Spielberger, Charles D.

Sumner Sydeman
Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, AZ, USA

Charles Donald Spielberger, Ph.D. (1927–2013), was a faculty member in the Department of Psychology at the University of South Florida for over 40 years (O’Roark et al. 2014). He was a clinical and community psychologist with research in the areas of: clinical and health psychology, behavioral medicine, assessment of emotions including anxiety, anger, curiosity, and depression; job stress; personality and learning; psychosocial risk factors associated with hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and cancer; cross-cultural research on emotion and personality; community psychology; and the assessment and treatment of test anxiety (O’Roark 2013). He died at the age of 86 from congestive heart failure and is survived by his wife Carol and son Nicholas (Morgan 2014).

Early Life and Educational Background

Spielberger was born on March 28, 1927. His grandparents had emigrated from Hungary to Arkansas in the nineteenth century. His parents moved when he and his younger sister Joyce were children to Atlanta, Georgia (O’Roark et al. 2014). Spielberger had originally planned on entering the family business (soft drinks). He enrolled at the Georgia Institute of Technology with a focus in chemistry. However, he enlisted in the Navy in 1945 (O’Roark et al. 2014). He completed active duty as a radio and electronics technician in 1945 and 1946 (Munsey 2010). After World War II, he remained in the Naval Reserve, retiring eventually in 1979 with the rank of Commander (Munsey 2010; O’Roark et al. 2014).

After completing his active duty in the Navy, Spielberger returned to Georgia Tech to complete his bachelor’s degree in chemistry in 1949. Later that year, Spielberger became a national field secretary for Alpha Epsilon Pi, his college fraternity. He received a scholarship to study psychology at the University of Iowa for his services, supervising a new chapter of his fraternity at Iowa (O’Roark et al. 2014). He earned his bachelor’s degree in psychology in 1951. He continued on for graduate education at Iowa; during his graduate studies, he took advantage of the GI bill to help fund his education and was funded as a research and teaching assistant through the Veteran’s Administration (VA trainee) and as a United States Public Health System (USPHS) Fellow (O’Roark et al. 2014). Spielberger completed his master’s degree in 1953 and his doctoral degree in 1954. Spielberger’s doctoral dissertation was chaired by Kenneth Spence at Iowa and examined anxiety and stuttering. During his time as a graduate student at Iowa, Spielberger served as
research assistant for other renowned psychologists including I.E. Farber, Judson Brown, and Grant Dahlstrom (O’Roark et al. 2014). He completed his predoctoral internship (USPHS) at the Worcester State Hospital in Massachusetts, during which time he received clinical supervision from psychologists associated with the renowned Boston Psychoanalytic Institute.

Spielberger then completed appointments at Duke University (Assistant Professor to Associate Professor, Chief Psychologist) in psychology and psychiatry from 1955–1963. Spielberger moved to Vanderbilt University where he served as Professor of Psychology from 1963 to 1967; he was on leave from Vanderbilt at the National Institute of Mental Health as a training specialist from 1965–1967. He then moved to the psychology department at the Florida State University, serving as Professor of Psychology and Director of Clinical Training from 1967 to 1972 (O’Roark et al. 2014).

In 1972, he made his final academic move, finding his permanent academic home in the Department of Psychology at the University of South Florida in Tampa, Florida, at the rank of Professor. As Professor and Director of Clinical Training at USF from 1972 to 1977, he led the way for the clinical psychology program to receive accreditation from the American Psychological Association (O’Roark et al. 2014). Also in 1973, he was recognized by the USF as its first recipient of the university’s Distinguished Scholar Award, the highest academic honor bestowed by the University. He developed the USF Center for Research in Behavioral Medicine and Health Psychology, serving as the director for 25 years. From 1983 to 2005, he held the rank of Distinguished University Research Professor. Spielberger retired in 2003 but continued on at USF as Distinguished University Research Professor Emeritus. He received honorary doctoral degrees from: Kent State University in 2003, the Pacific Graduate School of Psychology in 1990, and the Hungarian University of Budapest in 1991 (O’Roark et al. 2014). He continued to work prolifically until nearly the time of his death in 2013 (O’Roark 2013).

Professional Career and Research Interests

Charles Spielberger was a worldwide ambassador for psychology, making significant contributions to the field in his many roles, including researcher, scholar, leader, mentor, and teacher (Morgan 2014). As a prolific scholar, he made numerous editorial contributions that included six journal-associated editorships and editorships of five book series. Over his career, he authored over 460 professional publications including book chapters, monographs, and journal articles. Spielberger was awarded 17 grants for research, advanced study institutes, and educational and scientific conferences over the course of his career. His publications have been referenced with more than 50,000 citations (O’Roark et al. 2014).

It was during his time at Duke University that Spielberger started providing consulting services at a community-services center in North Carolina, which would be the start of his involvement in community psychology. Also while at Duke, he obtained National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) funding for his research on verbal conditioning and interventions to alleviate the negative impact of anxiety on academic performance. He was a founder of the field of community psychology and in 1972 started the Journal of Community Psychology (O’Roark et al. 2014).

