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# Beatrice A. Wright: A Life History

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Sheryl Lee Wurl entitled "Beatrice A. Wright: A Life History." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.

Diana Moyer, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Robert Kronick, Trena Paulus, Susan Speraw

Accepted for the Council:

Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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BEATRICE A. WRIGHT: A LIFE HISTORY

A Dissertation  
Presented for the  
Doctor Of Philosophy  
Degree  
University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Sheryl Lee Wurl  
May 2008

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Beatrice A. Wright, with great respect for her many accomplishments and with fond gratitude for her generous gifts of time and friendship.



Beatrice A. Wright

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I wish to thank all those who assisted and encouraged me in the process of completing this project. My major professor, Diana Moyer, and committee members, Robert Kronick, Trena Paulus, and Susan Speraw, each contributed more than they ever will realize to my learning, and did so with kind but scholarly direction. I appreciate also the help provided by librarians at the University of Tennessee, the University of North Carolina, the University of Kansas, and the University of Iowa when archival materials needed to be located and copied.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the support of colleagues and students at the University of Tennessee Medical Center, of Greg and other dear friends, and of my beloved family.

## **ABSTRACT**

This study investigated the life history and influences of Beatrice A. Wright on rehabilitation psychology. The research had four purposes: (1) to record and transcribe recollections of Beatrice A. Wright, the person known as a Founder/Mother of Rehabilitation Psychology, about her life and her work; (2) to trace the development of her major conceptual notions; (3) to explore the interplay between her life and her times; and, (4) to assess the merits of her contributions to the fields of psychology and rehabilitation counseling, as well as to disability rights.

The data gathered for this life history included audio recordings of in-depth interviews with Dr. Wright and Louise Barker; a telephone interview with Dr. Miriam Lewin; field notes from non-recordable time spent with Dr. Wright; and her presentations in Knoxville, Tennessee in September 2005. E-mail communication also was used to collect and verify information, and primary and secondary sources were reviewed. Dr. Wright's own words liberally were used in the body of the document, in order to preserve her personality and views. Data other than that comprising the introduction and conclusion were organized into major chronological segments of her life, which she identifies by major events or her geographical location at the time: the early years, war and transition, Kansas, and Wisconsin.

Contextual influences of Dr. Wright's life provide backdrops against which her actions were analyzed, especially the intellectual tenor of groups associated with Kurt Lewin during the 1930s and 1940s and the status of female psychologists from the 1930s

through the 1960s. While Dr. Wright's life has formed her ideas, the data reveal that her ideas have shaped her life.

Dr. Wright has dedicated her professional life to the psychosocial aspects of rehabilitation psychology and their application to real life and has contributed so richly to these areas that recent research confirms her as the most-cited person in the world on those topics. At the same time, she has dedicated her personal life to her family and, still independent at ninety years of age, she continues to enjoy loving interactions with all four generations.

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## CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

### Background

I didn't know exactly what to expect when preparing to meet Dr. Beatrice A. Wright at the Meriter Retirement Home in Madison, WI, on July 1, 2005, but it wasn't the tiny, beaming and energetic woman who greeted me at the information desk. If pushed, I suppose I would have confessed to imagining she would be a BIG woman, big enough to have worked with giants in the field of psychology seventy years ago. I would not have pictured someone who looked as though she might weigh a hundred pounds when dripping wet and dressed nattily in tan pants, lime green knit blouse, taupe flats and gorgeous, dangling gold earrings with rose inserts.

After all, Beatrice Wright is a living legend, someone who studied with Solomon Asch, Abraham Maslow, Kurt Lewin and Carl Rogers, among others, and who went on to excel in her own area of psychology. Known as one of the originators of what we now call "Rehabilitation Psychology," Dr. Wright also authored two (actually three, but that's a story for later on) of the first fifty books canonized by the American Psychological Association as outstanding twentieth century publications in the field. She has trained thousands of psychologists who specialize in the area of rehabilitation, and people with disabilities from around the world have lauded her work on such justice issues as passage of the American Disabilities Act and creation of the international symbol for accessibility. Although I then had no idea of the potential treasures this relationship would reveal to me over the course of the next few days, I remember shivering in

anticipation before approaching that information desk. Thus began my first series of interviews with Beatrice Wright.

We made our way to her spacious, airy and inviting apartment, chattering all the way with the kinds of talk that people usually rely on to begin getting to know each other. In the elevator ride to her floor, Beatrice had revealed that recent glaucoma surgery would dictate her reliance on me to read aloud whatever might need to be read during my stay. Entering into the rarified world of renowned intellectuals she so generously shared with me, I soon was on first-name terms with the likes of Erik Erikson, Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson, Fritz and Grace Heider, Kurt and Gertie Lewin, Roger and Louise Barker, Wolfgang Kohler, Eugenia Hanfmann, Tamara Dembo, and others Beatrice had known and of whom I'd only read about in psychology and education classes.

Two weeks later, thanks to Beatrice's 'introduction' over the telephone, I was welcomed into the home of Louise Barker, Roger Barker's widow and Beatrice's friend of nearly seventy years. For two hours, I listened as Louise reconstructed pre-WWII U.S. psychology-in-the-making and Beatrice's work with Roger Barker. Moreover, I was entrusted with the kinds of information that women gather when the well-known men in their lives are busy with being on the stage of worldly acknowledgement. On the drive home from that interview with Louise Barker, I realized how thoroughly Beatrice Wright and her work had captured my interest. I now wanted to tell her story, a large part of which has to do with the disability rights movement.

## **Beatrice Wright as Focus**

We have become so accustomed to thinking of disability rights that it is easy to forget things were very different not so long ago. In a 2005 address shortly before the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of President George H.W. Bush signing into law the American with Disabilities Act, Dr. Henry Tomes, American Psychological Association (APA) Executive Director for Public Interest, acknowledged what members of the disabilities movement and rehabilitation community have known for nearly half a century:

The emergence of both the disability rights and independent-living movements were critical to the development of the ADA. ... Social psychology, especially the research and writings of Beatrice Wright, showed that a variety of psychological and sociological mechanisms—including stereotyping, stigmatization, psychological discomfort and paternalization—caused nondisabled individuals to hold prejudicial views against persons with disabilities.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Beatrice A. Wright has had enormous influence on both, and she continues to contribute to our understanding of issues facing people with disabilities and of appropriate, even life-giving, responses we can offer. She has written or co-written six books (including the three cited by APA), a monograph that received a research award and has been reprinted at least three times, more than seventy articles (a number of which have been reprinted numerous times), and hundreds of reviews of research articles, as well as delivering more than 250 invited addresses around the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Tomes, “In the Public Interest: Civil Rights for People with Disabilities,” *APA Online Monitor on Psychology* 36, no. 6 (June 2005): 1. <http://www.apa.org/monitor/jun05/itpi.html> (accessed June 16, 2007).

Moreover, the history of rehabilitation continuously re-confirms that she is viewed by many in the field as being among the first to offer comprehensive theories of rehabilitation psychology. People like Dr. Tomer or internationally noted philosopher Jerome Bickenbach remind us of the part Beatrice Wright has played in changing social thought about disability and influencing social policy about reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities. As Bickenbach wrote, “Wright’s work was based on the view, revolutionary for the day, that ‘the source of obstacles and difficulties, that is, what actually handicaps a person, cannot be determined by describing the disability alone ... architectural, attitudinal, legal and other social barriers are handicapping, as are negative attitudes on the part of the person with a disability.’”<sup>2</sup> He and others continue to emphasize the significance of her work as a ‘major contribution’ to the understanding of disability.<sup>3</sup>

Her contributions helped lead to the Independent Living Movement of the 1960s and 70s, which led to the disability rights movement and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and, eventually, to the American with Disabilities Act in 1990. In fact, say some, “The early work of Beatrice Wright influenced the consumer-directed collaborations mandated in the 1992 Rehabilitation Act Amendments and emphasized the importance of client

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<sup>2</sup> Jerome E. Bickenbach, *Physical Disability and Social Policy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 142, citing Wright’s *Physical Disability—A Psychosocial Approach*, 11.

<sup>3</sup> David Wasserman, Jerome E. Bickenbach and Robert Wachbroit, eds., *Quality of Life and Human Difference* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 13.

participation in *all* [emphasis added] service delivery environments.”<sup>4</sup> It is no accident that a provision of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires the unique potential of each individual to be included in all programs: that was, and is, the basis of Beatrice Wright’s value-laden beliefs and principles.<sup>5</sup>

Now ninety years old, the intellectually fit and physically active Beatrice Wright continues to contribute, through both lectures and publications, to awareness of how we might respond compassionately and humanely to people with disabilities. Most recently, she wrote the “Foreword” to a new, comprehensive clinical manual,<sup>6</sup> in which she reviews the concepts that for the last half-century have framed our understanding of issues facing people with disabilities, concepts she first brought to our attention. In September 2007, she received the APA Disability Issues in Psychology Award (which, she jokes, officially makes her a DIP). How she arrived at this place of recognition by many is an intriguing story, beginning with the examples of social activism modeled by her humanist, immigrant parents.

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<sup>4</sup> Kyung Mee Kim, Michael H. Fox and Glen W. White, “Comparing Outcomes of Persons Choosing Consumer-Directed or Agency-Directed Personal Assistance Services,” *Journal of Rehabilitation* 72, no. 2 (April-June 2006): 33.

<sup>5</sup> Beatrice A. Wright, “Value-laden Beliefs and Principles for Rehabilitation Psychology,” *Rehabilitation Psychology* 19, no. 1 (1972): 38-45.

<sup>6</sup> Beatrice A. Wright, “Foreword,” in *Coping with Chronic Illness and Disability: Theoretical, Empirical and Clinical Aspects*, eds. Erin Martz and Hanoch Livneh (New York: Springer, 2007), xi-xiii.

## **The Problem**

Unfortunately, the importance of Beatrice Wright's contributions to the fields of psychology and rehabilitation counseling may be forgotten as time passes since the last (1983) publication of her major work. When she was invited in 2005 to speak several times at the University of Tennessee, for example, attendees primarily were faculty and students from the college of nursing and various psychology programs, community rehabilitation leaders, and hospital chaplains. No one from a rehabilitation training program was registered. In fact, a 2004 survey of the six most frequently recommended books by what was considered a representative sample of American Board of Professional Psychology Diplomates in rehabilitation psychology included no book published after 1987 and made no mention of hers.<sup>7</sup> Without a concerted effort by those interested in preserving the history of a significant international social movement, Beatrice Wright's firsthand account of how it evolved, as well as her part in it, may be lost.

Another aspect of this "problem" when it comes to preserving the intellectual contributions of Beatrice Wright is that many are unaware of her place in history as one of only two females in the United States to have earned her doctorate with the famed Kurt Lewin. Moreover, she now is the only surviving person in the world to have received her doctorate with Lewin. Her memories are a living archive, and this is a momentary

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<sup>7</sup> Joseph J. Ryan and Heather Tree, "Essential Readings in Rehabilitation Psychology," *Teaching of Psychology* 31, no. 2 (2004): 138-140.

opportunity for us in the *here and now* of today to hear firsthand accounts about the *there and then* of a yesterday that includes the likes of Lewin, as well as Abraham Maslow, Solomon Asch, Margaret Mead, Erik Erikson, Carl Rogers, John Gardner, and a host of others who wielded considerable influence in the fields of counseling, psychology, education, and public policy, to name but a few.

Beatrice Wright's work as a scholar, as a researcher, and as a teacher have been honored in a variety of ways, including Henry McCarthy's recently completed study funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research. Yet, no one to date has told the story of this scholar, researcher, teacher and *woman* who incorporated her personal values and principles into the very foundations of the field we know as Rehabilitation Psychology. That was my purpose, and it is something she supported, as evinced by this recent correspondence: "I ... think that your dissertation will give more attention to my story and contributions as a woman, than e.g., Henry McCarthy's evidence-based report to NIDRR."<sup>8</sup> McCarthy's research, evidence-based about her ideas alone, was not intended to deal with contextualization of her ideas evolving out of and in concert with her life as a woman and all that that entailed. Beatrice Wright's personal life and professional experiences together create the tapestry of her conceptual development

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<sup>8</sup> Email correspondence from Beatrice A. Wright, October 30, 2007.

### **Purposes of the Project**

The purposes of this project are to (1) record and transcribe recollections of Beatrice A. Wright, the person known as a Founder/Mother of Rehabilitation Psychology, about her life and her work; (2) trace the development of her major conceptual notions; (3) explore the interplay between her life and her times; and, (4) assess the merits of her contributions to the fields of psychology and rehabilitation counseling, as well as to disability rights.

### **Importance of the Study**

I am not alone in considering this research timely and important. Other scholars and related parties interested in Beatrice Wright, from other perspectives, already have asked about including my research in their projects. For instance, former student Henry McCarthy, Ph. D., of the Rehabilitation Counseling Department at Louisiana State University in New Orleans, Louisiana, requested permission to cite several of my preliminary findings in his Switzer Fellowship publication for the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research. Three ideas are of particular interest to him: the extent to which Beatrice was involved in writing the book attributed solely to Fritz Heider, the possible reasons for her absence from the canon of those who have been named recipients of the Lewin Award, and a general review of the literature illustrating multidisciplinary recognition of her influence on disability rights.

Next, a University of Iowa journalist included an interview with me about the merits of Beatrice's work in a news item to be published in the spring of 2008. And, the

president of The Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (Division 6 of the APA) invited me to consider several venues for sharing my research on Beatrice Wright with that organization.

This research is particularly important to the fields of cultural studies, with its emphasis on justice, and of counselor education, with its emphasis on the wellness model, for Beatrice Wright's theories lead to understanding and empowerment for change rather than to pathologizing and hopelessness or resignation. Finally, she is a historical treasure, eager to share her experiences before they are lost to the ravages of time and mortality.

## CHAPTER II. METHODOLOGY

Telling stories is a hallmark of being human, and the most interesting stories are about humans, human interactions, or the interactions of other life forms that have human characteristics. For centuries, what might be termed ‘biography’ was the most common term for telling stories about people. And, it was assumed that entire cultures and times could be understood from stories about people deemed worthy of becoming a legend, without critique of who was telling the tale, about whom, for what purpose, and with what biases or assumptions or agendas. There was little concern about who those not included in the stories might be and what they might have to say: “The assumption that history was the sum of the biographies of a limited number of dominant individuals came easily to an age which conceived the hero as the center of that society. The actions of lesser characters were only elements of a setting within which the greater operated; and other forces, if considered at all, were part of the background.”<sup>9</sup>

### **Combining Biographical and Historical Documentation**

Yet, while this long may have been the perspective of biographers, some historians, and laypeople, it was not the perspective of those who understood (and continue to understand) a historical approach to the human story as something more than either biography or lists of dates commemorating when something occurred that was deemed important by a dominant culture. Along with others, I acknowledge that, “the

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<sup>9</sup> Oscar Handlin, *Truth in History* (Cambridge, MA: Belnap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979), 267.

lessons of history are that one cannot transcend the specifics of time and place.”<sup>10</sup> The story I researched and seek to tell best can be described as *biography*, “a mode akin to history, yet a separate kind of endeavor. The biographer uses evidence from the past but focuses upon the individual and answers questions about personality and character that the historian usually does not ask.”<sup>11</sup>

Such forms of historical inquiry have been accepted as a valid for of research for so long, observes Moyer, that only recently has there been an expectation that one describe the methodology associated with conducting original research<sup>12</sup> more precisely than, “interviewer listened to and recorded story teller” or “researcher sought out as many primary and secondary resources as possible archived in as many locations as possible. Yet, as Habel notes, biographical research may require the researcher to reverse the process of a social scientist, who relies on a methodology from the beginning, and instead develop a methodology after starting on a subject and following the evidence where it leads.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Barbara Thayer-Bacon and Diana Moyer, “Philosophical and Historical Research,” in *Doing Educational Research: A Handbook*, eds. Kenneth Tobin and Joe L. Kinchelo (Rotterdam, the Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2006), 153.

<sup>11</sup> Handlin, 266.

<sup>12</sup> Thayer-Bacon and Moyer, 7.

<sup>13</sup> John Carl Habel, “Constructing a Biography of Nicholas Hobbs,” *Inside Stories: Qualitative Research Reflections*, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998, 17.

At one point, the individual's story may take center stage; at another point, what is happening in the world at large may be the focus. Overall, though, argues Miller, "The micro-macro interplay between motivations of the individual actor and the social structure that provides opportunities and impediments to ambition and hopes inevitably moves to the fore."<sup>14</sup> In the end, Habel concludes, "the decisions regarding choice of subject, selection of information, and the thematic structure depend more on the vagaries that are involved in the relationship between biographer and subject than on any explicit biographical method."<sup>15</sup>

### **This Study**

While tracing the intellectual foundations on which Beatrice Wright's views about disability could be accomplished through any of a wide range of options, the one chosen for this research project is the form of biography<sup>16</sup> called a *life history*, "a narrative about a specific significant aspect of a person's life."<sup>17</sup> The genesis of life history methodology

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Miller, "The Historical Context," *Biographical Research Methods*, ed. Robert Miller (London: Sage Publications, 2005) 1:332.

<sup>15</sup> Habel, *Inside Stories*, 18.

<sup>16</sup> John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998), 48. Creswell is among those who use the term 'biography' to include all forms of telling the stories of others, rather than differentiating individual biographies from autobiographies, life histories, and oral histories.

<sup>17</sup> Susan E. Chase, "Narrative Inquiry: Multiple Lenses, Approaches, Voices," in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 3rd Ed., eds. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 652.

can be traced to the 1918-20 publication of a five volume sociological study entitled, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, by William Isaac Thomas and Florian Znaniecki. It was so highly revered for the next several decades as an example of the finest possible research that it led to the Social Science Research Council asking psychologist John Dollard to develop criteria differentiating life history from literary biography or simple story-telling. Dollard was among those who thought that, “The material must be worked up and mastered from some systematic viewpoint.”<sup>18</sup>

### Life History Research Methodology

Maintaining that a life needed first to be understood through a range of perspectives and in a variety of contexts and then to be conceptualized, Dollard developed seven principles that comprised what still is considered by many to be *the* standard for constructing a life history.<sup>19</sup> These criteria serve as the methodological framework for this life history of Beatrice Wright delineated in the section on “Data Analysis” that appears later in this chapter.

Briefly stated, the first four of Dollard’s criteria require a researcher to assess (1) the organic, (2) the familial, (3) the situational, and (4) the historical-cultural contexts within which a life is to be studied. The next two criteria involve analyzing the life being

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<sup>18</sup> Ken Plummer, *Documents of Life: An Introduction to the Problems and Literature of a Humanistic Method* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), 49.

<sup>19</sup> John Dollard, *Criteria for the Life History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1935).

studied to demonstrate (5) the continuity and interactionality of the narrator’s behavior from childhood through adulthood, which in turn illustrates (6) how ‘the organic materials’ or specifics of that person’s life translate into social behavior. Finally, according to Dollard, the life historian “must do the critical work of fashioning the necessary concepts, of making the required connections, and of piecing the whole life history together.”<sup>20</sup> (Sixty years after publication of these criteria during the golden age of life history research in America, Donald Polkinghorne updated Dollard’s language and thereby made the seven criteria for judging a life history more accessible to the current generation of researchers.<sup>21</sup>)

More than a mere recounting of what happened when, and where, “Life histories are ‘knowledge in the making’—knowledge that is simultaneously substantive (reflecting the consistencies in the narrator’s biography), reflexive (re-interpreting these consistencies) and emergent (incorporating the novelty of the present).”<sup>22</sup> Moving from the past to the present and back again, reflecting on how one’s life has been shaped by external events, is a primary strength of the life history, writes Plummer. According to

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<sup>20</sup> Dollard, 34.

<sup>21</sup> Donald E. Polkinghorne, “Narrative Configuration in Qualitative Analysis,” *Biographical Research Methods*, ed. Robert Miller (London: Sage Publications, 2005) 2:87-89.

<sup>22</sup> Margaretha Järvinen, “Life Histories and the Perspective of the Present,” *Narrative Inquiry* 14, no. 1 (2004): 62.

him, “A life history cannot be told without a constant reference to historical change, and this central focus on change must be seen as one of life history’s great values.”<sup>23</sup>

As a researcher, I wanted to document Beatrice’s story of how her ideas developed, from her narrative point of view and from her location, both then and now, because I thought it was a story worth hearing. This primarily was accomplished through use of what Denizen calls the biographical method, a “studied use and collection of life documents that describe turning-point moments in an individual’s life.”<sup>24</sup>

To a large degree, my interest in Beatrice Wright stemmed out of her already having attained international fame as a founder of rehabilitation psychology. To an even larger degree, my interest in her was related to my certainty that history has much to offer us and should, therefore, not be forgotten. That applies especially to the lives and contributions of women. So, discovering that Beatrice Wright’s incredibly significant influence on the fields of rehabilitation, disability rights, and counseling often is *not* being recognized by contemporary leaders in the field motivated me from both the historical and feminist perspectives. Plummer tells us that life histories are done about three classifications of people: the marginal, the great, and the ordinary.<sup>25</sup> As a woman in a patriarchal culture, as a founder of a new field of psychology, and as a self-described

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<sup>23</sup> Plummer, 70.

<sup>24</sup> Norman K. Denizen, *Interpretive Biography* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1989), 69.

<sup>25</sup> Plummer, 88-89.

‘normal person,’ Beatrice might qualify as any or all of the three. But, my interest and imagination being captured by this particular person ultimately can be explained most completely by, as Habel described it, the biographer’s “idiopathic judgment.”<sup>26</sup>

And so, the past few years have been devoted to gaining increasingly deeper understanding about the facts of Beatrice’s life, her take on those facts and, then, my interpretation of the facts of her life and my thoughts on her interpretation of the facts of her life. “In neither case can the stories be seen as the lives themselves,” Goodson and Sikes remind us, “but, we argue, they are as close as it is possible to get.”<sup>27</sup> At the same time, it must be acknowledged early on that, “Life historians commonly do make extensive use of quotations and transcripts from interviews.”<sup>28</sup> Although life historians and other biographers accept responsibility for describing, interpreting or analyzing the lives being presented, they also generally have high regard for what the people living those lives have to say about their own stories. And so, Denzin reminds, “Our texts must

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<sup>26</sup> John Habel, “Precipitating Myself Into Just Manageable Difficulties: Reflections on Constructing an Intellectual Biography of Nicholas Hobbs,” *Inside Stories: Qualitative Research Reflections*, ed. Kathleen Bennett deMarrais (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998), 17.

<sup>27</sup> Ivor F. Goodson and Pat Sikes, *Life History Research in Educational Settings: Learning from Lives* (Buckingham, UK: Open University Press, 2001), 56.

<sup>28</sup> Goodson and Sikes, 52.

always return to and reflect the words persons speak as they attempt to give meaning and shape to the lives they lead.”<sup>29</sup>

In approaching research in this manner, I became a narrator as well, seeking also to make meaning of the material I studied and to ‘be heard’ despite the limitations of **my** locations and situation.<sup>30</sup> Goodson and Sikes elaborate on the nature of the collaborative effort between researcher and research participant to co-construct a story of events in a particular time and place, as experienced by the participant and interpreted by both participant and researcher:

The life history is collaboratively constructed by a life storyteller and life story interviewer/researcher. ... The aim is to ‘locate’ the life story as it operates in particular historical circumstances. A range of data is employed: documents, interviews with relevant others, theories, texts, even physical locations and buildings. ... to locate the life story as a social phenomenon existing in historical time.<sup>31</sup> ... In this way it is possible to gain some glimpse of, and insight into, the rupture and the marriage between individual lives and the social settings in which they are lived.<sup>32</sup>

### The Risk of Life History Research

A layer of parallel process between Beatrice, life storyteller, and me, life story researcher, is the reality that departing from more favored modes of research carries with

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<sup>29</sup> Denzin, 1989, 81.

<sup>30</sup> Chase, 656-58.

<sup>31</sup> Goodson and Sikes, 62.

<sup>32</sup> Goodson and Sikes, 107.

it some risk for the researcher. Goodson and Sikes describe what appears on the face of it to be the same kind of ‘risk’ that Beatrice accepted when pursuing a career in psychology despite her gender, her marital status and her motherhood:

... the move to present sociology as an objective science led to a decline in life history work and to a consequent muzzling of the qualitative appraisal of subjective experience: so, not to put too fine a point on it, using life history can have negative implications for a researcher’s career development. It may make it harder to achieve academic qualifications, to get work published and therefore read; to attract funding and to attain seniority and promotion, even though the ‘objective’ status of quantitative and ‘scientific’ research is no longer as inviolate as it once was. In fact, it has been suggested that one important reason why women have apparently been more willing to embrace auto/biographical and narrative forms is that they have less to lose.<sup>33</sup>

How fortunate I am to nearing the end of a satisfying and meaningful career, so that I can savor this glorious opportunity for expending time, energy, financial resources, and personal commitment to conduct the historical research of my choice! It truly has been a life’s dream for me. Tracing the developments of another’s life and ideas requires searching out and then examining the junctions of personal and professional lives, the places where one aspect of the self clearly influences another aspect of the self. The result is the culmination of an artistic process that weaves a narrative fabric out of the factual, descriptive, interpretive and analytic threads that emerged during research. This approach of wedding the science of historical research to the art of constructing

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<sup>33</sup> Goodson and Sikes, 106.

biography<sup>34</sup> begins with a researcher's sense of how humans construct the past and interpret its meaning.

### **A Philosophy of History**

*Locating the life story as it operates in particular historical circumstances* is an important phrase, for it signified the overarching methodological frame for my work, and it was grounded within a philosophical stance best articulated by George Herbert Mead's theory of the past and Paul Ricoeur's notion of emplotment.

Mead was an American philosopher, sociologist, psychologist, and co-founder of social psychology who posited that there is no concrete, objective 'past.' Rather, we reconstruct the past from our always-evolving perspective of the present. "What it was" does not exist, according to Mead, only "what it is. With every new present, there comes a new past."<sup>35</sup> The experiences we remember are those that disrupted the continuity of ordinary life and led to some adaptation on our part. Called 'emergent events,' they are distinguishable only through retrospection; there is no planning for them, nor no recognizing them in the moment.<sup>36</sup> Simply put, Mead's theory maintains "that neither

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<sup>34</sup> David Novarr, *The Lines of Life: Theories of Biography, 1880-1970* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1986), 140.

<sup>35</sup> Järvinen, 47. As Järvinen further notes, Mead's conceptualization of Time—complete with Past, Present and Future—is similar to Augustine's differentiation between what we clergy call *Chronos* (ever-changing, mortal time) and *Kairos* (eternal, divine time)

<sup>36</sup> George Cronk, "George Herbert Mead," *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/m/mead.htm> (accessed July 7, 2007).

the past nor the future have existence in and of themselves, but that they are important components of the present.”<sup>37</sup> So, then, when one narrator’s reconstruction of an emergent event is different from another narrator’s, or from ‘facts’ recorded somewhere else, the Mead-oriented researcher understands that all the various interpretations of one experience may be ‘correct.’ That researcher’s task is to invite more conversation about the emergent event and the part the narrator sees it playing in her life. “The initiative in narrated history does not belong to the past but to the questions asked about it,” Järvinen notes, “and these questions are always posed from a specific perspective, the perspective of the present.”<sup>38</sup>

By looking at these phenomena regarding memory from a perspective informed by Mead’s theory of the past, then, one can see that people select situationally relevant events in their lives, and of the world, and then ascribe meaning to those selected events. Ricoeur’s theory on time and narrative carries this notion further.

Paul Ricoeur was a French philosopher whose philosophical anthropology explained how people structure their understanding of life.<sup>39</sup> A primary way that humans make sense of their experiences is to organize them through what Ricoeur terms

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<sup>37</sup> David R. Maines, Noreen M. Sugrue, and Michael A. Katovich, “The Sociological Import of G.H. Mead’s Theory of the Past,” *American Sociological Review* 48:2 (April 1983): 162.

<sup>38</sup> Järvinen, 48.

<sup>39</sup> Bernard Dauenhauer, “Paul Ricoeur,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ricoeur> (accessed July 4, 2007): 1-26.

‘emplotment,’ with the author/narrator situated in the present, seeking to provide a retrospective view of the whole story. As he explained, “order is our homeland despite everything [and so we require that history] puts consonance where there was only dissonance.”<sup>40</sup> In other words, Ricoeur complements Mead’s theory of the past in relating *what* happened by adding *why* to the story.

Ricoeur holds that development of a narrative identity evolves through four stages.<sup>41</sup> In the first stage, the narrator pulls together all the strands of what might seem separately like a disorganized list of ‘emergent events’ and organizes them into a coherent story with beginning, middle and end. Next, the narrator fashions a text that is plausible, whether for chronological or contextual, or other, reason, even though the disparate elements might appear unlikely for such summation. Third, the narrator adds people, with all their complex and contradictory characteristics, to the action of the story. Fourth, and last, the narrator enlivens these people with personality and makes an ethical assessment of their behavior. This is where the data can be very interesting, indeed!

Ricoeur’s thinking, says Järvinen, is somewhat similar to the ‘conversion plot’ of Augustine’s *Confessions* when it comes to how we construct our pasts: “Conversion may turn bad fortune into good, or good fortune into bad, but what makes these stories

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<sup>40</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) 1: 2, as quoted in Järvinen, 49.

<sup>41</sup> Dauenhauer, 14.

recognizable is some kind of reversal on the theme [of] human happiness/success vs. human unhappiness/misfortune.”<sup>42</sup>

Beatrice calls this, “The happenstance of circumstance” and reflects, for instance, that her life would have been very different, and perhaps negatively so, if she hadn’t been discriminated against by anti-nepotism laws that kept her off the faculty when her husband was hired as a professor at the University of Kansas. According to both Mead and Ricoeur, in order for this interpretation of how good came from bad to be accepted, it has to be believable, or typical, for others as well. That Beatrice and countless other women have not just survived sexism, but even have thrived in some way because of it (she wrote an internationally recognized book that has become a classic in its field during her ‘free time’ of unemployment), lends sufficient credibility to her conversion plot. This, too, then, is an important element of conducting narrative research. As Järvinen reminds us,

What kinds of emplotment people use in their life histories; how emergence is mitigated by changing perspectives on the past; what kind of narrative identities are constructed by the stories, what kind of relationship the story establishes between the narrator and his/her social environment, and finally, how all this is related to the narrator’s ‘ongoing projects’ — these seem to be the aspects Mead’s and Ricoeur’s theories invite us to focus on as life history researchers.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Järvinen, 54.

<sup>43</sup> Järvinen, 53-54.

### Interpreting Historical Research

Unlike other forms of research, the role of interpretation in historical research is primary, and it cannot be underestimated. This is so, says Ödman, especially when facts and theories lead to subordinate questions about the dominant forces in society at certain times, the processes of socialization and world-views of both the dominant and subordinate, and what prompted some groups to be treated differently than others. Such questions lead to information that must be interpreted: “First, there is a need to understand the meaning of the basic material. For instance, a pedagogical statement in its relation to the intentions of the individual . . . Second, it also is necessary to establish totalities which promote an understanding of different events in their relation to the larger context of which they were a part.”<sup>44</sup> Further, according to Ödman, one’s hermeneutic stance provides the historical researcher with a methodological framework:

Hermeneutics, as the theory and practice of interpretation, is by necessity closely linked with research predominantly devoted to interpretation . . . [in that] . . . What the researcher aims to do is to understand the meaning of the conglomerate of observations of reality, that is, the data that have been collected. This can be done only by relating the traces from the past to the context of meaning of which they were a part.<sup>45</sup>

Ödman then goes on to identify Ricoeur as helpful to those conducting historical research because of Ricoeur’s notion that a personal text always includes the narrator and

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<sup>44</sup> Per-Johan Ödman, “Interpreting the Past,” *Qualitative Studies in Education* 5, No. 2 (1992): 167.

<sup>45</sup> Ödman, 168.

the existential world that both the narrator and the listener inhabit. This joint perspective bridges the tension between traditional and contemporary approaches to empirical evidence. Ödman summarizes how Ricoeur joins factual and symbolic approaches so that they work together:

The interpretational work, thus, can be described as the process by which other possibilities of being-in-the-world are made apparent. The reader/interpreter understands [self] in a new way when faced by the text and the world it exposes.

This may sound ruthlessly subjective. But only in what is subjective—with my consciousness mediating between the past and the present—that we can regain what is objective, which once *was* in people's existence, which once was part of being. In this context we must not forget the strong emphasis on examination which all historical research has and ought to have, whether it is a question of examining the literature on the subject or its authentication. Subjectivity and objectivity, in this way, presuppose each other.<sup>46</sup>

Such an approach to research, which is contrary to the traditional bias in favor of 'objectivity,' requires that historical researchers value their own and the narrators' subjectivity as a starting point.

Once a hermeneutical stance is identified, researchers begin the work of gathering and interpreting historical data. Ödman describes a methodological process of interpreting the past that was used in this study.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ödman, 169.

<sup>47</sup> Ödman, 173-75.

Interpreting the past starts with hypotheses, or what Ödman calls *pre-understandings*, based on preliminary assessments that later may turn out to be shallow, presumptive, biased or flatly wrong. So it was with my initial assumption that Beatrice would be an angry feminist eager to tear down whatever walls had prevented her from claiming what was due to her, professionally speaking. That view of how things would be, though nullified by later data, provided a launching pad for subsequent research and was, therefore, a crucial step.

The second, or *explanatory* stage requires that the researcher learn first about the narrator, and then about the context within which the narrator is situated. This detailed yet broad approach is the stage where a researcher dissociates somewhat from the subject of the research, so as to see the narrator's story from more perspectives than either the narrator or the researcher's. This second stage of interpretation was initiated when seeking to verify whether Beatrice was Lewin's only female student and, if Lewin were so supportive of women, what could explain the lack of affiliation between his better-known male students and the females, including Beatrice. Primary data hinted, and then demonstrated, that another woman graduated two years earlier under Lewin's direction.

The final, or *appropriation*, stage of interpreting historical research is an example of Ricoeur's 'hermeneutical arch.' This union of experience and contextuality bridges the gap between a researcher's initial naiveté and an eventual critique. Ödman summarizes it this way:

During work with historical texts, the phenomenon of appropriation often is coupled with the experience of the reality under study as something

timeless, as a kind of being parallel to one's own existence, as something *being*. The past really is 'placing itself in front of the text,' as Ricoeur puts it; it is meeting me not only as lived but also as *living reality*. History becomes life. I experience a human parallel in the fact that the subject of the text shares with me the existential basic condition of being as such. It is as if the text speaks to the interpreter, it is a fellow human being or a whole choir of human beings who are speaking. I thus can experience what the text speaks about as an existing living condition which could as well have been my own. The prerequisites for hermeneutical understanding are thus present. I can appropriate the meaning of the text, which means that knowledge and experience are united and my own existence relativized. And with my new understanding as a point of departure, I can expound . . . [on] the text, interpret it, and thus convey my new understanding to my readers.<sup>48</sup>

Reaching the appropriation stage requires that the historical researcher be guided by such considerations as (1) whether the base of knowledge is sufficient to support the conclusions; (2) whether the researcher's interpretations square with other interpretations with similar information and if not, why; (3) whether these interpretations offer anything meaningful or have been over-simplified; and (4) whether biases have limited the researcher's scope of research, depth of analysis, or integrity of conclusions.

Continuously measuring one's research process with these questions is daunting, to say the least, and may take longer than a researcher wants to spend on the data. But, in the end, such research is worth the effort, for even the tension naturally arising from such intellectual discipline can lead to the 'productive uncertainty' necessary for new discoveries to come.

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<sup>48</sup> Ödman, 174.

To make good guesses and to create sound narratives is the most difficult and advanced phase of the hermeneutical process. It is never easy to make a good guess. Neither is it easy to decide which interpretation should be preferred, or how it may be formulated in the most exact way. Those decisions *must* be difficult; otherwise, the interpreter in some way is making the research too easy. Hermeneutical research requires as great a methodological awareness on the part of its practitioner as do its quantitative counterparts. . . .Is this not where we want to arrive in our research? After arduous interpretational work, finally to find explanations which shed light on the mystery and create a context that binds together matters which we previously believed had nothing to do with each other? Is it not a worthy scholarly goal, even if it happens at the price of cherished patterns of thought?<sup>49</sup>

### The Issue of Gender

I fall essentially within the category of those who seek to ‘recover’ women left out of traditional histories and, as Sam Stack commented about his biographical work on Elsie Ripley Clapp, “to tell her story in the context of her historical time frame and life experiences.”<sup>50</sup> In large part, that is because I think that necessarily problematizing gender, or any other socio-political aspect of a life, can take the focus away from the person whose story is being told and shift it toward the perspective of the researcher. I realize this to some extent always is the case, beginning with the researcher’s choice of what to preserve and what to leave out of a life history. Yet, problematizing an issue

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<sup>49</sup> Ödman, 183.

