destined for popularity due to its soap-opera-ish quality, not to mention the exhibitionism/voyeurism, even pornographic element. Why has one couple been sex-less for a year? Will the non-fertile couple conceive? Will the almost-engaged young couple get past the man's doubt that he can live a monogamous life? Most important for the Media Watch Committee, how will the role of the therapist evolve? Will she even be noticed in the midst of all the other—er—activity? You can check it out: Sunday nights on HBO, 9 EST, repeated several times later in the week.

Seen by Sharon Lamb, Executive Editor: AMC's *Mad Men*, possibly one of the best new shows this season, features a psychiatrist in an important but more minor role. *Mad Men* is created by Matt Weiner, a writer and producer who won an Emmy for his work on *The Sopranos* and who perhaps learned there how gripping therapeutic encounters can be. The show, which takes place in 1960 and is about the lives of Madison Avenue ad execs, keeps its psychotherapy and disorder references true to its time. While there are many intersecting stories,

the most compelling for psychologists will be that of leading man Don Draper and his Grace Kelly look-alike, suburban wife Betty who for some mysterious reason loses feeling occasionally in her hands. In an early episode her hands go numb while on the steering wheel of her car and she ends up driving onto a neighbor's lawn. Similar to the upper class women whom Freud saw whose hysteria (now conversion disorder) may have stemmed from repression or, according to feminist theory, from a boring life as an object not a subject, Betty invests heartily in trying to be the perfect housewife and mother. Don, Betty's husband, spends Episode 2 trying to figure out, à la Freud, "what women want"—in terms of his wife, his mistress, and an ad campaign he's working on for lipstick. He finds a psychiatrist (more of a psychoanalyst) for his wife, and she lies on his couch insisting that she's very happy. That same evening Don calls his wife's doctor, and Dr. Wayne has no qualms about telling his patient's husband, "I had a very interesting hour with your wife this afternoon." In this scene, we're made to remember that at that time, women were treated almost like children and it might not have been so odd (or unethical?) for a doctor to break confidentiality and talk to the "referring husband." Betty continues to see Dr. Wayne and Dr. Wayne tells her husband that she is not very forthcoming and childish! In a later episode he makes a simple interpretation that she might be angry at her mother to which she responds with shock and resistance. While anger at her mother is pretty obvious given what we're allowed to see of Betty's mother, it still evokes the therapy of the time when many a disorder could be blamed on mothers! Yes it's the same old psychoanalytic story of repression, gender, and psychotherapy; however, with writers this good and attention to language and visual detail so accurate, the story of unfulfilled housewife Betty is poignant and promises to go deep. The psychoanalytic therapy she is embarking on, although at present fairly stereotypical and shockingly cold, may prove to be an interesting thread that continues—for years and years.

Book Review

Violent Video Game Effects on Children and Adolescents

By Craig Anderson, Douglas Gentile, and Katherine Buckley

Review by Jeanne Funk

Violent Video Game Effects on Children and Adolescents by Craig Anderson, Douglas Gentile, and Katherine Buckley is a multifaceted walk through the world of research on violent video games. The authors summarize and interpret prior research within the context of the General Aggression model, developed by Anderson, Brad Bushman, and colleagues. They assert that past research demonstrates that exposure to violent video games is a risk factor for aggression for all players and present three previously unpublished studies to further support this claim.

In a chapter summarizing the effects of exposure to violent entertainment media, the authors do an excellent job of explaining the principles of scientific reasoning. They argue for “triangulation” of methodologies to develop causal models and clearly describe the primary research paradigms. Unlike most scientific journals, the book format allows the authors the space to describe their perspective in detail and to address common criticisms of media violence research.

The General Aggression model is a theoretical framework for understanding how past and present influences act together as risk factors for aggression. This volume further develops the model by adding a developmental perspective. This framework has been and will likely continue to be very useful for media researchers and the current description is clear and comprehensive.

Some parts of the volume appear to be directed at audiences who are unfamiliar with the basics of research (perhaps students or policy makers), while other sections provide the technical detail needed to evaluate a study’s methodology and conclusions. This is important as the three studies discussed are key to the final chapters’ policy and parenting recommendations.

Study 1 included both children (9- to 12-year-olds) and college students. Participants completed several questionnaires, played a violent or nonviolent video game, and played a competitive reaction time task during which they could give noise blasts to a supposed opponent (the dependent, aggression measure). Even games with cartoon violence caused more aggression, relative to nonviolent games. Relationships were also noted between general exposure to media violence and self-reports of actual violent behavior.

In Study 2 high school students were surveyed about exposure to violent media, various beliefs about violence, and frequency of their own verbal or physical aggression. Relationships were as expected, with more violent media exposure, particularly for violent video games, associated with more reports of physically aggressive and violent behavior.

