

Cover Photograph: Behind the Scene

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The photo of William Chase, Herbert Simon, and me was taken, I believe, in 1973, following the Fischer-Spassky chess match in 1972, or possibly early 1974. That was a time of great excitement for chess fans—including new ones who weren't players—all eagerly following the antics of Bobby Fischer who had to be convinced by Henry Kissinger to go on with the match as he kept threatening to withdraw from the World Championship over match conditions in Reykjavik.

The story of an American vying for the world championship against the Soviet champion, a classic America versus the Soviets battle typical of the then Cold War, was a welcome distraction from the very unpopular Vietnam War still raging. I was obviously keenly interested in the match too, so much so that I brought a pocket chess set along on the honeymoon trip to Bermuda during the match, something for which my wife Beth has probably never forgiven me. The chess set didn't get much use. The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) was the funding agency for the Chase and Simon chess skill project, and no doubt wanted to cash in on the heightened interest about chess.

I deduce the date from two important visual features. The first is the position on the chessboard that I set up for the photo shoot. As we came into the room and were asked to set up a chess board I vaguely remember discussing with Bill Chase, my thesis supervisor, and Herb Simon, my dissertation committee member, along with Dick Hayes, what position to use and deciding to pick something from the match, hence the date had to be after that game took place and before I left Carnegie Mellon University with my doctoral degree in August of 1974.



Figure 1. William Chase (left), Herbert Simon (right), Neil Charness (middle) in a publicity photo for the Chase and Simon chess project. Source: *National Institute of Mental Health*

The second clue is my wonderful mismatching outfit, which must have meant that it was before my wife educated me about matching clothing, hence early in our marriage which took place on August 13, 1972. Although Bill Chase had mentioned that NIMH was coming for a publicity photo shoot of the Chase and Simon chess project, I had probably forgotten the exact date, and the photo shoot probably occurred on a Thursday or Friday, because laundry was usually done on the weekend, and I do remember scrounging around that morning for clean clothes and being down to a green plaid shirt and a seldom worn pair of striped black and white polyester pants that mismatched rather spectacularly. I also remember when being told to set up the lab for the photo that I briefly toyed with the idea of heading back to my apartment to change, but it was too late. I was going to be in the

background and photos were typically in black and white, so I was hoping that my garish outfit wasn't too off-putting.

Bill and Herb sat down in front of the board, and I pretended to be videotaping their gestured activity using the black and white video-camera (hooked up to a small black and white CRT monitor and videotape deck) that we used to record experiments. The typical study, outlined in the Chase and Simon 1973 "Perception in chess," *Cognitive Psychology* article, and the 1973 "The mind's eye in chess" book chapter in *Visual Information Processing*, videotaped chess players while reproducing chess positions in order to transcribe (by painstakingly playing, rewinding, and replaying short tape segments) the sequence of piece placements and the time between placements.

We used that sequence and pause structure to uncover the chess chunks that players of different skill levels had activated to encode the positions that we briefly displayed before asking them to recall the positions. The photographer took several photos, and the one you see was the one NIMH used for publicity purposes. They sent some copies back to the CMU department, and I still have my copy sitting on a shelf in the family room, with the same thick, black-rimmed glasses I wore back then hanging over the top of the photo frame.