<sup>50</sup> Sam Stack, “Elsie Ripley Clapp and the Arthurdale Schools,” in *Founding Mothers and Others: Women Educational Leaders During the Progressive Era*, eds. Alan R. Sadovnik and Susan F. Semel (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 107, quoted by Weiler, 171.

seems a more troubling form of such discernment, because the practice can lead to objectification or even victimization of the human whose story is being referenced. In the case of my research, for instance, Beatrice easily could have been presented merely as the object or victim of a social practice now considered unacceptable, rather than as a woman of remarkable ingenuity, resilience and influence.

At the same time, I took seriously Kathleen Weiler's caution that, "there is danger in the recovery project of taking an uncritical and even romantic approach to women subjects, replicating a kind of individualistic biographical history by focusing on the achievements of individual women and ignoring the ways in which male/female binaries worked to create difference and gendered structures of power."<sup>51</sup> Gender clearly affected Beatrice's academic life, and so is included her life history. Yet, so also are her interpretations, which at times include the view that patriarchal privilege worked to her advantage. She recalls that her first professional job, in 1942, was the result of such circumstances. When a colleague from Swarthmore College contacted Kurt Lewin for suggestions of who could fill a teaching position in the psychology department, Lewin's immediate response was, "Beatrice Wright." She was hired on the spot, sight unseen and without an interview, during these early days of World War II. Her interpretation of the event was that, because of enlistments or the military draft, males were in short supply; her take on it was that, in this as in many cases at the time, women therefore were

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<sup>51</sup> Kathleen Weiler, "The Historiography of Gender and Progressive Education in the United States," *Paedagogica Historica* 42, nos. 1 & 2 (February 2006): 175.

employed. However, her interpretation does not gibe with the conclusions of research conducted on career mobility of female psychologists during World War II. Therefore, I provide commentary from both a clearly *here and now* perspective toward sexism and a *then and there* cultural perspective that aims to honor the contradictory interpretation of Beatrice's life experience.

At the same time, I have addressed possible reasons for Beatrice Wright's seldom receiving more than a brief mention in the historical records of Kurt Lewin's students who went on to be very influential in their professional fields. Even when she is lauded, it frequently is Lewin who earns the recognition. Indeed, it was in the role of what Petra Munro terms "the dutiful daughter"<sup>52</sup> that Beatrice was mentioned casually to me during a conversation about the great Kurt Lewin. And, it was in this role that I contacted her in the first place. So, then, I was back to the quintessential concern of a feminist methodology: agency. Keeping in mind the caveat of a worldview that can critique patriarchy as also limiting men, I had to acknowledge it was more difficult for women to succeed professionally, and be recognized for that success, between the end of WWII and the crest of the second wave of feminism than it is now. I also wanted to remember that,

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<sup>52</sup> Petra Munro, "Engendering Curriculum History," in *Curriculum: Toward New Identities*, ed. William F. Pinar (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998), 272-74.

“Whether women exhibit agency at all depends in large measure on societal conditions as well as personal efficacy.”<sup>53</sup>

One of those societal conditions long has been that women are mentored by men, play intellectual Galateas to their brilliant Pygmalions, so to speak. With this worldview, the female never is recognized in her own right, even when “...the significance of her work extends beyond the actualization of [his] theories.”<sup>54</sup> In this regard, Beatrice departs from the traditional mode of claiming affiliation with a male mentor, as Diana Moyer recognized about Elsie Ridley Clapp’s motivations: “[her] use of [his] name was an effective means of obtaining new responsibilities and garnering support for her educational projects.”<sup>55</sup> Instead, Beatrice gave credit where credit was due and went on to produce her own work on Flawed Human Perception and Fundamental Negative Bias, among other notions, that goes far beyond what she learned from Lewin and others.

Beatrice gives credit to her humanist parents for instilling within her a collaborative, positive and inclusive perspective toward life, and she is very generous toward everyone I observed her interacting with over the course of several years. That included her introductions of me when seeing someone at the senior center whom I’d not

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<sup>53</sup> Margaret Smith Crocco, Petra Munro, and Kathleen Weiler, *Pedagogies of Resistance* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999), 7.

<sup>54</sup> Diana Moyer, “Agency in Feminist Historical Research: Representations of Elsie Ripley Clapp,” *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* (Winter 2004): 36.

<sup>55</sup> Moyer, 37.

yet met. I was a little embarrassed at how thickly I think she poured it on; when I told her that, however, she responded that I was being too modest. And yet, I wonder how much of her mindset came out of a sense that it's one way a female could cope with not being a member of the dominant culture. The result was a very pleasant interchange that left people feeling good about themselves, so I'm not saying it was bad. In fact, Nel Noddings might have been describing Beatrice as well as at least some of her contemporaries when writing, "Instead of groping and grasping for power, they recommended and used cooperative methods, accepted all comers on a more or less equal basis."<sup>56</sup> Rather, my question had to do with agency. Did she act this way to subvert the power structure? Did she act this way because she freely chooses to do so? Did she act this way because of a hegemonic perspective that supports the normalcy of such behavior—which means she does not in fact have much agency beyond deciding at some level how to operate within a restrictive environment?

True, hegemonies grow out of human behavior and shape human behaviors that maintain those same hegemonies. And yet, hegemonies also are changed by human behavior. Simply put, no amount of socially constructed, hegemonic, agency can imbue some people in power with the quality of agency; we've all encountered abysmally bad dynastic leaders who haven't the agency to get themselves out of a wet paper bag. At the

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<sup>56</sup> Nel Noddings, "Foreword," in *Pedagogies of Resistance*, eds. Margaret Smith Crocco, Petra Munro, and Kathleen Weiler (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999), ix-x.

same time, socially constructed limitations simply cannot prevent some people from climbing up the socio-economic-political pecking order; their lives are the bases of inspiring biography and insightful life histories. In many ways, meeting Beatrice and her peers resulted in my experiencing something similar to what Petra Munro described upon meeting Agnes, a research candidate who did not meet Munro's original 'profile' and whose advanced age also necessitated an interview sooner rather than later.

Agnes introduced Munro to women of the past and, in doing so, expanded Munro's awareness of the past to include "a larger network of women activists and social reformers, who saw education as central to social reform."<sup>57</sup> Individually and collectively, they demonstrated an agency that contemporary feminists might term resistance to oppression, anti-patriarchal, counter-hegemonic, or even collaborative, but which *they* might see as simply doing what one had to do. I was led to ask if the view of the outsider, in this case the modern feminist, were more valid about what was going on than that of the insider, the woman who actually lived in another time and considers herself to have had enormous agency? We see a very different power dynamic if the insider reflects on her past behavior and concludes that she did or did not have much agency than if an outsider does all the interpreting.

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<sup>57</sup> Petra Munro, *Subject to Fiction: Women Teachers' Life History Narratives and the Cultural Politics of Resistance* (Buckingham, UK: Open University Press, 1998), 45.

That is why I like Moyer's suggestion of "rethinking agency as a process of mobilization rather than a quality that is either present or absent."<sup>58</sup> The either-or assessment of something as nuanced and complex as *agency* seems particularly linear and implies that it is something easily determined and understood. This unitary view of human action understands *agency* as an event; by offering us a process orientation, Moyer invites us to look at *agency* through a participative lens. Having discovered that I am less interested in assigning one or another motivations than I am in hearing the stories, this was the approach I followed when assessing Beatrice's agency.

Although neither Mead nor Ricoeur speak directly of gender when describing how 'man' seeks to equilibrate what was experienced with explanations for what was experienced, the reality of gender can be located within what Ricoeur would term *emplotment* and is consistent with Mead's theory of the past. Their theories maintain that humans seek to understand what we remember about past experiences (or, as Mead would say, emergent events) and organize them so that they're recognizable by present standards (or, as Ricoeur would say, emplotments). Yet, because women have different informing mythologies from those provided for men, *how* women make sense of their past is of special interest to researchers of women's narratives. As Sara Alpern writes,

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<sup>58</sup> Moyer, 41.

gender always is in some way “central to an understanding of a woman’s life, even if that woman is not particularly conscious of that centrality or even denies it.”<sup>59</sup>

Mary Gergen builds on Alpern’s assertion and adds that the image of a strong, silent and singular masculine hero conflicts with the traditional feminine pattern of “the long-suffering, selfless, socially embedded heroine, being moved in many directions, lacking the tenacious loyalty demanded of a quest.”<sup>60</sup> That is what we expect of each gender, even though it may be an unwarranted expectation contradicted by the specifics of a life’s experiences. Even a woman narrating her own life story may put a different spin on what happened because of, say sexist attitudes against professional women, by relating that she willingly gave up a satisfying career to assume her husband’s social identity.<sup>61</sup> In such a circumstance, this *conversion plot* is not so much an error as it is the basis of an interpretive insight “structured around a cultural framework of meaning and shaped by particular patterns of inclusion, omission, and disparity.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Sara Alpern et al, eds., *The Challenge of Feminist Biography: Writing the Lives of Modern American Women* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 9.

<sup>60</sup> Mary Gergen, “Life Stories: Pieces of a Dream,” in *Storied Lives: The Cultural Politics of Self-Understanding*, eds. George C. Rosenwald and Richard L. Ochberg (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 130.

<sup>61</sup> Kathleen Weiler, “Remembering and Representing Life Choices: A Critical Perspective on Teachers’ Oral History Narratives,” *Qualitative Studies in Education* 5, no. 1 (1992): 39-50.

<sup>62</sup> Casey, 234.

To approach a life story from a feminist lens, then, requires awareness that while men's stories focus on and around their achievements, especially on what might be considered heroic deeds, women's stories focus on and around their social embeddedness, despite their heroic deeds. This applies to women of all socio-economic-political ranges, and "even when women are top leaders, or prominent in society in some other way, they cannot construct their personal narratives according to a plot that would be self-evident—and self-explanatory—for their male colleagues."<sup>63</sup> Having this awareness is not enough, however, to qualify as having a feminist lens toward one's research. To be feminist in approach, one must also be interested in the narrator as a person in her own right, and in her perspective about the life she's lived.<sup>64</sup>

Developing this narrative strategy is crucial, says Chase, for understanding "the narrative linkages"<sup>65</sup> between the facts of a narrator's life and what those facts mean to the narrator, to the researcher, as well as to the collaborative effort they make to tell a particular *life history*. This brought me to the question of what voice to adopt for presenting Beatrice's story. Chase identifies three possibilities—the authoritative voice, the supportive voice, and the interactive voice—all of which a researcher might use at one time or another, although I viewed choosing one as a predominant mode as wisest.

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<sup>63</sup> Järvinen, 57.

<sup>64</sup> Chase, 655.

<sup>65</sup> Chase, 663.

That is because I see the authoritative and supportive voices as least egalitarian among the three, and in both cases, the narrator is the one with less power.

My experience with interviewing a wide range of women, in a number of contexts, over the past thirty or so years, tells me that the ‘richest’ stories are offered only to those understood at some level as peers. In this regard, I agreed wholeheartedly with Casey that, “without actually abdicating their monopoly on expertise, scholars are finding, they cannot succeed in narrative research, initially in eliciting authentic stories from speakers whose experiences and interpretations are different from their own and finally in understanding the worth of what they have been given.”<sup>66</sup> From the narrator’s perspective, researchers cannot be trusted with the tenderest or most poignant details of a life until and unless they have proven their trustworthiness. And that requires mutuality at some level.

Using an interactive researcher voice rendered me vulnerable, too, for I was expected to reveal my thoughts and feelings, to share the reconstructed perspectives of my past, to reflect on my understanding of the relationship I shared with Beatrice, and to declare my sense of the cultural milieu we inhabit. Although more complex, energy-demanding and time-consuming, the interactive narrative strategy “undermine[s] the myth of the invisible omniscient author”<sup>67</sup> and is, in large part, why I preferred to use it.

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<sup>66</sup> Casey, 233.

<sup>67</sup> Chase, 666.

## Critiques

Although viewing narratives as an important tool for including women and their achievements when revisiting old stories and constructing new ones, Munro offers three important considerations when researching a life history.

The first begins with the disempowering notion of “‘recovering’ the voices of women who have traditionally been marginalized.”<sup>68</sup> To approach research in this manner is to reinforce the notion that, if it were not for the researcher, these individuals still would not be heard—once again victimizing them through an assumption that they lack their own agency. As long as the dynamic between researcher and narrator is that of liberator to the oppressed, Munro warns, an unequal power dynamic exists.

Remembering to approach construction of a life history, then, as a collaborative effort between the life storyteller and the life interviewer/researcher, is crucial. This was brought home to me once when Beatrice responded to the suggestion that I deliver her to the door of her church on a rainy day while I found a parking place some distance away by giving me a look of stern admonishment and declaring that if she needed my assistance she would ask for it. While it is true that my take on Beatrice’s life history is different from how others have approached it, and while it is gratifying to think that I alone am saving her from anonymity, the truth is, she is an articulate and competent individual who can take care of herself, thank you very much. We both walked in the

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<sup>68</sup> Munro, *Subject to Fiction*, 12.

rain from parked car to church entrance, although she did take my arm. Her gesture may have been age-related only; yet, I understood it also as mutual recognition that she'd made her point.

Next, Munro identifies a tendency, perhaps natural, to 'romanticize' the person whose story is being told, rather than allowing the fallible human being, complete with warts, to be known within the context of that life. When this happens, not only are we denied the opportunity to appreciate how complex an ordinary life is, we may not be afforded as full a picture as possible of how the narrator interacted with the particularities of social life during that time.

Munro also cautions that power dynamics and interpretive biases are present in this form of research, no less than in any other form.<sup>69</sup> Just as it is important not to forget that the narrator does have a voice, it is vital also to remember that there is more to an individual's story than that gleaned and interpreted by any single researcher, or researcher working in concert with a narrator.

The women Munro wanted to interview had their own thoughts about how those interviews should be structured and what their relationships should and would be. She recalls that the interviewees met her initial assumptions about launching into a collaborative effort of equals with firm resistance. Some saw her as the researcher and themselves as the subject of a project that was 'work.' Further, her willingness to share

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<sup>69</sup> Munro, *Subject to Fiction*, 12.

in their vulnerability by telling them her personal story was experienced by at least one as “odd,” given that she was the interviewer and was, therefore, to be the listener.<sup>70</sup> I felt a similar tension the first few times I spoke with Beatrice, and realized in retrospect that it had taken us several years to reach the point of friendly collaboration that we eventually shared.

Likewise, Munro discovered that the narrators sometimes wanted to talk about different topics than those she had settled on. Her experience of an interviewee yielding to Munro’s choice of subjects reminds me of when I insisted on talking about one thing at a time that Beatrice clearly wanted to talk about another. When, several months later, after I’d read the transcript of our previous interview and saw how many times I’d re-directed the conversation, I opened the conversation with the topic she’d wanted, an unbelievable wealth of information and stories poured forth. This sequence of events taught me that, at least with Beatrice, I could not assume our being females who got along famously would be sufficient reason to bypass the normal human process of getting to know someone and attempt to quickly rush into an instant assumption of equality.

Finally, Munro invites us to consider the extent to which the collaborative process extends to the analysis and final research product. Just as she envisioned participating in the narrative process by sharing her own story, she anticipated that the narrators (her term was ‘life historians’) would be involved in analyzing and writing their life histories. Yet,

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<sup>70</sup> Munro, *Subject to Fiction*, 127-29.

they did not necessarily jump at the chance to shape the stories about their lives. In fact, she received the same response from one that I got from Beatrice: other than checking the accuracy of facts, I as researcher was entrusted to tell her story.<sup>71</sup> At the same time, Beatrice clearly was invested in the product of our work. At one point we spent several hours going over more than thirty detailed changes she requested in the draft of a chapter. One of those changes was ‘clarification’ of a published comment she’d made some years ago; one was a substantive revision that totally removed the essence of her personality from an interchange with a person who had disabilities. When I objected to what I called her sanitized version and its subsequent sterility, she paused, laughed, and said, “You’re right! It’s your paper, and I did say it that way. You decide.” When I told her I’d always opt for letting the “real Beatrice” shine through, she got a little tearful and said she was glad I’m the one doing the research. That was a poignant moment, and it demonstrated to me the collaborative nature of our relationship, with boundary-related limits.

Recognizing that I have both known and unknown prejudices and limitations, I did what I could to make sure that what I recorded has been protected and will be available for others to interpret as well. To that end, upon completion of this project, I will provide Beatrice and Louise Barker (or their families) with copies of our interviews and have assured Beatrice that all my tapes and materials relative to her life history will be forwarded to her archives. Bottom line, I sought to incorporate my feminist, humanist,

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<sup>71</sup> Munro, *Subject to Fiction*, 132.

relational stances into my identity as a historian who values all her sources and so will do all I can to maintain the integrity of the record. As Handlin reminds us, “No concern could be deeper than assaults upon the record, upon the very idea of a record.”<sup>72</sup>

### **Data Collection**

Because life histories incorporate personal, historical, cultural, situational and interactional perspectives, conducting the research necessary to produce sufficient data for analytic induction requires a creative and flexible approach. According to Annabel Faraday and Kenneth Plummer, the preferred technique for exploring the specific details of general areas required for construction of a life history “is best described as *Ad Hoc Fumbling Around*.”<sup>73</sup>

This study was grounded in unstructured interviews drawing from Beatrice Wright’s and others’ recollections, from primary documentation in Dr. Wright’s personal files, and from data in the public domain, such as archives or public documents. Interviewing people in such manner was the preferred course of action because this method ‘opens up’ the conversation to areas neither the narrator nor the researcher initially may have considered.<sup>74</sup> The interviews began taking place over the course of a

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<sup>72</sup> Handlin, 408.

<sup>73</sup> Annabel Farraday and Kenneth Plummer, “Doing Life Histories,” *Biographical Research Methods*, ed. Robert Miller (London: Sage Publications, 2005) 4:260.

<sup>74</sup> Gabriele Rosenthal, “Biographical Research,” *Biographical Research Methods*, ed. Robert Miller (London: Sage Publications, 2005) 3:31.

three-day weekend in July 2005 at Beatrice's home in Madison, WI, and started with this question: "*How has this work, this time that you spent with Kurt Lewin, impacted your life?*" Beatrice's response to the open-ended invitation to interpret her story led to nearly three years of non-linear conversation about her life, her ideas, her work, and her sense of the legacy she has built. Four additional face-to-face interviews took place between July 1, 2005 and October 15, 2007, and we still call and email each other regularly. On December 27, 2007, for example, Beatrice telephoned to talk about several topics, including her inclusion in the most recent edition of *The American Psychologist* advertisement of works by influential psychologists.

In anticipation of our July 2-3, 2005, conversations, Beatrice gathered papers, photographs and other mementos of her life. She also allowed me to make copies of original papers presented by Kurt Lewin, Margaret Meade, and Erik Erikson during the topology group meeting at Smith College in 1940 and the verbatim interchanges of this group in order to understand as 'first hand as possible' how she experienced that event. She demonstrated the same generosity on each successive visit to her home for interviews.

Five other women (no men were alive) who knew Kurt Lewin and Beatrice Wright from 1938-1942 were identified, contacted, and able to provide additional information about their experiences with the two: Louise Barker, the widow of Lewin student Roger Barker, and their daughters Celia Barker Lottridge and Lucy Barker Henighan; Dr. Patricia Woodward Cautley, a University of Pennsylvania doctoral

student who came to Iowa to work with Lewin the summer of 1941; and Dr. Miriam A. Lewin, Dr. Kurt Lewin's daughter, who remembered Beatrice Wright as one of her father's most promising graduate students. All were willing to participate in this research project. Louise and Celia Barker were interviewed July 15, 2005, and Lucy Barker asked to share her recollections when we met on September 10, 2005. As that occasion was a 99<sup>th</sup> birthday party for Louise Barker, it was a special reunion between Louise Barker and Beatrice Wright. Miriam Lewin was interviewed by telephone on December 5, 2005. Sadly, Dr. Cautley died before we could meet; however, her daughter earlier had sent me a copy of an unpublished oral history Dr. Cautley completed some years earlier, along with permission to use it in my research.

In-depth interviews and researcher observations provided the bulk of data used in this study. All participants were advised that their participation was voluntary and that they could discontinue participation at any time without negative consequences. Data were recorded through audiotape, videotapes when possible, and handwritten notes. The purpose of such recording was to ensure accuracy in documenting interviewee comments and narratives. Permission to interview and photograph them, and to make copies of documents they provide, was obtained orally on audiotape.

Analysis and interpretation included Beatrice's responses to copies of interview transcriptions provided to her. Both published and unpublished oral histories and interviews provided additional data for this study, and those sources are cited as fully as possible.

Because the words we use to tell others about our understandings comprise a bridge between our inner and outer selves, I paid attention to the details of her and others' verbal construction, including descriptions of people and the sequencing of events, for these elements can reveal a great deal about the interviewee's story. As Bamburg notes,

When we study narratives, we are neither accessing speakers' past experiences nor their reflections on their past experiences (and through them how they reflect their selves). Rather, we study talk; talk that does not reveal immediately or directly (and potentially not even indirectly) the speaker's internal organization of his/her self (if there actually is such a thing). However, in and through talk, speakers establish (i) what the talk is about (aboutness/content), and simultaneously (ii) the particular social interaction in the form of particular social relationships. ...In working from these two levels of positioning . . . we are better suited to make assumptions about the ideological positions (or master narratives) within which narrators are positioning a sense of self ....<sup>75</sup>

Such enriched narrative analysis was especially fruitful in some circumstances. For instance, an oral history conducted in 1990 that Beatrice dislikes is the only one of at least nine interviews that captured a tone of impatience with her interviewer, making loud and clear her opinion of his sexist attitude about her sons being so outstanding while ignoring her daughter's accomplishments. Also, a more complete analysis of Louise Barker's recollections led to awareness that she had referred to complicated personal relationships between several of the people being recalled. However, while immensely interesting, the information was at most only somewhat tangentially related to Beatrice Wright's life history and so was not deemed relevant to this project.

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<sup>75</sup> Michael Bamburg, "Stories: Big or Small: Why Do We Care?" *Narrative Inquiry* 16, no. 1 (2006): 144-145.

## **Documentation**

Exploring the past often can lead to better understanding of the same circumstances for future students and educators, and a wide range of sources was utilized for research on the development of Beatrice Wright's concepts about disability and disadvantage in general. Preliminary, primary and secondary sources, to use Borg's<sup>76</sup> classifications, all played a part in this historical documentation.

Preliminary sources, tools that located "primary sources . . . directly involved in or witnesses to a particular historical episode or issue [and] secondary sources . . . written after the event, usually by those who are not a party to it,"<sup>77</sup> began with a conversation about Lewin's work in Iowa that led to the incidental information about Beatrice Wright's having been one of his students. PsychInfo database and advanced Google searches then were conducted of publications that included her name; a librarian at the University of Iowa pulled and copied Commencement programs of doctoral candidates between the years of 1936 and 1944 so that a list could be compiled of women receiving doctorates during Lewin's tenure with either a major or minor in Child Psychology; and, archivists at the University of Kansas, the University of Iowa, and the University of North Carolina libraries helped locate oral histories and obituaries. Additionally, a

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<sup>76</sup> Walter R. Borg, Joyce P. Gall and Meredith D. Gall, *Applying Educational Research: A Practical Guide* (White Plains, NY: Longman), 1987.

<sup>77</sup> Gary McCullough and William Richardson, eds., *Historical Research in Educational Settings* (Buckingham, UK: Open University Press, 2000), 79.

graduate level research assistant the at the University of Iowa was retained to retrieve the twenty-four dissertations of women who graduated from the University of Iowa with a Ph.D. in Child Psychology between 1936 and 1944, to examine the acknowledgment pages for evidence of what professors directed the studies, and to copy the dissertations of two female students whose “Acknowledgment” pages thanked Professor Kurt Lewin and the oral histories of other Iowa Child Welfare Research Station students during that time period. Perhaps the most helpful preliminary source of information, however, was Beatrice Wright’s professional curriculum vita, which listed all her training, employment, professional achievements and publications in chronological order.

Ultimately, primary documentation comprised the bulk of investigative resources for this historical research. In addition to Beatrice Wright’s books, monograph, and published articles, I relied on the following sources of information: taped interviews, telephone conversations, and email and postal correspondence with Beatrice Wright, Miriam Lewin, and Louise Barker, among others; unpublished and published oral histories of Beatrice Wright, Roger and Louise Barker, Fritz and Grace Heider, Ronald Lippitt, Marie Skodak Crissey, and Patricia Cautley; Beatrice Wright’s collection of photographs, awards, letters, the minutes of meetings, her retirement scrapbook, boxes of other memorabilia; and, unpublished drafts of later publications authored by Roger Barker and Miriam Lewin. Finally, I relied on such additional primary sources as published biographies of Lewin and autobiographies of Heider and Barker, nearly three

dozen obituaries, several books, and what seemed like countless articles to complement the previously noted 'raw data.'

Secondary sources of research information for this study included historical interpretations of research or events occurring decades ago, as well as contemporary assessments of and research on Beatrice Wright's influence. These primary and secondary sources provide breadth and depth to an understanding of how Beatrice A. Wright has influenced the field rehabilitation psychology and the times in which she has lived.

### **The Process**

This historical research of Beatrice Wright's life history began with a mutual friend of hers and mine casually commenting to me on April 11, 2005, that Kurt Lewin's surviving student was a neighbor. He agreed to ask if she would be interested in working with a doctoral student from the University of Tennessee who wanted to learn more about Kurt Lewin, and did so on April 14, 2005.

Once Dr. Wright gave her permission for the mutual friend to give me her email address and telephone number, I contacted her by telephone on April 20, 2005, and followed that introductory conversation with an email correspondence on April 21, 2005. At the same time, IRB approval was sought for permission to work with human subjects.

I first visited Beatrice at her home in Madison, WI, during the weekend of July 2-3, 2005, and followed with visits to her home February 14-16, 2006, May 18-21, 2007, and October 11-15, 2007. During the first visit I stayed in guest quarters at the retirement

center where she lives; during the last three visits I was an overnight guest in her apartment. We spoke of her experiences, certainly, but also exercised an hour a day in the community fitness center and participated in such retirement center activities as lectures, concerts, movies, and parties. Additionally, we once walked to the nearby farmer's market to shop for fresh vegetables, went to a Momix dance company performance and a movie, and watched July 4 fireworks from a friend's apartment window. While in Madison, I've also shared several meals with Beatrice's son Erik and his wife Marcia, as well as with a number of Beatrice's friends at the retirement center. I've also talked by telephone with her daughter, Colleen, and son Woody while in Madison.

Two additional events occurred shortly after the July 2005 visit in Madison. First, as Beatrice had provided a telephone introduction to Louise Barker during my July 2-3 visit, and as Mrs. Barker expressed a willingness to be interviewed as well, I contacted the chair of the University of Tennessee IRB about expediting an amendment to my original proposal so that my research could include more interviews than with Beatrice Wright. The amendment was granted, and so, on July 15, I spent several hours with 98 year-old Louise Barker and her daughter, Celia Barker Lottridge.

Next, one of my professors received funding to invite Beatrice to the University of Tennessee to deliver an address in September 2005. During that time, she stayed in a motel in Knoxville, and my daughter and I provided transportation and companionship during the visit. This included escorting Beatrice to Louise Barker's 99<sup>th</sup> birthday

celebration and joining her and the Barker family at the dinner table. It was very moving to witness the reunion of women who had been friends for over seventy years but who hadn't seen each other for a time. It's impossible to describe the texture of joy Beatrice and Louise displayed at having this opportunity to catch up, face-to-face, on each other's lives. Holding hands and sipping tea, they tearfully and smilingly reminisced for an hour or so. Then, we gathered at the table, ate and sang happy birthday to Louise.

In all, then, Beatrice and I have spent five weekends in each other's company, talking about her life and her experiences, her thoughts, her beliefs, and her legacy. These conversations were audio taped during the July 2005 and February 2006 interviews, for a total of one hundred pages of transcribed material. Field notes, photocopies, two video tapes of Beatrice making presentations, ongoing email or telephone conversations, and postal notes or packages comprise and complement documentation for the other three visits. Beatrice received and had opportunity to react to transcriptions of the taped interviews. Other than correcting dates or the spelling of names, she did not request changes in the transcriptions.

Since our first conversation in April of 2005, Beatrice and I telephoned or emailed each other nearly weekly, sometimes more often, in what I experienced as a mix of professional, personal, and, most recently, collegial affection. The topics mostly included a fragment of information or insight from one or the other of us, although we sometimes also referenced political issues. On January 31, 2008, she called to let me know she'd been ill with bronchitis but was well

enough to anticipate receipt of this dissertation when committee members receive it, so she can check the facts one more time.

### **Data Analysis**

As noted earlier in this chapter, John Dollard's seven criteria for judging a life history technique were used for assessment of the data generated during the course of this research project. Doing so required a conceptual, rather than sequential, mindset: the criteria were met in a non-linear fashion, although a roughly-chronological organization was followed. Data used in this research are analyzed below according to Dollard's seven criteria, albeit in particularized and contemporary language.

The three most important categories of data that supported the first criterion, viewing the 'specimen' in a cultural series, involved the effects of Beatrice's family, of her studies in Iowa, and of her experience in Kansas. These were discrete, highly influential 'cultures' within which she functioned as a member and by which she was significantly affected. This is both her and my assessment of the different cultures that most contributed to who she now recognizes as herself.

Her family's secular humanism has been foundational to her understanding of how she and others are to relate to one another, which led to her interpretation of the disability-related research she read, and in turn led to her work in the field of rehabilitation psychology. Likewise, her family's devotion to each other continues to influence how she interacts with her own children and the 'grands,' as well as her peers and others.

Her years in Iowa were enormously important, and it was there that she forged her strongest personal and professional relationships. Marrying M. Erik Wright and studying with Lewin, Dembo, and others crystallized her identities as wife and conceptualist. While in Kansas, she grew into her promise as a theoretician and professor, reared a family, and established her legacy in disability rights and rehabilitation.

Assessing the motivations of the person and what that person can and will do, Dollard's second criterion for analyzing the data generated by life history research, also pointed to Beatrice's choice of 'family' as her top priority and her positive, humanistic bent. Her gender may have limited her options in the world of psychology, but because she saw herself as living the life she chose, that reality was not as bothersome to her as it was to others. Presented with countless opportunities to respond other than positively, creatively, and agreeably to the cultural norms for professional women after WWII, she made the best of what she could and circumvented or accommodated if she deemed appropriate.

Dollard's third criterion emphasizes a researcher's awareness of how the person reflects familial influence. As already noted in discussion of the first criterion, Beatrice's family of origin was key in her development as a person. The fact of her Jewish heritage, however, is one that Beatrice does not see as important. On several occasions I've speculated that her being Jewish may have had something to do with a noted Jewish economist providing her with room-and-board during college, in exchange for baby-sitting, or that her noted Jewish professors may have felt a kinship with this brilliant

young Jewish woman that contributed to their interest in seeing her succeed. That is not her understanding of her experience, however, and so the conversation has not proceeded. At the same time, her family's interest in intellectual pursuits, education, universal human rights, progressive politics, and communism all suggest that their immigrant, secular and (perhaps stereotypically understood) Jewish culture also played a role.

Additionally, that her parents lived nearby and cared for her children as she wrote, and that her husband provided strong support of her work constitute a major portion of the data comprising this life history. She currently maintains a similarly close, intergenerational relationship with her children and their children and grandchildren, thereby continuing the family tradition of involved parents and grandparents. Therefore, it was not untoward that four generations recently gathered in Madison, Wisconsin, to celebrate her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, an occasion Beatrice found very moving.

“In the life history the body is what we have to go on,”<sup>78</sup> Dollard reminds us, in the fourth criterion that assesses the ‘organic material’ of a person. In Beatrice’s case, her female body had a great deal to do with her professional and personal lives. This reality has been analyzed through political, social, and biological lenses, and illustrates both her uniqueness and her solidarity with other women: interrupting one’s work in order to breastfeed a fussy child, for instance, is not a part of every life history ... but it is of a good many women’s. Further, throughout her ninety years, Beatrice has been

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<sup>78</sup> Dollard, 24.

healthy, able, and intellectually quite gifted. Clearly, then, the organic cannot be overlooked when considering Beatrice Wright's life history.

The fifth criterion of a life history is tracing the relatedness of a person's actions and views to something other than serendipity. Again, the influence of Beatrice's family, with their humanistic and positive outlook on life, cannot be underestimated when assessing her behavior. True, her personality may be organically pre-disposed to a sunny disposition and an accepting tolerance toward others. If so, being born into the Posner family only reinforced these characteristics. Dollard puts it this way: "the life history record shows a center of feeling and positive motivation moving through a culture, over time. The culture offers to this moving center of feeling its preferred barriers and permitted exits, much as in the psychologist's maze."<sup>79</sup> Resilience is key to Beatrice Wright, whether applied to coping with her own tragedies or to her ground-breaking attitude of how we all can view disabilities.

Activism and feminist awareness are the primary features of analyzing this life history data according to the specifications of Dollard's sixth criterion. Keeping "in mind the situation both as defined by others and by the subject,"<sup>80</sup> Beatrice's experiences in being hired during and after WWII are in stark contrast to the results of quantitative research conducted at the time on employment practices of female psychologists. By and

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<sup>79</sup> Dollard, 29.

<sup>80</sup> Dollard, 32.

large, they were not hired, and they experienced even greater chauvinism during WWII than before. At the same time, Beatrice was hired, and she experienced her gender as a favorable factor most pronouncedly during the War. Both ‘facts of life’ were true. Though conflicting, Dollard reminds us, such views must be held simultaneously in a life history that accurately takes into account the factors of a social situation.<sup>81</sup>

While loosely chronological, as demonstrated by organizing the chapters according to where Beatrice was physically located or designated by an especially important time of her life, this life history also has thematic strands. Gender, political and social issues, and personal circumstances all have influenced the development of her intellectual legacy, and they cannot be separated from the picture if one desires to have the fullest possible portrait of Beatrice Wright. And so, both chronology and theme provided the bases for this, the seventh criterion of analyzing life history data in an organized and conceptualized manner.

### **Limitations**

Two potential limitations were the various shortcomings associated with autobiographical memory and researcher bias.

First, Beatrice was in her late 80s when we met and being asked to recall experiences of more than sixty years ago. Readings on autobiographical memory helped me with such issues as event cueing, event clusters, and sequence retrieval. Additionally,

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<sup>81</sup> Dollard, 33.

when possible I compared her responses to other sources for at least factual discrepancies. One such example of her remembering something differently from what the record shows is her oft-printed statement that the Topology Group never reconvened after the 1940 gathering. However, according to Daniel Horowitz, Bettye Goldstein (who later catalyzed the second wave of feminism with a book written under her married name, Betty Friedan) attended the 1943 Topological Society meeting at Smith College, along with Lewin, Mead and others.<sup>82</sup> And, Lewin's biographer reported that the group met again after WWII until disbanding in 1965, even though Kurt Lewin died unexpectedly on February 11, 1947.<sup>83</sup> These differences aside, it is clear that Beatrice did not attend a Topology Group meeting after 1940. By 1948, she had two small children, was pregnant with her third, and was deep into the requirements of job and family. Clearly, to use Mead's language, the 1940 Topology Group meeting was the emergent event for her. At the same time, her overall recall of the past and grasp of everyday contemporary issues has been amazing, and there's no indication that that's changing, even though she recently celebrated her ninetieth birthday.

Regarding the second potential limitation, Beatrice and I developed a relationship over the years that went beyond researcher and narrator. She early on had introduced me

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<sup>82</sup> Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 100.

<sup>83</sup> Alfred J. Marrow, *The Practical Theorist: The Life and Works of Kurt Lewin* (NY: Basic Books, 1969), 112-15.

face-to-face to her son and daughter-in-law, who live in Madison, and by telephone to her daughter, who lives in Florida, and younger son, who lives in Texas. Likewise, I had introduced my daughter to Beatrice when Beatrice came to Knoxville, and they are quite fond of each other. Beatrice and I also shared stories about our families, to the extent that we asked about them by name and within the context of recent events in their lives.

After Beatrice and I met, my father had a series of strokes and has been for some time a hospice patient, both my children married and had babies, and I changed my academic program and focus of my dissertation. Beatrice has welcomed several new great-grandchildren into the family, attended graduations of grandchildren from college, and gone through a year or more of concern after Woody, her younger son, was diagnosed with multiple myeloma. We celebrated his remission with a rare glass of wine. Moreover, Beatrice long has been a Unitarian Universalist and I'm a Unitarian Universalist minister, so we attended her church in Madison on several occasions and shared our theological and spiritual views.

During my visit to Madison in May 2007, Beatrice and I went to "Away from Her," a poignant movie about how love can transcend faded memories and ordinary relational boundaries. We were both quite moved by the film, and later referenced it in our telephone conversations. We planned to discuss the movie further over lunch the next day, and I hoped to ask if it had reminded her of the love she clearly still has for her husband, Erik, who died suddenly and unexpectedly more than twenty-five years ago. However, I received word early the next morning that my daughter had gone into

premature labor and so left hurriedly for Knoxville on the next flight. Since that time, our conversations have begun with updates on the health of both my daughter and new grandson before moving on to the subject at hand.