Study 3 was another survey, this time with elementary school children. Again focusing on violent media exposure and aggression, surveys were

administered twice, about five months apart, and included self-teacher- and peer-reports. Children who played more violent video games at the time of the first survey were more aggressive later in the school year.

In each of the three studies there are other interesting findings, many with implications for factors that may (and may not) moderate the effects of exposure to violent video games. For those with less experimental sophistication, very practical and reader-friendly summaries are provided for each study. Termed “Study x in a Nutshell,” brief paragraphs describe what was done, with whom, what was found, and what surprised and worried the researchers. A subsequent chapter applies the results from each study to a discussion of the role of risk and protective factors.

After discussing the implications of the findings of the three new studies, the authors address myths about the links between media violence and aggression and apply their findings and conclusions to public policy. They begin with a discussion of the relative effect size of various risk factors for aggression and violence, noting that the effect size for video game violence is one of the largest. They then present systematic and compelling critiques of the catharsis hypothesis and the video game industry’s position on the effects of violent video games. Options for public policy, including warning labels, licensing requirements, universal ratings systems for screen media and restrictions on access are briefly discussed. In the final chapter the authors make specific recommendations for consumers, particularly parents. They also provide addresses for several web sites that address parenting and media issues.

This book makes a meaningful contribution to the literature on violent video game effects and to the general body of media violence research. Written at varying levels of complexity, every chapter will not be for every reader, but readers with a variety of backgrounds will find important insights. The book would be a useful complementary text for several disciplines, particularly psychology and media studies.

Volunteer for a Divisional Committee!

If you would be interested in volunteering time and effort for one of Div. 46’s committees, please e-mail Frank Farley, Division 46 President-Elect, at frank.farley@comcast.net. Name the committee or committees you would be most interested in and outline some of your interests or experience relevant to those committees. The committees are as follows:

- Membership Committee
- Telehealth and New Technologies Committee
- Fellows Committee (Division Fellows only)
- Media Watch Committee
- Awards Committee
- News Media, Public Education, and Public Policy Committee
- Ethics Committee
- Student Committee
- Editorial Policies and Guidelines Committee
- Internet Psychology Committee
- Publications Committee

Asked and Answered

ASKED: How can we as media psychologists talk about trauma and traumatized victims with the press in a way that will help them not sensationalize it?

ANSWERED: For the past 20 years I've evaluated and treated Catholic clergy sex offenders and their victims and have published several books and many research articles on this topic for the past 10 years or so. In talking with the press a great deal about this topic I have found that most members of the mainline press do try to be thoughtful and respectful about victims (less so with the offenders). There is often a push from the press to overgeneralize both victim and offender thoughts, feelings, and behavior stating that all victims and all offenders behave alike. Often there is little room for diversity of thoughts, feelings, and behavior. There is also pressure from the press for us to disclose client details and break confidentiality. I tend to think that when we discuss trauma (especially something as tantalizing as sexual victimization most especially in the Catholic church and other morally and ethically focused institutions) we should be careful to talk with members of the press who are more likely to manage the topic and our interviews with integrity and responsibility and to be careful never to break confidentiality or overgeneralize. While the press will do whatever they wish that we certainly cannot control, we can at least be careful not to play into the sensationalism, be selective about whom we talk to in the press, and be mindful of our ethical principles.
—Thomas Plante, PhD

ASKED: As a new cadre of media psychologists forms, is there tolerance (*open-mindedness, welcoming, expansive thinking, widening the catchment*) by Div. 46 members to increase their focus to include many of the new and constantly emerging areas of media psychology? Or is it preferable that this energy is better served by infiltrating other APA divisions, thereby sharing the value of media psychology?

ANSWERED: I sent your question to several long-time division members who neglected to answer so let me give you my opinion. I think there is interest in this and yet I think that much of the old cadre of Division 46 is still in an "Isn't this amazing" phase! In order to really widen the catchment and expand thinking, people who are really in the know about emerging areas of media psychology are going to have to be invited to serve on committees and to be mentored into leadership roles in the division. There are two attempts in this issue to include newer members—the survey and the call for committee interests—whether these attempts will actually work to change the division will depend more on the effort made by those who are in positions of leadership. Some of that will mean yielding power to members who have not worked long and hard over the past 20 years to form the division and make it what it is. My feeling is that the name change is more about wishful thinking—if you name it, they will come. And when they come, these knowledgeable individuals—what are you going to do with them? RE: infiltration. Many APA members belong to a few divisions and the cross-pollination is great. Over time you'll figure out what your primary divisions are, who needs your expertise the most, and who provides a stimulating and nurturing environment for your professional growth.

