

In Memoriam:

Sue White, Ph.D. (1945- 2025)

Leader, Advocate, Clinician, Administrator



Leader, Advocate, Clinician, Administrator

By Terry Stancin, Ph.D., ABPP and Michael C. Roberts, Ph.D., ABPP

Sue White, Ph.D., was a leader who did much in building the strong field and the flagship organization of the Society of Pediatric Psychology (SPP) existing today. She contributed through her exceptional organizational skills, dedication and diligence, clinical and personal experiences. She was a caring advocate for children and families, with her scholarship and clinical work. She was supportive of her colleagues and supervisees with whom she was insightful, sensitive, and wryly humorous.

Dr. White graduated with her Ph.D. from Memphis State University and interned at Tennessee Medical Center in Memphis. As with many early pediatric psychologists, she entered the field with a background in developmental psychology, working with children with developmental disabilities. She then received additional clinical supervision to be licensed as a practitioner.

She subsequently served as the Division Head of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at MetroHealth Medical Center and held a tenured position as Associate Professor at Case Western Reserve University. She retired in 2011 after serving at MetroHealth for 33 years where she combined clinical care, research, and teaching in remarkable ways.

When elected Secretary/Treasurer of SPP in 1984, Dr. White moved to separate the two positions because the workloads for each were getting too much for one person and formalized the position descriptions. She retained the position as Treasurer and moved the still-fledgling organization from a shoebox record system to more streamlined accounting and membership database. Then, as President of SPP, she organized the celebration for the 21st birthday of SPP, "Coming of Age in New Orleans" in 1989 with commemorative tee-shirts and keychains. She hosted the river cruise for SPP on the Mississippi River. Her presidential address that year was reflecting on "A Developmental History of the Society of Pediatric Psychology" later published in the *Journal of Pediatric Psychology (JPP)* (White, 1991). In the article, she used a developmental approach to describing significant milestones in the field and organization from before 1968 to 1989. She concluded with a thank you to "the many individuals who have worked so hard in all these years to provide this wonderful organization the fiscal soundness to pursue those issues of training, research, service, and professional growth which each of us need on a daily basis as we serve the children and their families who are in particular need of our expertise" (p. 409). (The article is available on the SPP History webpage: <https://pedpsych.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/developmental.pdf>)

One of her earliest publications was in JPP in which she reported on posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) presenting in a mother of a child with bilateral arm amputation (White, 1991). She emphasized that health care professionals need to be alert to PTSD potentially developing in caregivers that might affect treatment of victims (secondary or vicarious trauma).

Later she partnered to assess pediatric psychologists' perceptions of work settings, professional activities, and workloads. Drotar, Sturm, Eckerle and White (1993) reported overall satisfaction by the respondents: "Highest ranked sources of satisfaction included professional autonomy, patient care, and relationships with colleagues. Highest ranked sources of dissatisfaction included lack of time for research, salary, and patient care work load" (p. 237).

As a major thrust of her scholarship, Dr. White developed an exceptional reputation in pioneering in a conceptual framework and methods for assessing, interviewing, and treatment victims of child sexual abuse. In particular, her research and clinical work on using anatomically correct dolls was critically important at a time when children's reports were dismissed and/or clumsy interviewers further abused vulnerable children. In the initial research study by White, Strom, Santilli, and Halpin (1986) examined how children interacted with the anatomical dolls. They found that children who had not been referred for suspected sexual abuse demonstrated few behaviors indicative of abuse, whereas the

children who had been clinically referred exhibited significantly higher rates of sexually related behaviors when interacting with the dolls.

Dr. White and colleagues subsequently contributed significantly to the empirical and clinical literature on anatomically detailed dolls in child sexual abuse investigations (Koocher, Goodman, White, Friedrich, & Reynolds, 1995; Quinn, White, & Santilli, 1989; White, 1988, 1990, 1991, 1993; White & Santilli, 1988; White & Quinn, 1988). She also presented at conferences and workshops for both legal and mental health professionals on the use of anatomical dolls and appropriate interview approaches for children. Her work influenced practices and policy in the interface of the professions. She later pioneered clinical work with juvenile fire setters.