I detail all this because the relationship that Beatrice and I share no longer is limited to the one-dimensional characterization with which it began. We have become friends, yes, and collegial professionals increasingly more candid with one another about how we've experienced life, academic and otherwise. Moreover, true to her word, Beatrice gradually has allowed me into a fuller, more intimate understanding of her professional identity that includes disagreements of opinion and perspective. In this regard, we have the kind of interview relationship Leslie Bloom described as that "from which long-lasting relationships may develop."<sup>84</sup> While this transition obviously renders me less 'objective' in the traditional sense, the development of a friendship out of what began as simply a dissertation project is what led to so much richly textured research. Oscar Lewis noted this phenomenon in his 1961 work with Mexican families, "Basically it was their sense of friendship that led them to tell me their life stories."<sup>85</sup>

### **Chronology is Not Sacred**

A final consideration might better be identified as a 'complication,' rather than a 'limitation.' The fact that Beatrice contemporaneously recounts the story of her life for

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<sup>84</sup> Leslie Rebecca Bloom, *Under the Sign of Hope* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), 17.

<sup>85</sup> Oscar Lewis, cited by Plummer, 139.

the past ninety years means that she cannot interpret it in a strictly chronological timeframe. Remembering what happened both before and after an event enables her to reflect on the meaning of her yesterdays from today's perspective. Traditionally, a biographical approach means adhering to the 'unfolding' of actual time, and it is thought by many that only a novelist moves back and forth from actual to reflective time.<sup>86</sup> And yet, gracefully transitioning from the past to the present, and occasionally to the future, Beatrice tells her actual life story with the multi-dimensional perspective that only a reflective person can.

In the end, choosing to ally with those who maintain that "chronology is not sacred to biography"<sup>87</sup> was deemed the most authentic way to represent Beatrice and her life story. For this reason, titles of the arbitrarily segmented chapters of this study essentially describe what is within but include a modicum of references to other time periods. In general, then, within the following chapters is what Rosenthal calls, "a proximity to the courses of action and to the experiences, and not only to the present interpretations of the investigated persons."<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Novarr, 141-151.

<sup>87</sup> Novarr, 173.

<sup>88</sup> Rosenthal, 29.

## **The Nature of Historical Studies**

Finally, while as comprehensive and accurate as possible, I acknowledge from the outset that this document merely is one person's attempt to do justice to the life history of Beatrice Wright and the influence of her ideas on the field of rehabilitation psychology.

In his dissertation on Nicholas Hobbs, which inspired the initial shaping of my research, Habel offered this unpublished reflection by Hobbs about the nature of historical studies.

I can say it no better:

History is an invention, an artistic construction that aspires to be an accurate record of things past. Selective recall, the need to have things one way rather than another, the distortions of condensation, the inevitable personal involvements, the lack of technical skill in historiography, all these and more stay the hand of writers who seek verisimilitude between their account and what indeed did happen. But write they must to complete a task about which they care deeply. Thus this apology. It may serve both as a warning to the reader that the account will have imperfections, and as an admonition to the writers to keep the imperfections as few as they can. Though such assurance is frail, it does make it possible to start.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Nicholas Hobbs, cited in "Precipitating Himself into Just Manageable Difficulties: An Intellectual Portrait of Nicholas Hobbs," John Carl Habel doctoral dissertation, the University of Tennessee, 1989, Preface.

## CHAPTER III. THE EARLY YEARS

### Childhood

Beatrice Ann Posner was born to Jerome and Sonia Posner on Sunday, December 16, 1917, at their home in Richmond, New York, now known as Staten Island. Her brother, Sidney, was born in the hospital twelve hours later that day, joining sisters Beatrice and Esther as the Posner children. “That must have been an auspicious occasion,” Beatrice laughs, “because neither my parents (nor my 4-year-old sister) expected twins.”<sup>90</sup> While birthdays are always important to children, once Beatrice discovered December 16 was also when Beethoven’s birthday was celebrated, it became an even more special day to her. She and Sidney, she thought, traveled in good company! Theirs was a close family, working and living together in one configuration or another while the parents were alive.

Sonia and Jerome Posner had come to the United States from southern Russia in 1911, when she was 22 and he four years older, to join his brother in New York. That they were secular Jews was of little import to their neighbors in Richmond and St. Albans, on Long Island, where they re-settled two years later and reared their children on Farmer’s Boulevard. The Posners lived in a large apartment on the top floor of a hardware store they owned that carried a little of everything, including plumbing and electrical supplies, fertilizer and grass seed, bins of nails, and Sherwin Williams paints,

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<sup>90</sup> “Beatrice A. Wright,” *Legacy Giving*, published by the First Unitarian Society, 900 University Bay Drive, Madison, WI, undated, p. 36.

for which Beatrice continues to have a fondness: “to this day, when I see a store selling Sherwin Williams paints, I just, my heart . . . because I had a really wonderful childhood.” She recalls her parents as partners in the business, modeling the kind of relationship she later would have with her husband and children:

My mother was a devoted partner serving customers and helping my father who quickly became known as ‘Chief’ because he could fix anything. In those days, you didn’t need a license to be an electrician, plumber, or carpenter, so my father did it all. Sometimes I helped by delivering shore ads in the neighborhood, climbing what seemed like endless stoop stairs until I became very tired.<sup>91</sup>

Nobody in their circle had much in the way of material wealth, and everybody worked long hours and spent as many evenings as possible on the front stoops of their living quarters. “My job every Saturday was to wash, to scrub, the stairs going up to the apartment,”<sup>92</sup> Beatrice remembers, as evidence that the children in her family, like those of others in the neighborhood, were contributors to the family’s general welfare.

The elder Posners were not alone in having left families in the “Old Country,” so they participated in the kind of assimilation that describes the normative U.S. immigrant experience through most of the twentieth century. How well one interacted with others, how quickly one learned to speak and write English, and what one made of oneself were what determined success for the immigrant. The former religion, ethnic characteristics, political affiliations, and family traditions that in the previous homeland had defined one

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<sup>91</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 15, 2006.

<sup>92</sup> Beatrice Wright interview May 20, 2007.

now were of far less importance, and in some cases actually the bases of punitive discrimination.<sup>93</sup>

Leaving everything behind, including loved ones who would never be seen again, was painful, especially when the news from back home was bad. Beatrice remembers the time when she was about five years old and found her mother weeping in the kitchen upon learning that a sister-in-law left behind had died. Apparently, apparently no family members remained in parts of the world to be threatened later by Hitler and the Holocaust. In terms of extended family, there were no grandparents in the United States to play a part in Beatrice's life. She did have four cousins through her father's brother, and her first experience with death came when one of them died of spinal meningitis when he was only six.<sup>94</sup>

Their political leanings were liberal, although not made much of, recalls Beatrice's son, Erik: "Although I was not aware of this at the time, my [maternal] grandparents and the New York relatives were Communists. This was never openly talked about, but from time to time I would hear glowing things said about the Soviet Union, socialism would be held out as an ideal, and America and capitalism would be

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<sup>93</sup> John Mack Faragher, Mari Jo Buhle, Daniel Czitrom, and Susan H. Armitage, *Out of Many: A History of the American People* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2002).

<sup>94</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 16, 2006.

criticized in emotionally laden ways.”<sup>95</sup> Never impressed with labels, Beatrice terms her son’s interpretation “a bit exaggerated” and remembers her parents as humanistic, loving and supportive, characteristics that had nothing to do with being either ‘Jewish’ or ‘Communist.’ While they may have been enthusiastic about the notion of shared distribution of wealth in the early days of communist thought, she agrees, their horror at Stalin’s actions would have prevented them from aligning with ‘Communism’ as it was practiced in their Russian homeland after the 1920s.<sup>96</sup>

She notes that her parents were “staunch defenders of human rights and argued for greater egalitarianism. When there is injustice, a tension is created that can be resolved in two ways. One way is to justify the situation. The other way is to do something about the injustice.”<sup>97</sup> They supported the notion of sharing the distribution of material wealth with the common person. She recalls one instance of doing something when she was in the fifth grade and formed the Help A Way Club. With “H.A.W.” on their identifying pins, she and others performed various tricks to raise money for what they deemed worthy causes. Her trick entailed holding two toothpicks in an X-formation

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<sup>95</sup> Erik Olin Wright, “Falling Into Marxism; Choosing to Stay,” in *The Disobedient Generation: Social Theorists in the Sixties*. Edited by Alan Sica and Stephen Turner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005: 328-329.

<sup>96</sup> Telephone conversation with Beatrice Wright, January 10, 2008.

<sup>97</sup> Henry McCarthy, “Learning with Beatrice A. Wright: A Breath of Fresh Air that Uncovers the Unique Virtues and Human Flaws in Us All,” *Rehabilitation Education* 7, no. 3 (1993): 162.

between the forefinger and thumb of her right hand in such a way that they were held fast by the tension. Then, without disturbing the tension of holding the toothpicks in that configuration of opposite directions, she transferred them over to the forefinger and thumb of her right hand. Then she invited others to do the trick themselves. If they could, they owed nothing; if they couldn't replicate the feat, they paid her a penny that would go toward a H.A.W. cause. It's still a good trick, and it earned her some appreciative applause when she performed it eighty years or so later, on October 12, 2007.

Some years after experiencing success with H.A.W., Beatrice expanded her repertoire of support for justice issues. She got more actively involved in what her mother deemed a worthy cause when she was a high school junior, and it led to Sonia protesting the consequences:

As a junior in high school, this concern for the disadvantaged became evident when I distributed leaflets in support of the janitors at the high school who were on strike for higher wages. In retribution, the principal of the high school expelled me from Arista, the school's honor society. My indignant mother promptly went to the principal's office demanding that I be reinstated. He immediately conceded, wishing to avoid further trouble, I suppose.<sup>98</sup>

At that time, because she'd skipped two grades, Beatrice was fourteen or fifteen. She always liked school a great deal and describes herself as "just an ordinary good student." Her life as a child had been typical for the time and place in which she lived. She and classmates walked to school and walked into town with a dime every Saturday

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<sup>98</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 15, 2006

morning to see the movie serial that had left the heroine being cut in half or otherwise imperiled the week before. Her protective parents hadn't allowed her to ride a bicycle, even though there were no cars in the street (so she would have to learn that skill as an adult). But, she had had girlfriends her age, dated interesting boys, and otherwise enjoyed growing up.

Only one memory, of a classmate's death, seems to cloud recollections of that time: "We had graduated from eighth grade, and then she died. I don't know what she died of, to this day. But, I remember seeing the open casket, and there she was, in her graduation dress. So, it made a big impression, and of course I felt so sad."<sup>99</sup>

### **Brooklyn College**

A few months after graduating from high school in 1934, the sixteen-year-old Beatrice headed for Brooklyn College to begin undergraduate work. And why had she chosen this institution of higher learning? Because it was free. Her parents strongly supported education, but her father by that time was ill with rheumatoid arthritis, and the Depression years meant limited finances available for college.

Founded in 1930 as the first coeducational liberal arts college in New York City, Brooklyn College was intended to provide a quality education for the children of immigrants, working people and others who could not afford private educations. It was funded through the joint efforts of New York City and the federal Public Works

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<sup>99</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 16, 2006.

Administration, which prompted a visit in 1935 by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

He remarked on its purpose(s):

This project is killing two birds with one stone. It is not only putting to work thousands of people who need work, but it also is improving educational facilities now and for generations to come.

There has been much suffering in this depression, but much good also has come out of it. It has given an opportunity to better conditions for the young people. I am interested in all projects for the improvement of education, and my wish for Brooklyn College is the fine future it deserves. May it live to build a better American citizenship.<sup>100</sup>

Because Brooklyn College was two hours away, each way, from Farmer's Boulevard, Beatrice went home only on the weekends for the next four years. During the week, she lived with an economics professor whose class she'd taken, in exchange for providing child care. Although Beatrice didn't know it at the time, Dr. Theresa Wolfson already was well-regarded for her advocacy work in labor relations, especially when it came to treatment of women in the workplace and in trade unions, and also was a pioneer member of the Brooklyn College faculty.<sup>101</sup> It was a busy time for Beatrice, who remembers: "I was not active otherwise in student affairs because of having the responsibility of babysitting. I was after school often babysitting, and at night, and then

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<sup>100</sup> "About Brooklyn College," [http://www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/pub/bc\\_history.htm](http://www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/pub/bc_history.htm) (accessed December 26, 2007).

<sup>101</sup> "Personal Information for Theresa Wolfson," Jewish Women's Archive, <http://jwa.org/archive/jsp/perInfo.jsp?personID=672> (accessed January 2, 2007).

going home on weekends.”<sup>102</sup> Besides, it never would have occurred to her to approach a professor about such things as the status of women.

While at Brooklyn College, Beatrice majored in psychology and took classes from several psychologists who went on to considerable fame and influence in the worlds of psychology and education. Again, while she enjoyed learning from them and appreciated their attentiveness to conceptual thought, she had no idea they later would be considered so important.

Solomon Asch, whom Beatrice assisted in his early experiments on social perception and conformity, eventually formulated what is known as the ‘Asch Situation.’ This phenomenon occurs when someone capitulates to peer pressure even when the action clearly is incorrect. “I wrote up some of the experiments,” she recalls, “and, somewhere in the boxes I must have, there are copies of the experiments.”<sup>103</sup> His later “minority of one” experiments demonstrated that even minimal support could enable someone to resist social conformity.

Another of her professors, Abraham Maslow, interviewed her “at length as part of his study on human motivation which eventually led to his formulation of five levels of needs starting with physiological needs and ending with the need for self-actualization,

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<sup>102</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 16, 2006.

<sup>103</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 15-16, 2007.

thereby providing a model that gives a positive thrust to human nature.”<sup>104</sup> Today, most educators and other service-oriented professionals are very familiar with the resultant *Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs*.

Beatrice also attended lectures given near Brooklyn College by Gestalt psychology founder Max Wertheimer, during which she learned about the importance of a context within which each human experience occurs. But, it was Austin Wood, another psychology, whom she remembers with gratitude for having encouraged her to go to the University of Iowa. It was he who encouraged her to go to Iowa because a fellow named Lewin was doing some unusual work. And, Beatrice recalls, Wood recommended her in such positive language that he “made me sound like I was sent from Heaven!”<sup>105</sup> She goes on:

Here I was, short of 20, I don’t know from anything, no family experience about graduate school or whatever ... and he said, ‘Beatrice, you have a conceptual mind. There’s an interesting fellow out in Iowa named Kurt Lewin, and he’s doing interesting things. Go there.’ So, I got an application, applied just to that university, that’s all. And, by dumb luck, shall I put it that way, it’s one of my ‘coincidences,’ I happened to be admitted and arrived at the University of Iowa.<sup>106</sup>

The fact that she had graduated from high school at 16 and with her baccalaureate degree at 20 may have signaled to them that she was more than *lucky*: clearly Beatrice

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<sup>104</sup> Beatrice Wright, “Diller Honorary Lecture: A Personal Photo Journey,” Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, Canada, August 8 2003, text for slide 2.

<sup>105</sup> Telephone conversation with Beatrice Wright, July 31, 2005.

<sup>106</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 15-16, 2006.

Posner was an intellectually gifted student. She arrived in Iowa as a twenty-year old who already had studied at Brooklyn College with two psychologists later recognized as among the most influential of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>107</sup> and who had worked her way through college by caring for the children of a nationally known labor economist.

She traveled from New York to Iowa City by way of bus, a tedious journey, and was met by Lewin student Dan Adler, who she now speculates must have found her both tired and “a little bit scared, or shall I say a lot scared?” They made their way to University housing about six blocks away from the bus depot.

So, I became a student and I recall the other students working with Kurt Lewin. . . . Now, that was 1938. . . . Call it Depression Days par excellence. That’s hindsight. As I lived it, I did not experience it. Why? Frugal, I was. We watched our pennies and nickels and dimes. But that was a way of life! We all did that. I didn’t experience any suffering. When I moved to Iowa, at that point my parents had decided to sell the hardware store and to move to warmer climates, thinking that would help my father. So, they moved from the East to someplace in Arizona. In Iowa, by ’38 there were already brewings in Europe about Hitler. I wasn’t in it, somehow, I was a student, studying and that was my world.<sup>108</sup>

Thus began her new life.

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<sup>107</sup> Steven J. Haggblom et al, “The 100 Most Eminent Psychologists of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century,” *Review of General Psychology* 6, no. 2 (2002): 146.

<sup>108</sup> Beatrice Wright interview July 2, 2005.

## **Iowa**

*Kurt Lewin never held a tenured academic appointment in any university. Yet, each place he worked, students gathered around him—students who changed the face of psychology.*<sup>109</sup>

One such place where students who changed the face of psychology gathered around this “founder of modern social psychology” was the Iowa Child Welfare Research Station, and one such student who changed the face of psychology was Beatrice Ann Posner Wright. As one of only two women in the U.S. who earned a doctorate with the famed social psychologist, and now Lewin’s only surviving doctoral graduate, she continues to influence the world of rehabilitation psychology, as well as to earn recognition for her ground-breaking work in understanding and responding to people with disabilities. Upon arriving at Iowa City and being escorted by Dan Adler to her student residence, her studies began when she was assigned an office alongside other graduate students:

They were all men, except for one student, vaguely I remember. I don’t know what happened to her, and that’s also when I met Tamara Dembo ... we were housed in what’s called East Hall, that was the former hospital, so they had all these little patient rooms. So each graduate student had their own office, and that’s where you lived.<sup>110</sup>

Beatrice and several other (male) Lewin students from Iowa went on to wield considerable influence in the world of psychology. As noted by one contemporary

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<sup>109</sup> Shelley Patnoe, *A Narrative History of Experimental Social Psychology* (NY: Springer-Verlag, 1988), 4.

<sup>110</sup> Beatrice Wright interview July 2, 2005.

psychologist, “During the 1930s, Professor Kurt Lewin was no doubt the best known of the faculty members at the Iowa Child Welfare Research Station. His record of producing outstanding doctoral students certainly preceded his move to Iowa ... It is thus no surprise that 4 of his 12 Ph.D. students at Iowa attained the criteria of eminence used here.”<sup>111</sup> Named among that group, along with Daniel Adler, C. Edward Meyers and Leon Festinger, is one of Lewin’s two American female students: Beatrice A. Wright.

Before going further in this narrative about Beatrice Wright’s life history and influence on subsequent psychological thought, it is important to establish the ‘climate’ where she completed her graduate studies under the direction of Kurt Lewin, with the assistance of Tamara Dembo, for she consistently identifies her time at Iowa as crucial in her professional formation.<sup>112</sup>

### Kurt Lewin

Kurt Lewin had emigrated from Berlin to America in 1933, when he was 43 years old. While at the University of Berlin he had associated with such colleagues as Max Wertheimer, Wolfgang Köhler, and Kurt Koffka—founders of what now is known as Gestalt psychology. Lewin had served as visiting professor at Stanford University for six months in 1930 and then returned this country when the position of Jews worsened in

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<sup>111</sup> Donald K. Routh, “Intellectual Progeny of Seashore and Spence,” *Learning, Speech, and the Complex Effects of Punishment* (NY: Plenum Publishing Corporation, 1982), 224-225.

<sup>112</sup> Beatrice A. Wright interview July 2-3, 2005.

Germany. He accepted work first at the Cornell School of Home Economics. Then, in 1935, he moved to the Iowa Child Welfare Research Station, where he stayed until leaving for MIT in 1944.<sup>113</sup>

Along the way, he had earned a reputation for brilliant—if somewhat difficult to follow—thinking in the relatively new field of psychology. He also was known for engaging with students in a remarkable manner: he treated them as colleagues in search of answers to countless scientific questions. One of those students was the young Fritz Heider, who recalls attending Lewin’s seminars in Berlin and initiating there what would become a 25-year conversation with Lewin about Heider’s interest in establishing to what extent one’s environment influences one’s viewpoint and thinking.<sup>114</sup> Like other Jewish intellectuals at that time, Lewin was denied the position of Professor in Germany and instead given the title of ‘Lecturer.’

Roger Barker, known later for his work in “Ecological Psychology,” was introduced to Lewin in 1930, while Lewin was a visiting professor at Stanford University. In 1977, Barker described the reactions Lewin’s ideas sometimes received:

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<sup>113</sup> By the time Lewin arrived in the USA, he had compiled impressive films of children’s behavior, including a classic, “The Child and the World.” Therefore, he was assigned to such areas as home economics and child research, rather than to psychology. His Iowa work is included in the films preserved by the National Film Preservation Foundation <http://www.filmpreservation.org/preserved/date.php?link1=193> (accessed July 25, 2005).

<sup>114</sup> Gardner Lindzey, ed. “Fritz Heider,” in *A History of Psychology in Autobiography*, (California: Stanford University Press, 1989), 8:134.

...I was able to attend Lewin's class only as a visitor. He attracted me greatly as a person, but his psychology confused me, or perhaps more correctly it was incomprehensible to me. Fairies and ectoplasm would have been more comprehensible than life-space, valence, psychological force, inner-personal regions, substitute value, psychological saturation, and so forth. ... I suppose Stanford University in those days was among the least auspicious places in the United States for an understanding of Lewin; theory was almost a non-word in the psychology department although we did use it in connection with Spearman's interpretation of intelligence test inter-correlations, (theory of general intelligence) and we read about psychoanalytic theory. But most of us had no background in the philosophy of science, and the place of theory in science. So Lewin's Dynamic Theory of Personality ... was a transient foreign body, a UFO, to most of us. I cannot recall that any of the students who attended his class took and retained a serious interest in his viewpoint unless they had later association with him. The gulf was too wide to be bridged quickly, and the dissonance was so great that some rejected his ideas out of hand. I was not negative, I was tolerantly baffled.<sup>115</sup>

Later assessment would have it that Lewin simply was ahead, far ahead, of his times. As Gestalt psychologist and former Lewin student Mary Henle reportedly observed, social science in 1977 was just then "advancing toward where Kurt Lewin had been 60 years before."<sup>116</sup> However, though at times baffled, Barker also was intrigued by Lewin's work, sufficiently enough to agree to a postdoctoral fellowship at the Iowa Child Welfare Station in 1935. Once there, he experienced what others have described about Lewin's energetic and egalitarian style. True, Lewin was in charge as the Professor; yet, he also was a learner whose curiosity sometimes exhausted others:

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<sup>115</sup> Roger G. Barker, "Settings of a Professional Lifetime," unpublished draft copy, copyrighted 1980, provided this researcher by Dr. Barker's widow, Louise, and daughter, Celia, on July 27, 2005, 16-17.

<sup>116</sup> Martin Gold, ed, *The Complete Social Scientist: A Kurt Lewin Reader*,. (Washington, D. C.: The American Psychological Association, 1999), 15.

In the beginning, the sessions in Lewin's office were an ordeal for me; they were bewildering and tiring. ... Lewin's eagerness, and the energy to back it up, seemed boundless; whereas, the tension and alertness of the two-hour sessions of [Lewis] Terman's seminar left me dog tired, after meeting with Lewin, [Tamara] Dembo, and [Herbert] Wright from 2:00 to 7:00 in the afternoon (with Lewin reading aloud what he had dictated the day before, interlining new sentences, rearranging the order, violently objecting to a criticism by Dembo, turning to Wright "Herbert, is she right?", accepting Dembo's criticism, diagramming a relation on the blackboard, crossing the whole page out, dictating a new version to Dembo, and so forth) I was ready to drop. After five o'clock I would hope beyond hope that my dear, pregnant, wife, lonesome at home, would telephone that I was urgently needed. Sometimes she did. A frequent concluding remark by Lewin was "We must think about this," and that after three, four, five hours of nothing else. Did this add up, perhaps, to a kind of brainwashing? In any case, as the months went by, I began to understand Lewin, and his ideas have remained at the center of all my subsequent work. But equally important to me has been the new, higher level of intellectual effort to which I became adapted. I could never come close to Lewin's intensity; I had to take it much slower, but his refrain, "We must think about this" has stayed with me. Although no one could have been more subordinate to Lewin in terms of knowledge, I was always treated as a colleague, never as a pupil. My contributions, however naïve, were always taken seriously, Lewin often seeing in them more than I had intended.<sup>117</sup>

Anitra Karsten, one of Lewin's Berlin students, also reported that "working with Lewin was 'one long discussion.'"<sup>118</sup> Tamara Dembo, former Lewin student in Berlin

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<sup>117</sup> Barker, 19-20. Of note is that in Barker's published recollections, entitled "Settings of a Professional Lifetime," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 37, no.12 (1979): 2145, the draft statement that "Dembo and I had joint authority over entire setting" on page 20, was changed to "Lewin established the program of the setting ... but the details of the procedures were worked out in group consultation, where he was first among equals."

<sup>118</sup> Mitchell G. Ash, "Cultural Contexts and Scientific Change in Psychology: Kurt Lewin in Iowa," *American Psychologist* 47, no. 2 (February 1992): 198-207.

who worked closely with him until the end of his life and went on to influence psychology in her own right, put it this way: “Lewin was not the domineering ‘founder’ in the sense of a ‘leader,’ but Kurt, who always had excellent ideas, and readily accepted ideas from coworkers.”<sup>119</sup>

According to Fritz Heider, Lewin’s ability to attract outstanding students who then went on to become outstanding contributors to the field of psychology was a well-known phenomenon in both Germany and this country.<sup>120</sup> Patricia Woodward Cautley, a social psychologist who had earned her Ph.D. at the University of Pennsylvania, was typical in remembering that working with Kurt Lewin on the “Changing Food Habits” research project was “a high spot in my life.”<sup>121</sup>

Patricia Woodward had interviewed participants in the famous food habits study, where she so impressed the Executive Secretary of the Committee on Food Habits that she was offered a job in Washington, D.C. The Executive Secretary was Margaret Mead, and Dr. Woodward worked with her for the next two years.

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<sup>119</sup> Tamara Dembo, “Approach as a Description of the Nature of Scientific Activity: Some Reflections and Suggestions,” in *The Lewin Legacy: Field Theory in Current Practice*, eds. Evelyn Stivers and Susan Wheelan (NY: Springer-Verlag, 1986), 4.

<sup>120</sup> Lindzey, 144.

<sup>121</sup> Patricia Woodward Cautley, “My Contribution to the Women’s Heritage Project of Division 35, Psychology of Women, American Psychological Association,” December 1991, an oral history provided to this researcher by daughter Dr. Eleanor Cautley, October 12, 2005, 21-22. Dr. Patricia Cautley died before a scheduled interview with this researcher.

That Beatrice A. Posner Wright and Mary Martha Gordon Thompson were the only women who earned doctorates directed by Kurt Lewin after he came to the United States is of note, because he was known to be especially supportive of women at a time when women were not encouraged to seek advanced education, in either Germany or the United States. Since Jews in Berlin were not allowed to teach at the highest University levels, this brilliant professor who had been denied equal teaching status worked primarily with a group of brilliant women denied equal student status. Lewin's female Berlin students produced amazing research in a field dominated by men. Alfred J. Marrow describes their work in his biography of Lewin.

Bluma Ziegarnik was the first, and she developed a theory about the recall of uncompleted tasks still known as, "the Ziegarnik effect." Her research revealed why it is that, for instance, a server remembers every item someone has ordered *until* the bill is paid. Then, all is forgotten. Maria Ovsiankina built on Ziegarnik's work to further demonstrate that the tension of uncompleted work actually adds pressure toward completion of the task. Vera Mahler took these experiments in another direction to discover that interrupting one's task orientation with a substitute worked only if one's original goals were met. Sara Sliosberg built on her peers' work by studying the difference between adults and children when it came to uncompleted tasks and substitution: she discovered that children can be transitioned more easily than adults from the original goal to another worthy aim. Gita Birenbaum explored to what extent the emotional state of a subject influenced the tension aroused in uncompleted task;

Anitra Karsten (from Finland) looked at satiation, the reverse of an uncompleted task; and, Sara Fajans studied the aftereffect of both success and failure. Tamara Dembo included all their work, and expanded greatly on it, to conduct what still is considered a landmark study on the genesis of frustration and anger.<sup>122</sup>

As for Lewin's female Iowa students, only two of the twenty-four women graduating with the Ph.D. during his time there from 1935-1944 who could have worked with him acknowledged him as their major professor: Mary Martha Gordon Thompson, who graduated in 1940 and wrote a dissertation entitled, "The effect of discriminatory leadership on the relations between the more and less privileged subgroups," and Beatrice Ann Posner Wright. Of Thompson, there is no record of any publication bearing her name as author beyond her dissertation archived at the University of Iowa. And, there is no record of her being cited for anything beyond mention in a 1946 article by Lewin. In it, he described her research on how prejudicial leadership affected a group of ten-year-old children:

The leader set up an underprivileged minority group of children who originally had equal status. After a number of club meetings as the children of the privileged majority continued to treat the rest of the children as underprivileged even when the leader left the room. This discrimination, however, was not so strong as in the presence of the leader. This shows both that the presence of the power field of the leader has some influence and that the induced goals have been taken over in some measure."<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Marrow, 244-259.

<sup>123</sup> Kurt Lewin, *Resolving Social Conflicts and Field Theory in Social Science* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 1997), 375.

Neither Thompson nor her research is mentioned in Lewin's biographical information, including *The Practical Theorist*, which is considered the most comprehensive presentation of his life and works. Omission of Thompson from even Appendix D on "Iowa Studies" in Marrow's biography is highly unusual, given the frequency with which the works of Lewin's other students were mentioned.<sup>124</sup> Further, she is omitted from Hamilton Craven's list of eight U.S. students (among which Beatrice Wright is the only female) who received their doctorates under his direction.<sup>125</sup> To date, investigation about what happened to her after graduating with the Ph.D. in 1940 has revealed only that she died on November 11, 1996, in Houston, Texas.<sup>126</sup>

Because Lewin was assigned to the Child Welfare Research Station, and because working with children was assumed to be a field primarily for women, females comprised a large number of the students admitted to study in that program. Beatrice surmises that's why she, yet another female, was so readily accepted for study. At the same time, a political split between the clinical and experimental psychologists created some distance and enmity between the two factions. That, in turn, led to an even more finely tuned

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<sup>124</sup> Marrow, 262-266.

<sup>125</sup> Hamilton Cravens, *Before Head Start: The Iowa Station & America's Children* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 166. Hamilton cites Marrow as the source of his information about Lewin's Iowa students, which may account for Thompson's exclusion.

<sup>126</sup> Email correspondence to Beatrice Wright from Margaret Lillard, Office of Alumni Records at the University of Iowa, on December 31, 2007.

distinction between experimental sociologists and experimental clinical psychologists like Lewin and his group.<sup>127</sup> These political realities may in part explain the lack of collegial relationship between Beatrice and Mary Martha Thompson, for Thompson wedded her interest in child psychology to a sociological perspective.<sup>128</sup> Or, the situation may have been as simple as the fact that Thompson was married, and the others were single.

Further, as Beatrice commented during a telephone conversation on December 20, 2007, that Thompson was finishing her doctorate at the same time that Beatrice was finishing her master's work would have contributed to their traveling in different circles. At the same time, Thompson clearly was not a member of Lewin's inner circle, and Beatrice was.

Another factor possibly contributing to the intensely close relationship among Lewin, his staff and his students is more difficult to verify. That's because of at least several biases against Lewin, who spoke and acted differently from the Midwesterners at Iowa. Marie Skodak Crissey, in child psychology, recalls this about the people with whom she worked and studied between 1935 and 1938:

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<sup>127</sup> Henry L. Minton, "Interview with Ronald Lippitt," January 14, 1982, housed in the University of Iowa archives.

<sup>128</sup> Mary Martha Gordon Thompson, "The Effect of Discriminatory Leadership on the Relations between the More and Less Privileged Subgroups," University of Iowa doctoral dissertation, August 1940, "Acknowledgment" page, wherein she thanks Professor Kurt Lewin, [Sociology] Professor C. W. Hart, Dr. Tamara Dembo and Dr. D. L. (Daniel L.) Adler for making the experiment possible.

... I'm sure they weren't as strange as we thought they were, but, in the Iowa context, they were weird. That's the way the kids would say it. Stoddard was right, in that he made everything possible for them, the space he gave them, facilities, and so on. That was not particularly appreciated at a time when everybody was earning \$50, \$60 a month and having to struggle to do that. Here were these people who were difficult to understand, who made really not very much of an effort to accommodate themselves to the Iowa mores.<sup>129</sup>

She makes no mention of whether attitudes toward Jews contributed in any way to these assessments of the foreigners in Iowa. However, between 1936 and 1940, Lewin was disturbed enough about "the evils that grew out of Midwestern isolationism"<sup>130</sup> to write several articles comparing certain elements of his new homeland with Germany: "Though he found Americans so unlike Germans in most of their social attitudes because of a basic difference in the American personality structure, Lewin was sadly surprised to find that, on the question of anti-Semitism, Americans displayed many of the prejudices directed against him while he was growing up in Germany."<sup>131</sup>

Iowa was a particularly difficult place for Jews to take up residency both because of its traditionally conservative view toward outsiders and because of a period phenomenon in the person of a Roman Catholic priest named Charles Coughlin. Father Coughlin, who preached anti-Semitism from his Detroit-based radio program, and the

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<sup>129</sup> Crissey, 12.

<sup>130</sup> Marrow, 97.

<sup>131</sup> Marrow, 100.

Christian Front had large followings in the Midwest.<sup>132</sup> Their vitriolic tirades and attacks on Jews would have been impossible to ignore, or at least to ignore for long.

When asked, however, Beatrice does not recall feeling discriminated against because of her ethnic origin. Of course, she was raised as a secular humanist, not as a Jew. On the other hand, it's not beyond the realm of possibility that Jewish professors Asch, Maslow and Lewin recognized her "Jewish-sounding last name" and for that reason were willing to mentor this intellectually gifted young woman in an accepting cohort group.

Despite the blight of anti-Semitism, however, the 'atmosphere' of research and psychology in the late 1930s and early-to-mid 1940s was nothing short of electric, particularly when it came to Kurt Lewin and his famed *Topology Group*: "...the first of several alternative discussion groups outside the established psychological organizations to develop and propagate his ideas."<sup>133</sup>

According to his widow, Gertrude Weiss Lewin, and others, Lewin appropriated the language of mathematics, physics and chemistry, in order to advance in a scientific manner his theories of "conceptual representation of the social-psychological world."<sup>134</sup> That was true in the case of using topological language, he explained, because "...

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<sup>132</sup> Horowitz, 27-28.

<sup>133</sup> Ash, 204.

<sup>134</sup> Lewin, 1997, 10.

topology remains the basic mathematical discipline for the presentation of dynamics in the whole field of psychology, and I am more and more convinced that it will become, beyond this, a solid framework for a dynamic sociology.”<sup>135</sup> Beatrice still is guided by the phenomenology of Lewinian psychology, although she doesn’t use the language of topology. As one example, she endorses Lewin’s basic approach to understanding the behavior of an individual by requiring understanding the phenomenology of the person in an environment as *perceived* by that person.

### The Topology Group

The *Topology Group* was a venue for what would become some of the most influential people in American scholarship to meet and enjoy spirited discussions of this brilliant and charismatic professor’s thought. Fritz Heider recalled that, “Those of us who had been associated with Lewin (and our wives) had known each other for some years, at least from meetings of the ‘Topologists.’”<sup>136</sup> Roger Barker described the topology meetings, in both unpublished and published recollections, as a time over Christmas vacation when Lewin and invited guests met in conference rooms at various universities, including Cornell, Bryn Mawr, and Smith, to discuss Lewinian theory and research findings. Barker noted that invited guests were comprised of Lewin’s former and present students, and others interested in his ideas. The host university was

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<sup>135</sup> Kurt Lewin, *A Dynamic Theory of Personality* (NY: McGraw-Hill, 1935), vi.

<sup>136</sup> Lindzey, 149.

responsible for arrangements, Lewin for the program of papers, and all the participants for free discussion.<sup>137</sup>

These meetings had begun at Smith College in 1933, going in 1934 to Duke University, in 1935 to Bryn Mawr, in 1936 to Harvard University, in 1937 to Merrill Palmer School, in 1938 to Cornell University, in 1939 to the University of Illinois, and back to the Comstock House at Smith College in 1940.<sup>138</sup> In a letter to Beatrice, Grace Heider, psychologist and wife of Fritz Heider, recalls the 1940 meeting, which began New Year's Eve with Lewin's address on "Bringing the Life Space Up to Date:"<sup>139</sup>

It was almost fifty years ago that we must have first met, approaching forty-eight to be exact, at what Fritz in his autobiography calls the 1940 meeting of the Topological Group, that is of people associated with Kurt Lewin. This meeting was at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, where we then lived, and the picture in the autobiography of the people who attended includes you and Erik, and to mention a few others, Margaret Mead, Tamara Dembo, Genia Hanfmann, and Kurt Koffka, also Fritz of course. I believe that it was taken at lunch time when I was at home keeping with our three sons, aged almost five, three, and approaching one year, so I do not appear though I attended most of the meetings and had time to get acquainted.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Barker, 1979: 2146 and 1980: 21.

<sup>138</sup> "Proceedings, Eighth Annual Topological Psychology Meeting, December 31, 1940-January 2, 1941, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts," from Beatrice Wright's private collection.

<sup>139</sup> Marrow, 114.