Member News

Ed Abramson, PhD: I presented a Continuing Education Workshop, "The Psychology of Weight Regulation: Eating, Exercise, and Body Image" at APA in San Francisco and at the Canadian Psychological Association meeting in Ottawa in September. I'll be presenting a series of workshops, "Obesity & Compulsive Eating" for PESI in NY, TN, WA, OR, NC, and OH. I was quoted in recent issues of *Good Housekeeping*, *Us Weekly*, and *Women's Health*. My book, *Body Intelligence* (McGraw-Hill, 2006) was published in Indonesia and Brazil and is scheduled to be translated into Arabic. I'm available for book signings in Bali and Rio, but not Baghdad. www.dredabramson.com

Lisa Boesky, PhD: My new book *When to Worry: How to Tell If Your Teen Needs Help—And What to Do About It* was featured in *USA Today*. In the few months since the book has been published, I have done over a dozen radio interviews, eight print interviews, and six TV segments including *The Montel Williams Show*. *When to Worry* focuses on the full spectrum of problematic teen issues, and helps parents recognize warning signs of serious mental health conditions. www.drlisab.com and www.whentoworry.com

Alma Bond, PhD: My 13th book, "Magnificent Monster: The Story of Margaret Mahler," is presently in publication with McFarland Publishers. My books, "Old Age is a Terminal Illness" and "Camille Claudel, a novel," were published last year. My website is http://alma_bond.tripod.com.

Irene Deitch, PhD: I was reelected to serve as Member-at-Large. My interview dealing with Pet/Human Companionship appears in *Business Week*. I also was first place winner (for my age group), at APA's Annual 5K "Ray's Race" in San Francisco. My article, "When a Runner Can't Run" appears in the *Running Psychologist*, Division 47's newsletter. I also am the recipient of the Brooklyn College Alumni Lifetime Achievement Award.

Roy Eidelson, PhD: By way of introduction, I've been an APA member for 25 years, but a member of Division 46 only since last month's APA convention. My recent professional efforts have included creating a short (10-minute) video that applies my "dangerous ideas" framework to the public appeals of the current administration in Washington. The video is entitled *Resisting the Drums of War* and it is available for viewing at <http://www.eidelsonconsulting.com/videos.php>. In the video I describe how the White House has promoted the war in Iraq by targeting our core concerns about vulnerability, injustice, distrust, superiority, and helplessness. roy@eidelsonconsulting.com

Howard S. Friedman, PhD: I recently edited Friedman, H. S. & Silver, R. C. (2007) (Eds.), *Foundations of Health Psychology* (Oxford University Press). This volume has been called seminal for anyone with an interest in

Member News

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improving their understanding of the biopsychosocial model to conceptualize, study, and intervene on human health. It has been reviewed as “the book to have” in health psychology. howard.friedman@ucr.edu

Kenneth Herman, EdD, ABPP (Clinical): I have recently published a self-help book entitled, *Secrets from the Sofa—A Psychologist’s Guide to Achieving Personal Peace* (iUniverse). I retired from practice after directing The Psychological Service Center in Teaneck, NJ for many years and am currently involved with the Bergen Volunteer Medical Initiative, a group in the process of launching a free medical center for the uninsured in Bergen County New Jersey.

Florence Kaslow, PhD: In addition to receiving the Division 46 Lifetime Achievement Award in Media Psychology at the APA Convention in August 2007, I will be receiving the Family Firm Institute’s Interdisciplinary Achievement Award for my collaborative work in the family business arena in October 2007. drfkaslow@bellsouth.net

Roger Klein, PhD: I received the 2007 Media Award from the Pennsylvania Psychological Association. It was the second time that I have been the recipient of this award. I also continue to produce a radio segment in Pittsburgh—*The Psychology Minute*—and to produce videos in psychology for textbook publisher Wadsworth. My most recent videos have featured researchers from the University of Minnesota and Rutgers. I’ll be working with psychologists at Ohio State this Fall. By Spring, 2008 there will be 55 videos in the series. rklein@education.pitt.edu

John E. LaMuth, PhD: I am pleased to announce the launch of my newly released website devoted to comparative neuroanatomy spanning across evolutionary timescales—based upon a previously published journal article of mine. <http://www.angelfire.com/rnb/fairhaven/forebrain/>. This new theoretical formulation proves significant in a media-psychology sense in that it represents the first “Periodic Table” for the human forebrain, wherein imparting a crucial sense of systematic order to the fragmented and confused state of affairs within the neurosciences. legacypr@sisp.net

Thomas Plante, PhD: I and my co-author, Carl Thoreson, recently published the book *Spirit, Science, and Health How the Spiritual Mind Fuels Physical Wellness*. tplante@scu.edu

