

Dementia Alliance International

A Meeting of the Minds

28/29 October, 2015

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**DEMENTIA
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INTERNATIONAL**

Support and Advocacy, of, by and for people with dementia



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The global voice of dementia

Introducing

Professor Steven Sabat:

**“Understanding
the Selfhood of
People with a
dementia:
Context is Key”**



Understanding the Selfhood of People with a Dementia: Context is Key

Steven R. Sabat

Department of Psychology

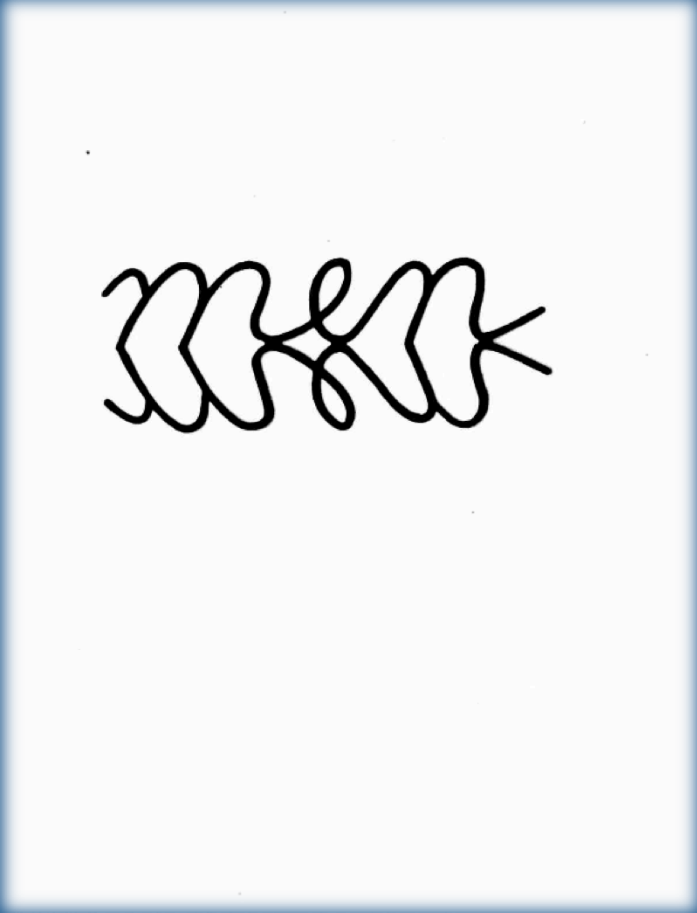
Georgetown University

Washington, D.C. U.S.A

Ways to Understand Dementia

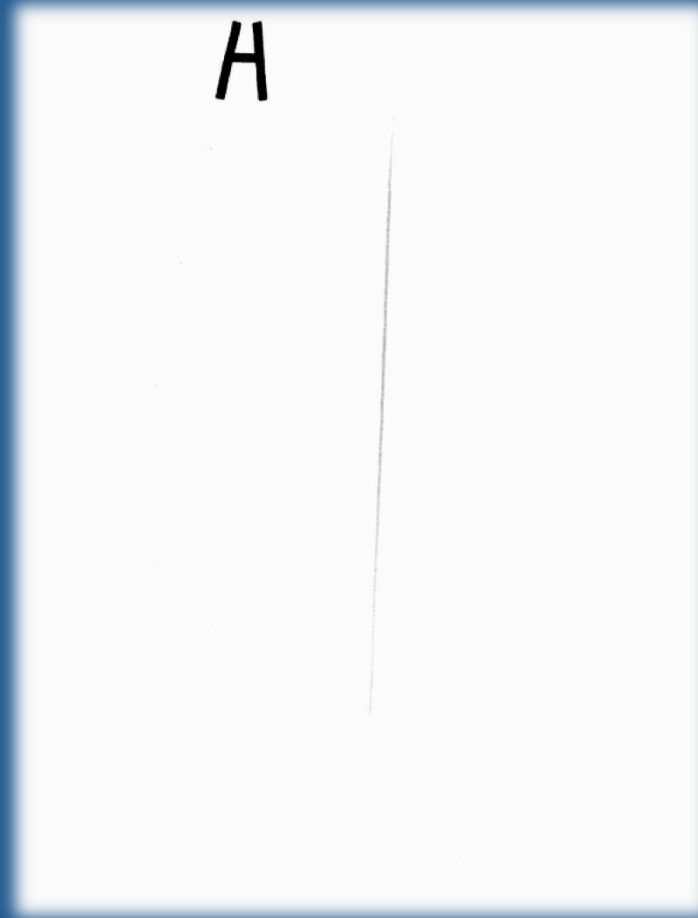
- Biomedical Approach
- Existential Phenomenological Approach
- Bio-psycho-social Approach