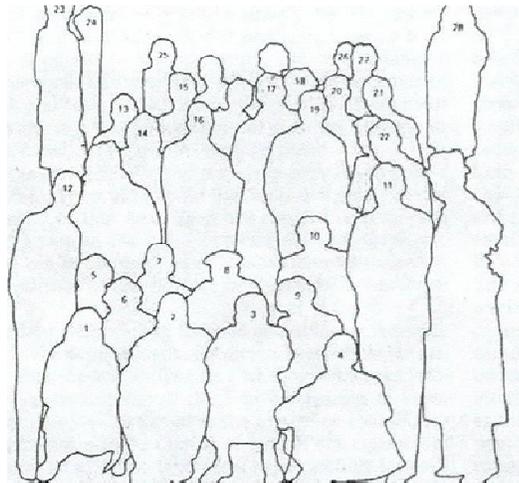
<sup>140</sup> Grace Heider, unpublished letter to Dr. Beatrice Wright upon the occasion of Beatrice Wright's retirement from the University of Kansas in 1988, from Dr. Wright's collection.

Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson, Kurt Lewin, Kurt Koffka, Fritz Heider, and Erik Erickson are for many the most recognizable names and faces in the photograph to which Grace Heider refers (Figure 1); yet, the group comprised of individuals whose likenesses were captured that day reads retrospectively like a “Who’s Who” of the history of American psychology, activism and education. Because of their interdisciplinary approach to what Lewin deemed the purpose of work such as theirs—social justice<sup>141</sup>—each row also represents a wide range of contributors to the ‘soul’ of cultural studies in education. They worked at bringing about change.

Here’s what we now know about the twenty-eight named people, mostly in the order they are identified by the accompanying key (the last two are reversed). Beatrice speculates that the five anonymous attendees were associated with Smith College.

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<sup>141</sup> Lewin, 1997, 67.



Margaret Mead (1); J.J. Gibson (2); Gregory Bateson (3); Kurt Lewin (4); M.A. Rickers-Ovsiankina (5); Mary Henle (6); Henry Murray (7); Kurt Kofka (8); Beatrice A. Wright (9); Erik Wright (10); Robert C. Challman (11); Karl Zener (12); Stuart Stoke (13); Eugenia Hanfmann (14); Jacob S. Kounin (15); Lawrence K. Frank (16); Erik Erikson (17); Tamara Dembo (18); Alfred Baldwin (19); Ronald O. Lippitt (20); Ralph K. White (21); Fritz Heider (22); Gertrude Lewin (23); Rosalind Gould (24); Seth Wakeman (25); Harold Israel (26); John Gardner (27); Elsa Siipola (28).

Figure 1. The 1940 Topology Group, from Beatrice Wright's personal collection

Anthropologist Margaret Mead was best known for her work on non-literate societies, gender roles, and status of women, among other things. Her use of photography enabled her, and successive generations of anthropologists, to study Culture from afar. And, of course, she was involved in the 1942 work on ‘Changing Food Habits.’<sup>142</sup> On New Year’s Eve at the 1940 meeting, Morrow reports that she “led the group in a folk-dancing session that lasted past midnight”<sup>143</sup> and the next day presented a paper on “Family Organization and the Superego.” Psychologist J.J. (James Jerome) Gibson is remembered for his work in visual perception and information pickup theory. Rejecting behaviorism, he coined the term ‘affordance’ to describe actions that someone potentially can perform.<sup>144</sup> Gregory Bateson, married to Margaret Mead, also was known for his work in other areas, including anthropology, cybernetics and communication theory.<sup>145</sup> Kurt Lewin was, of course, instigator of the Topological Meetings, as well as mentor to many of those in attendance. And, despite his early death, Lewin is considered

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<sup>142</sup> Books and Writers, “Margaret Mead,” <http://kirjasto.sci.fi/mmead.htm> (accessed June 13, 2007).

<sup>143</sup> Morrow, 114.

<sup>144</sup> Human-Interaction Web Cycle, “Introduction to the Purple Perils of James Gibson,” <http://www.huwi.org/gibson/index.php> (accessed June 13, 2007).

<sup>145</sup> Emuseum at Minnesota State University, Mankato, “Gregory Bateson,” [http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/information/biography/abcde/bateson\\_gregory.html](http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/information/biography/abcde/bateson_gregory.html) (accessed June 13, 2007).

one of “The 100 Most Eminent Psychologists of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.”<sup>146</sup> From there on, the group continues to be an impressive one.

M. (Marika/Maria) A. Rickers-Ovsiankina earned her doctorate with Lewin in Germany and then came to the United States where, after working extensively with Rensis Likert, she enjoyed an illustrious career in the areas of personality assessment and use of the Rorschach ink-blots.<sup>147</sup> Mary Henle, who studied with Lewin one summer in Iowa, is known as an influential gestalt psychologist who spent most of her career at the New School for Social Research.<sup>148</sup> Henry Murray, founder of the Boston Psychoanalytic Society, later developed the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) still widely used by psychologists;<sup>149</sup> Kurt Koffka was a founder of the Berlin School of gestalt psychology and a mentor to Mary Henle, among others.

Beatrice Wright is next, with her husband, M. Erik Wright, behind her. He was a psychologist and psychiatrist who went on from his studies in Iowa eventually to head

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<sup>146</sup> Haggbloom et al, 146.

<sup>147</sup> Leonard Handler, “Maria Rickers-Ovsiankina: a Russian Expatriate in America, a Review of *Rorschach Psychology*,” *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 65:1 (1995): 169-185.

<sup>148</sup> Michael Wertheimer, “Mary Henle,” in *Women in Psychology: A Biobibliographic Sourcebook* eds. Agnes N. O’Connell and Nancy Felipe Russo (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 161-163.

<sup>149</sup> Test Developer Profiles, “Henry A. Murray, M.D., Ph.D.,” <http://www.mhhe.com/mayfieldpub/psychtesting/profiles/murray.htm> (accessed June 21, 2007).

clinical psychology training at the University of Kansas in 1951. Robert C. Challman later served as chief clinical psychologist at the Winter VA Hospital, Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas;<sup>150</sup> Duke University perceptual psychologist Karl Zener developed what is known as the “Zener Cards” that measure ESP;<sup>151</sup> and, psychologist Stuart M. Stoke was associated with Mount Holyoke College.<sup>152</sup>

Eugenia Hanfmann, who worked as a psychologist for the Office of Strategic Services during WWII,<sup>153</sup> spent the rest of her career specializing in the area of schizophrenia and developed the Concept Formation Test.<sup>154</sup> Jacob S. Kounin, classroom management theorist, coined the term ‘ripple effect’ and studied the *withitness* of teachers.<sup>155</sup> In 1969, Lawrence K. Frank was eulogized as “one of the founders of and

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<sup>150</sup> Robert C. Challman, “The Clinical Psychology Program at Winter V.A. Hospital, The Menninger Foundation, and the University of Kansas,” *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 3, no.1 (January 1947): 21-28.

<sup>151</sup> Edward D. Jones, “Karl Zener Obituary,” *Journal of Personality* 32, no. 4 (December 1964): 511-513.

<sup>152</sup> Philosophy and Psychology Department Records, Mount Holyoke College Archives and Special Collections, South Hadley, MA. <http://home.mtholyoke.edu/lits/library/arch/col/rg18/rg18zi.shtml> (accessed June 21, 2007).

<sup>153</sup> Nancy Felipe Russo and Florence L. Denmark, “Contributions of women to Psychology,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 38 (1987): 293.

<sup>154</sup> APA Historical Database, <http://www.cwu.edu/~warren/calendar/cal0303.html> (accessed June 22, 2007).

<sup>155</sup> Jacob S. Kounin and Paul V. Gump, “The Ripple Effect in Discipline,” *The Elementary School Journal* 59, no. 3 (December 1958): 158-162.

major catalysts of the child development movement,<sup>156</sup> and psychologist Erik Erikson went on to be known for his development of psychosocial stages.<sup>157</sup> Tamara Dembo, Lewin graduate student from Berlin who worked with him in Iowa—later becoming a close friend to Beatrice Wright—was known for her work in frustration, regression, and anger (her dissertation is said to have been one of the bases of Sartre’s theory of emotion),<sup>158</sup> and, with Beatrice, is acknowledged to have been a leader in founding rehabilitation psychology.<sup>159</sup>

Alfred Baldwin earned recognition for his work in child development, particularly the longitudinal Rochester study of children and their schizophrenic mothers;<sup>160</sup> Ronald O. Lippitt, Lewin student whose interests in classroom management led to the Iowa studies on the classroom leadership styles, later was acknowledged as—much like

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<sup>156</sup> Milton J.E. Senn, Lois Barclay Murphy, J. Roswell Gallagher, Lois Meek Stolz, and Herbert R. Stolz, “Lawrence K. Frank,” *Child Development*, 40:2 (June 1969): 347.

<sup>157</sup> Haggblom et al, 146.

<sup>158</sup> Joseph de Rivera, “Tamara Dembo,” *American Psychologist* 50, no. 5 (May 1995): 386.

<sup>159</sup> Rene van der Veer, “Tamara Dembo’s European Years: Working with Lewin and Buytendijk,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 36, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 109-126.

<sup>160</sup> Alfred L. Baldwin, “Introduction to the University of Rochester Child and Family Study,” *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development* 47, no. 5 (1982): 1-11.

Lewin—a “linchpin” to successfully bridging social science and social practice.<sup>161</sup> Ralph K. White is known for his involvement with Psychologists for Social Responsibility and the psychology of peace,<sup>162</sup> and Fritz Heider is hailed as another of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s most influential psychologists because of his theories of balance and attribution.<sup>163</sup>

Comprising the final cluster of people standing at the back of the photograph are Gertrude Lewin, who, in addition to being Lewin’s wife, was a trained nursery school teacher responsible in the late 1920’s for developing in Germany what we now would call a center for ‘on-site childcare’ at her father’s factory and who continued a collegial relationship with participants in the Topology Group after Kurt Lewin’s death in 1947;<sup>164</sup> Rosalind Gould Starobin, a clinical professor of psychology at NYU;<sup>165</sup> Seth Wakeman, a professor at Cornell University who was responsible in 1927 for bringing Koffka to

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<sup>161</sup> Martin Gold, “Ronald Lippitt,” *American Psychologist* 43, no. 5 (May 1988): 398.

<sup>162</sup> Richard V. Wagner, ed., *Pioneers in Peace Psychology: Ralph K. White* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005).

<sup>163</sup> Haggblom et al, 146.

<sup>164</sup> Telephone conversation with Dr. Miriam Lewin, daughter of Kurt and Gertrude Lewin, on December 2, 2005.

<sup>165</sup> *The New York Times* “Dr. Rosalind Gould Starobin, N.Y.U. Psychology Professor,” December 25, 1983. <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9502E3DB1538F936A15751C1A965948260> (accessed June 22, 2007).

Smith College;<sup>166</sup> Harold Israel and Elsa Siipola, psychologists at Smith College;<sup>167</sup> and, John Gardner, Stanford University psychologist and activist who served as Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare under President Lyndon Johnson, was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, headed the Urban Coalition, and founded Common Cause, among other things.<sup>168</sup>

As Beatrice asks, more than a little rhetorically, given the attendees, “Can you imagine the vitality of ideas that bounced around as a single paper was discussed at length?”<sup>169</sup>

These people were not only bright and well-educated thinkers gathering to share ideas. That would be an ordinary kind of event for intellectuals such as they, although the Topology Group meetings were something special, “stops on the more-or-less underground, nonestablishment railroad of psychological ideas and methods.”<sup>170</sup> Given the times and the sociopolitical climate of those times, the 1940 Topology Group is extraordinary for its large composition of those with Jewish ancestry, including Beatrice

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<sup>166</sup> D. Brett King and Michael Wertheimer, *Max Wertheimer and Gestalt Theory* (New Brunswick, USA: Transaction Publishers, 2005), 176.

<sup>167</sup> Horowitz, 47-48.

<sup>168</sup> *Stanford Report*, “Renowned Social Reformer John Gardner dies at 89,” February 17, 2002.

<sup>169</sup> Wright, Diller Lecture, script for slide 4.

<sup>170</sup> Lindzey, “Roger Barker,” 19.

Wright, and for its treatment of women as professional equals. Both characteristics were a cherished commodity among the attendees, many of whom had experienced the kind of discrimination contrary to a cultural studies perspective. American anti-Semitism at that time has been amply documented elsewhere, and Mary Henle was one participant in this group who later emphatically noted its adverse effect on the careers of Jewish psychologists.<sup>171</sup> For Beatrice, a humanist, that aspect was less influential than the gender issue.

### **Treatment of Women**

In terms of how women were treated in general versus how they were treated by Lewin and company, one need only listen to their stories. At age 99, Louise Barker, Roger Barker's widow, remembered how, even though she had a master's degree in biology and had graduated with a Phi Beta Kappa bachelor's degree with special distinction from Stanford University, her primary 'job' was editing his manuscripts. And that wasn't always recognized as important.

...somebody called from Stanford [where her uncle had been President] and said, "What were the dates that you were employed? We find them quite helter-skelter." I said, "you know just as well as I do—you were there—that I worked all the time." I was paid if there was money, and if there wasn't money I wasn't paid. But, I worked anyway and I think that women often have done that and because the work has to be done, and their husbands' career was dependent on it and so what had to be done they did. ...I think that unfortunately in that period women didn't take

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<sup>171</sup> Russo and Denmark, 292.

their careers as seriously as maybe they should have, and we all identified with our husbands' careers.<sup>172</sup>

As for Lewin, she remembers that he “certainly was sensitive to the problem” and recalled a time when he advised her to stand up for herself: “that was a nice thing Kurt did for me, he kind of stiffened my spine.”<sup>173</sup>

Grace Moore Heider also experienced diminution of her capabilities while working on her master's degree at Mt. Holyoke. She had been offered a place in the program in the hope that, with her considerable experience in deaf education (she was considered a national leader), she would be able to interest Kurt Koffka in coming to the college. Koffka did agree, but only if someone “more advanced than she”<sup>174</sup> was hired to head up the psychological division of the research department. Fritz Heider, who had his Ph.D., knew little about what he was to do, but Grace filled him in after he was hired. Then, she married him.

Tamara Dembo was refused a position because, a letter she later received explained, “the director of the extension session ... said they needed a man.”<sup>175</sup> Patricia Cautley was asked by a professor to explain why she was in Graduate School, implying

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<sup>172</sup> Interview with Louise Barker, Seymour TN, July 15, 2005.

<sup>173</sup> Louise Barker interview.

<sup>174</sup> Lindzey, 140.

<sup>175</sup> Sandra Hodgson, “Tamara Dembo (1902-1993): A Life of Science and Service,” *Society for the Psychology of Women Heritage Site*, <http://www.psych.yorku.ca/femhop> (accessed June 15, 2007).

she should be getting married.<sup>176</sup> And, Beatrice recalls being “sternly admonished” by Dr. Stoddard, Dean of the Graduate School, for staying in Iowa to meet requirements for her Ph.D., rather than moving to Ohio where her husband had been employed:

I got my master’s degree at that time [1940] and needed at least one year of residency before I could work toward my Ph.D. off-campus, that was the rule. So, my husband and I talked it over and decided we’d commute during the holidays. Now, we needed to get our registration card signed off by the Dean of the Graduate School. So, dutifully, I went there and he looked at me and, very sternly admonished me with, ‘What are you doing here?’ Well, I was very young, only a kid, and mumbled something, and, of course, he had to sign it. He said, ‘Don’t you realize this is Erik’s first teaching job, and it’s very important that a wife be by his side.’<sup>177</sup>

Fifty-six years later, in 1996, Beatrice was invited to give a talk at the University of Iowa and, after the talk, was startled to learn that she had been awarded the distinguished alumna award. She was asked to say a few words and wished she’d had the presence to compare the University’s reception of women then and now:

Well, on such an occasion, which is certainly a very pleasant one, you’re full of appreciation, and everything was wonderful. ... it never occurred to me to mention that if I had followed the Dean’s advice in 1940 I would not be here on this occasion. It was later that I really regretted that that thought didn’t even come into my mind. I regretted it so much because I would have liked to have pointed that out, saying, you know, really, we’ve come a long way. And, really, we have a long way to go. But, it was a missed opportunity.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Cautley, 15.

<sup>177</sup> Beatrice Wright interview July 2-3, 2005.

<sup>178</sup> Beatrice Wright interview July 2-3, 2005.

However, she did take the opportunity in 2007 to recount “the Dean story” when she received the Pioneer Award at the University of Iowa for “extraordinary ... and robust contributions” to the field of Rehabilitation Counseling. On that occasion, she stressed that there’s always something we can do to overcome discriminatory attitudes and practices involving *either* sex.

Lewin, according to his daughter, Miriam, was more directly appreciative of women’s contributions and often demonstrated that he was, “never one to see women as nothing other than children, kitchen, church.”<sup>179</sup> That echoes Louise Barker and Beatrice Wright’s recollections. Therefore, it was not unusual that particularly Lewin himself would treat a female graduate student like Beatrice as a peer at the Topology Group.

This was demonstrated when Lewin presented his paper entitled, “Recent Progress in Methodology and Theory” on Tuesday morning, December 31, 1940, in which he devoted an entire section to her work on altruism-egoism: “I will confine myself to a few words about the study of Mrs. Beatrice Wright. The problems she attacked are rather diversified. ... This is one of the few studies where the validity of projective technique can be tested.”<sup>180</sup> Later on, in the discussion portion of the

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<sup>179</sup> Dr. Miriam Lewin, telephone conversation, December 2, 2005.

<sup>180</sup> 1940 Topology Group “Proceedings,” Lewin’s paper, 11.

“Proceedings,” Lewin again referenced Beatrice Wright’s work as “a good example” of how “the life space is the person and the environment.”<sup>181</sup>

The next afternoon, on Wednesday, January 1, 1941, Margaret Mead offered a paper entitled, “Family Organization and the Super-Ego.” A dialogue ensued that included the following interchange among Lewin, Mead and Beatrice Wright. Of particular interest is the tone of easy collegiality displayed by Mead and Lewin, already influential experts in their fields, toward graduate student Beatrice Wright:<sup>182</sup>

Mead: The Iatmul child has a large area of freedom. The geography and the men’s house and food are the only factors which limit the child’s freedom.

Lewin: You mean that the parents don’t limit the child’s freedom? The power of the parent is used chiefly to repel the child from the particular areas which are of value to them?

Mead: Exactly.

Mrs. Wright: I don’t understand why guilt feelings arise only in family organization where the parent is closer to God than to the child.

Mead: I think that guilt feelings arise only, are tied up with a qualitative dichotomy between the morality of the child and the parent. In [Dan] Adler’s experiment this morning, the situation generates guilt chiefly because the subject is behaving in a way which good adults don’t.

Beatrice Wright’s role at this meeting was to interact as an equal, although still a student, among greats and to continue to build the foundation for a professional career that would affect our understandings of disability and disadvantage (a word Beatrice

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<sup>181</sup> 1940 Topology Group “Proceedings,” Lewin’s Paper, 15.

<sup>182</sup> 1940 Topology Group “Program,” 67.

frequently uses and may have coined), rehabilitation, and her value-laden beliefs—all of which she accomplished. Her singularity has turned out to include being Lewin’s only surviving Ph.D. student and one of the last witnesses of this event (Mary Henle also survives at this point), as well as a preserver of original documents from the proceedings.

### **Her Studies at Iowa**

Beatrice earned both an M.A. and a Ph.D. from the University of Iowa. While studying at the Iowa University Child Welfare Research Station, she also worked on a variety of research projects that included studies by Kurt Lewin, Ronald Lippitt, and Ralph White on the democracy-autocracy experiments and the changing food habits study for a committee chaired by Margaret Mead.

The democracy studies eventually were conducted in two stages but initially had been intended only to expose one group of children to autocratic and another group to democratic teacher behavior and compare the results. Ralph White was chosen to model the democratic teacher, and Beatrice was one of the research assistants to take note of how the ‘students’ responded. She reports that, in going over the tapes, Lewin concluded White’s performance hadn’t been democratic at all, but *laissez-faire*. “Instead of throwing out that data,” Beatrice explains, “he included a third group where the protocol was spelled out as to what it means to be a democratic leader, how a democratic leader behaves, and that’s why the research is sometimes called the autocracy-democracy and *laissez-faire* experiment. Kurt was not averse to try to understand the data as it’s coming

in.”<sup>183</sup> From that kind of mentorship, she learned the importance of keeping an open mind about everything.

In what has become famous as “The Iowa Housewives Experiment,” Lewin and Margaret Meade directed research at the Child Welfare Research Station at the University of Iowa as a part of the concern about national defense after the fall of France to Germany in 1940. President Roosevelt invoked the National Defense Act of 1916 and, on May 29, 1940, set up the National Defense Advisory Commission. Commission member Harriet Elliot, responsible for consumer interest and the welfare of civilians, worked with the National Research Council to form the Committee on Food Habits. The Committee on Food Habits, in turn, was charged to “draw together existing knowledge bearing on food likes and dislikes and the processes of their formulation and change” in order to assure that the population could be fed in the event of anticipated food shortages if the impending war lasted as long as it was feared it would.<sup>184</sup>

Beatrice assisted with those studies also, again as an observer of behavior, from which the concepts of ‘gatekeeper,’ ‘group dynamics,’ and ‘change process’ evolved. In this study, Lewin and associates first worked to confirm his disputed theory that homemakers, not their husbands, made the decisions about what food to serve the family:

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<sup>183</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 17, 2006.

<sup>184</sup> Milburn Lincoln Wilson, “The Problem of Changing Food Habits: Report of the Committee on Food Habits 1941-1943,” *Bulletin of the National Research Council* 16 (October 1943): 3.

they needed to prove that it was women who served as ‘gatekeepers’ of what food came into the home. If homemakers weren’t convinced of the need to change their families’ eating habits, Lewin et al maintained, those eating habits would not change. Although this research included seminal features of what would lead to psychologist Tamara Dembo’s later ideas about the concept of insider-outsider perspectives and psychology student Beatrice Wright’s later notion of including the client in rehabilitation care planning, at the time it was considered primarily significant in regard to the process by which changes in people’s behavior can be managed.

Once those housewives were identified as the decision-makers, researchers investigating the best way to initiate change discovered that encouraging the women to discuss strategies, nutrients and recipes with their peers was more effective than hearing a lecture from some expert imported for the moment. Finally, the researchers also learned that change was a three-step process that involved ‘unfreezing’ current assumptions, replacing those assumptions with new information, and then providing social support to confirm or ‘re-freeze’ the benefits of such change. Those findings were so revolutionary that contemporary self-help groups still rely on them and the theories undergirding such practices. As for Beatrice’s work, both the gatekeeper and change-process theories that developed as a result of her “Lewin Experience” certainly have continued to influence her. But, she went beyond Lewinian theory to develop concepts applicable to the new field of rehabilitation psychology.

While Beatrice didn't know it until 2005, when she saw a copy of a now-declassified 1943 publication, Lewin had acknowledged, in a footnote on the first page, her contributions to analyzing and writing up the results.<sup>185</sup> She was touched and pleased at this reminder of how supportive her professor had been, for Lewin clearly affected her life, in enormously positive ways for which she still is grateful.

### **Meeting M. Erik Wright**

But, the most important aspect of the Iowa years from Beatrice's perspective is that she met her future husband, Erik, there, in Lewin's *Topological Psychology* class.<sup>186</sup> She remembers hearing a voice from the back that was so "full and resonant" that it caused her to turn around to look back at the student who would become her husband in 1940. Before that, though, they lived in a small room with a little cook stove and shared one bathroom with the tenants of three other rooms, worked hard at their graduate studies, and enjoyed the camaraderie of the Lewin group. She remembers, for instance, the Tuesday noon meetings at Smith's Café,<sup>187</sup> fashioned after Lewin's practice in Germany of gathering informally with students to talk about whatever they wanted.

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<sup>185</sup> Kurt Lewin, 'Forces Behind Food Habits and Methods of Change,' in "The Problem of Changing Food Habits: Report of the Committee on Food Habits 1941-1943," *Bulletin of the National Research Council* 16 (October 1943): 35.

<sup>186</sup> Dr. Beatrice Wright's husband, Dr. M. Erik Wright, also was a student of Lewin's in Iowa, and Dr. Herbert Wright, no relation to either Beatrice or Erik, was on staff as well. Understandably, this occasionally has caused some confusion, including one source inaccurately identifying Herbert as Beatrice's husband.

<sup>187</sup> Marrow, 88, refers to this establishment as "The Round Window Restaurant."

Lewin called these meetings “Quasselstrippe” (in German, *quassel* means ‘to ramble on’ and *strippe* is ‘a string’), just as he had in Berlin, but his Iowa students re-named it “The Hot Air Club” and combined serious debate with much laughter.<sup>188</sup> They also stayed up late working in small, converted hospital rooms that served as graduate student offices until adjourning in the wee hours of the dawn to skip down the middle of city streets until arriving at Smith’s Café to drink coffee near the large, circular window and continue sharing good conversation.

Regarding coffee, Beatrice remembers the moment Erik and she were in a restaurant having coffee when they decided to drink their beverage without cream and sugar because of food shortages at the time:

I remember taking that first cup of black coffee, and it was so bitter I thought, ‘Oh, I don’t know if I can do this.’ But, by the end of the week I liked it. Big lesson. How, in this case one’s taste buds can adapt and learn to like things you don’t like, if you just give it a try and persist, especially if it’s embedded in a good cause—the idea of embedding in a positive context is important in general, you can do it. ... now, when I’m sometimes served cream by accident, I taste it and don’t like it and exchange it for black coffee.<sup>189</sup>

Things changed when Erik finished his doctorate in August of 1940 and accepted a position at Ohio State University, though. “He finished in ’40 and then we got married. Because decisions had to be made, I think that’s why. Otherwise, we would have just continued happily together. But, if he were leaving Iowa City, you know, that was a

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<sup>188</sup> Marrow, 26 and 88.

<sup>189</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 15-16, 2006.

different kettle of fish, one had to come to terms, so there was no question.”<sup>190</sup>

Therefore, after attending the annual American Psychological Association conference, held that year at State College, Pennsylvania, they went to a justice of the peace for their September 27, 1940, ceremony. Afterward, Lewin and a number of the Iowa graduate students held a party for them, and then they went to Florida to tell her parents. Dean Stoddard had to be told, too, and that’s when he chided Beatrice for continuing to work on her doctorate, rather than abandoning it to stay at the side of her newly employed groom.

Because Beatrice had to continue her residency in Iowa for another year, she and Erik commuted back and forth between his apartment in Worthington, Ohio, and her room in Iowa City. It wasn’t until her last year of graduate school in 1941-42 that she was able to join him in Ohio, and travel back to Iowa City as necessary to go over her dissertation.

Besides working on her dissertation, she was able to take a class at Ohio State taught by Carl Rogers, who already had developed his client-centered therapy. It was an experience she recalls as, “momentous.” There, she became sensitized to discerning the feelings of clients as expressed in tape-recorded counseling sessions.<sup>191</sup> The focus was on how a therapist re-phrased reflective thinking without interjecting personal biases, so

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<sup>190</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 15-16, 2006.

<sup>191</sup> Wright, Diller Lecture, script for slide 6.

that the client feel understood: “I would go line by line: was that the best response? It was all so exciting!”<sup>192</sup> This skill complemented what she’d learned from previous professors Asch, Maslow and, especially, Lewin, and helped prepare her for what would become the focus of her professional life. Understanding the client’s perspective later became part of the more general concept of the ‘insider versus outsider perspectives,’ as related to interpersonal relations in general and those involving people with disabilities in particular.

So then, Beatrice Ann Posner first graduated from the University of Iowa on August 2, 1940, with an M.A. in child psychology and is listed in the Commencement program as having written a thesis entitled: “Selfishness, guilt feelings and social distance.” Two years later, on July 31, 1942, Beatrice Ann Posner Wright graduated from the University of Iowa and is listed in the Commencement program as having written a dissertation entitled: “Fairness and generosity: an experiment in the development of ideology.” Her doctoral research indicated that eight year olds supported the ideology of generosity, while eleven year olds more often supported the more complex and abstract notion of fairness. She found, in other words, that, “The relative occurrence of the ideologies of fairness and generosity is significantly related to age ... explained by a theory in which the ideology becomes differentiated into an ‘action

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<sup>192</sup> Beatrice Wright interview May 20, 2007.

ideology’ and a more ‘unrealistic ideology’ with age.”<sup>193</sup> These results were arrived at after observing what five and eight year old children did when they had the choice of keeping or sharing a preferred toy and led to publication of an article entitled, “Altruism in Children and the Perceived Conduct of Others.”<sup>194</sup>

### **Importance of the Iowa Years**

The four years spent in Iowa yielded her not only a happy and successful marriage, two degrees and wonderful memories of studying with Kurt Lewin; she also had met people whose friendship would continue to enrich her professional and personal life. And, she took with her a way of thinking about problems, about what could be accomplished and about positive action pathways, that meshed well with what she’d learned from her family of origin.

This is a skill she still demonstrates in ordinary life. During a July 3, 2005, trip to the local photocopying service near her home in Madison, for example, she provided two instances of this thinking in short order. The first was in response to a comment that all the mechanization at Kinko’s surely reduced the number of jobs for people who needed the low-paying work. Her response? “Have you considered thinking about it not as lost jobs but that mechanization results in greater opportunity for people to do work more

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<sup>193</sup> “Summary of Dissertation,” *Final Examination of Beatrice A. Wright*, University of Iowa, The Graduate College, July 21, 1942.

<sup>194</sup> *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* (now known as *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*) 37, No. 2 (1942): 218-33.

demanding and satisfying?” Later, during a walk around the block, a stranger waiting next to her for the traffic light to change commented about the comet smasher making international news that week as a possible defense for our planet. “Think of all the money that could be going to help poor people,” the woman muttered as she turned in a different direction. Pausing only briefly, Beatrice retorted, “Why can’t we afford both a comet smasher and to eliminate poverty? Why must it be one or the other? See, pure Lewin!”

Finally, she took with her a different experience of the relationship between professor and student. Students marveled at how easily Lewin accepted them as equals in the search for knowledge and understanding. She recalls how taken aback she was when Lewin first asked her to address him by his first name: “I wasn’t there very long when he asked me to call him ‘Kurt.’ Imagine! Not even American professors asked their students to call them by their first names. ...The first time I even remember saying, ‘Kurt’ it stuck in my throat.”<sup>195</sup> It wasn’t long before she felt comfortable enough even to offer him a critique, even though it was a gentle admonition of the sort she encouraged from her own students over the next fifty years:

He was always eager to engage students in discussion, but when he disagreed with them, he might say, emphatically, ‘Vut utter nonsense!’ After witnessing one such interaction, I took heart and said to Kurt, ‘When you say that, students are devastated.’ He was so surprised and said, ‘Oh, I only mean I’m sorry to disagree with you.’ I never again heard him say,

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<sup>195</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 15-16, 2006.

‘Vut utter nonsense!’ Don’t you think this story reflects Lewin’s readiness to change, his sensitivity and understanding?<sup>196</sup>

Like her own mentor, Wright went on to spark the imaginations of her students and treat them with empathic respect. One, a professor himself when he wrote to Beatrice on the occasion of her mandatory retirement from the University of Kansas in 1988, recalls experiencing the praxis of her theories while he was a doctoral candidate:

The time was evening and the place was one of the seminar rooms somewhere in the upper floors of Fraser Hall. The Ph.D. committee was meeting for a [dissertation] defense.

The Ph.D. candidate was yours, a candidate you had snatched from the jaws of dismissal after trouble, much of it political and none of it academic, had developed for the candidate in another Ph.D. program.

The candidate had done an interesting, very worthwhile [dissertation]. That night the [dissertation] defense was able and convincing. The [dissertation] was approved, the candidate received a hood. And once again, Beatrice Wright saved academe from its sometimes pretentious and contradictory self.<sup>197</sup>

Graduation from the University of Iowa in August 1942 was the end not only of Beatrice Wright’s doctoral studies; it also was the beginning of the end of Lewin’s work at the Child Welfare Research Station. Increasingly involved with trying, unsuccessfully, to get his mother out of Holland and safe from Nazi oppression and working with the U.S. government against Hitler, Lewin left Iowa for M.I.T. in August 1944. As for

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<sup>196</sup> Beatrice A. Wright, “Kurt Lewin: A Student Remembers Sixty-Five Years Ago,” *Polskie Forum Psychologiczne* 9, no. 2 (2004): 97.

<sup>197</sup> J. Laurence Day, unpublished letter to Wright, April 14, 1988.

Beatrice and Erik, their lives also were changed by the war that had begun during her last year of study.

## CHAPTER IV. WAR AND TRANSITION

Beatrice still recalls with apprehension the moment World War II began, “Here we are, on December 7, 1941, listening to the radio together in Ohio. All of a sudden, Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s voice comes on the air, telling us about the bombing at Pearl Harbor, and ‘this will live as a day of infamy,’ and on the spot he declared war. . . . well, Erik was all of 24 years of age, prime time to be drafted.”<sup>198</sup> They knew things were about to change, even though Erik was able to complete teaching the spring semester of 1942 at Ohio State University before enlisting in the Navy.

### **Transition from Student to Professional Activities**

Meanwhile, Beatrice continued to commute between Ohio and Iowa, meeting with Lewin and Dembo about her dissertation and wondering what was going to happen after graduation. She vividly remembers the day when Lewin received a phone call as they met in his office. Wolfgang Koehler was calling from Swarthmore College to inquire if Lewin could recommend anyone to teach psychology, and Beatrice heard Lewin say, “I have just the person for you, Beatrice Wright.” She concluded at the time that, because so many men were in one of the armed forces, there were vacancies needing to be filled. As a woman, she was available. At the same time, she recognizes that Lewin’s generally enthusiastic support for all his students, including the females, may have played a part: “And why was I just the right person? I’m sure Kurt Lewin might

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<sup>198</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 15-16, 2006.

have felt that way anyway because he always had a positive view toward women, as he did toward men colleagues. But, it was just the environmental circumstances of the war that provided that opportunity, because most of the young men eligible to fill a faculty position would be in service.”<sup>199</sup>

Beatrice’s interpretation of the event was that, “the fact that I’m female finally benefited me! I got a job, without applying. I didn’t even have to present a resume! I didn’t even have to give a seminar! Sight unseen, they welcomed me at Swarthmore!”<sup>200</sup> Yet, while a number of women psychologists did have similar experiences when it came to filling the ranks of employment during WWII, they were in fact the exception.

### **Gender Bias**

In an analysis of how women psychologists fared during World War II, James H. Capshew and Alejandra C. Laszlo examined both statistical and anecdotal records of a nascent feminist activism within the ranks of women psychologists and found that

With the outbreak of war in Europe, American psychologists began mobilizing for the national defense. ... It soon became apparent, however, that mobilization plans ignored the potential contributions of women psychologists. ... By the end of the war it was clear that the stereotype of the liberated woman worker, mythologized in Rosie the Riveter, did not apply to women psychologists.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Beatrice Wright interview July 2, 2005.

<sup>200</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 15, 2006.

<sup>201</sup> James H. Capshew and Alejandra C. Laszlo, “‘We Would Not Take No for an Answer’: Women Psychologists and Gender Politics During World War II,” *Journal of Social Issues* 42, no. 1 (1986): 158.

For example, women held almost 27% of the doctorates in psychology at the beginning of the war. Yet, at a joint meeting of the American Psychological Association (APA) and the American Association for Applied Psychology (AAAP) in September 1940,

Gladys Schwesinger, chair of the AAAP's Section of Consulting Psychology, disgustingly noted that 'as the list of activities and persons rolled on, not a woman's name was mentioned, nor was any project reported in which women were to be given a part.' Even worse for the action-minded women, 'no promise was held that the pattern would be altered to include them.' They protested but with disappointing results. Summarily ignoring their status as psychologists, the male leaders informed them that tradition favored the services of men in wartime. The women's role was to 'keep the home fires burning'; the best they could expect was to 'wait, weep, and comfort one another.'<sup>202</sup>

Admonishing them to be 'good girls,' members of the Emergency Committee in Psychology encouraged women psychologists to channel their patriotism into volunteer activities at the same time that their male peers were finding employment in the military and federal government. The outrage and insult that a group of activists felt about this state of affairs eventually led even to advising Eleanor Roosevelt of the situation. But, all was to no avail. So, on November 11, 1941, thirteen women psychologists met in Alice Bryan's Manhattan apartment to form a professional women's group known as the National Council of Women Psychologists (NCWP) and designed, "to promote specific

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<sup>202</sup> Capshew and Laszlo, 163, citing Gladys C. Schwesinger, "Wartime organizational activities of women psychologists: II. The National Council of Women Psychologists," *Journal of Consulting Psychology* 7 (1943): 298-299.

projects for women psychologists.”<sup>203</sup> Florence Goodenough served as the first president of NCWP, and hopes initially were high that their group would have a positive impact on opportunities available to women psychologists.

