GRE Is Not an Admission Screen

In response to “Prediction of Academic and Clinical Performance of Occupational Therapy Students in an Entry-Level Master’s Program” (AJOT, October 1997), I have criticism of the methodology. The use of the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) as a measure of potential performance in an entry-level master’s program is flawed by the very nature of such a program. By definition, an entry-level master’s program attracts the nontraditional student. Many of these students have been out of school for more than 10 years. The use of the GRE as an admission screen is inappropriate in these cases. If not corrected for, this study’s results are brought into question because of the use of an invalid measure for the study population. It would be appropriate to apply this study’s results only to those students who have been out of school for less than 10 years. An interesting demographic breakdown would be to look at any correlation between the length of time since graduation from the bachelor’s program and admission to the master’s program.

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Authors’ Response

Because Mr. Barry does not cite a source for his claim, we contacted Educational Testing Service via e-mail message. Their response was that scores that were more than 5 years old could not be considered valid (GRE agent 4, personal communication, October 15, 1997).

We are unaware of research that indicates that the GRE is not a valid predictor for students who have been out of school for several years, although there has been some evidence to suggest that regression equations that are based on different age groups may differ (e.g., House, 1989). In any event, Mr. Barry’s claim presupposes the answer to the very question that this study was intended to address, whether the GRE is a valid predictor of success for students in a master’s-level occupational therapy program. We found that it is.

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Reference


Confusion About Aides Versus COTAs

The main point of Gurman and Merton’s article, “The Issue Is—Applied Scientific Inquiry: An Answer to Managed Care’s Challenge?” (AJOT, September 1997) is that occupational therapy must do the research to prove that it is a skilled service with treatments that really work. This point has been made before, and who can argue with it? The authors’ suggestion that academic researchers enlist clinicians to help with this task is good, and their explanation of the six components of cost-effectiveness was informative and useful.

My concern is with the authors’ discussion of a group of persons variously referred to as “a trained technical aide,” “rehabilitation aide,” “multiskilled technicians and aides,” “technical aides,” and simply “aides.” Is that me you are talking about? Or do you really mean aide—and if you do, what about us COTAs? It particularly disturbs me that both authors work in my home state of New York where the Occupational Therapy Practice Act specifically prohibits aides from performing occupational therapy treatments. Misrepresentations like this are the best argument anyone could make for a COTA name change! We are technical-level practitioners; who are these “technical aides?”

Furthermore, I think the authors should have included COTAs among the clinicians who could be enlisted to collect data for applied research because our technical-level education prepares us to administer standardized assessments. The American Occupational Therapy Association has been making an effort over the past few years to reach out to COTAs, the profession’s so-called “minority group.” As part of this effort, AJOT articles of this type should address the role of the COTA as well as that of “therapists and aides.”

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Orthodox Practices Clarified

It is refreshing to see a renewed appreciation of the role of spirituality in occupational therapy, with both AJOT and its Canadian counterpart devoting full editions to the subject. Because many readers will be referring to these articles in the future, we would like to draw your attention to some problems in one recent study, “Jewish Spirituality Through Actions in Time” (AJOT, March 1997).

First, the wording of a statement on page 200 gives the impression that there are almost 6 million Orthodox Jews in the United States and more than 4 million in Israel. These figures actually represent the total number of Jews of all backgrounds living in these countries, of which Orthodox Jews comprise only a small fraction.

Second, a paragraph on page 205 gives the impression that the major denominations of Judaism share a belief that G-d’s will is “realized through fulfillment or avoidance of specific acts (mitzvot) that are understood . . . to constitute G-d’s law for the Jewish people or halakhah.” Actually, Reform Jews (who make up the majority of Jews in America) categorically reject the notion of halakhah, and one would be hard-pressed to find any non-Orthodox couple that lives a lifestyle centered around the fulfillment of mitzvot and the sancti-
fication of otherwise mundane daily activities such as eating, bathing, and sleeping.

