

# The 'Other' Side of Psychology:

## Women Psychologists in Toronto from 1920 to 1945

by Lykke de la Cour

In 1976, the Canadian Psychological Association published an extensive report on the status of women in Canadian psychology. The findings of the report were hardly encouraging. As students and professionals, women occupied only a marginal position in the discipline. Under-represented in graduate programs, among faculty in university departments, in research and administrative positions, and in professional associations, women psychologists were for the most part located in the least prestigious and lowest paying ranks of the field.

The marginality of women in psychology in the 1970s stands in marked contrast to their position in the profession from 1920 to 1945. In Toronto, a leading centre of psychology in Canada, scores of women entered the field throughout the 1920s, 1930s, and early 1940s and formed an active and often numerically predominant force in educational, research, clinical, and professional association settings. During the Second World War, women psychologists made substantial contributions both at home and overseas. Far from occupying a marginal existence, Toronto's women psychologists were a major and vital component of the profession from 1920 to 1945. The following is a brief overview of their history. As a discipline and profession, psychology in Toronto dates roughly from 1920 and the founding of a Department of Psychology at the University of Toronto. Prior to this date, psychology existed as a branch of epistemology in the Department of Philosophy with work centering primarily on esoteric inquiries such as experiments in optics or colour aesthetics.

Developments within the field in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, however, increasingly oriented psychological studies to an applied science of human behavior and, following the First World War, psychology became a distinct field of scientific inquiry. In 1920, an independent Department of Psychology was established at the University of Toronto and, according to the *Canadian Journal of Psychology*, "students began to flock to the psychology classrooms." What the journal failed to mention was—these students were mainly women.

Female students predominated in psychology at several levels of the programme. While figures are not available for the years 1920 to 1930, data from 1931 to 1945 indicates women formed over three-quarters of the undergraduate students in psychology. Their representation frequently rose above 80% during the 1930s, peaking in 1932 with women constituting 92% of the undergraduate psychology students. At the graduate level, women received two-thirds of the Masters degrees between 1930 and 1940 and 41% of the Ph.D.s from 1920 to 1945. The first Ph.D. ever conferred in psychology went to Emma Sophia Baker in 1903 when psychology was still a sub-section of the philosophy department; her thesis title was "Experiments on the aesthetic of light and colour: On Combinations of two colours. Spectrally pure colours in binary combinations."

As professionals in the field, women psychologists held a variety of educational, research, and clinical positions. In 1922 Katharine Banham was appointed the first woman lecturer in the Depart-

ment of Psychology and the number of women on staff as lecturers, instructors, and professors steadily increased from 15% in the 1920s to 30% by the 1940s. Dr. Mary Northway, a graduate of the department in 1938, was appointed Assistant Professor in 1946 and Dr. Mary Salter obtained a similar appointment the following year. While the majority of women psychologists were engaged by the department as class, laboratory, clinical, and research assistants, their presence in these positions was nevertheless unusual compared to other areas at the University of Toronto where the biases of male department heads and the economic restraints of the 1920s and 1930s generally resulted in the systematic and discriminatory exclusion of women from many faculties. In psychology, however, nearly half of all the assistantships went to women from the inception of the department.

Research in psychology during the inter-war years was located in two settings in Toronto: the Department of Psychology at the University of Toronto and the Institute of Child Study (initially known as the St. George's School). In the Department of Psychology, laboratory as well as applied studies were conducted on a range of topics spanning behavioral and community investigations to the development of apparatus and procedures for psychometric testing. Some projects, particularly in the early years of the department, were co-operative ventures and women psychologists participated with male colleagues as co-investigators and joint-authors. Independent research projects were undertaken only by high-ranking male

professors or by graduate students of both sexes completing these requirements. In this latter body of graduate work, gender appears to have been one factor influencing approaches to research. Female graduate students tended to focus on issues relating to the emotions (depression, suicide, or concepts regarding feelings of security) or topics such as children's adjustment to nursery school, companionship among children, children's eating habits and play interests, truancy and delinquency. Male students, on the other hand, concentrated their research on physiological questions (muscle actions, mechanical tasks, or oscular movements) or studies on advertising, automobile accidents, reasoning patterns, paresis, and tremors. In 1939, Mr. J.H. Sunley investigated job satisfaction among *male* retail salesclerks.

Research at the Institute of Child Study was primarily the domain of women psychologists. Located at 47 St. George Street, the Institute was among the first of a series of child study centres being established across North America in the early 1900s and opened January 1926 as a research and educative centre in child development. The Institute of Child Study had four functions: 1) to provide student training programmes in child development, 2) to offer demonstration courses in nursery school education, 3) to conduct parent education classes, and 4) to undertake research in child studies. To facilitate research, a nursery school was established on the premises to act as an observational and investigational setting where child study hypotheses could be tested and theories developed.