Linda Sapadin, PhD: I did two videotapings for ivillage.com—one on overcoming fear; one on beating procrastination. I was quoted in *O, The Oprah Magazine* in the article “The ‘Dear John’ talk and other dreaded conversations.” I was invited back to the Smithsonian Associates to present a program on “Overcoming Procrastination.” I was quoted in the *Wall St. Journal* in an article on “The Most-Praised Generation Goes to Work.” I was quoted in *Better Health and Living* in an article on “How to Love Doing the Things you Hate.” I was quoted in an article published by the Aspen Education Group on “Narcissistic and Entitled to Everything! Does Gen Y Have Too Much Self-Esteem?” www.PsychWisdom.com

Karen Sherman, PhD: I am a relationship expert and co-author of *Marriage Magic! Find It, Keep It, and Make It Last*. I also am a weekly blogger for ThirdAge.com, and writing a column “Disputes” for Hitchedmag.com. I write articles regularly for Yahoo personals. I also offer teleseminars on relationship topics. www.drkarensherman.com.

Obituaries

LEONARD D. ERON (1920–2007)



Psychologist Leonard D. Eron, whose path-breaking research made media violence a public health concern around the world, died May 3, 2007, at the age of 87. Len is survived by his wife Madeline of Lindenhurst, IL, his daughter Barbara and two grandchildren also of Lindenhurst, and his son Don. His other daughter Joan died in 1990.

Len Eron’s contributions to understanding the extent to which media violence causes aggressive behavior helped revolutionize psychology’s perspective on the mass media during the past 60 years, and his efforts to apply this knowledge to public policy have left a lasting impact on society. During his years as a Professor at Yale University, the University of Iowa, the University of Illinois at Chicago, and the University of Michigan, he also left his mark on countless students who carry on his tradition of merging research with public policy applications of psychology.

As Jocelyn Stewart wrote in the *Los Angeles Times* (May 15, 2007), “The message of Eron’s research was clear: The more violence children watched on television, the more aggressive they were in school. Over the years, those findings drew loud objections from television executives,

but Eron argued that the correlation was undeniable.” In 1993, during an appearance on the *MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour*, Eron said, “There is no rational person outside the tobacco industry who would deny that there is a causative link between cigarette smoking and lung cancer. And it’s the same thing with television violence viewing and subsequent (aggressive) behavior in young children.”

Len Eron was born on April 22, 1920, in Newark, New Jersey and grew up in Passaic as the son of Lithuanian immigrants. After graduating from Passaic High School, where he indulged his talents for the theater, he began to study on a scholarship at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. But when his father died, he turned to earning a BS at City College of New York which he received in 1941. To support himself, he worked as an usher in Manhattan movie houses. During this time he not only developed his interest in psychology, he acquired an enormous repertoire of 1930s and 1940s songs, which he sang at parties for the rest of his life. After one semester of graduate work at Columbia University, during which he met the love of his life, Madeline Marcus, the bombing of Pearl Harbor occurred, and Eron was drafted into the army. He served in the campaigns of North Africa, Sicily, and Italy and attained the rank of 1st lieutenant. He never forgot the horrors he experienced on the beach at Anzio and in other battles, and this undoubtedly contributed to his later interests in understanding and preventing aggressive and violent behavior.

In 1946, Eron completed his MA in Psychology at Columbia, and in 1949, he received his PhD from the University of Wisconsin under the mentorship of Ann Magaret. On the lookout for a job, he attended the 1948 APA meeting in Philadelphia, where his future wife Madeline introduced him to her friend Seymour Sarason from the faculty at Yale. Sarason offered Eron a position as an Assistant Professor of Psychology at Yale. At Yale Eron first continued with the research he had started in graduate school on the reliability and validity of projective techniques, culminating in 1965 with the publication along with colleagues Joseph Zubin and Florence Schumer of *An Experimental Approach to Projective Techniques*. However, influenced perhaps by his war experiences and the mood in the 1950s, Eron was at the same time becoming increasingly concerned about the development of aggressive behavior in American youth.

Eron's mentor and role model, Seymour Sarason, argued that to really contribute to child psychology researchers needed to get out of the laboratory into the community. Following Sarason's advice, Eron reduced his time at Yale to part-time in 1955 and accepted a position as Director of Research and Chief Psychologist at the Rip Van Winkle Clinic in Columbia County New York. That foundation was run by a Yale graduate, Caldwell Esselstyn, who had a vision for providing mental health services that was ahead of his time (i.e., county-wide free mental health services). Eron was allowed to hire a research staff and conduct his own research with little interference. He chose to conduct a community epidemiological study on aggression in children. Thus began one of the longest running (spanning over 40 years) longitudinal studies to date: the Columbia County Longitudinal Study.