In the area of research, Spielberger is perhaps most widely known as the author of the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI), a 40-item self-report measure of state and trait anxiety (Spielberger et al. 1983). The STAI was revised to its current form (Form Y) in 1983 and since its inception the has been translated to over 70 languages and dialects (Spielberger 2010) and has been cited in more than 16,000 archival research publications, making it one of the most widely used psychometric tests in the world (Spielberger 1999). He also authored numerous other widely used psychometric measures including the State Trait Anxiety Inventory for Children (Spielberger et al. 1970), the Test Anxiety Inventory (Spielberger 2005), the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory-2 (Spielberger et al. 1999), the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory Child/
Adolescent version (Brunner and Spielberger 2009), two measures of lifestyle defense mechanisms (the Rationality/Emotional Defensiveness (R/ED) Scale and the Need for Harmony (N/H) scale) (Spielberger and Reheiser 2000), the Job Stress Survey (Spielberger and Vagg 1999), and the State-Trait Personality Inventory (STPI). The STPI includes scales to measure state and trait anxiety, anger, curiosity, and depression (Spielberger 2005).

Spielberger was a leader in numerous societies in various officer positions. He served on the American Psychology Association’s Board of Directors, as the APA Treasurer, and he was the 100th president of the American Psychological Association in 1991 (O’Roark et al. 2014). As APA Treasurer, spear-headed the controversial decision to sell Psychology Today, a publication owned by the APA. The magazine had become a significant drain of APA resources and Spielberger foresaw that this problem would only continue and worsen. With this sale, he and APA leaders restructured APA’s reserve funds and investment in property. This culminated in the purchase of APA’s building: APA, which had previously rented office space in Northern Virginia area, bought the beautiful American Psychology Association Building on First Street in Washington, DC.

In 1961, Spielberger became a diplomate in clinical psychology from the American Board of Professional Psychology. He was a charter member and founder of the American Board of Assessment Psychology in 1995. He was also a fellow in 14 divisions in the APA over his career. In total, he served as president of eight different psychological associations. Further, he served as president of four divisions within the APA (Community, Clinical, International, and Media) and four different international associations. He was the 25th president of the International Association of Applied Psychology, the first multinational psychological organization. He served on the Board of Trustees in the American Psychological Foundation and also served as the chair of the Council of Scientific Society Presidents (O’Roark et al. 2014).

Spielberger received more than 23 prestigious career awards, including the Award for Distinguished Contributions to the International Advancement of Psychology in 2005, the Wilhelm Wundt-William James Award for Substantial and Enduring Contributions to Psychology as a Science and as a Profession in 2005, The Gold Medal Award for Life Achievement in the Application of Psychology from the American Psychological Foundation in 2003, the STAR (Society for Test Anxiety Research) Lifetime Contribution Award from the Society for Stress and Anxiety Research in 1998, the Centennial Award for Distinguished Contributions to Knowledge and Professional Practice from APA in 1994, the Centennial Award for Distinguished Sustained Contributions to Education in Psychology from APA in 1992, and the Distinguished Lifetime Contributions Award from Psi Chi (O’Roark et al. 2014).

Spielberger was also a key figure in international/cross-cultural psychology (Morgan 2014; O’Roark 2013). His first international collaborations were in Latin American starting in 1976 as an officer in the Inter-American Society of Psychology (IAAP). In his 12 years of presidential roles in IAAP, he organized an international conference in Singapore, implemented four book series that included 14 volumes devoted to health psychology and behavioral medicine, and spearheaded the publication of the Encyclopedia of Applied Psychology with involvement of researchers worldwide. Over his career, he served as a Visiting Professor at the University of Santiago de Compostela in Spain, spent time at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study, and worked abroad at the Florida State University London Study Center (O’Roark et al. 2014). With renowned psychologist Irwin Sarason, he obtained a NATO grant that supported an advanced study institute and collaborated with Sarason and Hans Eysenck, Ph.D., a British psychologist, to organize a conference on “Stress and Anxiety in Modern Life” held in Germany. Further NATO grants supported three additional conferences held in Norway, Italy, and England. On two separate occasions he spent significant time at The Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies as a Research Fellow. During this time he organized two major international conferences focused on
“Stress and Anxiety” as well as an international conference on “Health Psychology” held in Europe (O’Roark et al. 2014).

Spielberger and his wife Carol were known for their dedication to students and generosity that included significant donations to numerous professional organizations, including the American Psychological Foundation to endow an annual $5,000 graduate student research scholarship named for Spielberger and his wife (O’Roark 2013). His support for graduate students was also exemplified by his key support in 1987 in efforts to form a national graduate student association, which resulted in 1988 in the formation of the American Psychological Association of Graduate Students (APAGS), which currently has a membership of over 30,000 graduate students. Over his career, Spielberger served as chair for over 60 doctoral dissertations (O’Roark et al. 2014).

Charles Spielberger was not only one of the great diplomats for the field of psychology but was also a physically imposing man at 6 feet, 2 inches in height. However, despite this larger than life stature, both personally and professionally, those who worked with Spielberger described him as an approachable, patient, kind, gracious person with an intense curiosity and love for psychology, a “gentleman and scholar” (O’Roark 2013).

References