This was not to be, either, however. A highly-charged public conversation between Alice Bryan and Harvard University psychologist E. G. Boring revealed that, in fact, unemployment of women psychologists increased during the war: overall, they did not replace men in teaching positions even though some 400 positions had opened up between 1940 and 1944. Further, males with doctorates enjoyed a median salary that was 20% higher than females with doctorates.<sup>204</sup>

The demands of a world war notwithstanding, deeper cultural attitudes about women psychologists prevailed. Bryan and Boring went on to co-author an article that summarized the results of a study conducted through a grant awarded by Pi Lambda Theta, National Association for Women in Education.<sup>205</sup> Choosing for investigation the entire APA membership of American women with Ph.D.s earned from 1921-1940, for a total of 440, they paired each female participant with a male who had earned a Ph.D. in psychology the same year (or as nearly as possible) and from the same university.

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<sup>203</sup> Capshew and Laszlo, 164.

<sup>204</sup> Capshew and Laszlo, 172.

<sup>205</sup> Alice I. Bryan and Edwin G. Boring, “Women In American Psychology: Factors Affecting Their Professional Careers,” *The American Psychologist* 2 (1947): 3-20.

Among their findings, presented in 26 separate tables, were three conclusions that could be applied as well to Beatrice Wright's professional career in psychology.

To begin with, both women and men thought that, generally speaking, women were at a disadvantage because of their gender: "The men get work more easily. They earn more when they get it. In marriage they lack the women's conflict and perhaps for this reason are able to achieve more. They get promoted more readily."<sup>206</sup> At the same time, nearly 25% of the female respondents reported that their gender made getting a job easier, even though those respondents tended to have "the 'women's jobs'—in schools, educational systems, clinics, guidance centers, hospitals, and custodial institutions."<sup>207</sup> Had she earned her Ph.D. two years earlier and agreed to participate in the survey, Beatrice would have fallen into this camp, in attitude and placement.

Next, in terms of family obligations, results from full-time psychologists indicated that while marriage was viewed as advantageous for men, it was not for women: 75% of the men viewed marriage as definitely a professional asset; half that many women viewed marriage as an asset, and 25% said it was a professional hindrance. As for those who were employed part-time in psychology, "In no case is marriage reported as the reason for a male Ph.D.'s abandoning his career. On the other hand, a quarter of the married

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<sup>206</sup> Bryan and Boring, 19.

<sup>207</sup> Bryan and Boring, 13-14.

women with part-time work in psychology report abandoning their careers on account of marriage. An additional third say that marriage has made their careers difficult.”<sup>208</sup>

Finally, as for children, 60% of the mothers responding to Bryan and Boring’s survey reported their children as professional liabilities. Children were considered professional assets by only 25% of the mothers. Conversely, only 5% of the fathers responding to this survey viewed their children as professional liabilities and 40% as professional assets.<sup>209</sup> Clearly, given the data from this research, to be a female psychologist shortly before and during World War II was to be destined for less pay and less prestigious work in the field of psychology. To be married as well, and also to have children, at that time constituted a gender-based negative trifecta.

That thinking, according to psychologist Marie Skodak Crissey’s obituary, led to a norm of late-in-life marriages for women psychologists of her era. Also a graduate of the University of Iowa’s child psychology program in 1938, just four years earlier than Beatrice, Skodak married for the first time 35 years after she earned her Ph.D. and was retired.<sup>210</sup> Orlo Crissey, whom she’d met while at the University of Iowa, was a widower after 38 years of marriage and the father of three adult children when he and Skodak married. Skodak recalled that she had learned while waiting on tables that women

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<sup>208</sup> Bryan and Boring, 15.

<sup>209</sup> Bryan and Boring, 15-16.

<sup>210</sup> Tom Fagan, “Marie Skodak Crissey (1910-2000),” *American Psychologist* 57, no. 5 (May 2002): 367.

psychologists were “different. They seemed more casual in dress and behavior,” so she eagerly registered for a class taught by Dr. Sophie Rogers, who “represented a woman who made it in a man’s world.”<sup>211</sup> Skodak’s experience confirmed what Bryan and Boring were discovering from their research, for she viewed marriage and children as detrimental to her professional life during the same time period that her future husband experienced a marriage of thirty-eight years’ duration and the rearing of three children.<sup>212</sup> Likewise, psychologist Leona Tyler reflected on her single life: “I never decided not to get married . . . I would have like to have been married . . . I would have liked to and always intended to have children . . . but you couldn’t combine roles then.”<sup>213</sup>

Boring’s participation in the study and co-authoring the report with Bryan is interesting, given his thoughts about women in the profession. This was made clear in a private letter Boring sent to psychologist and colleague E. R. Hilgard several years later, in which he clarified his opinion of the effect that marriage had on women, and went on to voice an even more curious notion: “If married, they have more divided allegiance than the men. If unmarried, they have conflict about being unmarried (although I did not

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<sup>211</sup> Marie Skodak Crissey, “Marie Skodak Crissey,” in *A History of Developmental Psychology in Autobiography*, Dennis Thompson and John D. Hogan, eds., Westview Press, 1996: 52.

<sup>212</sup> Crissey, 67.

<sup>213</sup> Leona Tyler, “Mountain Iron Woman: A Case of Androgyny,” *Personnel and Guidance Journal* 55, No. 8 (April 1977): 453.

say that. It seemed too infuriating to say).”<sup>214</sup> It would seem that, from his perspective, women were distracted by conflict if they did marry and distracted by conflict if they didn’t! Curiously, he maintained this opinion about professional women even though his wife, who held a Ph.D. in psychology, had subordinated her career to his until she reached middle-age, and even though his beloved older sister—who was teaching in Japan—lost her life’s work and prospects when having to return to the United States after the War started.<sup>215</sup>

### **Her Experience was Different**

Twenty-two year old newlywed Beatrice Wright didn’t know about such issues, though. In fact, her lack of sensitivity toward or conscious concern about gender issues is something she talks about even now with a mixture of contextual understanding and personal bemusement. She simply was naïve and unaware as a young adult, she says. Coming from a family where mother and father worked together as loving equals to do good things instilled an intrinsic motivation to do well, regardless of gender. And yet, she also was a woman of her time. She views the experience described by Capshew and Laszlo in somewhat similar ways as to how Alice Bryan herself did. Both Bryan and Wright are less incensed than a 21<sup>st</sup> Century feminist might be when looking back at what

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<sup>214</sup> Capshew and Laszlo, 174, citing an unpublished letter from the Harvard University Archives, Folder “He-Hn 1951-52.”

<sup>215</sup> Capshew and Laszlo, 171, citing an unpublished letter from Boring to Bryan housed in the Harvard University Archives, Folder “Bryan 1942-43.”

currently would be judged to be the patronizing and demeaning treatment to which they were exposed.

First, says Bryan, coming on the heels of the Great Depression, any employment was considered a blessing. Therefore, that most prospective members of the NWCP did have full-time jobs was a fact mitigating any sense of urgency to radicalize for better paying employment with higher status. Next, because winning World War II was by no means a foregone conclusion to those living through it, victory had to be given the number one priority.<sup>216</sup> Marie Skodak Crissey speaks of that time in an oral history interview some forty years later: “It’s hard to describe to someone who didn’t live through it how caught up the whole country was and everybody. You gave up careers, you gave up plans, your personal life because this was crucial.”<sup>217</sup> Beatrice echoes those sentiments some sixty-five years after the fact, as did three other professional women in her age group who discussed the topic while watching Independence Day fireworks over the lake from a living room window on July 3, 2005. There is no way someone who didn’t live through it can understand, they agreed, even though they described themselves

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<sup>216</sup> Alice I. Bryan, “A Participant’s View of the National Council of Women Psychologists: Comment on Capshew and Laszlo,” *Journal of Social Issues* 42, no. 1 (1986): 183-84.

<sup>217</sup> Henry L. Minton, “Interview with Marie Skodak Crissey and Orlo Crissey,” January 15, 1982, archived at the University of Iowa.

as feminists who always were very sympathetic to the cause of equal access to employment and equal pay for that work.<sup>218</sup>

Another aspect of the cultural context was an assumption that men would recover their jobs when they returned home from the war and that women graciously would relinquish those posts. Such an assumption relied upon role assignments that at least some women viewed as voluntarily embraced. It was not unusual to hear women say something along the lines of this comment by Ruth Tolman, psychologist herself, as well as wife and sister-in-law of influential men in the world of psychology: “I always find it hard to abstract ‘being a woman’ from being a particular woman and tend to hold responsible my particular idiosyncrasies rather than my sex for the arrangements of my life.”<sup>219</sup> This also sounds like Beatrice, who views her decisions to marry and bear children as hers, even as she does acknowledge cultural influences. And, like Ruth Tollman, she chooses to view the outcome of those cultural influences as generally positive.

Yet, one wonders about the process of how women went about making sense of the social, political and cultural messages delivered to them at that time. Take for instance the 1947 survey data that found 12% of the female psychologists reporting they had given up professional work to assume ‘personal obligations,’ while only 1% of their

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<sup>218</sup> Beatrice Wright interview during gathering with five other resident of the retirement home where she resides on July 3, 2005, in Madison, Wisconsin.

<sup>219</sup> Capshew and Laszlo, 176-177.

male peers report such. Why was it that ‘personal obligations’ resulted in women leaving the work for which they’d trained and earned doctorates and not men? It would seem that their culturally-determined roles as wife and mother certainly played a large part in the dynamic. Further, of those women, 12% reported ‘regretting’ having given up their professional work and wanting to resume at least part-time activity in psychology. Bryan and Boring reflect thus on their poignant data:

There is, then, this faint protest, but it is not vociferous. How could it be? The mother, who now looks after her own children instead of administering tests to other mothers’ children, in general accepts the pattern which the culture sets her, regretting a little but not protesting too much. There are a few exceptions, but usually successful adjustment to reality means that you accept what you cannot change and also that you grow to like it. These psychologists, on the whole, know how to take their own therapy.<sup>220</sup>

Regardless of what was going on at the national level between female and male psychologists, being hired to teach at Swarthmore so soon after earning her Ph.D. was a wonderful professional opportunity for Beatrice. Plus, it would get her closer to her dear husband, stationed on the East Coast at that time. While teaching at Swarthmore, she also took advantage of the opportunity to sit in on classes led by Wolfgang Köhler, who along with Kurt Kafka and Max Wertheimer are considered the founders of Gestalt psychology. For a brief time, all was well:

I got to Swarthmore and it wasn’t very long after that Erik is transferred to the West Coast! Three thousand miles apart. And, I remember at Christmas, now I’m teaching at Swarthmore, and I remember at Christmas, the only reason why I could get on a train was that I was the

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<sup>220</sup> Bryan and Boring, 13.

wife of a serviceperson. That's the train ride I'll NEVER forget. Jammed, shoulder-to-shoulder, people standing, sitting, with servicemen. Or an occasional civilian like myself. WACS, WAVES, you had women in uniform, men in uniform, jammed, jammed. On that train, oh, I'll never forget this, there's a WAC named, her name's Buddy Savetra. And we struck up a friendship. We had to change trains in Chicago, and she was carrying some kind of valise, and the handle broke, and we're running to make the connection. And, with her broken valise, we get onto another jammed train. And then, Erik met me at the train.

Now, I remember I said during the Depression time I didn't experience any travail, that's because of my youth, and we were all in the same boat. But it was quite another thing during the wartime, because I remember when I had to go back to Swarthmore, thinking that my husband would be shipped to the Pacific at any ti—who knows? He was stationed at the Oak Knoll Naval Station in Oakland, California. So, I remember crying (weeping softly), and then we decided I should stay at Swarthmore because if he's in the Pacific, at least it's a wonderful college. Well, months go by and he's not shipped. ... So, at that point we decided I should leave Swarthmore and go to Oakland.<sup>221</sup>

### **Introduction to Disability Issues**

Beatrice and Erik Wright set up housekeeping in Oakland, California, in 1944, (Figure 2)

and she began working with the United States Employment Service in San Francisco.

This was another case of not having to apply for a job. Beatrice had attended a party at

Berkeley for psychologists and met Barbara A. Kirk, a counseling psychologist, who

asked if she might be interested in testing prospective employees and then placing

“persons with disabilities who were hard to place, an urgent need because of the shortage

of workers . . .this was my first introduction to basic disability issues.”<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 15-16, 2006.

<sup>222</sup> Wright, Diller Lecture, script for slide 7.

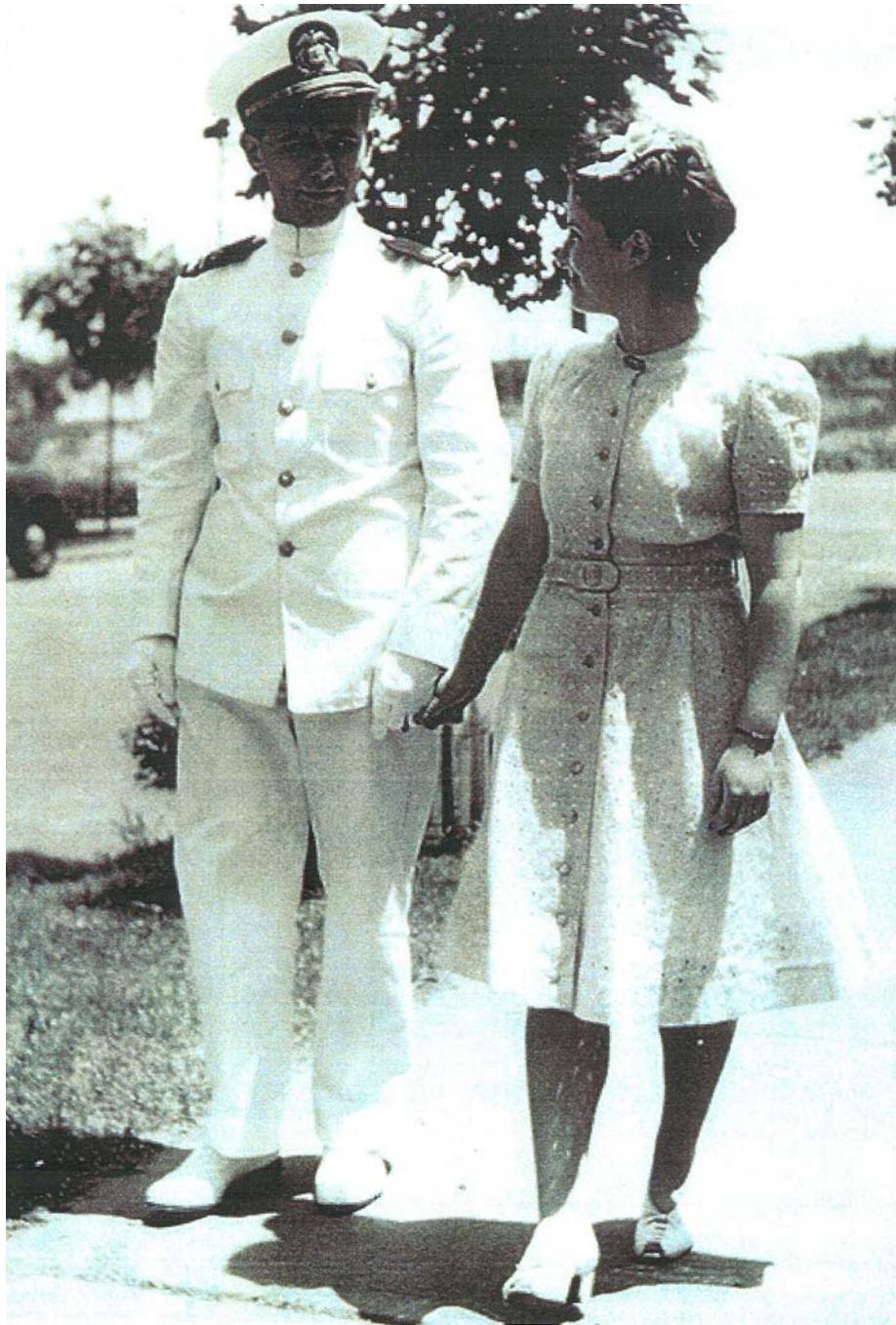


Figure 2. M. Erik and Beatrice Wright, from Beatrice Wright's personal Collection.

Driving from her home in Oakland to the United States Employment Service office in San Francisco every morning, she worked primarily with people declared mentally retarded, administering Stanford Binet intelligence tests and learning from their responses and behavior how they could succeed if placed in a worksite. After conducting whatever tests need to be performed, her task was to place clients appropriately with employers willing to make adjustments for the disabilities:

So, off I go to San Francisco and look through the job applicants, call in this fellow. He seemed to me perfectly employable. He couldn't read, tested out in the 60s or something, and I did call up the employer and spoke to the person in charge of hiring, and said, "Do you know, this man could really be employed. He doesn't read. Can't you find a co-worker who could be a buddy (I used the word 'buddy') who could kind of keep him on track? Sometimes he may not know what to do, and to read any information that comes to the employees." And, I remember he was hired. So, that's the group I worked with, and they now call that 'reasonable accommodation.'<sup>223</sup>

And then, I remember in terms of this person who was in a wheelchair. Of course, in those days there were no ramps. It was before the idea of reasonable accommodations. I called and spoke to the personnel manager and discussed—the applicant was a very able person—but, of course, he needed certain accommodations. Using a wheelchair, how would he get into the building? Well, somebody brings him in. In that case, someone would have to help him by carrying him, and so on. But once you're in the building, will the surface at which he'll be working be too high? Well, lower it, because he would be a big asset. So they provided a workspace to accommodate him; it wasn't called reasonable accommodations in those days, but it sure made sense. ... now that was my first introduction to the real world of people who would be in one sense discriminated against because of disability of one sort or another. Though I had worked in a mental hospital as a research assistant while I was in Iowa, Mount

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<sup>223</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 15-16, 2006.

Pleasant State Hospital, and that was to do assessments, not actual real world life accommodations.<sup>224</sup>

Beatrice believes that the World War II examples of employing women and people with disabilities may have helped pave the way for later rights movements:

These WWII examples of how forces in the environment—call it the situation or circumstance, all meaning outside the person—can either close off opportunities or open them up. And the fact that they can open them up, in terms of disability, or that they hired all the women they could get in terms of sex or feminist issues, could have provided the backdrop, background in the United States that gave a boost to both the feminist movement, because they had been employed outside the home, and the disability rights movement because they were being employed.<sup>225</sup>

Beatrice worked for the US Employment Service, placing hard-to-place employees until 1946, during which time she gave birth in July of 1945 to Colleen, the first of what would turn out to be three Wright children. As the War ended, Erik decided to continue his professional training by going to medical school to earn an M.D. at Berkeley that would augment his Ph.D. in psychology. That meant they would be in California for the foreseeable future.

### **Adjustment to Physical Handicap and Illness**

During this same time, Roger Barker, who had completed his work with Lewin at Iowa just before Beatrice began hers, had come to Stanford and received a grant from the Social Science Research Council to review the literature on illness and disability. While Roger Barker and Beatrice hadn't met in Iowa, they knew of each other, she recalls, "he,

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<sup>224</sup> Beatrice Wright interview July 2, 2005.

<sup>225</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 15-16, 2006.

having been at Iowa with Kurt Lewin for two years, I believe it was 1936 and '37—I came in '38, so we didn't overlap. I didn't know him personally then. But I knew of him because he had participated in what became well-known frustration-regression studies."<sup>226</sup> Learning that she was in Oakland and available for work, he called and asked her to join him in conducting this review. She continues, "Now, I'm here on the West Coast. My husband is in medical school. I knew I could do that with a child at home. I could review the literature. And that turned out to be a very important experience, because I was dismayed by what I read."<sup>227</sup>

...I read a lot of literature dealing with tuberculosis and dealing with blindness and many other disabilities. And when I read the original articles, I was absolutely appalled...because here were people who have enough troubles, then researchers used methodology which is biased against them, from the start, and all the negatives you could think of, such as beset with inferiority feelings, anger. But, the survey prepared me for my future work.<sup>228</sup>

The results of that literature review became the first of her publications to later influence the Independent Living Movement, which led to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.<sup>229</sup> It was while reviewing this research that Beatrice recalls a growing awareness of the prejudicial myths surrounding people with disabilities. She speculates that, in the

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<sup>226</sup> Beatrice Wright interview July 2-3, 2005.

<sup>227</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 15-16, 2006.

<sup>228</sup> Beatrice Wright interview July 2-3, 2005.

<sup>229</sup> Roger G. Barker, Beatrice A. Wright and Mollie R. Gonick, *Adjustment to Physical Handicap and Illness: A Survey of the Social Psychology of Physique and Disability* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1946).

Barker et al review of the literature, “For the first time, I believe, the position of persons with a disability was conceptualized as a minority group.”<sup>230</sup> This notion of *disability* as a social construction developed out of the thrust of what she was exposed to in that review of the literature. More than sixty years later, she acknowledges, “I still think about it: it was awful! What was in the literature at that time just said ‘stigma’ and ‘isolation’ and all the bad things.”<sup>231</sup>

### **Adjustment to Misfortune**

Shortly after completion of this project with Roger Barker, Beatrice teamed up with former Lewin associate Tamara Dembo, whom she’d also met in Iowa. A former Lewin Berlin student herself, Tamara Dembo had immigrated to the United States from Germany when Hitler was on the ascendancy. Also at Stanford in 1946, Dembo received a grant from the government to conduct a study of returning injured servicemen. Along with Gloria Ladieu-Leviton, also at Stanford, Dembo designed a study based on interviews of over one hundred WWII injured servicemen after their first furlough home from the hospital. They were asked about their personal encounters, not about their medical problems, and recounted reactions to curiosity about their injuries, to being helped and stared at, to pity and sympathy. Analyzing these encounters led to a fundamental understanding of issues in interpersonal relations. “They had been at the

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<sup>230</sup> Wright, Diller Lecture, script for slide 8.

<sup>231</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 15-16, 2006.

hospital for a year or so before they had their first furlough,” Beatrice recounts, “and the interviewers just wanted to know not about how their physical burns or amputations were faring from the medical point of view, but just what it was like to be in the general life outside the hospital.”<sup>232</sup>

This research, completed in 1948, led to a monograph entitled, “*Adjustment to Misfortune: a Problem of Social-Psychological Rehabilitation.*” The publication eventually was lauded as a landmark in its scope of issues faced by both individuals with disabilities and a society that stigmatizes and marginalizes them. However, because of its qualitative methodology at a time when quantitative analysis was accepted as synonymous with ‘real research,’ it was not published until 1956. It then appeared in the relatively unknown journal, *Artificial Limbs*. David Shakow, Chief of the Laboratory of Psychology for the National Institute of Mental Health in Bethesda, MD, introduced the edition thus:

Despite the technical significance of the final report of the project, only a few mimeographed copies were distributed. It is only now—more than eight years later—that the results are seeing the light of print. Because it recognizes the basic nature of the contribution and its significance in the presentation of important problems in the psychology of handicap, the Prosthetics Research Board of the National Academy of Sciences National research council has seen fit to devote an entire issue of *ARTIFICIAL LIMBS* to the reproduction of a single, exceptional monograph otherwise long since obscure and inaccessible. ... The authors would, to be sure, be the last persons to claim any definitiveness for their study. Its major contribution lies in opening up questions and delineating areas clamoring for further psychological investigation both by more precise methods and

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<sup>232</sup> Beatrice Wright interview July 2-3, 2005.

greater intensity. The authors' own attitudes in this respect may be gathered from the fact that they conclude the body of the monograph with a chapter headed *Direction of Further Research*.<sup>233</sup>

Reading the interviews had been a grueling task, Beatrice notes, because “what they dwelled on was basically interpersonal relations dealing with issues of being stared at, being helped, being the subject of curiosity, discussion of the injury, pity.”<sup>234</sup> The publication included veterans' recollections like that of a 25 year old with a leg amputation and arm injury who said, “I heard this remark right in the hospital. A woman said, ‘Where’s all the freaks at?’”<sup>235</sup> He went on to express a strong distaste for the word ‘cripple’ and an unwillingness to use the word ‘stump,’ saying, “My wife never saw my leg. ... I don’t ever want her to see it. Even dogs notice it. They stand and look.”<sup>236</sup>

A 23 year old who had face, shoulder, arm and leg injuries, with his left eye gone and scars around it, talked about the difference between visible and invisible injuries. As far as he was concerned, even plastic surgery wasn’t much help for some of his comrades:

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<sup>233</sup> David Shakow, “Artificial Limbs—Their Human Owners,” *Artificial Limbs* 3, no. 2 (Autumn 1956): 5.

<sup>234</sup> Beatrice Wright interview July 2-3, 2005.

<sup>235</sup> Tamara Dembo, Gloria Ladieu Leviton and Beatrice A. Wright, “Adjustment to Misfortune—A Problem of Social-Psychological Rehabilitation,” *Artificial Limbs* 3, no. 2 (Autumn 1956): 58.

<sup>236</sup> Tamara Dembo, Gloria Ladieu Leviton and Beatrice A. Wright, “Adjustment to Misfortune—A Problem of Social-Psychological Rehabilitation,” *Rehabilitation Psychology* 22, no. 1 (1975): 90.

For 31 months a fellow has been in the hospital. He barely went outside of the gate. He looks like Frankenstein. If his face was fixed so he could look like he should he would go out. They are more concerned about the face. That is something you can't hide. You get a wound on your face you will always carry it. But the rest of them you can hide. ... most people will look at him and ask questions. He won't feel like answering them. He is trying to forget it. This fellow out here, he feels the same. He feels like nobody wants him. He asked me several times, 'Do you think I will ever get married? Do you think anybody will want me?' His own folks came, and he wouldn't even go out to see them.<sup>237</sup>

The third veteran cited in the publication was 21 years old, with facial scars, an eye injury, and amputation of his right arm below the elbow. His attitude was different, for he could see some value in having a prosthetic hook:

It was rough when I couldn't feed myself and was helpless. [Other hand also was injured.] I learned to tie my shoes and write, and the more I learned the better off I was. But if you have self-sympathy you won't get along. If you figure out how you can do it it helps take your mind off. Recondition yourself. I felt low at the beginning. I thought of the shock to my folks. I knew there was some things I couldn't do. So what? I was determined I could. They told me I couldn't swing on the rings, but I did it. Having no feeling is one advantage. You can stick it in a fire, and chemistry acids wouldn't bother you. If someone is in an accident, the best thing to do is to send someone who has one and show him how to use it. I was told but couldn't visualize it. If you send someone, the guy may resent it at first, but in the long run it helps out.<sup>238</sup>

In Beatrice's more contemporary language, this young man had achieved a level of acceptance that allowed him to reassess his assets and adjust to his changed circumstances. Moreover, consistent with findings from the "Changing Food Habits" studies in Iowa, peer interaction—insider collaboration—is deemed especially helpful.

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<sup>237</sup> Dembo, Leviton and Wright, 1975, 93.

<sup>238</sup> Dembo, Leviton and Wright, 1975, 99.

This is a concept continuously validated by the activities of such self-help groups as Alcoholics Anonymous, Weight Watchers, Reach for Recovery, and many others.

Interestingly, this research also investigated attitudes of the veterans with injuries toward women who may have sustained the same disabilities. For the young men cited earlier, gender did make a difference.

*Interviewer:* Is an injury easier to take for a woman or a man?

*Subject #1:* The injury is worse for a woman. A man thinks of a woman as something he is proud of and wants everyone to see. It wouldn't make any difference if my wife got her leg cut off. She couldn't help what happens to her. I don't know if I could marry one though. I never saw a lady with a prosthesis. I never saw one, and if I could I would gawk just as much as anyone.

*Interviewer:* Would you object to marrying an injured woman?

*Subject #1:* It's possible but not probable. I would give it lots of consideration and thought. After you are married and love them it's different.<sup>239</sup>

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*Interviewer:* Do you think there is a difference, from your experience, in how women and men feel about appearance?

*Subject #2:* I think there is. The women ... The man figures he don't care after a while. He will kind of forget about it. But a woman—they are always prettying up you know.<sup>240</sup>

*Interviewer:* Is an injury easier to take for a woman or a man?"

*Subject #2:* It's worse for a woman. Most people will accept it on a man.

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<sup>239</sup> Dembo, Leviton and Wright, 1975, 90.

<sup>240</sup> Dembo, Leviton and Wright, 1975, 94.

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*Interviewer:* Would you object to marrying an injured woman?

*Subject #3:* After I have had one off, for me, it wouldn't make much difference. I was never prejudiced much that way. I wouldn't go out of my way to look for one, but you have something to talk about anyway. She could wear long-sleeved dresses and the hand [shows his cosmetic hand and how it works].<sup>241</sup>

Publication of this work in *Artificial Limbs* (no longer in existence) generated the notice of other groups, first by the Rehabilitation Counseling of the American Personnel and Guidance Association, which recognized it with an award in 1959, then by *Blindness Research*, which reprinted it in 1969, and then *Rehabilitation Psychology*, which reprinted it in 1975.<sup>242</sup>

Conducting the research for this landmark study was an example of shared responsibility among the three female psychologists that was based on individual needs and strengths. Dembo and Ladieu Leviton traveled to Brigham City, Utah, to interview the more than one hundred injured servicemen being treated at the Bushnell Military Hospital and arranged to have the interviews transcribed. Then, Beatrice, a strong conceptualist who was at home caring for a toddler and pregnant with her second child, joined the other two in analyzing the records.

We would get together and go over these records and discuss them and try to tease out what was really going on. Why was, for instance, a nice thing like 'help' problematic? What was problematic? And we understood

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<sup>241</sup> Dembo, Leviton and Wright, 1975, 99.

<sup>242</sup> Wright, Dillard Lecture, script for slide 11.

from the records that the target reacted in a certain way, either positively or negatively, and could figure out from the interviews a little conceptualization as to why that was. And so we would also make recommendations to the target—that means the injured person—as well as to the other person, whom we referred to as the donor, the one who gave the help or who was curious, and so on. So, it was a conceptualization of the interpersonal relations and recommendations. That study was such a basic study for me and my future work. Actually I can't give enough acknowledgement beyond what I have been trying to do.<sup>243</sup>

The project became a professional turning point for her, “a crucial study in my learning trajectory and now a classic in its own right,” she recalls, “because it dealt with real problems in everyday life, how to understand them, and how to ameliorate them. They spoke about being pitied. They spoke about how people would barge in and ask them questions about their injuries. Curiosity, being labeled.”<sup>244</sup>

The first of several articles to come out of that research dealt with how the interviewed veterans experienced curiosity about their injuries. Every one of the interviewed veterans had a strong opinion about discussing their physical injuries with others, with many agreeing that, “for a stranger to ask questions, that's out,” or “If it's carried too far it makes me mad.”<sup>245</sup> Just under half spoke of how they felt about *staring*, and their experiences are both painful and enlightening to read, as in these examples:

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<sup>243</sup> Beatrice Wright interview July 2-3, 2005.

<sup>244</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 15-17, 2006.

<sup>245</sup> Ralph K. White, Beatrice A. Wright and Tamara Dembo, “Studies in Adjustment to Visible Injuries: Evaluation of Curiosity by the Injured,” *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 43, no. 1 (January 1948): 15.

You have forgotten about it yourself, really. But you can never forget it if they keep bring it up—if they keep reminding you of the fact that you are injured.

Some people look at him and act like he's not human or something. It is mostly morbid curiosity. They aren't interested in your uniform or your ribbons. ... They just can't resist seeing the blood flowing.

If someone will take your handbag that's OK. But in Williamsburg they'd like to carry me off the train. That makes a fellow feel he is a cripple ... Staring makes a fellow self-conscious—it makes him feel he really is a— (sentence not finished).<sup>246</sup>

We felt like a monkey in a glass box.

They come into the hospital and make the soldier feel that he is a guinea pig.

The audacity of staring and putting you in the same class as some freak in a sideshow.<sup>247</sup>

So, by the time this research was completed in 1948, Beatrice had had experienced varied and personal interactions with people who had disabilities. From her perspective, developing a conceptual framework that would define a constructive view of life with a disability instead of a devastating view was a natural result of her upbringing: “I tell you, I have a diary from my father who, in later years, had a severe case of rheumatoid arthritis, and he wrote in it, ‘It’s a pleasure to be old and sick. Everybody is

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<sup>246</sup> White, Wright and Dembo, 18.

<sup>247</sup> White, Wright and Dembo, 22.

so kind to you.’ You see where I get my positive outlook? As a caveat, a constructive, positive outlook includes dealing with the pains and affronts of life.”<sup>248</sup>

Beatrice recalls how she managed carrying on this work, thinking about what she had learned from their research, and going about her own daily routine, which was quite full for this psychologist, writer, wife, and mother. Noting that most of the other women psychologists she knew were either single or married and childless, Beatrice remembers that she did her research in the evening:

Well, I did a lot of work at night, after the kids went to bed, and I have a cute story to tell you. A personal story. Colleen was the kind of baby who—now, I’m not exaggerating, even though it sounds like it!—who at the age of three weeks could sleep through the night. And I said to myself, or to my husband, ‘ people who have so much trouble with their children, all you need to do is take care of them and love them and feed them.’ I was nursing and didn’t have any problems with sleeping. The Good Lord heard me! ‘Oh, you call yourself a psychologist, do you? We’ll fix that.’ So, baby Erik arrives, and he was the kind of baby who woke up every two hours at night throughout the night. All he wanted was a swig, just a little bit, until eighteen months of age. ... I worked mostly at night, but they did go to bed early, so I did have long evenings.

But, you know, there are a couple of good lessons that I single out as particular experiences. One was learning to like black coffee while a student in Iowa, you know, that taught me a very important lesson. And, the other was this thing about smugness in regard to childcare. I remember that, it’s a lesson to me; whenever I feel so self-satisfied, watch out!<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> Beatrice Wright interview July 2-3, 2005.

<sup>249</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 15-16, 2006.

### **Developing A Focus**

The time spent reflecting on what the voices of those injured servicemen were sharing with the interviewer tapped into one of Beatrice's greatest strengths, conceptualization—especially with an eye toward practical application and improvement of situations. “What does this mean for real life? And, in terms of real life, how do you make things better? That’s kind of an offshoot of action research, though I never worked in communities to effect change,” she explains. “But in my writings, I discuss the implications for clinical practice and research. My books dealing with disability offer recommendations to the insider as well as to the outsider.”<sup>250</sup> One example of this approach can be seen in the conclusion to that 1948 article on ‘curiosity,’ calling for “the non-injured person [to be] guided by the wishes and needs of the injured man in regard to communicating about the injury.”<sup>251</sup> It presaged formulation of what Beatrice considers one of her most important contributions to the field of rehabilitation psychology, a value-laden principle of actively seeking participation of the client in the planning and execution of the rehabilitation program.<sup>252</sup>

Beatrice's analyses of data on how people with disabilities interacted with their environments, and on what environmental changes were necessary to better

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<sup>250</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 15-16, 2006.

<sup>251</sup> White, Wright and Dembo, 28.

<sup>252</sup> Wright, 1983, xii.

accommodate the needs of people with disabilities relied heavily on a concept she learned in Iowa called ‘action research.’ Including both an individual and the environment when seeking to make changes relates to Kurt Lewin’s work in Iowa. As former Lewin student Leon Festinger recalled, “What Kurt Lewin understood *very* well, and what he communicated to people who worked with him, was the relationship between theory and the empirical world.”<sup>253</sup>

Although Lewin formally introduced the concept of *Action Research* in a 1946 article entitled, “Action Research and Minority Problems,”<sup>254</sup> he earlier had overseen experiments based on the premise of effecting social change through interventions that addressed both the individual and the environment. In particular, the “Changing Food Habits” study that sought to bring about healthy eating and wise meal planning has been identified as an early example of ‘action research.’<sup>255</sup> This is, of course, the study with which Beatrice assisted and in reference to which Lewin cited her analytic and writing contributions.<sup>256</sup> Beatrice remembers the Iowa Housewives “Changing Eating Habits”

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<sup>253</sup> Patnoe, 252.

<sup>254</sup> Kurt Lewin, “Action Research and Minority Problems,” *Resolving Social Conflicts; and, Field Theory in Social Science* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2004) 143-152.

<sup>255</sup> Marrow, 128.

<sup>256</sup> Kurt Lewin, ‘Forces Behind Food Habits and Methods of Change,’ in “The Problem of Changing Food Habits: Report of the Committee on Food Habits 1941-1943,” *Bulletin of the National Research Council* 16 (October 1943): 35.

research and her assignment to, “examine the data and then write what I felt it was speaking to . . . you see, there must have been several different groups going on . . . each research assistant had two of those groups to analyze and write up. It was a control group always with the experimental group.”<sup>257</sup>

The “Changing Food Habits Study” produced a number of conclusions about individual and group behavior that now are so widely accepted they seem to constitute truisms. At the time, however, they were newly confirmed results stemming from research headed by Lewin and Margaret Mead. The results of these experiments led to concepts of ‘group decision,’ peer support, and the motivation of individuals comprising groups when they have the power to govern themselves.<sup>258</sup> Documenting such basic understandings of human behavior actually required a thorough understanding of the complex dynamics between people and their environment and the most careful observation of when, and how, an individual’s psychological ‘field’ of perceptions incorporated new information.<sup>259</sup> At the same time, researchers like Beatrice had to take note of when, and how, the *group*’s psychological field of perceptions changed. Doing so required that she and others held in equal regard all the fields at play when a person

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<sup>257</sup> Beatrice Wright interview July 2-3, 2005.

<sup>258</sup> Marrow, 131.