Eron began the first phase of the study in 1960 with colleagues Monroe Lefkowitz and Leopold Walder. He and his staff interviewed 856 children, the entire third grade population of Columbia County and 80% of their mothers and fathers. The study's initial purpose was to relate the aggressive behavior of children in school to the child rearing practices of the parents. However, because there was widespread suspicion in the community about mental health research at that time, Eron and his colleagues also included a number of filler questions such as, "What are your child's three favorite TV programs?" Much to their surprise, when they analyzed the data, they found that there was a significant correlation between the aggressiveness of the boys they studied and the violence of the boys' favorite TV shows. This was the start of a life-long concern Eron displayed about the effects that media violence was having on children.

Eron's 1960 study along with Albert Bandura's laboratory studies and other media surveys led to increasing interest by policy makers in the issue of media violence. In the late 1960s, at congress's urging, the US Surgeon General initiated a set of studies on "Television and Youth" which included funding for a follow-up of Eron's original Columbia County participants. Consequently, the original participants were again interviewed just after graduating from high school in 1970 when Rowell Huesmann joined the project as a statistical consultant and collaborator. This time Eron was less surprised when the 10-year results showed a clear effect of age 8 TV violence viewing increasing boys' age 19 aggressive behavior but no tendency for their own aggression to increase their violence viewing.

Eron's conclusion that media violence causes aggression was published in the *American Psychologist* (Eron, Huesmann, Lefkowitz, Walder, 1972) and in the Surgeon General's multi-volume report and led to a storm of controversy. Critiques and counter-critiques were written. Mass media interests promoted opposition to the conclusion. Believing strongly in the importance of the public policy role for psychologists, Eron spoke about his work repeatedly in public forums, on radio and TV shows, and in testimony before congress. His firm but polite demeanor under fire convinced many skeptics of the truth of his conclusions. After hearing Eron's testimony, the Surgeon General himself (Jesse Steinfeld, March 1972, Senate Commerce Committee) testified that "... it is clear to me that the causal relationship between [exposure to] televised violence and antisocial behavior is sufficient to warrant appropriate and immediate remedial action. ... there comes a time when the data are sufficient to justify action. That time has come."

Over the next 25 years Eron devoted much of this time to empirical studies that could elaborate the dimensions of the effects that media violence had on youth and to theoretical expositions of his learning theories about why this happened. He continued with the Columbia County Longitudinal study, re-interviewing the participants at age 30 in 1980 when Eric Dubow joined the project, and most recently at age 48 in 2000, when over 500 of the original participants' children also were interviewed. The results from these waves established both the continued influence that exposure to media violence in childhood has even into adulthood and the strong continuity of aggressive behavior from childhood to adulthood in both males and now in females as well.

Along with Rowell Huesmann, in 1977 Eron initiated the 15-year long Cross-national Television Study in which an international collaborative of researchers investigated in a much more systematic manner the long-term effects of media violence in five countries (United States, Israel, Poland, Australia, and Finland). In each country substantial samples of children were studied as they progressed from the 1st to 3rd grade and 3rd to 6th grade. This study revealed long term effects of media violence on aggression for both males and females both within childhood and from childhood to young adulthood. It demonstrated that the resulting aggression in young adulthood included serious physical aggression and that identification with aggressive characters moderated the effects. Specifically, higher levels of identification with aggressive television characters and stronger beliefs in the realism of television violence in childhood enhanced the effect observing violence had on later aggression.

Eron was also interested in applying the knowledge he gained from those studies to preventing the development of aggression. In the 1980s and 1990s, collaborating with Huesmann and other colleagues at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Eron showed that classroom interventions designed to change 2nd grade children's beliefs about media violence and aggression could reduce the effects of exposure to such violence in the short run.

Overall, the results of all these empirical studies strongly reinforced Eron's conception that aggression was primarily a learned behavior in humans. What is learned by observation and reinforcement is not only the actual behaviors which are copied, but attitudes about the

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Obituaries

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appropriateness of such behavior, its efficacy, and its normativeness. In 1972 he published *The Learning of Aggression* with his colleagues Leopold Walder and Monroe Lefkowitz which outlined his initial learning theory. However, he continued to modify and elaborate the view to reflect the more important role that he thought cognitions played over the next 25 years.

Eron's scholarly output was prodigious. He is the author of nine books and approximately 150 articles most of which are in the highest quality edited journals. He served as editor of the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* (1973–1980), as associate editor of the *American Psychologist* (1986–1990), and president of the *Midwestern Psychological Association* (1985–1986) and of the *International Society for Research on Aggression* (1988–1990).

His public policy advocacy kept pace with this scholarly output. He testified numerous times before the United States Senate and the United States House of Representatives, as well as various state legislatures, on the effects of violence in the media, about V-chips and ratings systems to curb violence on TV, and on the implementation and evaluation of violence prevention programs. He met with President Clinton to discuss the topic and appeared on innumerable widely viewed national TV shows to talk about the issue. He served willingly on many professional and governmental panels including the National Research Council Panel on Understanding and Control of Violence and the American Psychological Association's Commission on Violence and Youth of which he was the Chair.