Research at the Institute took a variety of forms: longitudinal development studies, community surveys, and "practical" investigations on aspects of child behavior. Eighty-five percent of the projects undertaken between 1926 and 1945 were led by women psychologists. Women, in fact, formed the core of the staff at the Institute of Child Study. Apart from Dr. William Blatz, Director of the Institute, and Dr. Karl Bernhardt, Assistant Director, the staff was entirely female and by the 1940s the Institute also had a female Assistant Director, Dorothy Millichamp, who shared responsibilities with Bernhardt. These women published a substantial amount of material, participating both as writers and editors of the Institute's *Parent Education Bulletin* (which later became the *Bulletin of the Institute of Child Study*, a newsletter designed to inform parents on current developments in child study) and individ-

ually publishing a number of articles and books on topics such as children's social relationships, personality development, and methodological issues in child study. Dr. Mary Northway's work on research methodology was particularly interesting for it suggests that some women psychologists attempted to inject different qualities into the methodological and theoretical frameworks of their discipline. Northway argued for a more intuitive approach in research method: "Good inferences are as important as accurate observations," she claimed, and was extremely critical of hasty, short-term projects, "overpopularized intangible" psychological fads, and energies expended in "creating esoteric products suitable for weapons in use in the academician's battle of wits but useless in the market-places of human life."

Outside of the academic and research settings, occupational opportunities for psychologists in the 1920s and 1930s were few. Areas such as industrial psychology and personal and vocational counselling did not develop until after the Second World War. Similarly, facilities such as out-patient psychiatric clinics and psychiatric wards in general hospitals were largely non-existent until the early 1950s. But opportunities which were available for psychologists in the inter-war years do appear to have been held primarily by women. Female psychologists were employed as consultants by institutions and organizations such as the Protestant Children's Village in Ottawa, the Infant's Home in Toronto, the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), and various nursery schools. By 1946, 10% of the female membership of the Canadian Psychological Association were working as consultants for the public school boards. In the 1930s provincial psychiatric hospitals began to hire psychologists and by 1940 eight psychologists and four interning psychology students were women.

As professionals, women psychologists also formed a substantial and energetic component of psychology's national and provincial professional associations. The Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) was founded in 1939 and 17% of its founding members were women psychologists. By 1951, females constituted nearly 30% of the membership. Women actively participated in association functions. Four of the eight papers presented at the annual general meeting of the CPA in December 1940 were presented or co-presented by women. Dr. Mary Northway was one of

six directors of the CPA serving in 1948/49 and several women psychologists sat on publication and teaching committees. Kathleen Hobday was assistant editor of the CPA's journal, *Canadian Journal of Psychology*, in the late 1940s. At the provincial level, women constituted nearly one-third of the founding membership of the Ontario Psychological Association (OPA) when it was established in 1947 and held eight of the nineteen executive and committee positions. Leola Neal was President of the OPA from 1948 to 1949.

By the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, women psychologists had occupied a major position within the profession for nearly twenty years. Their role in the war effort was to be equally substantial both at home and overseas. Approximately 20% of the CPA's female membership was involved directly with military institutions. Acting as army examiners, staffing personnel selection directorates, and working in rehabilitation programmes for returning soldiers, women psychologists served in the Department of National Defense, the Canadian Women's Army Corps (CWAC), the Department of Veteran's Affairs, the Canadian Army, and the Canadian Military Headquarters, Canadian Army Overseas. Women psychologists also played a vital role by staffing clinical and academic facilities when male psychologists enlisted for active service. Between 1942 and 1945, the number of female CPA members employed in hospitals doubled and women psychologists formed nearly half of the faculty in the Department of Psychology at the University of Toronto. It was in the area of children's wartime services, however, that women psychologists made notable and major contributions. Specifically, in the Children's Overseas Reception project, the Garrison Lane Nursery Training School in Birmingham, England, and the Wartime Day Nurseries in Ontario. Women's employment in the British war industries, as well as the mass evacuations of urban centres during the war, created a child care emergency in Britain by the early 1940s. To ease the situation, Dr. William Blatz, Director of the Institute of Child Study, made two recommendations to British authorities: the establishment of the Children's Overseas Reception project and a training school for British child care workers staffed and organized by Canadian psychologists. In 1940 the Children's Overseas Reception project was launched to provide a temporary "haven" in Canada for British mothers

and children. Drs. Mary Salter and Karl Bernhardt administered the program. Salter was assigned the "strenuous commission" of meeting the British war guests at eastern Canadian ports and arranging their transportation to Toronto. Bernhardt then directed the British guests to placement homes. By the summer of 1940, twenty mothers and one hundred and fifty children had been brought to Canada. The Garrison Lane Nursery Training School opened in Birmingham, England on July 1st, 1942 as a training centre for British child care workers. Staffed by women psychologists from the Institute of Child Study, the school offered a three-week course in child study to British women who would run nursery school units throughout the country. By 1943, over three thousand units had been established.