<sup>259</sup> Kurt Lewin, *A Dynamic Theory of Personality*. NY: McGraw-Hill, 1935.

makes choices. It reinforced the notion that many options must be considered when arriving at conclusions.

Lewin believed that action research provided the link between theory and practice and would lead to justice-oriented social action. Psychology needed to do more than simply explain behavior; he maintained, “We must be equally concerned . . . with discovering how people can change their ways so that they learn to behave better.”<sup>260</sup> So then, the total field of interactive experience perceived by the individual and others made up the focus of Lewin’s action research. This was a perspective Beatrice had recognized in part from beliefs held by her family of origin regarding concern for those who were down-trodden in any way. Therefore, implementing methods she’d learned in Iowa for accomplishing social change was to be expected. Learning from her analysis of what injured veterans reported experiencing after their first furloughs home, Beatrice began emphasizing what would become her trademark practice by including recommendations for addressing barriers that prevented the best possible outcomes for people.

The article she co-authored in 1948 dealt with how injured and non-injured people can communicate with each other about the topic of the injury. Painful dynamics between the individual and other people (social environment) were succinctly identified in the first paragraph: “one of them is afraid to hurt, and the other is afraid of being

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<sup>260</sup> Marrow, 158.

hurt.”<sup>261</sup> This article went on to specify particular behaviors that are or are not helpful to the goal of communicating positively with a person who had been injured. Conclusions and recommendations, made by the three authors who all were former Lewin students and who had met at the Child Welfare Research Station in Iowa, included stating that the person without visible injuries needs to be guided by the person with the injuries makes use of the action research findings:

To avoid being hurt by the other person and to make possible the communication he desires, the injured man gives recommendations to the non-injured. A principle underlying his recommendations is that the injured man should determine when and how the discussion should start and the course it should take. The clues given by the injured man by which the non-injured person may be guided are rarely clear-cut and definite. They are often subtle and elusive, and may even be covered up. When the communication is an outgrowth of a definite situational or personal context, the non-injured person is better able to interpret the clues correctly since the imbedding in a broader context helps to structure their meaning.<sup>262</sup>

Within this brief segment were the concepts that, over the next half-century and more, Beatrice would take hold of and develop beyond what anyone else would accomplish. The notion of *insider-outsider* dynamics, of outsiders (other people) following the insiders (persons with disability) in determining how to proceed, was to be paramount in her work. Additionally, her attentiveness to what a conceptualist would term *field theory* (individual behavior within a social or physical environmental context) would determine how people with disabilities wanted others to interact with them.

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<sup>261</sup> White, Wright, and Dembo, 13.

<sup>262</sup> White, Wright and Dembo, 28.

## **Personal Choices**

That she was living a life other psychologists may have considered problematic did not occur to Beatrice, or trouble her, for she found fulfillment in her combined roles of psychologist, wife and mother. She considered marriage and her children to be core values compatible with the activities undertaken as a psychologist. Meanwhile, Roger Barker had moved to Lawrence, Kansas, in 1947 to head the Department of Psychology at the University of Kansas. Suffering from both a natural stagnation and a war-related depletion of faculty members, the KU psychology department needed to be strengthened. Barker's work with Lewin pre-disposed him to look for other like-minded psychologists. Beatrice remembers the particularities of how Barker went about recruiting her husband:

At that point, being post WWII, clinical psychology was on the big push upswing because clinical psychologists, or psychologists, such as my husband, though he wasn't trained in clinical psychology, he trained with Lewin, but he was used to helping servicemen. So, Roger wanted to build up the clinical psychology program in this psychology department, also know that there was federal funding for that, and waited for three years for Erik to finish his medical degree and internship to move to Kansas.

In 1948, before [third child] Woody was born, we went to Kansas, to see if we'd like it, knowing that in '51 we decided we would be there. Colleen and Ricky were born at that point, and my husband taught there for that summer. We liked the town, because we felt it was, and I still feel it is, a child-centered town. And, we wanted a place where we could rear our kids. So, at that point, there was a commitment made.<sup>263</sup>

M. Erik Wright was appointed Professor in the Departments of Psychology and Psychiatry and Director of the Clinical Psychology Program in 1951. Beatrice tells the

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<sup>263</sup> Beatrice Wright interview July 2-3, 2005.

story of that move from California to Kansas when she, Erik and their three children (Woody had been born in 1949) loaded up their car and trailer to head south from San Francisco and then east toward Kansas:

In Los Angeles we hear, ‘anybody with a helicopter go to Lawrence, Kansas, it’s flooded!’ Well, we go across country, leaving Los Angeles, which is bone-dry in the summer, everything brown, brown, brown, go across, there’s drought, drought, drought, brown, brown. We hit Lawrence, Kansas, green, green, green! Verdant green! Amazing, emerald green! All over! We came in from the southwest, I guess, and we see a man in front of some kind of machine shop, scraping the rust off his equipment. At that time they had housing, which was the old barracks for veterans that the new faculty used when they entered. So, we unloaded and then drove across the river. It was the northern part of Lawrence that was flooded. We see a car on top of a house. An automobile had just floated down. I guess since then there’ve never been any more floods ... that was our entrance to the Flood of ’51!<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 15-16, 2006.

## CHAPTER V. THE KANSAS YEARS

Because of Kansas's anti-nepotism laws, Beatrice could not be similarly employed at the University of Kansas. She understood the sub-text of that policy: "nepotism meant that the wife couldn't become a member of the faculty if the husband was on the faculty."<sup>265</sup> So, she would spend the next twelve years conducting research, working with parents of children with disabilities, reporting the proceedings of a conference in a book for the APA, collaborating on another's book, writing articles, affiliating with the Menninger Clinic, and rearing the daughter and two sons born to her and Erik between 1945 and 1949. She also wrote her own groundbreaking textbook on disability. All things considered, it was to be a very productive time.

Moving to Lawrence, Kansas, was good for the whole family, says Beatrice, despite the existence of anti-nepotism laws that for more than a decade kept her from being hired as a faculty member of the psychology department at the University of Kansas. Her husband, M. Erik Wright, who had earned a Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Iowa in 1940, now had finished his medical training in California and so had a dual appointment as a professor in the departments of psychology and psychiatry. But, Beatrice recounts, "I couldn't teach there because of nepotism. Nepotism meant that

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<sup>265</sup> Beatrice Wright interview July 2-3, 2005.

the spouse couldn't teach if the partner, the partner member, was on the faculty. That really meant wives couldn't teach."<sup>266</sup>

### **Anti-Nepotism**

There certainly was no legitimate reason for her not to be hired. The stereotype of mothers staying home to care for their children and wives eschewing their own careers in order to provide undivided emotional support for their husbands' careers<sup>267</sup> did not apply to her. Sonia and Jerome Posner, who had moved to California in 1945 after the birth of Colleen to be near their younger daughter and her husband, had followed them to Kansas in 1951 (Figure 3). Over the next twelve years, they would live approximately a mile away and provide childcare while Beatrice was engaged in applying her psychological training.

And that was a very good stroke of fortune because that meant I could—even though I couldn't teach, couldn't be on faculty—I could do professional work. Because they could come over and be with the children. So, my children never in their rearing came home to a babysitter while I was working. And when they were in grade school they never came home at lunch to somebody other than their grandparents. So, I did quite a number of things. It started out that Roger Barker would join me in the book that became known as *Physical Disabilities: A Psychological Approach*, which was published in 1960.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> Beatrice Wright interview July 2-3, 2005.

<sup>267</sup> James West Davidson and Mark Hamilton Lytle, "From Rosie to Lucy," *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2000) 2:312-324.

<sup>268</sup> Beatrice Wright interview July 2-3, 2005.



Figure 3. Beatrice's family (left to right): daughter Colleen, son Woody, husband M. Erik, son Erik Olin, mother Sonia Posner, father Jerome Posner. Photo taken by Beatrice in 1951, shortly before leaving California for Kansas.

First during this time came her 1951-53 revision of *Adjustment to Physical Handicap and Illness*. Then, *Adjustment to Misfortune* finally found a publisher in 1956 and went on to receive the 1959 Research Award of the Division of Rehabilitation Counseling of the American Personnel and Guidance Association. Then she started on her own book:

Roger was going to work with me on that. I would go to my parents' house and work in the morning on a typewriter, old-fashioned typewriter which my daughter still has as a memento of some sort, while my parents came to my house to be with the children. At that time, my daughter was in grade school ... and Roger would come to my folks' house, and I would read to him what I wrote. I believe he found it a little bit disturbing, what I was writing.... Because I did talk about what it felt like. In other words,

getting inside the phenomenology of the person in talking about issues of status or interpersonal relations ... and I made a lot of use of autobiographical accounts, again believing that that insider perspective needed to be valued. Eventually, he withdrew. I felt really very, very disappointed. And he withdrew because he was already into his ecological work, which went in a different direction. So, I took it upon myself to continue it. ... this book became known as my own book, not with Roger Barker, and in 2004 it was selected, with its second sequel to that book, published in 1983, to be part of the canon of distinguished books of psychology.<sup>269</sup>

She suspended work on her own book for two years, however, to help Fritz Heider, an old friend who asked for assistance in getting his book published. All the while, her husband and parents provided emotional support and child care necessary for her to do this work.

#### Heider's Book

After the revision of *Adjustment to Physical Handicap and Illness* for its re-issue in 1953, the first book she played a major role in writing was published in 1958 by Fritz Heider. Also selected to the canon of distinguished books in psychology, *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations* presented Heider's concepts of attribution and balance and is considered his opus. Hired by Roger Barker as part of the effort to rejuvenate the University of Kansas psychology department, Heider had received a Guggenheim Fellowship to get his ideas organized into a book. That was to be quite a task, and he turned to Beatrice for assistance.

Fritz Heider had been working on concepts which are now known as attribution—to what we attribute what, basically, if you put it simply—and

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<sup>269</sup> Beatrice Wright interview July 2-3, 2005.

developed very important ideas that I also find important, and he got a Guggenheim to put all of that in a book. He asked me to help him with that, noting, noticing that I was a ‘free-floating’ psychologist. I was available because I wasn’t on faculty, gladly said yes and worked basically from notes that he had, notes for his classes, his lecture notes, which were made up of fragments of thoughts—a sentence here, a sentence there. If I was lucky, a whole paragraph. ... And I worked on that for almost two years ... I had interrupted the writing of my own book on disability... just set that aside and then returned to it after I finished with the Fritz Heider book. And, I remember when I would turn in chapters and then for the final submission, Fritz Heider said to me, “Well, we’ll publish it Fritz Heider with Beatrice Wright,” and I tell this story only because I was pretty naïve in a way with respect to the feminist cause. I was so happy to be able to use my wherewithal and work to do something productive in the field, and I said to him, “Oh no, Fritz, you’ve worked on these ideas for twenty years or more. This is your book.”<sup>270</sup>

She ruefully acknowledges that she hadn’t yet been enlightened by a sense of feminism and now asks disbelievingly, “What was I thinking?” To his credit, Heider inscribed her copy, “From one author to the other.”<sup>271</sup> Moreover, he continued to acknowledge her collaboration, which others described as “enormous help,”<sup>272</sup> reflecting that she provided more than clerical assistance: “We had long talks about the ideas that I had been working with and she did a lot to reorganize and rewrite to make it all easier for readers to get hold of. She had been a student of Lewin and we had much in common in

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<sup>270</sup> Beatrice Wright interview July 2-3, 2005.

<sup>271</sup> Grace Heider letter, Beatrice Wright private collection.

<sup>272</sup> Bertram Malle and William Ickes, “Fritz Heider: Philosopher and Social Psychologist,” *Portraits of Pioneers in Psychology, Volume IV* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2000), 205.

our thinking.”<sup>273</sup> This book is widely appreciated and considered the origin of thought on attribution and balance theory, upon which much research in social psychology has relied for more than half a century.

### Psychology and Rehabilitation

While completing Heider’s book, Beatrice also was editing a book entitled *Psychology and Rehabilitation*, published in 1959, which presented “The Proceedings of an Institute on the Roles of Psychology and Psychologists in Rehabilitation Held at Princeton, N. J., February 3-7, 1958.”<sup>274</sup> She was responsible for sorting through the various perspectives to arrive at some sort of consensus:

...I undertook the task of making these ‘intangibles’ explicit in terms of a set of ‘principles and assumptions’ that seemed implicitly to underlie a common perspective and that, in effect, would capture the distinctive character of rehabilitation as a movement and philosophy. Twelve guiding principles emerged. ... They accord well with the spirit of the Independent Living Movement launched in the 1970s.<sup>275</sup>

At the time, her efforts were lauded in the “Foreword,” and the importance of this particular document recognized well ahead of its time. Victor Raimy, Chairman of the

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<sup>273</sup> Fritz Heider, “Interview with Fritz and Grace Heider,” conducted by Tom Lewin [no relation to Kurt Lewin], Oral History Project of the Retiree’s Club, University of Kansas, Winter 1985. University Archives, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas Libraries.

<sup>274</sup> Beatrice Wright, ed., *Psychology and Rehabilitation* (Washington, D.C.: The American Psychological Association, 1959).

<sup>275</sup> Beatrice Wright interview July 2-3, 2005.

Planning Committee, concluded by noting that Beatrice had done more than cobble together five days of conversation and ideas:

Dr. Beatrice Wright has received nation-wide attention for her theoretical and research contributions to the psychology of the disabled. In her hands, the proceedings of the Institute have been turned into a document which succeeds in relating psychology and psychologists to a vast rehabilitation movement in which psychologists are just one necessary segment. ... For the Planning Committee and for the associated groups which made the Institute possible, this opportunity is taken to assure the reader that Dr. Wright has done more than edit the proceedings: she wrote a book.<sup>276</sup>

Some 30 years after these principles were formulated and published, they would be reflected in a 1986 brochure prepared by Division 22 of the APA that described the objectives of the Division and the work of rehabilitation psychologists.<sup>277</sup>

#### Physical Disability: A Psychological Approach

Finally, Beatrice's own book was published in 1960. In it, she singled out Solomon Asch, Roger Barker, Tamara Dembo, Fritz Heider, Kurt Lewin, Carl Rogers, and M. Erik Wright as those most influential in the development of her thinking as a psychologist.<sup>278</sup> It was entitled *Physical Disability—A Psychological Approach* and would be expanded and re-titled in 1983 as *Physical Disability—A Psychosocial Approach*. (Beatrice prefers to have the 1983 version cited in this document, because it

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<sup>276</sup> Victor Raimy, "Foreword," *Psychology and Rehabilitation*, v-vi.

<sup>277</sup> Beatrice Wright, "Division of Rehabilitation Psychology: Roots, Guiding Principle, and a Persistent Concern," *Rehabilitation Psychology* 38, no.1 (1993): 64.

<sup>278</sup> Beatrice Wright, "Preface to the First Edition," in *Physical Disability: A Psychosocial Approach* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1983), xxi.

includes a discussion of her value-laden beliefs and principles and because it uses inclusive language.)

Although personally very fond of Roger Barker and professionally enormously grateful for his support of her work, Beatrice reflects that, when it came to writing *Physical Disability*,

Probably, it was a good thing that he withdrew. He was very supportive—the preface to that first edition was written by Roger Barker, extremely laudatory and so on. Well, probably it was a good thing because he’s a really different type psychologist, so it might have been, if he wrote different parts, maybe it would or wouldn’t have worked together, I don’t know.<sup>279</sup>

What everyone did know upon its publication was that Beatrice A. Wright had re-defined the field of rehabilitation and provided a new narrative for people with disabilities and professionals serving them. Building on her research since 1946, she argued for a new approach to viewing disability that seemed inconceivable at the time: a constructive one. This stance began with the theory proposed by Dembo, Leviton and Wright that a person’s values could change in the process of accepting loss or disability, evolving from an idealization of physical soundness to an appreciation of other human characteristics.<sup>280</sup> Given sufficient time and encouragement, people could enjoy satisfying, productive lives. And, by including the Lewinian principle that emphasizes environmental influences on behavior, she stressed that the same change in values could

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<sup>279</sup> Beatrice Wright interview July 2-3, 2005.

<sup>280</sup> *Adjustment to Misfortune*.

occur at a cultural level, if there were sufficient will to recognize the social bias against people with disabilities and then to make reasonable accommodations. In fact, upholding the human dignity of people with disabilities was an overarching theme of the entire book.

The theory of value changes in acceptance of loss or disability encompassed four areas, beginning with an enlargement in one's scope of values. At this stage, people with disabilities learn to widen and deepen their views of what constitutes a satisfying life. Next, having enlarged their scope of values, people with disabilities can re-prioritize their values so that physique-related concerns become relatively less pressing. The third stage of changing values involves containing, or limiting, effects of the disability as much as possible, rather than allowing the perspective to define the person as the disability (e.g., *the quad in room 23*). Finally, a re-evaluation of all that a person with disabilities can do leads to the transformation of comparative-status values into asset or intrinsic evaluation. For instance, if someone compares a wheelchair to walking, the wheelchair loses out. However, if someone considers what a wheelchair can do on its own and not in comparison with something else, it can be assessed as a positive factor.

Another area where *Physical Disability* broke new ground was a deconstruction of the perceptual tendencies that lead to devaluation of people with disabilities. Beatrice emphasized the distinction between perspectives of people as insiders vs. as outsiders, a

concept originally introduced by Tamara Dembo.<sup>281</sup> The insider is the person directly experiencing a situation, whereas the outsider can perceive the situation only indirectly as an observer or evaluator. The distinction is important because, among other things, the “sensitivity of the insider to factors in the environment tends to be greater than that of the outsider.”<sup>282</sup> Such empathy goes beyond a care provider or family member feeling pity or sympathy for the person with disabilities; it invites the person with disabilities to take the lead in developing a personal narrative and to serve as an expert on her or his own experience.

Next, she spoke of spread effects that occur when someone with a disability in one respect is deemed to have limitations in other areas (and so, for instance, we talk loudly to people with poor eyesight, as if limited vision extends to their hearing as well). The notion of ‘spread’ evolved out of findings from her research for *Adjustment to Physical Handicap*, wherein employer biases against hiring people with disabilities were found to be unwarranted. This bias steers the person, be it the insider or outsider, to perceive the cause and effect of disability to be negative. For instance, employers assume that people with physical disabilities will be limited in what they can produce; yet, as Beatrice and others had established in 1946, employees with disabilities actually had lower absenteeism, decreased accident rates, and if properly placed, production at least

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<sup>281</sup> Tamara Dembo, “Sensitivity of One Person to Another,” *Rehabilitation Literature* 25, No. 8 (1964): 231-35.

<sup>282</sup> Wright, 1983, 45.

equal to that of other employees.<sup>283</sup> Exaggerating the limitations of people with disabilities was due to what Beatrice termed *the fundamental negative bias*. A sign that this might be occurring is when people are labeled unemployable because of a disability, and insiders can succumb to this fundamental negative bias, as well.

The notion of a coping versus succumbing framework sets the stage for people, both insiders and outsiders, viewing the circumstances as surmountable or manageable, versus devastating. Her research on the “requirement of mourning” and “expectations of suffering” phenomena revealed that it typically is the outsider who can’t imagine any satisfaction living with a disability. The person with disabilities, like any other human, typically wants to get on with life, including both good and bad days. As Beatrice observed, “The person with a disability is faced with a strange paradox. On the one hand, lacking physical normality, the person is expected to suffer. That is the requirement of mourning. On the other hand, society frowns upon displaying one’s hurt and frustration in public. One should keep a ‘stiff upper lip’ and ‘keep smiling’—a ‘requirement of cheerfulness’ as it were.”<sup>284</sup>

The first of many awards presented to Beatrice for her work over more than half a century was the 1960 Family Life Book Award of the Child Study Association of America. Not surprisingly, this award is one of her most cherished, although others to

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<sup>283</sup> Barker, Wright and Gonick, 283.

<sup>284</sup> Wright, 1983, 84.

come certainly would be more prestigious. It heralds the Child Study Association's assessment of her accomplishment in writing *Physical Disability* as, "An exciting statement on the social and psychological meaning of physical disability, weaving complex data together with scholarship and skill. The profound insight which marks this book makes it a pioneering contribution to the literature on child development and family life."<sup>285</sup> Her 1960 work went on to be the second most frequently cited work published *before* 1973 in articles published in three volumes each of two major rehabilitation counseling journals. The 1983 edition fared just as well, also being the second most frequently cited work *after* 1973 in articles in these same volumes.<sup>286</sup> The influence of her work was not limited to journals, however. For instance, Erving Goffman made special note of her 1960 publication and liberally cited from it and several of her other publications in his classic work on *stigma*.

Goffman began his book by recognizing contemporaneous attention to the subject and acknowledging that, "For over a decade now in the literature of social psychology there has been good work done on stigma—the situation of the individual who is

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<sup>285</sup> Text of the 1960 Family Life Book Award presented to Beatrice Wright by the Child Study Association of America.

<sup>286</sup> Dana S. Dunn and Timothy R. Elliott, "Revisiting a Constructive Classic: Wright's *Physical Disability: A Psychosocial Approach*," *Rehabilitation Psychology* 50, no. 2 (2005): 186.

disqualified from full social acceptance.”<sup>287</sup> He went on to identify B. Wright, along with K. Lewin, F. Heider, T. Dembo and R. Barker, and advised readers to, “See especially B. Wright, *Physical Disability—A Psychological Approach* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), which has provided me with many re-quotable quotations and many useful references.”<sup>288</sup>

A major thesis Goffman adopted from Beatrice’s work was that having a disability, or being ‘different,’ produced feelings of shame in the person with the disability or difference. Wanting to be accepted, and acceptable, are poignantly human desires that both Beatrice and Goffman spent some time addressing, as well as how the one feeling stigmatized goes through a period of mourning when coming to terms with the disability/difference. (Beatrice, however, did not assume a simple causative relationship between disability and a sense of inferiority. She reminded us that the social practice of viewing a disability as predominately negative may have more to do with a person feeling inferior because of the disability than with the actual disability itself.)<sup>289</sup>

Goffman also referenced Beatrice’s work that described the vulnerability people with disabilities felt when being stared at, that highlighted how distasteful ‘sympathy’ can feel when expressed inappropriately to/about the person with a disability, and that

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<sup>287</sup> Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), Preface.

<sup>288</sup> Goffman, footnote 1.

<sup>289</sup> Goffman, 8; Wright, 78-81 and 155-156.

illustrated coping strategies adopted by people with disabilities.<sup>290</sup> Beatrice's influence on Goffman thus found an even wider audience for her ideas through his book.

In addition to identifying the phenomenon of devaluation facing people with disabilities, Beatrice discussed the difference between the terms *handicap* and *disability*, signaling her preference in both books for the latter term, since having a disability does not necessarily mean someone is handicapped: "A fundamental point is that the source of obstacles and difficulties, that is, what actually handicaps a person, cannot be determined by describing the disability alone. ... a person with a disability may or may not be handicapped, and a person who is handicapped may or may not have a disability."<sup>291</sup> (At the same time, the transcript of at least one veteran interviewed in the *Adjustment to Misfortune* study reveals that 'handicapped' was not nearly as objectionable to him as 'crippled.'<sup>292</sup>) Most significantly, Beatrice introduced a number of other concepts still used today for understanding the dynamics of disability.

Shortly after the 1960 publication of *Physical Disability*, professors around the world began assigning the book to their students, including professors at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, Kansas, where the state's anti-nepotism laws prohibited the author from appointment to that same faculty.

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<sup>290</sup> Goffman, 16, 19, 86, and 118.

<sup>291</sup> Beatrice A. Wright, *Physical Disability; A Psychosocial Approach* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 11.

<sup>292</sup> Dembo, Leviton and Wright, 1975, 90.

### Gender Discrimination Well-Known

Such restrictions were common (although not universal) at that time, and most everyone understood that the restrictions really applied to married women. Celia Barker Lottridge remembers how the law affected her mother, Louise Barker, who had been in Lawrence, Kansas, since 1947:

...when my mother was working on the research project my dad did for such a long time in Kansas, she could only, because they were both employed by the University, she could only rise to the level of really a clerical person. So she worked for years, you know, as the coordinator of all the people who were doing the research, and editing, and all the things she did, I mean, I think [she was] absolutely key in making that all work, 'cause there was a huge amount of community relations that had to be done, and that was my mother's specialty. And, and was she paid for that? Certainly not, you know. And, it was really . . . well, I mean, at the time I remember thinking there's something wrong here, but nobody had focused on it . . . .<sup>293</sup>

Louise and Roger Barker were interviewed sometime after Roger Barker's retirement from the University of Kansas, and both described having had similar feelings:

R: I don't want to give the viewpoint that the university was all . .

L: For one thing it was very strong on nepotism, so it was very hard for a wife to do anything. That was a very big thing when we first came. Then later on they changed their minds. But they weren't particularly pro-feminist. They never would appoint me to more than an assistant, research assistant.

R: . . . they never were recognized during those times for what they contributed because of this anti-feminist . . .

L: And when you talk with younger women or older women in some of the groups that I am involved with, you find among the younger ones a

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<sup>293</sup> Louise Barker and Celia Barker Lottridge interview September 11, 2005

very active interest in feminism and among the older women there is some applause for this, 'Well it's about time.'

R: . . . if you are working with your husband, you are supposed to volunteer; you don't get paid when you do that.<sup>294</sup>

So, like a number of faculty wives and despite her already impressive credentials, Beatrice Wright had been excluded from the faculty rolls at the University of Kansas. She remembers how she felt then about the situation, and surprisingly responds that it actually met her needs at the time:

. . .you asked me how I felt about not being able to teach at the University. Well, there was nepotism that wouldn't allow me to teach. And, you asked me how I felt. You know, I don't know, I just went with the wind, I was so glad to be able to do anything in my field that it didn't, if I say it didn't bother me, I'm speaking the truth. Because, I could always do something, and somehow, I managed to do something. . . . I truthfully can say that it didn't bother me. Now, am I fooling myself? Am I denying? I was so, what it was, I was so grateful to do anything in my field, and I valued whatever I did in my field, I basically thoroughly enjoyed it. It fit in with my family needs. I was satisfied, I can tell you that! I was really fulfilled, in every way, unless I'm denying, and I don't think so.<sup>295</sup>

Discerning to what extent her apparent acceptance was the result of hegemonic bias against women is difficult, at best, even though some feminists would assess her view as *prima facie* evidence of Beatrice's collaboration in her own subordination. Certainly, hegemony is at least partially responsible, as seen from the perspectives of those who implemented the anti-nepotism laws in favor of male professionals and against

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<sup>294</sup> Roger G. and Louise Barker, "Interview with Professor and Mrs. Roger G. Barker," conducted by Thomas Lewin, Oral History Project, University Archives, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas Libraries.

<sup>295</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 15-16, 2006.

female professionals and of those who accepted it as the norm. And, there is some parallel between the treatment of people who have physical or psychological disabilities and the treatment of people who are born female. In her later years, Beatrice speaks more easily of that reality in general, as well as how it played out in her own life. Yet, she also re-emphasizes that a supportive husband and parents made it possible for her to put her education and experience to work even though denied the opportunity to be hired as a faculty member at the University of Kansas.

True, her response may be an example both of Mead's contextualizing an emergent event and Ricoeur's theory of emplotment. Beatrice's posing contemporary questions about what contributed to her lack of outrage at the time about the anti-nepotism laws is a variation of Mead's sense that we always seek to construct a past that makes sense from our present perspectives. It is, therefore, a part of the natural urge to seek a greater understanding of what we did *then* from the position of *now*. Together with Ricoeur's notion of emplotting one's personal story, her response both makes sense logically and rings true emotionally. How else would someone who loved her husband, her children, her entire family, and her profession remember a time that even inadvertently made it possible for her to feel satisfied in every one of those areas?

So, well, I couldn't be on faculty. But, I could do other things. And, looking back, who knows what would have happened if I could have been on faculty. ... They were happy to give me grants but not to be on faculty. Another thing I did do during this interim was work with parents of toddlers who were newly discovered to be deaf. The medical school was in Kansas City, and they had a program every year where they invited parents of newly discovered children who were deaf to come and spend a week [or so] at the medical center where they could learn about deafness.

And I was asked to work with the parents as a psychologist and that was an important experience of working with parents who certainly faced a new situation that was a difficult one. ... Working within a family framework ... I still couldn't be on faculty, but I could do these other things because I had the support of both my husband and my own parents who allowed me to leave the home, who made it possible and where I would know my children were well-taken care of. ...

I return to my wonderment about that interim between '51 and ... '62 when I was invited to be on faculty at KU. That's ten years. Is that productive time? Is it proof productive? The *Psychology of Interpersonal Relations* is also in the canon of distinguished books, and I had something to do with that. And my own book, written during the time, is in the canon. So, what if I had been on faculty? Would I have had the time to be productive in that sense? And maybe it was a good thing. And the same thing when I say, 'Maybe it was a good thing that Roger Barker bowed out as a participant in it, maybe it was a good thing.' And I say maybe only because you can't project what the alternative trajectory might have been. But this was good, in and of itself.<sup>296</sup>

She and their three children also were able to join Erik on a Fulbright Fellowship at the University of Western Australia in Perth during the 1960-61 academic year. They enjoyed that experience very much, to such extent that she later referred to Australia as her 'second country, after the United States:'

The Australians were very friendly to Americans because the war hadn't been fought so long ago and they had personal memories of the Americans saving the Australians from the Japanese who were threatening. I like the Australians. They don't stand on ceremony, and seem like Americans, at least in terms of stereotypes.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Beatrice Wright interview July 2-3, 2005.

<sup>297</sup> Beatrice A. Wright, "An Interview with Beatrice A. Wright," conducted by Calder M. Pickett, December 5, 1990, Oral History Project, KU Retiree's Club, University Archives, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas Libraries.

Beatrice now asks somewhat rhetorically what difference the anti-nepotism laws in Kansas really made in the larger scheme of things, as she was hired as a visiting lecturer at that same institution and provided the same amenities as her husband.

. . . In Australia, and he would teach there, they didn't have nepotism restrictions. They invited me to teach, so I taught in Australia. At that point, my kids are well grown, I mean they're 11, 13 and 15, and they were all in school. So, here I am, I teach. Again, I never applied for this job.

But, to show you how naïve I was, and at that time I was in my thirties or something, there was a demonstration of women, equal pay for equal work, and I wondered about that. I thought, 'You know, we don't have that in the United States, that problem,' (laughter) equal pay for equal work. You know, and I can't believe that I was that naïve.<sup>298</sup>

As one of the pioneers-in-counseling cited in a 1990 article, Beatrice later would be in a group of those who, as women, "faced additional challenges and stressors because of their minority status and society reactions: in several instances this led them to follow less traditional career paths than their White, male counterparts."<sup>299</sup> On the face of it, that sounds like discrimination. Yet, as Beatrice repeatedly muses, her lived experience was more complex than might be understood at first glance because she nonetheless felt happy and fulfilled.

Other issues at this time, including racism, made a greater impression on her, and she remembers several instances of hometown activism in which she participated. The

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<sup>298</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 15-16, 2006

<sup>299</sup> P. Paul Heppner, Deborah M. Wright, and Kathryn Berry, "Discovering Ourselves by Unfolding our Panorama: Interviewing Pioneers in Counseling," *Journal of Counseling & Development* 68 (July/August 1990): 659.

first was an institutional response by the University of Kansas to segregated seating in the local movie theater; the second and third more personal reactions to different methods of segregation:

. . . while at the University, because there were issues of race in the town, race discrimination, not at the University, blacks would come from the southern states to go to the University of Kansas because they were welcomed. In fact, there were probably more blacks at that time than there is today, because now blacks can go to wherever they want. The first thing I became aware of was when I went to the movies in Lawrence, the blacks had to sit in the balcony. The chancellor . . . went to the movie houses and said, if you don't allow our students to sit wherever anybody else sits, we will show the same movies at the University. And the movie houses were de-segregated. I'd become a little more aware, not so naïve.

The swimming pool was not a city swimming pool. It was a private swimming pool; whites only, so my children didn't go to that swimming pool and I participated with other faculty and parents demonstrating against that segregation. So, gradually, my awareness of injustice, you know was, but the soil was ripe, because I had that foundation with my family, but also just my own values and ideology.

My daughter was a Brownie, and when you reached fourth grade you became a Girl Scout. So, the Brownie troops were integrated, blacks and whites, but when you hit fourth grade, white parents were notified of a certain meeting to gather together to learn about Girl Scouts. And the black parents were given a letter to meet at a certain place and time to learn about Girl Scouts. But, they were two separate troops, segregated troops. So, at a parent-teacher, PTA, meeting which I was involved with when my kids were small, and they were discussing how to, something about Girl Scouts, Brownies, and so on, and they informed the group that these were the arrangements. I got up and said, "You know, the Brownies were integrated. Why, I feel the girls should go on like we had been, and there should be one letter to all Brownie parents informing them. And there was discussion about that because some parents felt well, some white parents might object, and I said, "Well, if you raise the question, you might get some objection. But, if you just do it on principle, they'll just accept it, and there won't be any issue." So, after some discussion, the

vote's taken and yes, they'll have just one letter and there was never any issue.<sup>300</sup>

These stories reflect how Beatrice chose to address what she perceived as problems to be solved. While intensely interested in and committed to justice activism, she was not a joiner of groups who marched or protested or engaged in public confrontations. Her son Erik, who did go on marches, remembers that

. . . while the family culture encouraged an intellectual interest in social and moral concerns, it was not intensely political. We would often talk about values, and the Unitarian Fellowship we attended also stressed humanistic, socially concerned values, but these were mostly framed as matters of individual responsibility and morality not as the grounding of a coherent political challenge to social injustice.<sup>301</sup>

Beatrice assumed individual responsibility for doing what she could to bring about change through the integrity of her interactions with others, her thorough and insightful scholarship, her gifted teaching, and her consistent emphasis on potential.

#### Making the Most of Anti-Nepotism

Beatrice seems to be almost constitutionally unable to imagine *not* coping creatively and with a positive outlook. It simply is not in her to be negative or bitter about any turn of events. She herself continues to validate the findings in her doctoral research three-quarters of a century ago, when she reported that the children she observed tended to judge others as either altruistic or egoistic, “to the same degree as they

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<sup>300</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 15-16, 2006.

<sup>301</sup> Erik Olin Wright, 328.

themselves were.”<sup>302</sup> Beatrice not only is a generous and positive person herself; she assumes others are as well, and she chooses to look for the potential in any situation. Such was her view toward the anti-nepotism laws that for twelve years prevented her from being hired as a psychology professor at the University of Kansas.

This combination of personal temperament, creativity, and pragmatism, along with the unquestionable social support within the family, led to Beatrice using the period of enforced professorial unemployment as an opportunity to get on with her work in other important ways. From 1951-53 she worked as a consultant to the Kansas City Cooperative Nursery Schools and to the Kansas School for the Deaf (this latter affiliation lasted until 1968). From 1956-58, she served as editor of the *Bulletin*, a journal published by what we now know as the Division of Rehabilitation of the American Psychological Association. Moreover, in addition to working as a consultant, serving as a journal editor, and editing, authoring or co-authoring four books published in four years, Beatrice also published ten articles, three of which would be reprinted a number of times over the next three decades.

Looking at “The Problems in Fund Raising,” Beatrice used what she’d learned from work with Heider as a springboard for noting that to view people with disabilities in a consistently pitiful, succumbing light may have something to do with the predictably poor response to such a fundamentally negative bias. Instead, she argued for a more

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<sup>302</sup> Beatrice A. Wright, “Fairness and Generosity: An Experiment in the Development of Ideology,” 1942 dissertation, University of Iowa Archives.

positive, uplifting portrait of all the things people with disabilities could do, including those with epilepsy:

Might it not be psychologically more sound to present matter-of-fact information about the neurological disorder as such and to leave the affective overtones for constructive efforts on the part of both the person with epilepsy and those that help him? The child could be depicted in the classroom learning with others, on the field playing with others, for these are realities too, and the call could be for contributions for medical care and other rehabilitation services that would spread these realities still further.<sup>303</sup>

Citing Heider's balance theory which proposes that "we are prone to benefit persons we like or admire, and harm those we dislike; to feel sympathy with person whom we like and admire rather than with those whom we don't,"<sup>304</sup> she went on to apply it to the real world. Might nurturing a more positive attitude toward those with disabilities result in a better monetary response to fund-raising campaigns, she asked? At the very least, she noted, there was sufficient reason to further investigate the premise.

Another of her articles first was published in 1961 as a pamphlet by the National Society for Crippled Children and Adults and re-printed many times since then. In "Disabling Myths about Disability,"<sup>305</sup> Beatrice challenges five myths that devalue people with disabilities: Another of her articles, "Disabling Myths About Disability,"

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<sup>303</sup> Beatrice A. Wright, "Problems in Fund Raising," *Rehabilitation Record* 1, No. 4 (1960): 25.

<sup>304</sup> Wright, "Problems in Fund Raising."

<sup>305</sup> Beatrice A. Wright, *Disabling Myths About Disability*. Chicago: National Society for Crippled Children and Adults, 1963.

first published in 1961 and reprinted many times since then, challenges five myths that devalue people with disabilities: that people with disabilities are more maladjusted than the general population; that disability is a tragedy that denies a person the pleasures and satisfactions of life; that people with disabilities are more frustrated than people in general; that disability is an attribute of the person alone, the environment being ignored; that disability is a punishment for sin. She challenges these myths by discussing concepts that underlie them and by presenting new ways to view the total situation of people with disabilities including their active participation in living their lives.