Eron's accomplishments were widely recognized by his peers. He was a Fulbright Scholar twice. He was a diplomate of the American Board of Professional Psychology and a fellow of the Academy of Clinical Psychology, the American Psychological Association, the American Psychological Foundation, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. However, Eron was most proud of the three recognitions he received from the American Psychological Association. In 1980 he was given the APA award for Distinguished Professional Contributions to Knowledge; in 1995 he received the American Psychological Foundation's Gold Medal Award for Lifetime Contributions to Psychology in the Public Interest; and in 2003 he received APA's award for Distinguished Lifetime Contributions to Media Psychology.

On a personal level, Eron was the kind of individual who made everyone around him smile. He was proud of his "hard-nosed" approach to empirical research and scholarship, and woe to the student or author who asked him to read a methodologically sloppy piece of work or an ungrammatical sentence. However, his criticisms were always blunted by his wit and warmth. He cared about everyone and acted on those cares. And he enjoyed making fun of himself. He was that rare outstanding scholar who also possessed wit, self-deprecating humor, warmth, and great humanity. His scholarly accomplishments will live on for a long time, but we will all terribly miss the man we have lost.

Rowell Huesmann and Eric Dubow
Ann Arbor, Michigan
September 15, 2007

ALBERT ELLIS (1913–2007)



Legendary psychologist and early member of our Division Albert Ellis passed away July 24, 2007, at 93 years of age. He changed the world of therapy profoundly. Creator of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy and author of dozens of books and hundreds of articles, he was when alive probably the best known psychologist worldwide, having pioneered a cognitive approach to therapy and written in scholarly, professional, as well as popular venues to worldwide audiences. In his long-time hometown New York City, his famous Friday night sessions at the Albert Ellis Institute, open to the public, were a fixture for decades. He was also prominent in the media, a media psychologist, appearing on TV or radio, and being written about or interviewed in major magazines and newspapers.

At APA Conventions I did annual Conversation Hours with Al, Aaron T. Beck and myself for many years. When Al was unable to travel to APA for health reasons, he joined us by speakerphone. These great sessions were always standing room only (SRO). Another recurring session that I put together at several recent APA Conventions, sponsored by Division 46, was the "APA Comedy Jam," also SRO sessions in which Al was always the lead-off speaker, singing with the audience his famous therapy songs, which he had written using the music from well-known tunes of the American popular songbook.

Another highlight for me was the regular trips my doctoral class and I took each semester, when possible, to visit with Al at his Institute in New York. He was ever gracious and giving with the students, interacting with them for one-and-a-half to two hours in his office, laughing with them over their and his own impromptu renditions of some of his songs, posing for group photos, then signing any books or materials they had brought along, providing them indelible memories of this brilliant, creative man.

I've had so many wonderful experiences with Al at APA, as I'm sure many of you have also. Whenever I asked him to contribute to the program he always said yes. No special requirements, no strings, no hesitation, just a willingness to talk about his favorite subject—psychology—and interact with psychologists. I have never organized a session at APA with Al in which there were any empty seats in the room.

Al was a true original, unique, unusual, outspoken, with a no-nonsense approach to therapy and life, blunt, direct, famed for his colorful language, and by the faces of high enjoyment I have seen in the audiences of all these APA sessions over the years, I would have nominated him as our profession's most popular psychologist!

We'll not see his like again. He was my friend, and I will miss him always.

Al is survived by his widow, Debbie Joffe Ellis. Their time together was a great love story for the final years of his life.

Frank Farley
President-Elect, Division 46

Social Interactions in Cyberspace

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that their actual personality “leaked through” their play-acting. There was no evidence of greater or lesser success in role-playing or in leakage in one medium than another. In a second role-playing study, men in one condition were instructed to try to chat as if they were a woman and women as if they were a man. For obvious reasons, this study could be done in only one medium. In other conditions, participants were fully anonymous or their gender was correctly specified. The data indicated that, the gender of partners in the anonymous condition could not accurately be identified and that the actors had only marginal success at playing the opposite gender. The content of conversations and the personality ratings of partners (except for judged masculinity and femininity) when their gender was known and when it was not differed surprisingly little. Awareness of gender, which is so significant a factor in face-to-face social interaction, seemed to have little role in online interaction. This design, by examining gender role-playing, permitted us to study gender stereotypes in a different way from previous studies. It was clear that both in enacting and trying to detect gender interests and activities, e.g., sports for men, figured at least as prominently as personality traits, e.g., agreeableness. In a follow-up study, the texts of anonymous conversations were rated on trait scales and for likability by participants under experimentally manipulated ethnicity by gender designations. That is, the raters were told, for example, that the conversation they were about to read was between a male African-American and a male Asian-American student. The point of the study was not the content of their descriptions, but rather the degree to which judgments were affected by the gender and ethnicity information. The results indicate quite clearly that the individuating information conveyed by the conversation was the most important influence on trait ratings and liking. Except for the two traits, masculine and feminine, gender was less influential and ethnicity, though producing significant effects, was least influential of all. In sum, the biasing effect of gender and ethnicity on impressions of targets engaged in online conversations was detectable but minor.

