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Sellbom, Martin



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Martin Sellbom, Ph.D., is a Professor in Clinical Psychology at the University of Otago in Dunedin, New Zealand. He is best known for his scholarly work on the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) instruments, psychopathic personality, and dimensional models of personality disorders. He has also conducted research and taught in areas relevant to forensic psychology.

Background and Professional Trajectory

Sellbom was born and raised in Sweden. He was raised by his father, a manager at a factory producing aluminum cans, and his mother, who worked in office administration. Neither pursued university education and Sellbom was the first in his extended family to obtain any form of tertiary education. His route to academia was somewhat circuitous and generally unplanned. At age 19, he left for the USA to play American football at Tri-State (now Trine) University in Indiana.

He selected psychology as an undergraduate major because his football coach told him he had to select one, and it sounded easy; he was there to play football anyways and thought that his ultimate professional end station likely involved being a math and chemistry high school teacher in Sweden. These plans were eventually derailed when he became mentored by criminal justice professor Dr. Duane Dobbert (now at Florida Gulf Coast University), who taught two courses in forensic psychology. For the first time, Sellbom had discovered a professional venture that potentially excited him (i.e., being a practicing forensic psychologist). However, he needed to pursue postgraduate study in order to become a licensed psychologist.

Sellbom eventually enrolled at Ball State University to attain a Masters degree in Clinical Psychology as a stepping stone to prepare for pursuing doctoral study. He worked as a research assistant for Drs. George Gaither, Gary Meunier, and Darrell Butler and was invited to co-author publications based on their various projects. Sellbom also become involved in clinical training and eventually realized that, while forensic psychology practice seemed quite interesting, he was even more excited about scientific pursuits. Dr. Meunier, who served as his research mentor, introduced Sellbom to the MMPI-2 and research into antisocial and

borderline personality disorders, which ultimately helped shape his interests.

Sellbom enrolled at Kent State University to pursue his PhD in Clinical Psychology, and he was mentored primarily by Dr. Yossef Ben-Porath, but also secondarily by Dr. John (Jack) Graham. His research became quite focused on applied personality assessment using the MMPI instruments, but he maintained his interests in psychopathy and other personality disorders, publishing occasionally in these areas as well. While a doctoral student, Sellbom was also introduced to eminent scholars such as Drs. Scott Lilienfeld, Christopher Patrick, and Edelyn Verona who served in mentorship capacities as well, as he pursued psychopathy research. At the end of his doctoral program, Sellbom completed his clinical internship at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto, Canada, where he was supervised by Dr. Michael Bagby (now University of Toronto), with whom he remains in close collaboration.

After graduation, Sellbom returned to Kent State University for a part-time academic and part-time clinical postdoctoral fellowship. For the former, he worked with Drs. Ben-Porath and Graham on MMPI research, including assisting with the final development of the MMPI-2 Restructured Form (Ben-Porath and Tellegen 2008). He also worked part-time as a psychology resident at the Summit County Court Psycho-Diagnostic Clinic. He was supervised by Dr. Kathleen Stafford in forensic psychological evaluations, which was a tremendous training opportunity that has allowed him to continue to conduct such clinical work on the side of his academic job throughout his career.

Sellbom eventually chose the academic route as he had decided that his true professional calling was for research and teaching more so than clinical psychology work. In 2009, he started a job as a tenure-track Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Alabama. During his time at Alabama, his research became heavily focused on psychopathy, in part because he primarily supervised PhD

students enrolled in the clinical psychology and law program. He graduated a number of talented students, including Dr. Jaime Anderson (now at Sam Houston State University).

In 2013, Sellbom moved to the Australian National University in Canberra, Australia, mostly because he desired a change in cultural climate and because he was ready for a new life adventure. He worked there as a Senior Lecturer and later Associate Professor for 2.5 years and served as Director of Clinical Training. Because of heavy student interest, as well as the release of the DSM-5 in 2013, his work became more and more focused on personality disorders broadly and considering the best approaches to their conceptualization, assessment, and diagnosis.