As in Britain, women's wartime employment in Canada necessitated a rapid expansion of children's day care by the early 1940s. In July 1942 federal and provincial government agreements were signed to finance the creation of day care facilities; psychologist Dorothy Millichamp and the Institute of Child Study subsequently played a major role in the establishment and administration of wartime nurseries throughout Ontario. Millichamp was appointed Director of government day nurseries in Ontario immediately following enactment of the federal-provincial agreements. Responsible for locating facilities, equipment, and staff as well as developing programs, Millichamp reported having made "considerable progress" already by April 1943 with four day nurseries in operation in Toronto and "more...to be established soon." By October, the city had nine day nurseries and Dorothy Millichamp assumed responsibilities as Organizing Secretary for wartime day nurseries throughout the

province. Recognizing the establishment of these nurseries as a "valuable means of demonstrating childhood education to an increasingly interested public," Millichamp was careful to select only trained personnel for the facilities. The nurseries were staffed by women graduates of the Institute's Diploma Course in Child Study and the "untiring efforts" of hundreds of female volunteers. The Canadian Women's Volunteer Services contacted the Institute of Child Study as early as the fall of 1941 requesting the Institute begin "emergency intensive" training courses for volunteers working in nursery schools and creches. A programme consisting of six lectures on the principles of child training was established and supplemented with observational and practical experience in the Nursery School at the Institute of Child Study. Reports toward the end of the war estimated that over five hundred women eventually participated in voluntary work with the wartime day nurseries in Ontario.

Women's position in psychology declined abruptly following the Second World War with the influx of men into the profession, the re-orientation of the discipline to experimental psychology, and the intensification of discriminatory attitudes and practices in the field. Female enrolment in undergraduate psychology courses dropped from over 80% in 1940 to 48% by 1959. The number of women in graduate programs plummeted and female faculty in the Department of Psychology at the University of Toronto declined from 30% in 1930 to 11% by 1950. No women psychologists were appointed to professorships from 1947 to 1961; women's participation in the membership of professional associations slumped by the mid 1970s to 22% of the CPA and 16% of the OPA.

The predominance of women in psy-

chology from 1920 to 1945 was ultimately closely connected to the status and orientation of the field prior to the Second World War. As a new discipline and profession, psychology lacked the prestige and legitimation associated with older disciplines. Consequently, few men entered the field. Oriented primarily towards the study of child development, psychology undoubtedly held little attraction for men. For women, however, this orientation closely paralleled traditional female interests and thus represented a new and legitimate area of potential employment in a period when women were entering the public workforce in unprecedented numbers. While few women ever attained positions in the upper echelons of psychology during the inter-war period or enjoyed a full equal status within the profession, women psychologists nevertheless occupied a highly active, visible, and varied position in the field. Their presence was far from marginal. In fact, women were crucial to the development and advancement of psychology in its formative years. One wonders if Toronto could have been a leading centre in psychology in Canada had it not been for the participation of women psychologists in the discipline.

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## JEANNETTE MOREAU

### Content

voices joining together making sense  
sounding nice I guess that's harmony  
so nice outside inside I feel nice  
content to know you are out there  
but you still love me even though you  
can't see me or hear me or feel me  
I still love you too  
I wish you weren't out there but you are

I won't phone this time I'll wait  
very patiently I trust you sort of  
I guess it is others that I don't trust  
if that be the proper word insecure as I  
am  
I need you too  
so nice so nice just like a summer day  
we could go for a walk have a talk  
hold hands laugh and drink from a  
fountain  
or contentedly read a book stay home  
watch tv wonder what we are going to  
live on

fall into bed explore one concept of love  
I want you still voices joining together  
making sense  
abruptly I hear loud noises trucks cars  
the reality of the news so sad but too  
bad  
people right outside my window going  
right on living while I stopped to dream  
filling me with more content  
content can swallow miles  
and even though I can't see you, hear  
you or feel you  
I still love you