Two media, face to face and chat line, were contrasted in the next study in which, as usual, two participants became acquainted in either a 20- or 35-minute conversation. The results indicated quite clearly that participants liked each other more, reported being more self-disclosing and felt they got to know their partners better face to face than online. The results did not vary as a function of the length of the conversation. There was no evidence that public self-awareness, the concern with how one is regarded by partner, was greater in one medium than the other, though there was some indication that private self-awareness, sensitivity to one’s own states, was greater online. This line of research inevitably segued into studies involving online dating. Two have progressed far enough to report results. In one, we studied how the components of online profiles (photos, free description, fixed categories) contribute to judgments of attractiveness. Photos have the greatest influence, but the free descriptions also figure importantly; the fixed categories are more or less irrelevant. The free descriptions figure most in ratings of psychological characteristics like extraversion, masculinity and femininity, or warmth. In general, to be attractive, the profile must contain a reasonably attractive picture. If that is the case, the free response becomes significant; but it cannot do the job alone. The key role of the photograph is as true for the male as for the female profiles. In addition, for male judges ratings

of extraversion, femininity (positive) and masculinity (negative) are significantly associated with attractiveness. The results for female judges are only of marginal strength.

In the second study, the particular focus was on older users of an online dating service. The central question is whether what older (60 and above) people are seeking and offering differs from that of younger users. The sample consisted of men and women in four age ranges (20–34, 40–54, 60–74, and 75 and older) drawn from three different regions of the United States. In general, hypotheses derived from evolutionary psychology were supported. For example, men at all ages sought women younger than themselves; indeed, the gap increased with age. However, while younger women, as expected, sought older men, women above 75 sought slightly younger men, an intrusion, we surmise, of demographic reality. Men more than women mention physical attractiveness as a quality sought and this is not a function of age. Men offer resources and status and women seek it, again equally at all ages. As predicted by theorizing on sexual selection, women are more selective than men in what they are seeking. This is true in all age ranges, but the subjects became significantly more selective with age. There are no data available to us on which profiles received responses—this is a study of self-presentation and partner search. The collection of data of this kind from substantial samples of the young–old and old–old are, it seems, unique.

We recognize the limitations of the data in each of these studies, but some general conclusions are tenable, as follows. First, the norms that have governed social behavior in our society for centuries still do—there is no reason to believe that we are in the midst of a social revolution. There are important effects of the Internet on the formation and maintenance of social networks, fewer, so far, on social behavior. The Internet provides in the opportunities for observing and playing at social interaction a new form of entertainment, while its role in mate selection seems more a means of shopping than buying. It is, we think, well to remember that we evolved as face to face and body to body communicators. Norms may eventually change but not so soon. Second, our data, among the first systematic, experimental evidence available, do not support the idea of the Internet as having special qualities as a laboratory for identity exploration. Further, the argument that the anonymity and low social presence of the Internet facilitates disclosure of the real self was likewise not supported. Indeed, social presence and greater bandwidth were associated with more liking, openness and sense of knowing one’s partner. Is the Internet a democratizing medium? Perhaps so. If individuating information is conveyed, gender and ethnic labels do not have strongly biasing effects, at least not among the university students we studied. There is evidence (in other data) that when communication is not anonymous, stereotyping is a force online as it is in other areas of social interaction. People seem by and large interested in preserving their own anonymity while wishing to know the identity of others.

Despite my skeptical attitude toward various claims about the revolutionary aspects of the internet, there can be no doubt that it is not merely a technology—it is a social environment that demands study in its own right. And, it provides unprecedented opportunities for social psychological experiments and observational studies that raise fewer questions about ecological validity than many of our efforts in the past. Right now, we are too often titillated by the anecdotal. That’s OK as long as we do not lose sight of the fact that there is a lot of serious work to be done.