Effects of Context on Experience: Example 1

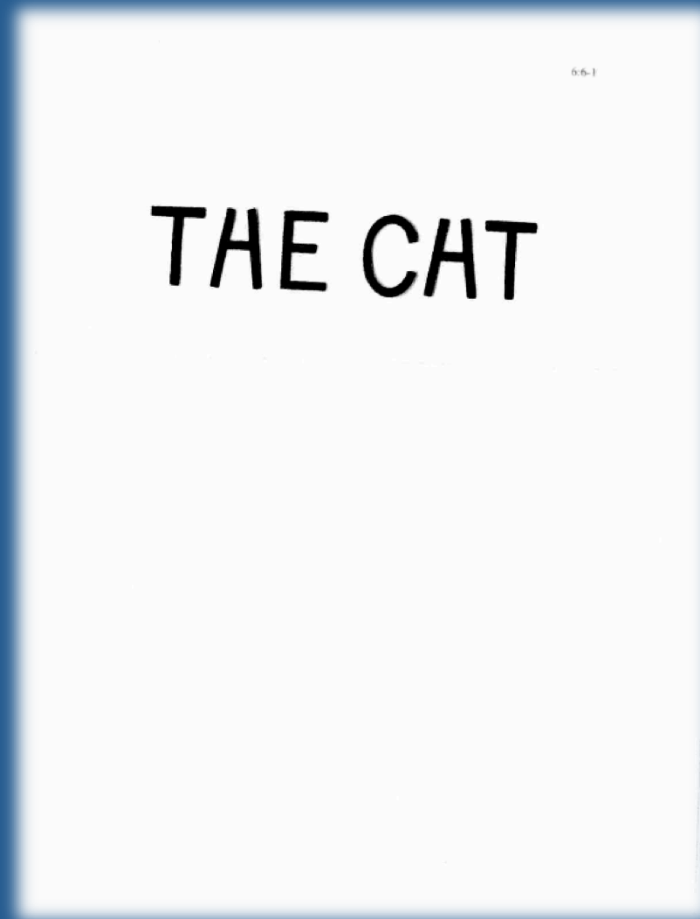


A black scribble consisting of several overlapping, wavy, and somewhat circular shapes, resembling a stylized signature or a series of connected loops. The scribble is centered within a white rectangular box.

