SIOP Presidential Biography
Angelo S. DeNisi

As I sit down to write this biography I am reminded of how unlikely it is that I would ever have been elected as president of SIOP. I was born in the Bronx – a few blocks from Yankee Stadium actually – in a fifth floor walk-up apartment. My mother had dropped out of high school to get a job (and because she spent too much time at the Paramount watching Frank Sinatra), and my father, who did graduate high school, worked as a book binder in Manhattan. My grandparents had all been born in small villages in the mountains east of Naples, and, now that things were going a little bit better, everyone believed that education was the ticket to the future. Unfortunately, there weren't a lot of role models for how to get a real education, or what to do with it later.

Public schools in the South Bronx were rough places even back in the 50s, and so my parents thought I should go to parochial school. I began at Our Lady of Pity and, after we moved further north in the Bronx (not far from Bronx Zoo), I transferred to St. Dominic. I'm not sure the education I received was that great, but the good sisters at St. Dominic surely didn't shy away from disciplining their students with a slap to the face or a ruler to the knuckles. It turned out that I was pretty good in school, which was fortunate because I wasn't very athletic, and I was rather small in a setting where status was based on who you could beat in a fight – needless to say, I had little status on this dimension.

As I got ready to graduate from elementary school, I was seen to take a special admissions test to see if I qualified to enter the Bronx High School of Science. This is considered one of the finest high schools in the country and they are very selective. Somehow, I was admitted but, always a great decision maker, I turned them down because it sounded dull and I wouldn't have any friends there. Who knows how things would have turned out had I chosen to attend Bronx Science, and every now and then, I kick myself for my short sightedness. Instead, I went to Cardinal Spellman High School (I actually believe that I must have overlapped with Justice Sotomayor), which was a very good school and one where the Christian brothers continued the same legacy of physical discipline that I had experienced in grammar school. Of course the brothers were generally bigger and so were we, so they hit much harder. I graduated after an undistinguished 4 years, applied to a few colleges, was accepted in some of them, but had to make a decision based on finances. My family really could not afford NYU or Fordham, so I went to Herbert H. Lehman College of the City University of New York – back then, it was free if you lived in New York City.

I began wanting to be a history major, until I took a specialized seminar on the French Revolution and realized that that I loved history in broad strokes but found some of the details boring. I gave some serious thought to majoring in theatre, especially after I received a standing ovation for my final exam (a scene from a Jules Feiffer play) in my acting class. I was exposed to a great deal of literature, took courses on Marxism and the works of Herman Hesse (it WAS the early 70s after all), and minored in economics. But I had also become interested in psychology and became a psychology major. I even took a course titled "Industrial Psychology," which used a book by some man named James Naylor. I did well in college and worked part time in soda fountain-luncheonette in the Bronx, where I also held the money for the local loan shark. Very few of my friends went to college, and I became quite an oddity in my neighborhood, albeit an entertaining one.

When the time came to graduate from college I had to give serious thought to what I would do next. I went to my advisor (Prof. Beverly D'Angelo), who told me that I should think about a PhD. I laughed of course, but eventually, she persuaded me I should apply to schools that gave the largest number of degrees in industrial psychology. I applied to Berkeley, NYU, and Purdue, was accepted at all three, but was offered a concrete financial aid package at Purdue. I had no idea what life was like in Indiana (I barely knew where the state was), but I did a little research and learned that a lot of the people I had read about in my course actually taught at Purdue. This included Jim Naylor himself, and another man, whose name was all over the textbook – Ernest McCormick. This was great because the assistantship I was offered would be working with Prof. McCormick on some project involving the Position Analysis Questionnaire or PAQ (whatever that was!). So I set off for West Lafayette, Indiana and it was a new world for me. Not only had I never been in the Midwest (or almost anywhere else for that matter), but the whole graduate school, experience was unlike anything I had experienced. In addition to McCormick, the other active industrial psychologists were Bob Pritchard and Dan Ilgen, and Joseph Tiffin was still roaming the halls. I took a one year course in Analysis of Variance from Ben Winer, and advanced selection methods from Hubert Brogden, as well as social psychology courses from the likes of Bob Baron, Donn Byrne, and Kay Deaux. I also took courses in Industrial Relations at the Krannert School of Business across the street. I worked on the PAQ project for all 4 years I was at Purdue, but, when it came time to come up with a dissertation project, I had decided that I wanted to do something that was really mine. So I developed this proposal about rater decision making during the appraisal process. I finished my degree in 1977, so, while I was developing these ideas, there was no Landy and Farr paper outlining how one could approach a problem such as this. I devised a very elaborate lab study to test the model I proposed. Unfortunately, I was really not ready to take on such tasks on my own. My model was weak and my results weaker and, although I received my PhD, I was never able to publish anything from my dissertation.