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Fax: (215) 204-6013
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Tampa, FL 33620-8200
Phone: (813) 974-2342
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3860 Sheridan St., Ste A
Hollywood, FL 33021
Phone: (954) 322-0348
Fax: (954) 322-0397
DrLEWalker@aol.com

Members-at-Large

Lawrence Balter, PhD
New York University
Department of
Applied Psychology
110 Bleecker Street, #28E
New York, NY 10012
Phone: (212) 473-4329
lawrence.balter@nyu.edu

Lillian Comas-Díaz, PhD
908 New Hampshire Ave. NW,
Suite 700
Washington, DC 20037
Phone: (202) 775-1938
cultura@starpower.net

Irene Deitch, PhD (05–07)
Oceanview-14B
31 Hylan Blvd.
Staten Island, NY 10305-2979
Phone: (718) 273-1441
Cell: (512) 626-1424
Office: (718) 273-1445
ProfID@aol.com

Lilli Friedland, PhD, ABPP
(05–07)
Executive Advisors
2080 Century Park East,
Suite 1403
Los Angeles, CA 90067
Phone: (310) 553-6445
Fax: (310) 553-3009
lillif@aol.com

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Mary Gregerson, PhD (06–08)
Director of Research
and Development
Family Therapy Institute
of Alexandria
220 S. Washington St.
Alexandria, VA 22314-3646
Voicemail: (703) 391-8661
oltowne@aol.com

Roger Klein, PhD (06–08)
Department of Psychology
in Education
University of Pittsburgh
5930 Posvar Hall
Pittsburgh, PA 15260
Phone: (412) 648-7043
Fax: (412) 624-7231
rklein@pitt.edu

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Director Media Psychology
Program, Fielding Graduate
University
1510 Heather Oaks Lane
Westlake Village, CA
91361-1541
Phone: (805) 495-0355
bluskin@Fielding.edu

Editorial Policies and Guidelines

Helen Friedman, PhD
7750 Clayton Road, Suite 210
St. Louis, MO 63117
Phone: (314) 781-4500
hfriedman5@earthlink.net

Ethics Committee

Kate Wachs, PhD
P.O. Box 5616
Chicago, IL 60680
Phone: (312) 203-0514
Fax: (312) 337-5781
doctorkate@aol.com

Fellows Committee

Alan D. Entin, PhD, ABPP
1805 Monument Ave
Suite 510
Richmond, VA 23220-7088
Phone: (804) 359-0109
adentin@earthlink.net

Historian

Fred Koenig, PhD
Rm. 220, Newcomb Hall
Tulane University
New Orleans, LA 70118
Phone: (504) 862-3006
Fax: (504) 865-5544
fkoenig@tulane.edu

The Media Watch Committee

Harriet T. Schultz, PhD
2524 Nottingham
Houston, TX 77005
Phone: (713) 528-3336
Fax: (713) 526-4342
htschultz@msn.com

Membership Committee

Frank Farley, PhD
213 Ritter Annex
Temple University
Philadelphia, PA 19122
Phone: (215) 204-6024
Fax: (215) 204-6013
frank.farley@comcast.net

News, Media, Public Education, Public Policy Committee

Elizabeth K. Carll, PhD
4 Bittersweet Court
Centerport, NY 11721
Phone: (631) 754-2424
Fax: (631) 754-5032
ecarll@optonline.net

Also Interactive Media Committee Chair; Federal Advocacy Coordinator

Newsletter *The Amplifier*

Executive Editor
Sharon Lamb, EdD
Department of Psychology
St. Michael's College
Colchester, VT 05439
Phone: (802) 985-2287
Fax: (802) 654-2610
slamb@smcvt.edu

Newsletter *The Amplifier*

Associate Editor
Jenny Whittemore Fremlin, MA
MetaPaint Communications
Design
319 Seward Street #2
Juneau, AK 99801
Phone: (907) 364-3402
jenny@metapaint.com

Student Committee

June Wilson, MA
1120 Clark Way
Palo Alto, CA 94304-2371
Phone: (650) 723-5353
juwilson@stanfordmed.org

Website and Listserv

Administrator
Richard Bedrosian, PhD
184 Otis Street
Northborough, MA 01532
Phone: (508) 393-5638
Fax: (508) 393-3671
rbedrosian@MySelfHelp.com

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The Amplifier is the official newsletter of APA Division 46, Media Psychology, and is published periodically throughout the year (Spring, Summer, Fall/Winter). Unsolicited contributions from members are welcomed and encouraged. Articles must be relevant to media psychology and should not have been published elsewhere. All submissions should be sent to Sharon Lamb, EdD (slamb@smcvt.edu), who will pass them on to the new editor after he or she is appointed. Submissions must be received by February 1 for Spring issue, May 15 for the Summer issue, and September 15 for the Fall/Winter double issue. Authors should ensure that their manuscripts comply with all APA publication and ethical guidelines.

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Thank you Dr. Sharon Lamb! Dr. Sharon Lamb's term with the *Amplifier* ends December 31, 2007, after outstanding contributions as Editor of the Division's only publication.

We now have an open search for a new editor, and if you might be interested please contact Frank Farley, President-Elect of the Division, at frank.farley@comcast.net.

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