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K. WARNER SCHAIE  
*University of Southern California*

PAUL B. BALTES  
*Pennsylvania State University*

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Requests for copies of this Comment should be sent to K. Warner Schaie, Andrus Gerontology Center, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California 90007. We also thank Robert L. Burgess, Richard M. Lerner, Lynn S. Liben, and John R. Nesselroade for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

### Condensation Is Irresistible

Condensing Tyson's (May 1977) comment on condensed writing is irresistible:

One can't blame authors who are allowed over 16 pages; it's only natural to let thoughts wander. However, printing, paper, and reader's time are expensive. Perhaps Freud and Munsterberg would each deserve 16 pages of *American Psychologist*, but most

psychologists don't. Condensed writing is difficult but considerate; it should be required. Most recent *American Psychologist* articles could have been improved by cutting them in half.

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RICHARD W. SROGES  
1465 Annunciation Street  
New Orleans, Louisiana 70130

### Clear and Precise Language

The "Guidelines for Nonsexist Language in APA Journals" (June 1977) is an admirable and important step in APA's attempt to enhance fair treatment for all people. However, this goal is only part of the larger goal of using clear and precise language to reflect clear and precise thinking. Some of the examples should have been chosen with greater care.

Example 1 ("The *client* is usually the best judge of the value of *his* counseling.") is followed by an alternative: "The *client* is usually the best judge of the value of counseling." This alternative may indeed eliminate the biased sexual referent, but it also changes the statement's meaning (or, at least, its implication). In the example, the client is the best judge of his or her *own* counseling. In the alternative, it could be implied that the client is the best judge of the entire field of counseling. The latter statement is therefore not an "alternative," but rather it is a different statement.

Example 2 ("*Man's search* for knowledge has led *him* into ways of learning that bear examination.") ends with an unintentional double pun. Your alternative ("*The search* for knowledge has led us into ways of learning that bear examination.") keeps the pun. Neither statement tells the reader whether *that* examination (That one! The one over there! The one for bears!) is learned *by* the bear him- or herself,

or whether it is learned in order to examine the bear. In addition, the phrase "to bear examination" is a somewhat pompous cliché.

Example 4 ("The use of experiments in psychology presupposes the mechanistic nature of *man*.") is not made less objectionable by substituting *human being* for *man*. The statement uses abstractions to the point of obscurity. What, for example, does "mechanistic" mean here? Does it mean that human beings are machinelike in their inner workings? Or does it refer to the mechanistic theory that all phenomena can ultimately be explained in terms of physics and chemistry?

These three examples and their alternatives seem to reflect the authors' bias in favor of sexual equality but against clear thinking. Why can't we have both? Particularly in a field such as psychology, where our ideas are intricate, we must be doubly careful to make our language precise.

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SANDER MARCUS  
9772 S. Vanderpoel  
Chicago, Illinois 60643

### Psychological Round Table in the 1960s

Benjamin's (July 1977) article on the first 15 years of the Psychological Round Table is a valuable beginning for a history of that intriguing organization. I'd like to add a few personal impressions of PRT in the 1960s.

In the 1960s, it was still "secret." The officers ("secret six" or "oligarchs") were unknown to us. One was instructed not to list PRT on a resume or as an "expense," to keep secret the existence of the organization and, apparently, to not even tell

anyone where one was going when attending a meeting. Although viewing itself as of the "best and the brightest," its selection procedures were also secret from the members. As earlier, one might not be invited back if one did not "fit in" (intellectually? socially?), or at least we were told so. Social, clinical, and applied psychologists, even of the experimental variety, seemed absent, and as I recall, there was a rather high proportion of members from a few departments, particularly Harvard, Princeton, Penn, and McMaster.

Benjamin refers to the Hunt Memorial Lectures as "scatological," "humorous," and "satirical," and as an "instrument for fun and relaxation." In my time, although these descriptions might still apply, the visual content was almost entirely slides and films of women undressed or undressing. Breasts were a dominant theme, although if I recall correctly, various sexual activities became more common in later years. To the extent that one can distinguish erotica from pornography, the material was usually on the latter end of the dimension. If it's not too fine a distinction, it was more like the contemporary *Hustler* than *Penthouse* and very far away from Ginsberg's *Eros*.

Benjamin's description of the "informal," "humorous," and "lively" nature of the meetings was still applicable in my years. My memory, however, is that serious fundamental criticism was much rarer than at, for example, a meeting of the (British) Physiological Society, the Neuroscience Society, or even most department colloquia I've attended.

In the late 1960s, many of my friends and I stopped going to the meetings, on the grounds of the elitist, sexist, antidemocratic, secret, etc., nature of the organization, but most of us never succeeded in communicating our concerns to the officers or membership. Finally, in 1974 I returned (with Naomi Weisstein) in order to raise these issues in an open meeting. By this time, the organiza-

tion had changed, at least superficially. A number of women were present, the officers were public although still self-perpetuating, we were asked for suggestions for new members, a wider range of departments was represented, and the scientific sessions seemed much better, although still informal. The Hunt Lectures continued, but male genitalia were added.

The organization has very extensive archives, and perhaps their study might be valuable. The analysis of the membership's subsequent role in grant-awarding committees, editorial boards, and open organizations could be instructive. PRT may be of interest not only to the historian of American psychology but perhaps to the sociologist of science or even of American society.

I almost forgot: The gavel was a brass penis.

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CHARLES G. GROSS  
*Princeton University*

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#### *Fin de Siècle*

Most of us will witness the turning of the year 2000. It promises the unusual excitement of the end of a century and of a millennium. Psychologists might well begin to plan now for fascinating events likely to precede this event. The material that follows is a brief introduction to possible trends in behavior and to the literature on ends of centuries and millennia.

*Fin de siècle* (end of the century) madness was widely reported and discussed in the 1880s and 1890s. Its emphasis was on despair and degeneracy. Nordau (1893) analyzed *fin*

*de siècle* madness as an intellectual state of grim humor, a feeling of impending doom, and an odd confusion of hectic restlessness. Its impetus, he claimed, was with the young and impressionable. Similarly, Millward (1955) saw artists and youths as passive participants in a general weariness and corruption. This was an era influenced by Wagner's music and Schopenhauer's pessimistic philosophy.

But as the turn of the last century drew near, optimism began to hold sway. It was time to inventory the accomplishments of the 19th century and to glory in the promise of the 20th. Consider Alfred Russell Wallace's (1898) *The Wonderful Century*: He believed his century had produced more inventions (e.g., railways, steam navigation, telephone, photography, electric lighting, antiseptics) than all the previous centuries combined (e.g., telescopes, printing press, alphabetic writing). The assumption was, of course, that progress would continue its rapid growth.

It appears now that as the tide turned away from pessimism, writers could at least find solace in the advances of humankind from a more primitive state (Shelton, 1892). Faint optimism grew into fanciful thinking. In a magazine article entitled "The Time-Spirit of the Twentieth Century" (Bisland, 1901), readers were led to hope that progress might even bring "some thought undreamed of, some new and happier guess at the great central truth which forever allures and forever eludes our grasp" (p. 22).

The millennium may be of even greater portent. The advent of the first chiliad, or 1,000 years, of our western system is often described as an era of numb terror, of waiting for the final cataclysm of the Apocalypse and the millennial reign of Satan. Hope for a second coming has persisted in various millenarian sects (Cohn, 1970). If there is a revival of chiliastic prophecies in the next decades, it may be expected to flourish against a background of dis-