Sellbom eventually left the ANU and moved to his current appointment at the University of Otago in Dunedin, New Zealand, in January 2016. He has continued to supervise many honors, Masters, and PhD students in his major areas of interest. In the beginning of 2019, he started his appointment as a full Professor in Clinical Psychology; just over 9 years into his academic career. Sellbom is a registered clinical psychologist in New Zealand and continues to have a small private practice on the side, which is focused on forensic psychological evaluations.

Broad Research Contributions

Most of Sellbom's work has focused on psychopathology structure, personality disorders, and personality measurement. In recent years, he has become heavily involved with the Hierarchical Taxonomy of Psychopathology (HiTOP) consortium (Kotov et al. 2017) and he is currently among the leaders in developing a comprehensive measurement tool to operationalize this perspective. He has also generally contributed to the elaboration of various aspects of psychopathology structure (e.g., Sellbom 2016, 2017a) and in particular, how it integrates with personality (e.g., Sellbom et al. 2008; Tackett et al. 2008).

As mentioned earlier, over the past several years, Sellbom has been a major contributor to the science on the Alternative DSM-5 Model for Personality Disorders published in DSM-5 Section III. This work has focused on both establishing validity for the Section III personality trait model (criterion B for specific PDs), with respect to hierarchical structure, associations with other conceptually relevant personality constructs, and their optimal assessment (e.g., Anderson and Sellbom 2018; Anderson et al. 2015a, b). Sellbom and his students and colleagues have also published a number of studies examining how these traits can optimally represent traditional personality disorder categories, with intermediate goal of highlighting continuity across DSM editions (e.g., Anderson et al. 2014; Sellbom et al. 2014a; Watters et al. in press). In addition, they have begun to demonstrate the utility of personality impairment augmenting traits in characterizing pathology (e.g., Sellbom et al. 2017; Wygant et al. 2016), which is supportive of the controversial DSM-5 AMPD Criterion A. Finally, a significant portion of this work has been devoted to validating these personality constellations in their own right, particularly with respect to psychopathy, borderline PD, and obsessive-compulsive PD (e.g., Liggett and Sellbom 2018; Sellbom et al. 2014; Wygant et al. 2016). These findings are important as future revisions to the DSM PD section are implemented, with the ultimate goal of characterizing patient psychopathology via an empirically supported model.

In terms of psychopathic personality disorder specifically, Sellbom's work has contributed to the literature in several important respects. In addition to widespread evaluation of the self-report assessment of psychopathy (e.g., Christian and Sellbom 2016; Neal and Sellbom 2012; Sellbom 2011; Shou et al. 2017a), he has been heavily involved in generating empirical support for an integrative triarchic conceptualization of psychopathy (Patrick et al. 2009), which considers the disorder according to three dimensional phenotypic domains of boldness, meanness, and disinhibition (e.g., Sellbom and Phillips 2013; Shou et al. 2017b). Indeed, Sellbom published

the very first empirical paper on the topic (Sellbom and Phillips 2013), which has been cited over 150 times. In addition, Sellbom and his students have been responsible for one of the very few studies available to examine compensatory variables (e.g., intelligence) in moderating the association between psychopathic personality traits and criminal behavior (Wall et al. 2013). Overall, these findings are impactful with respect to ultimately defining and operationalizing this important but controversial personality disorder.

Finally, Sellbom has been a major contributor to the field of personality assessment, particularly via his work on the MMPI-2-RF (Restructured Form). In an effort to align this new instrument with the contemporary psychopathology literature, his construct validity research on its scales has mapped them onto hierarchical personality and psychopathology models in the extant literature; thus, positioning the instrument to a central role in the empirically validated, clinical assessment of psychopathology constructs (e.g., Sellbom 2016, 2017a; Sellbom et al. 2008). In addition, Sellbom has also published a large number of studies that have articulated the applied utility of the MMPI-2-RF in terms of the assessment of personality disorders (e.g., Anderson et al. 2015a, b; Sellbom et al. 2014; Zahn et al. 2017) and psychopathy (e.g., Sellbom et al. 2012, 2016), as well as response bias (e.g., Brown and Sellbom in press; Sellbom et al. 2010), forensic and correctional assessment (e.g., Laurinaitytė et al. 2017; Sellbom 2017b), and public safety personal screening (e.g., Sellbom et al. 2007; Corey et al. 2018).

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