Debunking the myths accords with the notion that disability is a social construction. Yet, the parallel notion of gender-based sexism as a social construction did not strike her at the time. If it had, she still would have chosen to cope, thereby demonstrating to all, that what others might deem a limitation, need not be accepted as such.

In addition to all of the above professional roles, she was a devoted wife and the involved mother of three young children who was very active in their lives. In fact, she was chaperoning Colleen's biology trip in 1963 when she received a message that her father had died. This sad turn of events led to a major change in their lives, for Sonia did not drive and needed now to live where public transportation would allow her the independence to come and go as she pleased. Since Beatrice's children were teen-agers who no longer needed someone at home to fix them lunch and provide childcare, Sonia decided to move to New York and live near her older daughter, Esther.

It is true that the anti-nepotism years prevented Beatrice from being hired as a professor at the University of Kansas. However, they also allowed her flexibility and the freedom to rear her children and spend time with her family, as well as to write and think and develop her ideas and praxis as a psychologist. It turns out that it was her accomplishments during these years that ended the anti-nepotism rules in Kansas. Grace Heider recounted this story of what happened, and why, in a letter to Beatrice:

I happened to sit by former chancellor, Wescoe, at a Friends of the Library dinner or something like that. I suppose he and I chatted about the Psychology Department and how the group of us had come as friends and he added to what I had said by telling me that it was on account of you that he had worked to get the Regents to end their nepotism restriction. It was too ridiculous, he said, that while you had written an outstanding book in your field other members of the Department could make use of it in courses and you were not allowed to teach.<sup>306</sup>

Even though she had something to do with the demise of anti-nepotism laws in the state of Kansas, Beatrice was not involved in the actual policy decisions that resulted. As usual, she'd gone on with her life, and so she discovered the same way others did that things had changed: 'One day, in '63, I came home to see the headlines that night of the *Lawrence Journal World*, the local paper, that nepotism was rescinded. And that night I got a phone call from the chair of psychology to join the faculty. In those days there were no rules about search committees and publicizing a job opening or anything.'<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> Grace Heider, unpublished letter to Beatrice Wright, Beatrice Wright's private collection.

<sup>307</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 15-16, 2006.

### **After Anti-Nepotism**

The first thing Beatrice Wright did upon rescission of the anti-nepotism laws and an invitation to join the University of Kansas psychology faculty was to fulfill her contract with the Menninger Foundation in Topeka, Kansas. It had been an obligation gladly entered into, and one that represented her first actively sought employment. She also learned a great deal about making evaluations, a skill that complemented her notions about evaluating one's assets:

Through the encouragement of my husband—I couldn't have done all these things without all his encouragement and support—I had applied for a Switzer Award, administered by the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, to work at the Menninger Foundation ... just twenty-five miles to the west of Lawrence. At this point, my children were all in school, this was in 1962 and '63. I worked there for two years ... that was really a very important experience for me, because I was exposed to psychoanalytic thought. I decided to lend myself, just to give myself over to it because I wanted to absorb it. I worked in the Child department. You see, I was variously called a child psychologist and now am known as a rehabilitation psychologist, depending on your setting. Now, what happened there, I had excellent training in assessment, and a lot of my work besides the therapy aspects, was assessment, Rorschach and incomplete sentences and, of course, intellectual assessment on a whole battery of tests. And, I became sensitized through this exchange and supervision in what would now be considered to be a two-year postdoctoral, especially by a woman named Dorothy Fuller, who was on staff at Menninger. She was excellent in going over my reports. I wrote elaborate reports and became very sensitized to noting behaviors of the respondent, in this case the child, how he or she reacted to guessing and not knowing, whether it was difficult for the child or not. And to this day I feel that training in assessment takes more training in a way than does therapeutic training. So that was a great benefit, but I also, though I tried very hard to be supportive of psychoanalysis and to understand and to appreciate the psychoanalytic thrust, I could not basically go along with it in general... but still, the notion that there are hidden meanings or unconscious or semi-conscious meanings—I was very tuned into that, even though I might not necessarily go along with a particular

interpretation. I remember thinking, ‘things are seldom what they seem; skim milk masquerades as cream.’

...that must have been around October of '63, in the fall. I couldn't join the KU faculty then, because I'd promised Menninger's I would continue, but I did join the next fall.<sup>308</sup>

Her employment with the University of Kansas made Beatrice and Erik Wright the first tenured married couple at KU. She recalls her transition from unemployed psychologist and wife of a faculty member to a Psychology Department faculty member in her own right: “I remember, after joining the faculty, that I sent around my vita saying, ‘I think you ought to know what kind of person you’re getting.’”<sup>309</sup> In case anyone really wondered what kind of person she was, the first article she published after joining the KU psychology faculty provided a glimpse of her broadening perspective. It encapsulates important aspects of a complex message she would seek to convey over the next forty years and is worth reading carefully, for that alone. Yet another reason for directing attention to this publication is that it demonstrates the verve with which she took on a number of issues related to cultural oppression leading to hegemonic influence over the most vulnerable.

In this article, she spoke of the similarities and differences between cultural views of those living in poverty and those living with physical disabilities.<sup>310</sup> Specifically, she

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<sup>308</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 15-16, 2006.

<sup>309</sup> Beatrice Wright, KU Oral History.

<sup>310</sup> Beatrice A. Wright, “Issues in Overcoming Emotional Barriers to Adjustment in the Handicapped,” *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin* 11 (1967): 53

argued that while poverty is not just intrinsically a biological condition that must be eradicated, “a disability may be unremediable . . . and it is, ultimately, the lot of everyone who lives long enough.”<sup>311</sup> The two conditions required different responses and ought not, therefore, be addressed in the same way.

At the same time, in her view, those living in poverty and those living with a disability shared being stigmatized and devaluated. The phenomenon of *spread*, which associates one negatively viewed trait to many other characteristics of a person or group, applied to both populations. She elaborated, using an example of how the spread of a fundamental negative bias might affect members in these groups:

For example, in accepting blindness one needs to view a white cane as a symbol, not of dependency, but of facilitating locomotion, this being an intrinsically positive evaluation. . . . Consider the speech habits of a deprived people. The rich and complex language of the uneducated, or of the person in the ghetto, or of the poor, etc., could be positively appreciated were it not inextricably a symbol of the poverty and discrimination that are so rejected. . . . The example of speech of course, is used as representative of values at issue in rehabilitation; i.e., what values to support and what values to reject are just as important in the rehabilitation of the culturally and economically handicapped as in rehabilitation of the disabled.<sup>312</sup>

She went on in this article to address the negative images of people with disabilities as portrayed even by what was intended to be a sympathetic message. The first critique was directed toward those using the photograph of a wizened, pathetically wistful child on crutches unable to roughhouse with other children as a motivation to get

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<sup>311</sup> Wright, 1967, 54.

<sup>312</sup> Wright, 1967, 55.

children inoculated against polio. She asked several pointed questions: “Is this really the fate of a child with polio? Are we lying when we tell parents that the child with crippled legs can participate in sports, can play with non-handicapped children, can have happy times, even though he will know the suffering of frustration and rejection?”<sup>313</sup>

Identifying two other advertisements, she took their creators to task for the bleak portrayals of people with disabilities. The first involved blindness:

It depicts a blind man, with tin cup and white cane, shuffling along a city sidewalk. A sign on his back says, ‘My days are darker than your nights.’ Beneath the picture appears the caption, ‘Just be thankful you can have your eyes examined every year or so.’ What is accomplished by such a communication? . . . The white cane, instead of being regarded as a symbol of trying to cope effectively with the problems presented by blindness, is coupled with a tin cup as a sign of inevitable dependency on the charity of others. Would the agency fostering this public education appeal also submit it to the visually handicapped and their families?<sup>314</sup>

Clearly, the answer was ‘no,’ members of the marketing department would not face people with visual disabilities and their families with such a negative portrayal. But, they, along with the general populace, might continue perpetuation of those stereotypes unless challenged by someone like Beatrice to stop doing so and to replace the message with a more positive one.

The final example she presented in this article involved fund raising materials intended to support those with epilepsy.

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<sup>313</sup> Wright, 1967, 57.

<sup>314</sup> Wright, 1967, 57-58.

One leaflet depicts two dejected children, heads bowed and alone. They are introduced by the caption, 'Another Tragic Victim of Rejection' and referred to as '*the rejected.*' The accompanying text reiterates this aspect of the lot of the epileptic by adding: 'There are thousands of boys and girls in this country who are rejected every day . . . rejected by playmates . . . rejected by neighbors. . . . rejected by schools. They look forward only to a future of continued rejection.'<sup>315</sup>

The people depicted thus may not have been difficult-to-place workers or combat veterans injured on battlefields, but they were being treated in the same cruel fashion that had so appalled Beatrice in her earlier work. Now, though, she could do something to address the situation. She concluded this amazingly forceful article by acknowledging its tone and unapologetically reiterating her challenge:

The foregoing has sketched out some issues and principles involved in assessing efforts on behalf of handicapped groups, whether the handicap resides in physical, cultural or economic factors. They deserve a hard look, for the difficult job of rehabilitation ought not be made more difficult by the neglect of important environmental accommodations or by the communication of wrong messages in the very process of promoting rehabilitation programs.<sup>316</sup>

By this time, Beatrice Wright was recognized internationally as a leader in the field. What she wrote, and said, and supported, made a difference. Her impressive curriculum vitae reveals that—in addition to researching, publishing, teaching, and serving in numerous positions of leadership—between 1960 and 1989, she was a keynote speaker at seventeen international meetings in eight different countries: Ireland, Australia, England, USA, Brazil, Canada, Israel, and China. In 1972, for instance, she

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<sup>315</sup> Wright, 1967, 58.

<sup>316</sup> Wright, 1967, 58-59.

was asked to address the Twelfth World Congress, in Sidney, Australia, on “Personal Perspective in Mitigating Suffering,” based on her insider-outsider work. The universal symbol of access had been adopted at the previous World Congress, and the Australian government recognized the meaning of that symbol by issuing three stamps showing people with disabilities engaged in valued activities.<sup>317</sup>

During the late ‘60s and throughout the 1970s, Beatrice championed the cause of disability activism, and her publications during that period reflect a progression in ideas. She started out identifying how the fundamental negative bias against physical disabilities manifested by both individuals and society contributed to a number of problems faced by people with those disabilities: unemployment, inadequate housing, non-rehabilitative health care, interrupted education, financial dependence, environmental barriers to entering public buildings and events, despondency, anger, frustration, and so on.

Having expressed her opposition to negative images of people with disabilities, Beatrice dealt directly with other difficult issues they faced. Her positive outlook was obvious; yet, she did not minimize the pain of physical disability, nor did she romanticize people with disabilities as any more heroic than others striving to live meaningful lives. Learning to cope constructively with a physical disability was necessary and, more than that, possible.

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<sup>317</sup> Wright, Diller Lecture, script for slides 19 and 20.

Her view of coping constructively led her to challenge the “need to be realistic” as an automatic guideline in rehabilitation. She applied her concern with this issues to both individual and cultural contexts:

In everyday life we often recognize that ambitions for the future, however unrealistic, need not interfere with sound present striving and, in fact, may enhance it. We are not distressed, for example, when large numbers of school-age children aspire to high status occupations; rather, this is considered a sign of endorsement of cultural values. . . .Consider another example. Few of us would wish the United States to abandon the American dream expressed in the Bill of Right, even though the present reality falls far short of it. This ideal, by being an ideal, remains beyond reach, but none-the-less can strengthen the will to move forward toward a better approximation of it. . . .Is not the thought a haunting one that the ‘realistic attitude’ narrows vision? Is it not disquieting to consider that the realistic attitude, by focusing on realistic limitations and liabilities, may obscure realistic facilitations, assets, and opportunities?<sup>318</sup>

It is appropriate, she argued, to use realistic criteria in checking one’s progress towards achieving immediate goals. Whether long-distance goals are realistic or not can better await the test of time. Even in failing to reach one’s present goals, there is potential for learning and gaining strength simply in the attempt. The freedom to make mistakes and learn from those mistakes ought not be denied people with disabilities, she concluded, for “Being unrealistic can be a source of hope, achievement, and redefinition of the boundaries of new realities.”<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> Beatrice A. Wright, “The Question Stands: Should a Person be Realistic?” *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin* (1968): 292-293, 294.

<sup>319</sup> Beatrice Wright, “Should a Person be Realistic,” 296.

Later in 1968, Beatrice and a colleague similarly analyzed *hope*, acknowledging that while it could have both positive and/or negative consequences its existence was crucial to adopting a coping perspective. One key, they wrote, was in distinguishing *hopes* from *wishes*, which have a low level of probability, and then viewing hope as a process constructed of tasks that could lead to fruition.

The process begins with a *reality surveillance* that establishes the justification upon which to base one's hopes. This may require acknowledging that what once were hopes now are wishes and developing substitute hopes. After this comes the sustaining and motivating *encouragement* that the person with disabilities needs to continue coping. At the same time *worrying* must be acknowledged and viewed as a normative part of the process that can lead to identifying and solving problems. Once the person has been reassured of ongoing support in adjusting to a disability, the process of gaining hope requires attention to the need for *mourning*. This stage of the process includes more than the person with disabilities, for families and friends experience grief and loss as well. And, it is a crucial step for all, the authors write:

As with other emotions, the sorrow of loss is satiable. The person is gradually released from his intense emotional involvement with the hope that had to be given up. Forced by the intolerability of mourning forever, the person eventually considers other possibilities on which to construct and nurture hopes. Where the groundwork for substitute hopes had been laid in previous surveys of reality, recovery is speeded.<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Beatrice A. Wright and Franklin C. Shontz, "Process and Tasks in Hoping," *Rehabilitation Literature* 29 (1968): 330.

With three decades of involvement with disability issues, Beatrice took the highly unusual step of elucidating, in a 1972 article, eighteen value-laden beliefs and principles that guided her as a professional and that she saw as applying to the field of rehabilitation psychology: “They are not presented as a ‘creed’ to be followed by the field as a whole,” she assured readers, “but they are presented with the intention that discussion of them will be stimulated by virtue of their having been made explicit.”<sup>321</sup> In arriving at these beliefs and principles, she had built upon the original twelve principles outlined in the 1959 book she prepared containing the proceedings of the Princeton conference.

Her insight and understanding of the dilemmas facing people with disabilities (and Beatrice long has maintained that everyone has disabilities<sup>322</sup>) have been hailed from the beginning of her work in the field of rehabilitation. In fact, her notion that disability is a social construction that produces difficulties in the lives of people with disabilities, rather than a moral or solely medical condition, was light years ahead of how people still thought in the early 1960s.

For centuries, humans have tried to explain the phenomena of disability or illness by linking physical ailments or impairments to the morality of behavior, or to one’s

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<sup>321</sup> Beatrice A. Wright, “Value-laden Beliefs and Principles for Rehabilitation Psychology,” *Rehabilitation Psychology* 19, No.1 (1972): 38.

<sup>322</sup> Beatrice Wright presentation to chaplains and other health care workers, University of Tennessee Medical Center, Knoxville, TN, September 13, 2005, and Beatrice Wright, “Sensitizing Outsiders to the Position of the Insider,” *Rehabilitation Psychology* 22, no. 2 (1975): 130.

‘sinfulness.’ Citing both religious tradition and psychological data on the ‘just world phenomenon,’ the notion that victims are blamed for their own misfortunes, Beatrice reminds her readers that we often believe people get what they deserve:

Not only is the source of illness and disability sometimes felt to lie in sin, but the *consequences* may also be felt to be sinful. ‘A twisted mind in a twisted body’ captures this devaluation of the total person. Thus, with illness and disability both the perceived cause and the perceived effects sometimes, if not often, match the negative qualities of illness and disability. Moreover, the cause-effect relationships sometimes, if not often, have a moral reference.<sup>323</sup>

Drawing on Heider’s description of the ‘halo phenomenon’ to explain how people tend to see someone as all positive or negative,<sup>324</sup> Beatrice referred to ‘the spread phenomenon’ as applied to disabilities. In essence, our assessment of others relies on a single attribute that may lead us to dehumanize another. She argued against what Olkin later would refer to as the ‘medical model,’<sup>325</sup> the practice of referring to people with disabilities as ‘the disabled,’ or someone with an amputation as an ‘amputee,’ someone with a heart condition as ‘a cardiac,’ and so on. Our language is important, Beatrice maintains, going on to agree that, “It is more cumbersome to say a person with a disability, and I hope it remains more cumbersome in a way, so that it serves as a

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<sup>323</sup> Beatrice A. Wright, *Physical Disability—A Psychosocial Approach* (NY: Harper & Row, 1983), 67-68.

<sup>324</sup> Fritz Heider, *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations* (NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1958), 182.

<sup>325</sup> Rhoda Olkin, *What Psychotherapists Should Know About Disability* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1999), 26.

reminder to you that you're dealing with a person, first and foremost. The personhood has to be 'put up in neon lights' all the time because it's so easy to see a disability and not a person."<sup>326</sup>

Even construction of the chapters in Beatrice's work exemplifies her approach: "You'll notice in my 1960 book there are no chapters labeled by disability categories; they are all labeled in terms of a conceptual area or issue, like 'status position' or 'value changes in acceptance of disability.'<sup>327</sup> These are messages she felt strongly needed to be heard by as many as possible. That is why she had intended her book to be marketed for the general public. Her publisher saw it as having a narrower audience focus for a textbook, however, and that created a little tension between them:

You know that Harper & Row published my book as a college textbook. I frankly hadn't written it as a textbook at all. I just wrote it in clear language, I thought, so that the intelligent layperson could understand it. And I wanted everybody to read it! Lack of humility there? Well, I felt that it applied to everybody, that it was germane to the life condition of everyone, whether or not you had a disability defined by society. They thought it was a college textbook just because there were lots of literature references. I'm still dismayed, because you cannot buy this book in an ordinary bookstore. You can only get it at a college bookstore, which is a shame. When I tried to understand why you couldn't get it in both college and other kinds of bookstores, well, there are separate departments and they have separate rules as to cost and discounts. I still think it should be available as a trade book. And if it's used as a college textbook, fine, you

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<sup>326</sup> Henry McCarthy, "Learning with Beatrice A. Wright: A Breath of Fresh Air that Uncovers the Unique Virtues and Human Flaws in Us All," *Rehabilitation Education* 7, no. 3 (1993): 153.

<sup>327</sup> McCarthy, 151.

can buy it through your college bookstore or through an ordinary bookstore. But the publisher doesn't listen to me on that score.

... I still get letters from people who want to get it, but they can't. They go to the bookstore, and the bookstore says it is out of print, people say. But it is not [although the book did go out of print a decade later]. It is a conceptual book, but that shouldn't sound highfalutin; it just means it deals with an attempt to clarify ideas and issues. For years Harper wanted a revision and I said thanks, but no thanks. I was not going to write a revision, just to add a couple of references, so instead of '40s and '50s, it would be '60s or '70s. They wanted to be able to say second edition with a later date than 1960 to sell the book and not to have used copies around. Well, finally, I developed new ideas, and did some research that stimulated ideas. When I knew I had new material to add that wouldn't be just updating research references, I agreed to revise it. I added just the new ideas I was able to develop and relevant research references.<sup>328</sup>

#### The 1983 Edition of *Physical Disability*

By the time her 1960 book, *Physical Disability: A Psychological Approach*, was revised, expanded and published in 1983 as *Physical Disability: A Psychosocial Approach*, the 1972 list of her value-laden principles had increased to twenty and was included in the "Preface to the Second Edition"<sup>329</sup> (she now regrets not having them appear in the first chapter instead, since so few people read book prefaces). Such explicit description of the values and principles that undergird her work was not the rule, despite her having set forth those same evolving principles over more than two decades.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> McCarthy, 152.

<sup>329</sup> *Physical Disability*, 1983, x-xvii, appearing in Appendix A.

<sup>330</sup> "Valued Judgment: Beatrice Wright's Belief in Human Dignity has Guided Her Career," *Kansas Alumni News*, July 1988, 6.

Beatrice understands people with disabilities as needing what every human needs.

This was spelled out most articulately in the first of her twenty ‘Value-Laden Beliefs and Principles’:

*Every individual needs respect and encouragement; the presence of a disability, no matter how severe, does not alter these fundamental rights.*

A person is entitled to the enrichment of life and the development of his or her abilities, whether these be great or small and whether the person has a long or short time to live. The person must not be led to devalue the self or to give up hope. The person is not to remain neglected and deprived. Under no circumstances is the person to be treated as an ‘object’ or ‘vegetable.’

Biases that declare some groups to be more worthy or deserving of services than others lead to gross inequities and must be avoided. Life, increased mobility, and better communication skills are as important to a 72-year-old as to a 12-year-old, to a mentally retarded person as to an average person, to a black person as to a white person, to a poor person as to a rich person.

The affirmation of human worth and dignity must not only be kept explicitly in the forefront when allocating limited resources but should also be reflected in adequate case-finding efforts so that no person who has a disability remains neglected.<sup>331</sup>

This statement reflects both her spiritual values—the first principle of Unitarian Universalism requires that members covenant “to affirm the inherent worth and dignity of all people”—and her personal convictions. It also highlights a long unresolved tension for her around such issues as abortion. While viewing the choice to make decisions about one’s reproductive destiny as a woman’s right, Beatrice is troubled by reports that fetal imperfections may lead to terminated pregnancies. She sees a big difference between

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<sup>331</sup> Wright, 1983, xi.

preventing a child from being born into unbearable suffering and eliminating before birth those considered ‘defective.’ As recently as October 2007, she talked about her uneasiness with the topic, especially when the difficulties facing families who have children with disabilities could be mitigated by the greater allocation of resources and community support for the care of children with special needs.

A large part of what set Beatrice Wright’s work apart from the beginning, some say, was the high quality of her research combined with a perspective that accepted people with disabilities and treated them respectfully and encouragingly. Although she consistently traced this empathy to her upbringing, she also recognized how her own process evolved over the forty years between when she wrote the article entitled, “Altruism in Children and the Perceived Conduct of Others,” based on her dissertation research, and when she revised her award-winning 1960 book:

Now notice even the title, *Altruism*, connotes a positive stance, and the perceived conduct of others—that’s a perception, a phenomenological statement. And notice that it deals with values. Altruism. Values always, not always, I guess, see, this is the evolution of some awakening to a new show of values. I mentioned these two books separated 1960-1983 by twenty-five years. In preparing for re-thinking about a sequel, because the publishers had been really hounding me to do that, I began to wonder why, how and what I wrote about, and how I treated the material was really very different for me, the outsider, from what people wrote ... And as I began to think about it, I would write down a thought, which ended up as twenty value-laden beliefs and principles which I used as the preface to the sequel. Each of the twenty has about two paragraphs that flesh out what the statement means. As a preface, the very basic one goes something like this, “Every individual needs respect and encouragement, no matter how severe the disability may be,” and then it gets fleshed out.

That was basic. You see where that comes through, because I reviewed the literature, which showed no respect, no encouragement, you see.<sup>332</sup>

Even if her values hadn't changed over the years, they certainly had solidified through experience, and she had come to recognize the worth of clearly articulating her core values. This addition to her seminal work was, in a sense, Beatrice Wright's 'bully pulpit,' and she now is known almost as widely for her 'value-laden principles' as she is for her research and other publications. In this regard, she again is a pioneer, for, as she notes, "I am perhaps the only author to have ever laid out in a preface the beliefs that underpinned my work."<sup>333</sup> Like its earlier version, the expanded edition of her book, now entitled *Physical Disability—A Psychosocial Approach*, was the second most frequently cited work for several decades *after* 1973 in articles appearing in major rehabilitation publications.<sup>334</sup>

### Living Her Values

That Beatrice practiced her humanistic values long before publishing them is apparent through such stories as the time when, in 1969, she met a young man who'd been born without arms and was referenced in an autobiography written by another man born without arms. They were at Heathrow, awaiting flights to Ireland, where delegates to the Eleventh World Congress of Rehabilitation International were meeting to choose a

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<sup>332</sup> Beatrice Wright interview July 2-3, 2005.

<sup>333</sup> *Kansas Alumni News*, 6.

<sup>334</sup> Dunn and Elliott, 186.

symbol of access and where Beatrice later was to address the group about her ideas on coping and succumbing in an address entitled, “Activism vs. Passivism in Coping with Disability.” She recalls a particular moment:

Off in the distance, before we gather as Americans, I see this young man with a full red beard, with a rose right here [pointing to the armpit], but no arms. Of course, I walked up to him; I didn’t know he was an American at first. He gathers with the other Americans. We start introducing ourselves. He says, “I’m Bill.” And I said to him, “Are you Billy Bruckner?” I began to figure out here he was in his twenties. He said, “Yes,” and I was so excited to meet him. Usually, a stranger will shake your hand, “pleased to meet you,” but he had no hand to shake. I grabbed his beard, and I shook it! I remember that.

...And then, at that particular meeting, the World Congress, there had been a competition to develop a symbol of access. I forget how many countries participated, USA among others, but I think it was some Scandinavian country that got it, the one we now use, that you see at every airport, in every handicapped parking place. That’s the international symbol, and we voted on it, and that was wonderful to do.<sup>335</sup>

The internationally-comprised group at that Congress was able to talk about the unifying notion of a single universal symbol to represent accessibility because of the groundwork laid by many enlightened people, including those a decade earlier, giving shape to what we now know as the APA Division 22 of Rehabilitation Psychology. However, Division 22 had started out with a different focus than it now has.

Beatrice and other visionaries in the fifties and sixties had anticipated that ‘rehabilitation psychology’ would focus on the broader culture as well as on people with disabilities. Specifically, they imagined that through education people would begin to

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<sup>335</sup> Beatrice Wright interview, July 2-3, 2005.

understand that ‘the problem’ was largely cultural and not inherent in the nature of disability itself. In 1980, Beatrice and a colleague reviewed the history of rehabilitation psychology as a discrete field of study and practice, while also clarifying its uniqueness. It was not, they specified, the same as rehabilitation counseling or of a behavioral health specialty merely occurring in a rehabilitation setting. They wrote, “Rehabilitation psychology is concerned with the life problems of persons who have suffered deprivation because of a value loss due to disability or other condition such as old age and poverty.”<sup>336</sup> They further cited such defining characteristics of rehabilitation psychology as advocating that patients with even the most unfavorable prognosis receive “at least the same care as patients with the most promising futures,” that “programs be individually designed to take advantage of each client’s unique potentialities,” and that “the client or patient should be an active participant or co-manager in the helping relationship and be as self-determining as possible.”<sup>337</sup>

Over the years, she and others trusted that heightened awareness of how society turns disabilities into handicaps would bring about accessible buildings and an end to curbs, narrow hallways that could not be traversed by wheelchairs, and parking lots that ignored the needs of those who can’t walk as far as others or who require additional space for setting up wheelchairs. It took longer and occurred differently than they might have

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<sup>336</sup> Franklin C. Shontz and Beatrice A. Wright, “The Distinctiveness of Rehabilitation Psychology,” *Professional Psychology* 11 (1980): 919.

<sup>337</sup> Shontz and Wright, 922.

imagined, but their work eventually did bear fruit.<sup>338</sup> Some forty years later, the approach this group discussed was identified by Olkin as the ‘minority model of disability,’ the crux of which is a “shift in focus from the personal, individual, and problem in isolation, to group, environment, attitudes, discrimination—from individual pathology to social oppression.”<sup>339</sup> It had all started with the conviction, repeated over and over by Beatrice and other founders of the movement, that “The presence of a disability, no matter how severe, does not alter the right of the individual to respect, encouragement, and access to human values.”<sup>340</sup>

Back home in Lawrence, Kansas, Beatrice was a favorite and highly regarded teacher who also gained a reputation early on for providing a safe harbor to gay and lesbian students. She recalls once such experience:

In my class, which dealt with disability and chronic illness, occasionally I would bring in other disadvantaged groups, disadvantaged by society. I’d mention something about the poor, or something about an ethnic group or racial group, or something about homosexuals. Apparently, there were some people who were gay in my classes, I didn’t know that, but they began to come to me, not my students necessarily, but students at the University, to talk over problems they had. Often, the problem was so, you know, heart-wrenching. And it was before the time when the slogan was to come out of the closet. And they were torn about how to tell their family, and so I worked with them. Gradually, when the gay rights movement came, they had their own social networks. But, I did support them every bit of the way. I remember one really wonderful memory I

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<sup>338</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 15-16, 2006.

<sup>339</sup> Olkin, 28.

<sup>340</sup> Shontz and Wright, 919.

have. There was a gay student in the law school. . . . We arranged that I would work with the mother. The father was so resistant; you know, men have more homophobia than women. He wasn't going to be a part of anything dealing with homosexuality! So, I worked with the mother. And she could come to terms with it, being aware that her son now will have some special issues and problems to deal with, again because of society. So, her preference would be that she'd like to spare him that, but since that was his way, she'd support him. Years later, I'm going through the student union, there where you eat, and I see him and his mother AND his dad. After graduating from law school, he was employed at the University in some capacity. So, I stopped and, looking at the dad, I said, "I'm so pleased to meet you because you have such a wonderful son."<sup>341</sup>

However, her husband, Erik, did not agree with Beatrice on this issue, although eventually he arrived at her way of thinking. :

I came to the realization, before my husband did, that objecting to homosexuality reflected a cultural and religious bias. Why object to people expressing their love with mutual attraction and affection? I felt that if we appreciated the broad range of characteristics that attract heterosexuals to each other, we would find much overlap with homosexuals and therefore would be more accepting. Gradually my husband came around, so much so that he joined a clinical psychology doctoral student who was gay in offering a seminar on homosexuality.

This student had wanted to do a seminar on homosexuality, but he needed the support of my husband. The seminar was to take place in about two months, but the untimely death of my husband occurred in the mean time. The student wanted to call off the seminar, but I encouraged him. I said, "You can do it by yourself. It will be in memory of Erik, and you can bring him in as you wish. You have the strength and the ability and the knowledge to carry on. And he did."<sup>342</sup>

During her teaching career, one of Beatrice's primary concerns was sensitizing her classroom students to the full meaning of "constructive views of life with a disability"

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<sup>341</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 15-16, 2006.

<sup>342</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 15-16, 2006.

and “flawed human perception.” To this end, she engaged students in a variety of advocacy projects that required their personal involvement. Over the years, scores of letters were written, presentations made, and other forms of action taken by her students for the purpose of correcting unacceptable practices. She recently selected several examples to show the broad range of issues that were confronted, the first in response to Beatrice’s urging to promote change “in their own backyard”—the University—and a reply:

I am writing in response to the program distributed at the performance of Romeo and Juliet. I came across the program during a course dealing with disability and illness, which is taught by Dr. Beatrice Wright. Through this course I became aware of the importance of referring to the needs of people in a way that respects their personhood and avoids equating them with their condition or turning them into objects.

I would like to call your attention to page four which contains information about special seating. The following statement appears therein, ‘Special seating is available for wheelchairs.’ Don’t you think that this statement should be changed to read: ‘Special seating is available for persons using wheelchairs’? After all, isn’t it people who deserve special seating and not wheelchairs?

I hope you see to it that the wording is changed accordingly. I would very much appreciate learning of your reaction and action taken in this matter.  
[Student signature] March 31, 1992

....

I want to thank you so much for your letter of March 31. The wording that you describe in the program copy is indeed awkward, and you can be certain that we will change it immediately. [Signature] University Theatre Director, April 2, 1992

The second example Beatrice cites is the correspondence of a student who challenged the Motor Voter Bill before Congress. This letter specifically refers to the broad range of people affected:

This letter is in regard to Bill #HR the motor voter bill, the committee of which you are chairperson. I understand that the Senate version of the bill eliminated provisions for voter registration to be available at disabilities, unemployment, and public assistance agencies.

As you know, many people, such as those with low income, people who are elderly, and people with disabilities, don't own or drive cars. In keeping with our ideals of democracy, I think most Americans will agree that it is important that these people have equal opportunity to vote....

Please share my views with the Committee and reinstate the provisions contained in the House version of the bill. I would appreciate hearing from you as to the outcome. [Student signature] May 7, 1993.

The third example of student advocacy was a letter written to the President of Airborne Express, Portland, Oregon, urging correction of a law violation. The student was in a class that Beatrice was teaching at the University of Wisconsin at Madison:

I am a graduate student in the Department of Rehabilitation Psychology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I am writing to relate an incident involving one of your employees that I think you would like to know about so you could take steps to correct this misunderstanding.

While attending a friend's party [on a visit to Oregon] I was introduced to a man who is a manager in your company. When I explained that I was involved with helping people with disabilities obtain work, he replied that his company did not hire persons with disabilities.

I am sure you know that such a position is directly in contrast to the law as well as the fact that people should be seen as individuals first, each with something to contribute rather than as wholly defined by a label.

Training in the demonstrated values of a diverse work force and in the purpose and specifications of the Americans with Disabilities Act would be most helpful to your employees and your company. If you would like

information on training ideas, you can contact your local Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. You may also contact me and I would be happy to recommend speakers to you.

I look forward to hearing from you (and remain confident) that you will view this matter with the gravity it deserves. [Student signature]  
November 23, 1998.

The letters in each case were respectful in explaining the issue and in offering constructive suggestions and carefully reviewed by Beatrice before being mailed.

Additionally, her classes organized students with disabilities to meet weekly for support and community-building and launched the practice of spending at least one day with someone who had a disability, participating together in all events and activities during a single day. Inviting someone with a disability to share a routine day of activities taught students that, “you can’t make assumptions about what people with disabilities couldn’t do. Instead, ask them!”

She also included role-playing, but not from the perspective of, ‘See how awful it is to have this or that disability,’ which would have strengthened the fundamental negative bias against having a disability. Instead, Beatrice invited her students to spend several hours in a wheelchair with the purpose of identifying barriers that hindered access to important activities, as well as to think of and discover accommodations that facilitated access, thereby emphasizing both the justice and practicality of reasonable accommodations. Her students then understood the wisdom of her saying that, “The obvious is not obvious until it’s obvious!”<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> Beatrice Wright interview October 12, 2007.

So, Beatrice was an activist during those days, although not as a feminist. Despite anti-nepotism rules that for twelve years kept her from being employed as a faculty member at KU, she remembers feeling happy and fulfilled, because she was able to be involved with psychology. Working with Heider and on her own books, as well as with nursery school teachers and parents of deaf children, provided avenues for her to practice her training. After anti-nepotism was struck down, she found her professorship at KU to be challenging and satisfying, despite the low salary (about which she complained). The usual feminist questions about how she felt regarding gender, agency, and activism are answered differently, however, when Beatrice relates them to her daughter. Take for instance the following two interchanges between Beatrice and her 1990 KU oral historian. Although her least liked interview—the questioner appears incredibly inept at translating the dynamics between them—it is the most revealing of her perspectives on sexism and of her ability to be ‘tart’ when motivated.<sup>344</sup>

*Interviewer:* I was sitting here thinking, while you were talking, about your boys, how they always used to be interested in debate, theater, and stuff like that, dramatics or music. Was that something that was also an interest of yours?

*Beatrice:* First of all, I don’t want you to leave out my daughter. My daughter was also interested in many things, along with her brothers, when they were in school here in Lawrence. . . .

*Interviewer:* One thing that interests me very much is what effect the counter-culture years had on you. I don’t think your boys ever got caught up in that, did they?

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<sup>344</sup> Beatrice Wright KU Oral History.

*Beatrice:* How about my daughter?

*Interviewer:* Well, I don't know her. I don't think I do.

*Beatrice:* She's pretty wonderful, too. Well, the boys wore their hair long.<sup>345</sup>

This same conversational moment led into an exchange about anti-war tensions that involved KU during the sixties and seventies, with Beatrice recalling how she handled challenges in her classroom and to the University. After thus chiding the interviewer for, once again, excluding her daughter and then allowing that her sons had grown their hair, she went on:

*Beatrice:* To that extent their hair. But not the counter-culture at all. They were involved in civil rights and peace activities. I don't call that counter-culture. . . . I remember some time during the late 60s, maybe early 70s, when some students came in bare feet into the classroom and sat in the first row. I didn't like it. It just was not aesthetically pleasing. So I talked to them and asked them, 'Bring socks along if you want. Keep them in your pocket. When you come to my class, put them on.'

*Interviewer:* I just wondered how much this kind of thing hit the Psychology Department.

*Beatrice:* Just like any other department. I also remember how difficult the times were, such turbulence! Students were killed on campus. Remember when the faculty were asked to stay in their buildings all night on patrol duty? Erik and I took our sleeping bags to Fraser, and took turns every few hours to walk the corridors. I can't even imagine the sense of that. It was to protect the buildings from being bombed, as if faculty in the buildings would prevent the buildings from being bombed.<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> Beatrice Wright, KU Oral History.

<sup>346</sup> Beatrice Wright, KU Oral History.