The authors characterize one branch of Judaism as made up of ultra-Orthodox sects (p. 200), which, according to Webster's Dictionary, connotes exabyte, archaic, and extreme. This branch of Judaism is then compared with another group who the authors deem enlightened. Such language is inappropriate and insulting and is not in keeping with the American Psychological Association's guidelines that scientific reports should be written in a manner that is free of such implied evaluations.

Lastly, just to set the record straight, the Saturday "havdalah" ritual is actually called "havdalan." It takes place after sundown, not after the Sabbath. Most Orthodox Jews would be loath to have their place of worship called a "temple."

These are specific details that required clarification. It would be wrong to assume, however, that there are not more general problems with the study. There is an extensive body of literature (largely ignored by the authors) that deals with the value of rituals, particularly as they pertain to the therapeutic process. Unfortunately, this article does not represent one of the more useful contributions to this important area of research.

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Authors' Response

My coauthors and I thank Jessel and Weiss for the opportunity to correct an error on page 200 introduced during the copyediting stage. The original wording was: "There is considerable diversity among the Orthodox in the United States, where Jews number about 5,880,000, and in Israel, where Jews number about 4,335,200." Earlier we mentioned that Orthodox Jews represent about 10% of the American Jewry (p. 199) so that readers could calculate the number of Orthodox Jews if they wished.

We note with regret the contentious tone of the remaining points, which have little substantive relationship to the study and seem directed at eroding the credibility of the study. Although there is a body of literature on the value of rituals to the therapeutic process, that was not our topic. The purpose of the study was to examine how spirituality is constituted for a cohort of young Orthodox Jewish couples through specific deeds (mitzvot) commanded by God. The couples reported how participating in such occupations, shared by their partners and the wider religious community, contribute to their sense of a meaningful existence.

Jessel and Weiss's assertion that non-Orthodox Jews, who constitute the majority of Jews, do not believe in performing God's commandments (mitzvot) or following God's laws (halakhah) is peripheral to the merits of our study. Yet, it places an extremely inflammatory and divisive issue within the Jewish world before the readers of AJOT. Reading between the lines, it appears that Jessel and Weiss are concerned that our study misrepresents Orthodoxy and covertly slights or attacks the Haredim (Ultra-Orthodox).

The trustworthiness of our ethnography rests, first of all, upon the validation of the cohort of young Orthodox couples we studied. The couples we interviewed reviewed the manuscript, and their corrections and comments were incorporated in the published version. One of the coauthors, Shonna Tropper, a member of the community we studied, was a key resource in facilitating access and establishing the credibility of our report. Although the article presents only a very basic introduction to Orthodox Jewish observance, it was further validated by an occupational therapist in another part of the country who wrote the following to us:

I read with great interest your article in the March AJOT about spirituality in young Orthodox couples. I imagine it will be quite an eye-opener for those unfamiliar with Orthodox practice....Congratulations on a well-presented, legitimate, informative, and relevant piece of research.

The terms modern Orthodox and an enlightened Orthodoxy are standard usage and basically interchangeable in the United States. The word enlightened is not a value judgment but refers to an Orthodoxy that has adapted to modernity, that is, Western European culture since the Enlightenment. The term sect, according to Webster's, denotes only "a group of people having a common leadership, set of opinions, philosophical doctrine, etc." Although the term Ultra-Orthodox is also common usage, we could perhaps have benefited from Jessel and Weiss suggesting a more appropriate term. Does our text give any reason to think that the Ultra-Orthodox are excessive or fanatical?

At stake is the role of spirituality in occupational therapy—terms not only of practice, but also in research and professional relations. We agree that it is refreshing to see a renewed appreciation of the role of spirituality and are grateful to the guest editors Suzanne M. Peloquin and Charles Christiansen for the opportunity to contribute a Jewish perspective to the special issue on Occupation, Spirituality, and Life Meaning. I believe that our efforts must be aimed toward opening doors through which God at any time might enter. I would also like to leave readers of AJOT with the following view of Jewish spirituality, translating from a traditional Hebrew song, Hinei ma tov uma naim shevet achim gam yahad. "How good and pleasant it is for brothers to sit together as one."

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