Dr. Terry Stancin, professional colleague at MetroHealth, remembers, “Sue and I co-chaired the very first stand-alone regional SPP meeting in Cleveland, Ohio in 1987—a milestone for our Society. She later took on the role of Historian, possibly the first person to do so for SPP. Importantly, Sue was a memorable teacher. She supervised generations of Case Western Reserve University psychology students, many of whom carry forward her influence today. She left behind not only an impressive professional legacy, but also friendships and fond memories among those who knew and worked with her.”

Dr. Michael Roberts recalls, “Many of us who knew and worked with Sue White not only recognized her many talents and contributions, but also her modesty. She carried herself with a professionalism and a caring nature.” Dr. Kristin Riekert recollects, “She was the toughest and most exacting supervisor I ever had, and I was blessed to have many amazing supervisors, including Terry [Stancin] and Denny Drotar. I learned immensely from her and appreciated her wry humor and candor.” Dr. Gerry Koocher remembers, “Sue was a dedicated, self-effacing, and tireless advocate for SPP (and ped psych), but stood out most in my mind as a teacher and mentor to many. I’d add that she was an avid birder (aviculturist) and lived at the edge of the Western Reserve enjoying birds for many years.”

More specifically, after retirement, Dr. White devoted her enormous energy and knowledge to volunteering at the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, introducing children to nature and wildlife. As an enthusiastic long-distance cyclist, she also worked with youngsters in learning safe bicycling skills through the Cycling School in the Cleveland/Akron area. Other cherished hobbies included playing the piano, ice-skating, and photography.

In her SPP Presidential address and article (1991), Sue White thanked those who came before for their hard work in establishing and expanding the field. So, too, pediatric psychologists of today can thank her for advancing the field and her impact in serving “the children and their families who are in particular need of our expertise.”

<https://obits.cleveland.com/us/obituaries/cleveland/name/carol-white-obituary?id=59634359>

Sue White: List of Publications

Bourne, R., Newberger, E. H., & White, C. S. (1991). Mandated child abuse reporting. *Ethics & Behavior*, 1(2), 145-153. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327019eb0102_6

Corwin, D. L., Berliner, L., Goodman, G., Goodwin, J., & White, S. (1987). Child sexual abuse and custody disputes: No easy answers. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 2(1), 91. <https://doi.org/10.1177/088626087002001006>

Drotar, D., Sturm, L., Eckerle, D., & White, S. (1993). Pediatric psychologists' perceptions of their work settings. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, 18(2), 237-248. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jpepsy/18.2.237>

Koocher, G. P., Goodman, G. S., White, C. S., Friedrich, W. N., & al, e. (1996). Psychological science and the use of anatomically detailed dolls in child sexual-abuse assessments. *Annual Progress in Child Psychiatry & Child Development*, , 367. <https://www2.lib.ku.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/psychological-science-use-anatomically-detailed/docview/619063103/se-2>

Koocher, G. P., Goodman, G. S., White, C. S., Friedrich, W. N., Sivan, A. B., & Reynolds, C. R. (1995). Psychological science and the use of anatomically detailed dolls in child sexual-abuse assessments. *Psychological Bulletin*, 118(2), 199. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.118.2.199>

Quinn, K. M., White, S., & Santilli, G. (1989). Influences of an interviewer's behaviors in child sexual abuse investigations. *Bulletin of the American Academy of Psychiatry & the Law*, 17(1), 45. <https://www2.lib.ku.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/influences-interviewers-behaviors-child-sexual/docview/617624534/se-2>

White, S. (1988). Should investigatory use of anatomical dolls be defined by the courts? *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 3(4), 471. <https://doi.org/10.1177/088626088003004010>

White, S. (1990). Child sexual abuse: Legal, scientific, and clinical issues. In S. B. Morgan, & T. M. Okwumabua (Eds.), *Child and adolescent disorders: Developmental and health psychology perspectives* (pp. 303). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