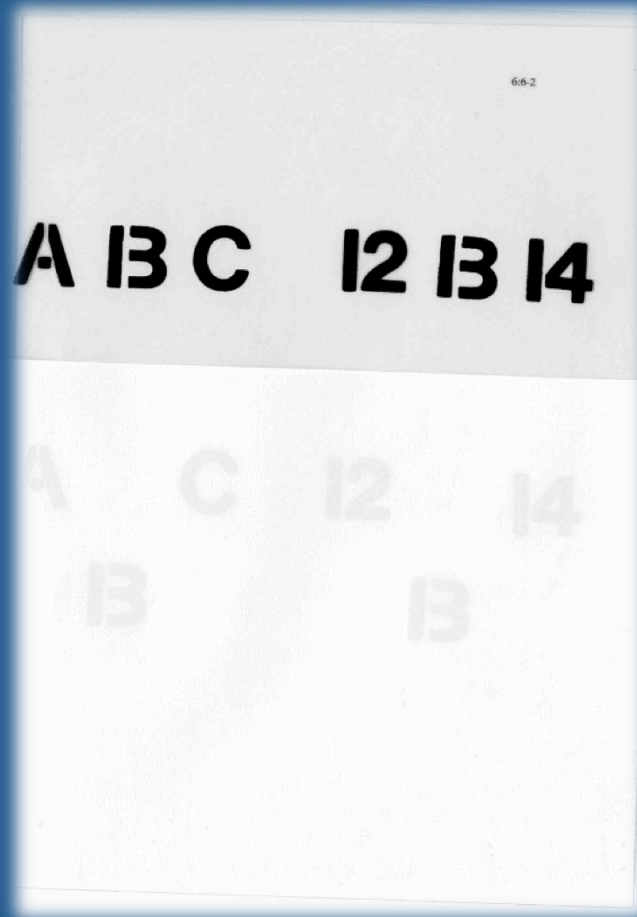
Out of Context



In Context



Importance of Context II



Identical diagnosis and degree of severity do not mean that:

- We can understand different people as people on this basis;
- Identical treatment will enhance QoL equally;
- Identical treatment will enhance carers' confidence and competence equally

So we have:

- A diagnosis
- A list of dysfunctions that mark the severity of that diagnosis
- A number of actions that may or may not be dysfunctional, depending upon the
- The context in which we view said actions,
- Including aspects of a person's selfhood.

Aspects of Selfhood

Self 1: expressed via personal pronouns

Self 2: Physical and mental attributes past and present, including beliefs about said attributes.

Self 3: Social personae constructed with cooperation of at least one other person: devoted spouse, loyal friend, demanding professional, dysfunctional patient.

Dr. M

- Refused to attend day center
- Refused to participate in drug studies
- Had a PhD in Sociology and a Master's degree in Social Work
- Was deeply embarrassed by her word-finding problems and said, "I can't talk."
- Said, "I know what my problems are, don't need tests to show me."
- Self worth strongly connected to intellect.

Mrs. D

- Attended Day Center three days per week at minimum; loved attending
- Called “life of the party” there, engaged other participants, made new attendees feel welcome; sang songs, told jokes—this was her “work”
- Had high school diploma, no college
- Made fun of her own verbal errors
- Didn't hold intellect as core aspect of self

Dr. B

- Attended Day Center 2-3 days per week
- Kept to himself apart from greeting participants politely
- Refused to be involved in activities; called most, “filler”
- Gravitated to staff members and me, differentiated himself from the group
- Happy to leave each day he attended

Visit with Mr. U

- “After you left Al was his old self. Took a nap downstairs (however, not long enough). I don't know how you did it, but I can't thank you enough.”
- **“you are a miracle worker”**

(from email letter dated 11 June 2006)

Delineating life stories

- Helps formal/professional caregivers understand their clients as people in their totality and relate to them as such, rather than as “dementia patients” solely or primarily
- Places clients’ actions in meaningful context
- Provides client or relative with recognition and validation of highly valued personal attributes, thereby enhancing feelings of self-worth
- Renews emotional bonds between relatives

Therefore:

- A person with dementia is still a person with a history
- That history is the context in which we must understand that person and his or her experience of and reaction to the effects of dementia and how he or she is treated by others.
- Understanding persons in relationship to others is a key non-pharmacological, low cost intervention that begs to be used.

DAI support and services:

- Exclusive membership to PWD
- Weekly online support groups
- Monthly online cafes
- Monthly webinars
- Master classes
- <http://www.infodai.org> / www.joindai.org



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Thank you kindly.



Thank you for attending

- This webinar does not provide professionals with credits for learning, but we will provide a Certificate of Attendance as requested
- DAI has paid an additional fee to support such a large number of registrants
- We are still an unfunded non for profit charity, and sincerely appreciate your support
- Donations are always appreciated