I had never been treated the way I was in graduate school. I was treated as a colleague whose opinion mattered, and I was treated with respect (even though I thought I was just some smart-ass kid from the Bronx). When I began at Purdue I

thought I wanted to work in industry (probably AT&T) and return to New York, but I changed my mind over time, and eventually decided to try to get a job in academia. I had taken serious note of how the faculty spent their time and I thought it would be great to get paid to talk about research, teach (remember, I had originally wanted to be an actor), and think deep thoughts. Bob (Pritchard) and Dan (Ilgen) did point out that there was this issue about publishing research in order to keep your job, but I would worry about that later. In the short run, I also came to realize that I could be paid a lot more for teaching essentially the same things if I took a job in a business school rather than in a psychology department, so I applied for jobs in business. I applied to lots of schools, got a few interviews, and even got a few offers (one was from the Krannert School at Purdue), but I went to Kent State University to begin my academic career as a faculty member in Management. I stayed there for 2 years and then moved to the University of South Carolina where I remained fro the next 10 years.

While I was at South Carolina, I got involved with Bruce Meglino (also in Management) and Tom Cafferty (from Psychology), and we began discussing some ideas about rater cognitive processes and performance appraisal. We also had two students who were interested in this work -- Kevin Williams and Al Blencoe – and together, we developed a clearer model of some of these processes (thanks also to the fact that the Landy and Farr paper had been published, as had Jack Feldman's model in JAP). We started designing some experiments and with Tom Cafferty's amazing grasp of the social cognition literature, we submitted a grant proposal to NSF which was actually funded – much to everyone's surprise.

By this point, I had begun getting involved in Division 14 (there was still no SIOP) as well as with the Academy of Management. My involvement was not very exciting and was limited to reviewing papers and serving on a few committees. I had also begun reviewing for a few journals, and my career was just humming along. When the time came to leave South Carolina I left some great friends, as well as an ex-wife and two children. In addition to Al Blencoe and Kevin Williams, I was able to work with a number of other PhD students including Ray Bagby, Trish McDougall, Tina Robbins, Joe Czjaka and Julio DeCastro. I had been serving on the editorial boards for AMR, AMJ, and later JAP. I was a Fellow of APA, a full professor, and I was returning (almost) home to Rutgers University in New Jersey.

During my time at Rutgers, I served as chair of a few SIOP committees, was named the editor of AMJ, I had received a second NSF grant, and I was asked to write a book about my research program by Shelly Zedeck. I also had the opportunity to work with another PhD student with whom I have remained friends, Arup Varma. More importantly though, I also met Adrienne Colella while I was there, and we have been married for almost 20 years.

Rutgers was a great place for living, but the University was a problem. I worked in the School of Management and Labor Relations and the people there were both great to be around, a very supportive, but there were issues at the higher levels of administration. The faculty there was unionized, which made life interesting, and

the University itself was VERY political, and so Adrienne and I moved to Texas A&M University. This was the best place to work I had ever been, with incredible colleagues and friends such as Ricky Griffin, Don Hellriegel, Javier Jimeno, Mike Putsay, Bert Cannella, and Mike Hitt, and later folks such as Christopher Porter, Mike Wesson, Cindy Devers, and Elizabeth Umphress. But despite the people and the school, living in small-town Texas was a bit of a stretch for us. My research had tapered off as I took on the task of Department Head, but I still managed to get some work done. I also managed to work with more great students including Jorge Gonzalez, Todd Dewett, Shung Jae Kim, Carrie Belsito, and Soo Min Toh, with whom I have worked the longest. I also worked with two PhD students from Spain, Alvaro Lopez Cabrales and Mirta Diaz Fernandez.

Over the years, my research interests changed. When I first started, I was very opportunistic and didn't think much about programmatic research. I recall discussing a possible study with George Stevens, who was the first student whose dissertation I supervised, and focusing on the fact that I thought we could do it and get it published, rather than how it might make a contribution. Once I got involved with Bruce and Tom and the NSF-sponsored work on performance appraisals, things changed. This was a case where we had literally laid out a program of research and mapped how we could build upon each previous study to try to really say something about cognitive processes involved in performance appraisal.

While I was at Rutgers, I met the next important individual for my professional development – Avi (Avraham) Kluger. Avi was an Israeli who had just received his PhD in I-O Psychology, and he had done his dissertation on the topic of feedback. He had conducted several experiments as part of his dissertation and he repeatedly found that individuals who received performance feedback performed WORSE on subsequent tasks than did people who received no feedback. Avi submitted papers to all the major journals, and he and I talked a lot about the reviewer reactions to his papers. Basically, everyone said the same thing – we all know that feedback works and so if you found something else, it means you must have done something wrong. They posed many alternative explanations, all of which Avi tried to address in more and more experiments, but none of the issues raised by the reviewers seemed to matter. Regardless of the sign of the feedback or the timing or just about anything else, people with no feedback out-performed people who had received feedback on earlier trials. And, of course the response from reviewers and Editors was the same. They all accepted feedback effectiveness as a given, and so there was clearly something wrong with Avi's research (although no one knew what).