- White, S. (1990). The investigatory interview with suspected victims of child sexual abuse. *Through the eyes of the child: Obtaining self-reports from children and adolescents* (pp. 368). Allyn & Bacon.
- White, S. (1991). A developmental history of the Society of Pediatric Psychology. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, *16*(4), 395-410.
- White, S. (1991). Hidden posttraumatic stress disorder in the mother of a boy with traumatic limb amputation. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, *16*(1), 103-115. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jpepsy/16.1.103>
- White, S. (1993). Assessing child sexual abuse allegations in custody disputes. In L. VandeCreek, S. Knapp & T. L. Jackson (Eds.), *Innovations in clinical practice: A source book, Vol. 12* (pp. 15). Professional Resource Press/Professional Resource Exchange.
- White, S. (2000). Using anatomically detailed dolls in interviewing preschoolers. In K. Gitlin-Weiner, A. Sandgrund & C. Schaefer (Eds.), *Play diagnosis and assessment (2nd ed.)* (2nd ed. ed., pp. 210-227, 775 Pages). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- White, S., & Edelstein, B. (1991). Behavioral assessment and investigatory interviewing. *Behavioral Assessment*, *13*(3), 245.
<https://www2.lib.ku.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/behavioral-assessment-investigatory-interviewing/docview/618143733/se-2>
- White, S., Halpin, B. M., Strom, G. A., & Santilli, G. (1988). Behavioral comparisons of young sexually abused, neglected, and nonreferred children. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, *17*(1), 53-61. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15374424jccp1701_7
- White, S., & Santilli, G. (1988). A review of clinical practices and research data on anatomical dolls. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *3*(4), 430. <https://doi.org/10.1177/088626088003004006>
- White, S., Strom, G. A., Santilli, G., & Halpin, B. M. (1986). Interviewing young sexual abuse victims with anatomically correct dolls. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *10*(4), 519-529.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/0145-2134\(86\)90057-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/0145-2134(86)90057-8)
- White, S., & Quinn, K. M. (1988). Investigatory independence in child sexual abuse evaluations: Conceptual considerations. *Bulletin of the American Academy of Psychiatry & the Law*, *16*(3), 269.
<https://www2.lib.ku.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/investigatory-independence-child-sexual-abuse/docview/617701861/se-2>

APA Convention 1989
SPP chartered a paddle wheeler
on the Mississippi River for the
21st Birthday: "Coming of Age" in New Orleans
organized by SPP President Sue White



Sue White, Thomas Linscheid, Terry Stancin, Dennis Drotar

Great Lakes Pediatric Psychology Conference (Cincinnati, April 27, 2007)

SPP Progress Notes, Fall 2009, p. 3

Regional and National Conferences

By Sue White, Ph.D. and Terry Stancin, Ph.D.

While enjoying the SPP Social Hour at the 1986 APA Convention in Washington, D.C., several SPP members (Denny Drotar, Terry Stancin, Helen Cleminshaw, Sue White) began discussing the idea of regional conferences as a means of improving networking and collaboration, and providing a venue for students to meet established SPP members and present research in a supportive atmosphere. The first SPP Regional Conference was held in Cleveland in 1987. The format included pre-meeting practice-oriented workshops, an invited keynote address, professional panel discussions, and research paper presentations. Tom Linscheid hosted the next regional meeting in Columbus in 1988. Since then, Great Lakes Regional Conferences (12 total) have been a highly valued venue for SPP members in the Midwest, alternating biannually with national Child Health Conferences. The regional conferences have been held mostly in the Midwest but also in the West (San Diego, San Francisco) and Southwest (Ft. Worth, New Orleans, Oklahoma City).

The University of Florida held the first "national" meetings for pediatric psychology in Gainesville (1988, 1989), followed by biennial meetings thereafter. Financial support for the conferences was primarily provided by the University, with relatively minimal support from SPP or other organizations. The Florida faculty and students, initially led by James Johnson and Suzanne Bennett Johnson (no relation), created a valuable venue and resource for the field. The conference was moved to Charleston, S.C. in 2004, back to Gainesville in 2006, and to Miami in 2008. A recent survey of SPP members revealed the extremely high value for holding a national conference.