We talked more and more about this and what could be done to combat the prevailing view. Most of the critical ideas were Avi's. My major role was to react, clarify Avi's thinking, and try to express some ideas more clearly, but the real heart of the matter was pure Avi. As a result of great deal of time and effort, we finally published a paper on feedback in Psychological Bulletin. The paper, which is the most cited and the most recognized by awards of any paper I have ever published, clearly demonstrated that feedback was NEVER as universally effective as we had

been led to believe. In the 50's, a paper by Ammons, selectively reviewed the earlier literature on feedback, simply ignoring the papers or studies that did not support his position, and concluded that feedback worked. For more than the next 50 years, no one bothered to go back and read the original studies, and most scholars started from the position suggested by Ammons that feedback worked. There were actually cases where a study contained three experiments – one supporting feedback effectiveness and the other two finding that feedback was a problem – where Ammons reviewed only the one study that supported feedback effectiveness. Anyway, we conducted a meta-analysis, proposed a theory of feedback effectiveness (which we terms Feedback Intervention Theory), and published the paper. Not only am I proud of the paper and my relationship with Avi (which continues to this day), I always point to this story as an example of how scientific method doesn't always operate the way it is supposed to, and how we should question assumptions whenever possible.

As I noted earlier, I worked with a number of PhD students while I was at Texas A&M, but I continue to work with one of them, Soo Min Toh. Soo Min is from Singapore and was interested in expatriate managers. However, as a Singaporean, she had a somewhat different perspective on the issue. She didn't understand why an expat manager, coming from the U.S. or Australia should be paid more and given all these extra benefits, relative to a local Singaporean, even though the local employee may have been trained and educated in the same school, with the same degree as the expat. We worked together on several papers, we continue to collaborate, and I have begun working with other students on some of the ideas that came out of my work with Soo Min.

But, at some point during my time at Texas A&M something else significant happened -- I was elected to be president of SIOP. I had been involved in the governance of SIOP by that point, so I felt qualified from a purely administrative perspective, but I didn't feel as though I was of the same stature as my predecessors in that office. This feeing was made especially salient when, at the end of my year as President, I had to give my Presidential Address. It is extremely humbling, as well as just terrifying to think about that talk. There are no only a few thousand people there, but, in that audience are the true luminaries of SIOP. I focused on three PhD students from Texas A&M, who were sitting in front of me, and I ended in a daze, but I made it.

My address focused on challenges to our field. I was concerned about how Psychology Departments were forcing out many I-O psychologists, while Business Schools were luring away others. I think that people thought these issues were important then, but I have found that, with each passing year, there is a growing awareness of how important these issues really are for the future of I-O psychology and SIOP. During my term as president, I also tried to move us a bit closer to APA and revived SIOP's interest in licensing for I-O psychologists. I wanted to impress upon our members that there was something wrong with a situation where many of our members could not legally practice what they were trained to do, while other

types of psychologists, who could become licensed, were free to set themselves up as experts. I'm not sure I solved anything but I think I at least roused some of our members to confront some of the real challenges that faced SIOP and I-O psychology.

Near the end of my time at Texas A&M I learned that I had won another election – I had been elected president of the Academy of Management. It seems that only one other person had ever been elected both, president of SIOP and president of the Academy, and that was Lyman Porter. Actually, Porter predicted that I would be the second, and we bet a dollar on the outcome. It was the best dollar I ever spent when I had to pay off on the bet! Serving as president of the Academy is a much different experience than it as at SIOP. All SIOP members, whether they work in academia, industry or consulting, all share a common training model. We all read the same literature, took many of the same courses, and most of us come from the same schools, or at least know someone else who went to the same school. The Academy brings together scholars (VERY few practice folks) from Strategy and Organizational Theory, along with people from OB and HR, so the diversity of training, interests and even judgments about the best places to publish research are much more diverse in the Academy. In some ways, this represents a real learning experience for an I-O psychologist, but it also presents unique challenges to leadership.

All of which brings me to the present. As I write this, I am serving my fifth year as dean of the A.B. Freeman School of Business at Tulane University in New Orleans. My oldest daughter (Jessica) is working as a tax attorney here in New Orleans. My youngest daughter (Rebecca) is an accountant in South Carolina. All is good and we love living in New Orleans, so here we will stay, even though next year will probably be my last year as dean, and my term in the leadership of the Academy will end later this year as well. I began my job here just before Katrina hit, and I led the Freeman School through the crises following Katrina, into the daylight before the financial crunch of 2008-2009 and now, hopefully, to better days. I have learned that, it is one thing to read about or even write about leadership, motivation or performance management, but it is quite a different thing to practice those ideas on a group of faculty and run a medium sized business. A lot of it has been fun but a lot of it has been frustrating. I guess I'm really ready to going back to where I started – as a management professor.

It is interesting to step back and realize how much time has passed. This past year, Adrienne, my wife, was elected the president of SIOP (we are now the third "Presidential couple in SIOP's history), and I am extremely proud of her accomplishments. But she keeps reminding me that many of the people on the present Executive Board don't even know who I am. How quickly they forget! The truth is that I have done what I could and it is time for others to step up and assume the leadership of SIOP. I feel extremely blessed and honored to have served as the SIOP president and I will remain always, a loyal member, but I still have to wonder some times, how did a kid from the Bronx get in this position?