While Beatrice shared an anti-war sentiment with some of those from whom she loyally sought to protect the KU campus, she never has advocated, nor seen the sense of, violence:

My temperament goes for resolution of conflict, not feeding the fires of conflict. Instead of unions versus management, I would much rather see executive boards with employee representatives who have a voice and voice in the organizational decision making and much more control of their own situation. Similarly, I would like to see groups of feminists get together with men's groups for mutual enlightenment.<sup>347</sup>

During all the turmoil, she continued to seek empowerment for people with disabilities, through building awareness and by encouraging social change. In more than three dozen articles written over a span of twenty years, from the mid-60s to the mid-80s, she presents a positive yet directive message that clearly leans toward justice-related activism. The following anecdote illustrates how she learned to respond non-aggressively, even when confronted with strong, if unearned, criticism. Auto-hypnosis, and interrupting negative thoughts and replacing them with positive ones, provide her with a method for staying engaged at such times:

I was invited to speak on attitudes, and there was a panel of respondents. Remember the year was 1973, which was a very activist period in general—civil rights demonstrations going on, students killed on campus—that was the background. One fellow who did have a disability was a member of the panel assigned to discuss my paper. He really piled wrath upon me. I don't recall his referring to the fact that I didn't have a disability, but he did scold me with something like, 'You academics living in ivory towers, what do you know? We want jobs, we want housing . . .'. He went through the real needs of people who are blind, and he discounted, discredited, and really scorned, my whole presentation as an

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<sup>347</sup> McCarthy, 159.

academic exercise in nonsense and futility. Well, I got into a state of auto-hypnosis right off, so that assault would not touch me personally. When I was invited to give a rebuttal, I addressed the action recommendations I had specified at the end of my talk; also, what to do about negative attitudes, and that there were positive attitudes as well. A lot of the members of the audience came to my defense, partly out of courtesy because the attack was so insulting and broke all the canons of propriety. After all, my assignment was to talk on attitudes. They asked me afterwards how I could keep so cool and collected. It was an unusual situation to be attacked with no edges softened in any way, no politeness. But my auto-hypnosis came to my rescue.<sup>348</sup>

As for her children, they also survived the upheaval of the 60s and 70s quite nicely. Colleen, the oldest, received a Ph.D. in psychology from Stanford University; second-born Erik received a Ph.D. in social science from the University of California at Berkeley; and, Woody, youngest of the three, followed in his father's footsteps by first earning a Ph.D. and then an M.D., both from Stanford University. Erik remembers that,

Life in my family was intensely intellectual. Dinner table conversations would often revolve around intellectual matters, and my parents were always deeply enthusiastic and involved in their children's school projects and intellectual pursuits. My mother would carefully go over term papers with each of us, giving us both editorial advice and substantive suggestions. . . . I knew by about age ten that I wanted to be a professor. Both of my parents were academics. Both of my siblings became academics. Both of their spouses are academics. (Only my wife, a clinical psychologist, is not an academic, although her father was a professor.) The only social mobility in my family was interdepartmental. It just felt natural to go into the family business.<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> McCarthy, 158.

<sup>349</sup> Erik Olin Wright, 327-328.

Together, the five members of M. Erik and Beatrice Wright's family earned five Ph.D.s and two M.D.s. Just as important to Beatrice, though, was experiencing her adult children as "fun people to be around."<sup>350</sup>

### Difficult Times

Family always has been Beatrice's top priority, and it was no secret that she loved them all. Moreover, her marriage to Erik clearly was a successful one, by any measure. So, a series of family deaths during a five-year span in the 1980s hit Beatrice very hard. She recalls that, for a period of time, she went through the motions of daily living while in a sort of 'fog:' "The '80s were difficult years for me, because my mother died. A year later, Erik died; then, my sister died—I adored her. So, that was a difficult time."<sup>351</sup> Even without those facts, one need only to look at her C.V. to note that something happened in the early 1980s, for nothing new was published between 1983 and 1986. While her mother's death was a blow, the 89 year-old Sonia had lived a full life, unlike Erik, who died only eight months after he and Beatrice celebrated their fortieth anniversary with a renewal of their vows:

He died suddenly. He had his bags packed to give a lecture the next day and said, 'I'm not feeling well.' It was at night, and he sat down and then just fell over. And because I was concerned, everybody thought it was a

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<sup>350</sup> David Keith Hollingsworth, Walter Cal Johnson, Jr., and Stephen W. Cook, "Beatrice A. Wright: Broad Lens, Sharp Focus," *Journal of Counseling and Development* 67 (March 1989): 384.

<sup>351</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 15-16, 2006.

heart attack, but I needed to know because of my children. . . . and it turned out that he had an aneurysm in the splenic artery.<sup>352</sup>

Grace Heider recalled hearing the news:

. . . the sorrow of May 11, 1981, when Beatrice Wright called early in the morning and said that Erik had died. It was as unbelievable as Kurt Lewin's death years before. Erik was an active, all-too-busy person, always ready to help a friend. I remember the former graduate student whom I called for Beatrice and who said, 'I understand every word you have spoken but I can't believe what you said.' And there was the wife of a local doctor who must have referred patients to Erik. She said, 'I don't know what we will do. There is nobody to take his place.'<sup>353</sup>

Beatrice received hundreds of condolences from friends, student, patients and their families, communications that she still treasures. Since she had finished revising her own book, which would be published in 1983, and felt his loss so keenly, Beatrice began working on completion of Erik's unfinished manuscript. It was a lifeline for her:

After Erik died, I was in shock for two years. I don't know, I just continued teaching like a robot. But the only thing that saved me was working on his book. Because I remember when I brought the manuscript to be delivered to the publishers, and deposited it at the post office, I had such a let-down feeling. I knew that the immediate contact with Erik while writing the book would be gone.<sup>354</sup>

Things had changed in the time since she had completed similar work on Fritz Heider's book. Beatrice regards what happened with the publisher of 'Erik's book' as a welcome change, even if it wasn't her idea at first:

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<sup>352</sup> Beatrice Wright interview July 2-3, 2005

<sup>353</sup> Fritz and Grace Heider KU Oral History.

<sup>354</sup> Beatrice Wright interview July 2-3, 2005.

. . . a parallel situation arose when I felt the need to complete my husband's book, called *The Clinical Practice of Hypnotherapy*, because of his sudden death. And, really for three years I worked very hard to get that book as a book, and had a lot of trouble with it, and finally got the key to how to do it. And, when the publishers accepted the manuscript, they wouldn't allow me to just publish it under my husband's name. And so, it's published under M. Erik Wright with Beatrice A. Wright, and this time I didn't protest, because twenty-five years later my own consciousness had been raised.<sup>355</sup>

What Beatrice had done during this very painful time after Erik's death was to practice all eight of the techniques she identifies in her coping-versus-succumbing framework. To begin with, while not denying the difficulties facing her, she focused on what she could do in the face of such terrible losses (1): she could continue teaching and take over the completion of Erik's book. Those certainly were areas in which her participation was worthwhile (2), and the action of moving forward represented taking an *active role* in directing her life (3). She also made decisions that were in her best interests (4), even though there may have been pressure to publish or behave in a manner that others preferred.

Though the pain of loss was real, she felt it was manageable because other aspects of her life provided some degree of satisfaction (5): her children and their families were healthy; she had friends and a profession she enjoyed; Tenny, her good-natured dog, was a daily companion; and, she was helping to get Erik's book published. Remaining in the home she and Erik had built, maintaining her status as a tenured professor, and staying active with students, friends and colleagues provided (6). This led her to continue

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<sup>355</sup> Beatrice Wright interview July 2-3, 2005.

enjoying life, a process that required such value changes as moving from a married identity to a single one (7). Finally, she re-engaged fully in travel, study, teaching, writing, research, and family activities, thereby demonstrating that she could live a meaningful life (8).

Succumbing, on the other hand, would have meant emphasizing what could *not* be done, finding little enjoyment in life, passively accepting the role of victim, minimizing accomplishments, ruminating on her pain, feeling resignation or denial, and accepting pity as her lot.<sup>356</sup> From her perspective, succumbing was never an option. A friend relayed to her sometime later that, shortly after Erik's death, Beatrice had said, "I don't know how I'll manage, but I know I will manage."<sup>357</sup> She experienced that time as one of having a choice to either cope or succumb. Consistent with her values and nature, she coped. An important element of her coping was the high regard and affection that others had felt for her husband, and she was comforted by such expressions of their appreciation as this one, included in her "Preface" to his book: "Erik added to the sum of human joy and fulfillment. If everyone to whom he did some loving service were to bring a blossom to his grave, he would sleep forever beneath a wilderness of flowers."<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> Wright, *Physical Disability*, 1983, 194-195.

<sup>357</sup> Beatrice Wright interview October 12, 2007.

<sup>358</sup> M. Erik Wright, with Beatrice A. Wright, *Clinical Practice of Hypnotherapy* (New York: Guilford Press, 1987), ix.

Having thus navigated through the years immediately after Erik's death, Beatrice was faced with coping with her sister's death in 1985. Once again, she responded to anything positive that she could 'grab onto,' as in the following instance. Returning home to Lawrence after Esther's memorial service in April, she remembers hearing a bird singing above the front door just as she put her key in the lock. It was a lovely, clear sound—"tweet, tweet, tweet"—coming from the nest built in a piece of driftwood that had hung near the door for years. Beatrice looked up and saw the bird in its nest, and thought, "just like my sister, you, little bird, are taking care of your family."<sup>359</sup> When Beatrice moved from Lawrence to Madison ten years later, she took both the driftwood and the carefully preserved nest with her as a way to stir fond memories.

Beatrice served as Professor of Psychology at KU until mandatory retirement in 1988, after which she continued for another six years to teach half-time as Emerita Professor of Psychology. She did not go gentle into that good night, however, and objected to the notion of mandatory retirement upon reaching an arbitrary age. "I have *been* retired," she emphasized, in one publication. "You need to put the source of the action where it belongs: By edict, by law, I have *been* retired. The source didn't come from myself. I still feel I am productive."<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 16, 2006.

<sup>360</sup> *Kansas Alumni News*, 6.

Five years later, she described her life as a retired but functioning Emerita

Professor to have been a mixed bag:

Well, there are some advantages to being retired officially, because you are no longer obliged to undertake University work what you don't really want to do. I no longer have to be on the Admissions Committee or the Promotion, Merit and Tenure Committee. I dislike ranking people. I continue to be on dissertation committees that I want to be on. I continue to attend Department meetings because I want to know what is going on, but I feel free not to go if something comes up that I'd like to do. At least you can say no if you don't want to do something, but you tend not to be asked. You certainly feel less pressure. I can now write without feeling pressured, and I continue to write and teach. The pressure's off and that's a nice payoff.

The disadvantages are also great, because you're marginalized. Really, if you ever didn't feel like you were marginal in some way, you sure do if you're retired. People don't really know what to make of you, quite.<sup>361</sup>

Mostly, however, Beatrice Wright continued being Beatrice Wright, regardless of being barred from full-time teaching: she taught, she observed, she conducted research, she lectured, and she wrote. The same month she was mandatorily retired, she went to China to study how the one-child-per-family policy affected families that had children with birth defects. Her report outlined the sad effects of a policy aimed at reducing over-population, including the abandonment at birth of children born with disabilities or even infanticide. Moreover, she observed a culture that values ancestors coming to terms with the realization that, within a few generations, there would be no aunts and uncles, or

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<sup>361</sup> McCarthy, 165.

cousins.<sup>362</sup> “That’s frightening for them,” she reported. “But they say, *what is our alternative?* Well, it’s famine.”<sup>363</sup> This policy and its aftermath may not have been their wish fulfilled, but it was a way to secure hope for the future; they were coping.

Beatrice continued to live in Lawrence for seven years after her mandatory retirement, teaching the occasional class and writing articles. In all, she would publish six more articles about disability-related issues between 1989 and 1995, a 1992 tribute to Solomon Asch four years before he died, and eulogies for Roger Barker (1903-1990) and Tamara Dembo (1902-1993). One of the articles dealing with disability-related issues originally had been prepared to honor Fritz Heider upon the occasion of his receiving the Psychological Science Gold Medal Award at the 1987 annual convention of the American Psychological Association.

When, in 1988, the *American Psychologist* accepted it for publication, she pled in vain with the editors to speed its publication because of the gravity of the illness ailing her old friend and colleague. She hoped he would take pleasure in being recognized for his contributions to her field and in reading how she used “his conceptual framework to

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<sup>362</sup> Beatrice A. Wright, “The Place of People with Disabilities in Chinese Society: Assorted Impressions Based on Short-Term Study Visit (May 16-June 1, 1988),” an investigation supported in part by a fellowship from the World Rehabilitation Fund under a grant from the National Institute of Disability and Rehabilitation Research, U.S. Department of Education, report submitted on July 18, 1988.

<sup>363</sup> *Kansas Alumni News*, 6.

systematize a great diversity of attempts to improve attitudes toward people who have a disability.”<sup>364</sup> But, Heider died a few months before the issue came out in early 1989.

Of three articles published in 1991, two became her favorites. She considers the first, which won the 1990 Menninger Alumni Association Scientific Writing Award, a good, thorough summary of the concepts she brought into her professional work in the field of Rehabilitation Psychology, and she invites people to read it if they’re interested in what she considers her conceptual legacy. In this article, entitled “Labeling: The Need for Greater Person-Environment Individuation,” she builds several arguments.

Early on in the article, she states that, if practitioners desire to foster both remediation potential and personal integrity when broadening their diagnostic lens in clinical settings, they have to take seriously Lewin’s notions of the whole person and behavior as a function of our interacting with the environment. That premise quickly brings her to one of the most troublesome aspects of environments within which people with disabilities live, work and play: ‘labeling.’ She sees labeling when implying something negative as a way to identify differences, rather than similarities, and of activating the fundamental negative bias. She goes on to demonstrate the connection between labeling and insider-outsider perspectives, as well as between labeling and the

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<sup>364</sup> Beatrice A. Wright, “Extension of Heider’s Ideas to Rehabilitation Psychology,” *American Psychologist* 44 (1989): 525-528.

neglect of environmental considerations. She concludes with implications for changes in professional practice and recommendations for further research.<sup>365</sup>

The article is vintage Beatrice in its comprehensive, systematic delineation of what thoughts contribute to the devaluation of people and then of what corrective measures can be taken. Not surprisingly, she reiterates the subject closest to her heart: “Another urgently needed recommendation is that researchers spend at least as much effort searching for and uncovering positive attitudes as they do negative ones.”<sup>366</sup> Coming some forty-five years after compiling the literature review that awakened her to such issues, this publication has the feel of a coda, the device that, in music, provides listeners the opportunity to reflect on the main body of the piece, to absorb the nuances, and to arrive at a sense of completion. Unfortunately, to her way of thinking, she allowed this article to be ‘updated’ and re-issued in 2002.<sup>367</sup> While very few of her words were changed, editing changed the tone of the article from that of thoughtful scholarship to a more energetic, clipped and facile-sounding one. Some of the difference may be a generational difference in approach, or simply personal preference. Yet, whatever the

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<sup>365</sup> Beatrice A. Wright, “Labeling: The Need for Greater Person-Environment Individuation,” in C.R. Snyder & D. R. Forsyth, eds. *Handbook of Social and Clinical Psychology*, Chapter 23 (Elmsford, NY: Pergamon, 1991): 469-487.

<sup>366</sup> Wright, “Labeling,” 485.

<sup>367</sup> Beatrice A. Wright and S. J. Lopez. “Widening the Diagnostic Lens: A Case for Including Human Strengths and Environmental Resources.” In Charles Richard Snyder and S.J. Lopez (Eds.) *Handbook of Positive Psychology*, Chapter 3. Oxford University Press, 2002: 26-45.

explanation, no one familiar with the tenor of Beatrice Wright's style would recognize it as hers.

The other article she considers a favorite was an adaptation of remarks she made at a centennial celebration of the KU Sociology Department, at which her son Erik had been invited to speak. Even though he'd attended Harvard instead of the University of Kansas for his undergraduate degree and had gone on after doctoral work at Berkeley to become a professor at the University of Wisconsin, a former Wisconsin student who now taught at KU understood the many connections the Wright family had with KU and arranged for Erik to be an invited speaker. Being asked to speak about her son was a pleasure. Erik, meanwhile, was a little concerned that his mother would embarrass him. She didn't, of course, and ended up thanking the city of Lawrence and the University of Kansas for providing such a wonderful environment for all three of her children to grow up in.<sup>368</sup> Beginning with the KU nursery school they'd attended, she identified characteristics of her community that had supported the growth and development of her children:

I mentioned that whatever my husband and I contributed in the way of parenting, I'm glad that we did what we could in a positive way. But, there's so much else that happened to these children. I mentioned the town of Lawrence. I told you that Lawrence, we felt, was a child-centered town. A kid didn't have to do hardly anything but blow a whistle and they'd be in the newspaper. My kids' pictures were in the main newspaper, called the *Lawrence Journal World*, published under that

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<sup>368</sup> Beatrice A. Wright, "A Parent's View of a Kid Growing Up in Lawrence," *Mid-American Review of Sociology* 15, no. 2 (1991): 15-19.

name today, my kids' pictures were frequently in that newspaper. Talk about reinforcing a child's sense of being valued! So, I paid a lot of attention in my talk to the city and to the school system. Why? . . . one good thing about the schools was allowing my kids to go to the library whenever appropriate, because some of the classes in high school or grade school would not be moving fast enough. I acknowledged the University. My kids could go and visit a professor at the University because of a science project.<sup>369</sup>

To this day, Beatrice praises the child-friendly environment at Lawrence, Kansas, as a great place to rear kids. She and Erik never regretted, "for even a moment,"<sup>370</sup> their decision to settle in the community and devote their professional lives to the University of Kansas.

The third article published in 1991 was a follow-up to Beatrice's 1960 article about "Problems in Fund Raising," in which she had encouraged further research on whether positive portrayals of people with disabilities would result in greater donations to the cause being furthered. The 1991 article, co-authored with two others, did a thorough job of reviewing the literature and describing a study that involved showing a group of undergraduate college students videotaped appeals featuring people with disabilities portrayed both positively and negatively. It also focused on the results showing there were no reliable differences in giving. But, its tone was very different than it had been in Beatrice's publication thirty years earlier.

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<sup>369</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 15-16, 2006.

<sup>370</sup> Beatrice Wright, telephone conversation, January 31, 2008.

This time, there was no mention of the moral implications of portraying people with disabilities in a negative light. Beatrice's careful, methodical process of building an argument was absent, and her strong voice for advocacy silenced. There was no energetic indictment of depicting people with disabilities as pathetically as possible to stimulate pity, rather than with high regard for all they can accomplish. It was a 'near-miss' in every sense of the word. Although her name was included in the publication, no one would recognize it as her work.<sup>371</sup> (In reality, Beatrice did not have a role in the write-up of the article. She recalls that her name had been gratuitously inserted by the co-authors because she had served as the dissertation advisor upon which the article was based.)

She clearly was the author of a commentary on the heritage of Division 22 at the APA Centennial Celebration in August 1992. In addition to detailing the history of the Division (22) of Rehabilitation Psychology, she recalled the original commitment of its founders to value-laden principles and how they were in tune with what would become known in the 1970s as the Independent Living Movement. Having thus established the roots of Rehabilitation Psychology, she turned to the legacy being fashioned by contemporary practice. Never deviating from a learned, scholarly and totally professional tone, she nonetheless quite frankly took her organization to task:

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<sup>371</sup> Amy B. Adler, Beatrice A. Wright, and Gary R. Ulichny, "Fundraising Portrayals of People with Disabilities: Donations and Attitudes," *Rehabilitation Psychology* 36 (1991): 233-242.

In my view, too much of the work of researchers and clinicians continues to reflect unconscious inclinations that contribute to disabling myths about disability. Examples could be drawn from literature in which the negative consequences of disability are emphasized with scant attention to the strengths and resources of the person, or in which the focus is on the person in an environmental vacuum to the neglect of reality conditions. Even positive attitudes toward people with disabilities are often gratuitously discredited as denial or social desirability. To steer researchers and clinicians away from those pitfalls, a set of guiding principles reflecting basic values was formulated in 1958, but evidently neither these principles, nor being exposed to ‘the somatopsychological relationship between physique and behavior,’ are sufficient to buck the power of what may be referred to as ‘flawed human perception.’<sup>372</sup>

Anyone familiar with the style and tone of something written by Beatrice Wright would recognize this as hers and hers alone. Beatrice told a former student who interviewed her a few years later that writing her thoughts down helped her to straighten them out and was much like the process of sculpting. The interviewer observed that, “She chips away, adds and patches until it has a coherent theme and shape that she can ‘stand by.’”<sup>373</sup> That’s what she’d done in preparing this address and its publication. After half a century of carefully developing a conceptual framework for a constructive view of life with a disability, Beatrice had earned the right of an elder to recall the group to its founding principles. And, she still had the political stature to get their attention.

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<sup>372</sup> Beatrice A. Wright, “Division of Rehabilitation Psychology: Roots, Guiding Principles and a Persistent Concern,” *Rehabilitation Psychology* 38 (1993): 64-65.

<sup>373</sup> Lorraine Mangione, “Reclaiming Our Heritage Column: Interview with Beatrice Wright,” *Feminist Psychologist, Division 35 Newsletter* (Summer 1996) 5, 10. Email copy provided by Lorraine Mangione on October 15, 2007.

At the same time, Beatrice had continued over the years to make known her opinion of mandatory retirement. When asked in a 1993 interview about whether she had any advice to those not yet retired, she replied:

I do know there's a lot of ageism, discrimination, and prejudice in our society. Most people who are senior citizens are really active, constructive, productive people. Yet the view of the elderly is that they are decrepit, unhappy, and depressed. Again, it's the fundamental negative bias. By and large, people who are classified as elderly are meeting challenges head-on like other people. The problem with ageism is very much part of the society. Of course, forced retirement is ageism right there. I used to restrict my schedule of national lectures and such to four times a year, not wanting to be away from the University more than that because I had obligations to the students. Well now, I wouldn't have to say no because I wouldn't be invited four times a year.<sup>374</sup>

She still loved Lawrence, Kansas, she still had ideas about how society could increase opportunities for people with disabilities, and she still had the energy to invest in her profession. Yet, it seemed that she was—for at least the moment—spinning her wheels.

### Leaving Kansas

In 1994, it was clear that the time was approaching for Beatrice to leave Kansas and move closer to one of her children, all of whom lived in areas she enjoyed: Colleen in Florida, Erik in Wisconsin, and Woody in Texas. While she had dated some after Erik's death, living near one of her children was preferable to staying in Lawrence.

Since she enjoyed life in Lawrence, though, she kept deferring the decision and was still undecided when she went to Wisconsin in 1994 for her annual Thanksgiving

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<sup>374</sup> McCarthy, 165.

visit with Erik and his family. While there, she received a telephone call from Edna Syzmanski, Associate Dean of Education at the University of Wisconsin, who offered her a standing invitation to teach what and when she wanted at that institution. And so, the decision was made: Beatrice would move to Madison and take up residence there. She purchased a first-floor condo, not yet built, in a location near both the University and her son's home that she found pleasing and could move into the following August. The time between Thanksgiving 1994 and August 1995 would be spent preparing to move and selling the home on Stratford Road that she and Erik had designed and built in 1971. After all, she reasoned, if the issues are clear, make a decision and move on: "I don't like to be in a state of indecision—too much energy to stew!"<sup>375</sup> Designed with large, adjacent studies for her and Erik to do their separate work while physically close together, her Lawrence house sold in less than a week.

During her 45 years in Lawrence, Beatrice had developed an acclaimed professional status, reared her family, and influenced thousands of students in this country and abroad. She'd written six books, seventy articles, and many book reviews. She'd survived both anti-nepotism laws that prevented her from working as a university professor and mandatory retirement policies that halted her from working as a university professor. And, she'd coped with the deaths of her parents and her sister, as well as of her husband, who was buried in the Lawrence Cemetery, which includes a memorial

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<sup>375</sup> Beatrice Wright interview October 12, 2007.

commemorating a long-ago battle with Quantrill's Raiders. Leaving after so many years of a deeply satisfying life would be difficult.

Nevertheless, seventy-seven year old Beatrice was ready to begin, with some uneasiness, the next phase of her life.

## CHAPTER VI. WISCONSIN YEARS

For nearly ten years, the condo in Madison, Wisconsin, near her church and not far from either the University of Wisconsin or her son's home, served Beatrice well. Situated at the top of a hill, it afforded her a view reminiscent of the green hills she'd enjoyed in Lawrence, Kansas. Teaching a class every now and then, traveling to professional meetings and family gatherings, Beatrice learned to slow down during her late seventies and early eighties. Besides, getting acclimated to the move took time. She related to her parents' immigration from Russia, commenting that, "it was hard enough, my transition from Kansas to Wisconsin. Here it is, same country, same language, family here, it took me two years, before I began to feel this is my place, my home."<sup>376</sup> She knew she'd made the shift when she started thinking "we" instead of "they" about the people she encountered in her new community.

Her health was good—she still is renowned for her stamina—and she was driving herself where she wanted or needed to go. Professionally, the period after moving to Wisconsin was a fallow one. The only publications bearing her name were a tribute to Grace Heider (1903-1995), an interview with a former student, two articles co-authored with daughter Colleen on eating disorders, and the regretted revision of "Labeling" that appeared in 2002. Then, she was invited to speak in Bydgoszcz, Poland, at an international conference commemorating the work of Kurt Lewin on September 10-12,

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<sup>376</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 15-16, 2006.

2004. Poland was claiming Lewin as one of its own, since he was born in Migilno, Poland, and spent the early years of his life there.

### **Travel to Poland**

She recently had moved from her condo into an independent living suite at a retirement center not far from the Capitol in downtown Madison when the invitation to Poland came up. Driving was no longer possible, because of vision limitations, and she once again was surrounded by boxes and furniture, all of which signaled another transition. But, there wasn't a chance she was going to miss this opportunity to celebrate her professor's "Contribution to Contemporary Psychology." The trip to Poland turned out to be one of the best experiences she's had since moving to Wisconsin.

She enjoyed herself immensely and had, in her own words, "a blast. I tell you, the fact that I was Kurt Lewin's only living Ph.D. student meant that they treated me like I was a Queen!"<sup>377</sup> She took not only her memories with her. She also carried memorabilia and two certificates from the APA, "Distinguished Books in Psychology Citations" for Lewin's *Topological Psychology* and *Resolving Social Conflicts and Field Theory*. Just as she felt those citations were the most significant recognitions she'd received from her peers, so, also, were these documents sweet confirmation for all those who'd long judged Lewin's influence as monumental. The response to her presentation of the citations was clearly appreciative and included applause from the Polish

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<sup>377</sup> Beatrice Wright interview July 2-3, 2005.

representative to the European Parliament (a social psychologist at Catholic University in Lublin who had brought Beatrice roses as a welcome to the country).

In order to accommodate the many participants wanting to see and handle the photographs and documents she had brought to supplement her presentation, eighty-six year old Beatrice facilitated five different groups of twelve before calling a halt to the day. More attendees were clamoring for additional sessions, but she was getting tired. A number of those mementoes had been placed on a CD for the Lewinian Archives, she assured them, so they would have an opportunity to see everything.

Her formal presentation, entitled “A Student Remembers Sixty-Five Years, How About That?,” was comprised of recollections of Lewin, in the form of stories that exemplified what it was like to be around and interact with him. She closed her remarks by inviting the assembly to join her in singing a song with which she and other Iowa students had fondly ‘roasted’ their professor over sixty years earlier. Sung to the tune of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” it captures the essence of his thought about fields of forces, as well as his method of drawing an oval configuration that looked like a potato to represent a life space. Beatrice recalls that the group in Poland quickly and boisterously got into the spirit of things:

Oh have you seen the system that belongs to Kurt Lewin?  
Looks like a baked potato—all the parts that we have seen.  
It’s got the force, it’s got the strength, it’s got the ideal goal,  
But has it got a soul?  
    Glory, glory for frustration  
    Glory, glory for frustration

Glory, glory for frustration,  
Break down the barrier!!<sup>378</sup>

Her remarks, published in 2004-05, signaled a renaissance of sorts for Beatrice. She began writing again, and being interviewed, this time from the perspective of what her own contributions to psychology had been over the sixty-plus years since graduating from the University of Iowa with her Ph.D. And, she delightedly shared the newly discovered Lewin citation of their work on the “Changing Food Habits” study with old friend Pat Cautley (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Beatrice A. Wright and Patricia Woodward Cautley review their 1942 published contribution for the first time on May 5, 2005.

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<sup>378</sup> Beatrice A. Wright, “Kurt Lewin: A Student Remembers Sixty-Five Years Ago,” *Proceedings of the International Conference on the Contributions of Kurt Lewin to Contemporary Psychology*. University of Bydgoszcz, Poland, September 2004, 98.

### **Professional Recognition**

Recognition of her influence has come to Beatrice through various routes. In 1998, she was honored with the Society for the Advancement of Field Theory Lifetime Achievement Award. In 2005, both her 1960 and 1983 editions of *Physical Disability* were designated as among the first 25 entries in a canon of APA's distinguished books in psychology.<sup>379</sup> (So, too, was Fritz Heider's *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations*, which she helped organize and write.)

In 2007, she was named a University of Iowa 'pioneer' for her early and continuing contributions to the field, including that she "is considered a founding mother of the College of Education's Rehabilitation Counseling Program, which was formed as the first rehabilitation counseling program west of the Mississippi River after she completed her dissertation."<sup>380</sup> True to form, Beatrice took the opportunity at that occasion to address current rehabilitation students and challenge them to work toward changing the concept of 'dissertation defense' to 'dissertation presentation.' Speaking from the same hall where she'd 'defended' her dissertation some sixty-five years earlier, she urged them to think about the ramifications of choosing an adversarial approach to discussing one's research versus a collegial one. Why not set the tone early for seeking peer review, she wondered aloud, and working with others to benefit humankind? Just a

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<sup>379</sup> Dunn and Elliott, 187.

<sup>380</sup> Heather Spangler, unpublished article sent via email on February 12, 2008.

few months later, she earned further recognition from the APA through its Disability Issues in Psychology (DIP) Award for her mentoring contributions through the years.

The University of Tennessee Hodges Library is another place where her influence could be documented as recently as May 31, 2007. This library's *Culture Corner* (an area for the display of thematized collections) topic for the summer was "People with Disabilities." A cursory check of how many books on the shelves referenced or cited Beatrice Wright revealed that nineteen of the thirty-six books at hand that particular moment did so. And, within those nineteen books covering a wide range of perspectives and published as recently as 2007, she was cited fifty-two times, far more frequently than any other single person. She was referenced most often in the areas of fundamental negative bias, spread, insider-outsider perspectives, and coping strategies.

Some viewed her contributions more broadly. Shakespeare<sup>381</sup> called her a forerunner of the social-contextual approach; Robinson<sup>382</sup> referenced her discussion of how the Independent Living Movement balanced independence, dependence, and interdependence; Switzer affirmed that her spread concept "remains prevalent today;"<sup>383</sup>

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<sup>381</sup> Tom Shakespeare, *Disability Rights and Wrongs* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 19.

<sup>382</sup> Frank M. Robinson, Jr., Doe West and Dwight Woodworth, Jr., *Coping+Plus: Dimensions of Disability* (London: Praeger, 1995), 75.

<sup>383</sup> Jacqueline Vaughn Switzer, *Disabled Rights: American Disability Policy and the Fight for Equality* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003), 37.

and Miller recommended a nursing strategy of Beatrice Wright's 'life-promoting framework.'<sup>384</sup>

Krotaski, Nosek and Turk identified the concept of 'spread' from Beatrice's 1983 book in their discussion of traumatic disability, which also drew on concepts introduced in her 1960 version;<sup>385</sup> Kennedy not only referenced her notion of looking at the 'assets' of a person with a disability, he reminds us that she uses the Lewinian formula ( $b=f[p,e]$ ) to emphasize that behavior is a function of the person within an environment, and that her work has influenced the thinking of such current disability experts as Rhoda Olkin.<sup>386</sup> In particular, Olkin's notion that handicap is a socially constructed concept seems related to Beatrice Wright's work decades earlier. Such influence affects popular culture also, as demonstrated by a 2002 article on the social construction of 'freaks' that cited Beatrice's 1960 publication.<sup>387</sup> Wendell<sup>388</sup> referenced her in a feminist philosophical discussion of

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<sup>384</sup> Judith Fitzgerald Miller, *Coping with Chronic Illness: Overcoming Powerlessness* (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis Company, 2000), 528.

<sup>385</sup> Danuta M. Krotaski, Maargaret A. Nosek and Margaret A. Turk, *Women with Physical Disabilities: Achieving and Maintaining Health & Well-Being* (Baltimore: Paul H. Brooks, 1996).

<sup>386</sup> Paul Kennedy, ed., *Psychological Management of Physical Disability* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 3, 19, 21.

<sup>387</sup> Beth A. Haller and Robin Larsen, "Public Reception of Real Disability: The Case of 'Freaks,'" *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 29, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 164-172.

<sup>388</sup> Susan Wendell, *The Rejected Body* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

disability, and Haller and Larson recognized her work as multicultural in nature.<sup>389</sup>

Finally, with Alston's application of her ideas to the area of chemical dependency,<sup>390</sup> her views about self-esteem and coping rather than succumbing have been incorporated into a wide array of treatment programs.

Her APA peers recognize her contributions, as well. Division 22 of the American Psychological Association is the professional 'home' for rehabilitation psychologists, and Beatrice has been active in it since its inception. In 2003, she was referred to as "our heritage" (and a good sport for leading the crowd in singing "Mustang Sally"),<sup>391</sup> and she frequently is referred to in the *Division 22 Newsletter*.

In a 2004 interview, Beatrice demonstrated her continued involvement in the field when she named "participation of the insider, which is often neglected, ignored, or discounted" as one of the most important contributions of rehabilitation psychology, and then went on to identify challenges she hopes her profession will address:

We know that the process of adjustment to loss (e.g., disability) is a process over time that involves important changes in one's values (e.g., enlarging the scope of values, subordinating physical values relative to the

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<sup>389</sup> See Willie V. Bryan, *Multicultural Aspects of Disabilities* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1999), 17; and Benedicte Ingstand and Susan Reynolds Whyte, *Disability and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 146, 161.

<sup>390</sup> Reginald J. Alston, "Wright's Constructs of Psychosocial Adjustment to Physical Disability as a Framework for Understanding Adaptation to Chemical Dependency," *Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling* 24, no. 3 (Fall 1993): 6-10.

<sup>391</sup> Daniel E. Rohe, "President's Column," *Rehabilitation Psychology News* 30, no. 3 (Spring 2003): 5.

importance of other values.) Yet we know little about factors that facilitate (or hinder) constructive value changes. The research focus could be on factors in the rehabilitation setting, the family, the broader society, etc., with a view to bringing about conditions favoring constructive value change. ... [and discussion of such issues as] life as lived in the community, how to stop the action [of the mind that fuels the] negative bias of flawed human perception, how to bring more focus to positive assets.<sup>392</sup>

Moreover, members of Division 22 cite her work as comfortably as do the disciples of any great leader (a metaphor the down-to-earth and self-effacing Beatrice finds amusing at best, dismaying at worst). The official last remarks of the 2004-05 President of Division 22 included her work on the 'requirement of mourning concept' in his critique of recommendations on how affective disorders should be coded for Medicare reimbursement.<sup>393</sup> His successor argued that one way to recruit more women to rehabilitation psychology is to highlight Beatrice's significant contribution to the field through her work on the insider perspective, "which is the key principle underlying the current emphasis on participatory action research models."<sup>394</sup>

Beatrice Wright's lasting and simultaneously contemporary contribution to the field of rehabilitation psychology is assured through a number of vehicles. When she retired from the University of Kansas in 1988, the psychology department established the

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<sup>392</sup> Mary G. Brownsberger, "Interview with Dr. Beatrice A. Wright," *Division 22 Newsletter* 31, no. 3 (Spring 2004): 8-9.

<sup>393</sup> Allen W. Heinemann, "President's Column," *Division 22 Newsletter* 32, no. 4 (Summer/Convention 2005): 2.

<sup>394</sup> Stephen T. Wegener, "President's Column," *Division 22 Newsletter* 33, no. 2 (Winter 2006): 3.

“Beatrice A. Wright Scholarship in Health and Rehabilitation Psychology.” In 1996, the KU psychology department went on to establish a new professorship, the “Beatrice A. Wright Faculty Scholar in Clinical Psychology.” These two funds were established in her name, reported Charles R. Snyder, psychology professor and director of the clinical psychology program, because, “Her work helped to break down prejudices against people with disabilities by applying her understanding of constructive views of life with a disability to real-life problems.”<sup>395</sup> Another recognition by her field is “The Beatrice Wright and Tamara Dembo Lecture in Rehabilitation,” given annually since 2003. The most recent lecture is an especially poignant reminder of the research topic that catapulted her into the world of rehabilitation.<sup>396</sup>

<b>Year</b>	<b>Lecturer</b>	<b>Topic</b>
2003	Franklin Shontz, Ph.D.	“Rehabilitation Psychology: A Personological Approach”
2004	Rhoda Olkin, Ph.D.	“Accessible Research with Parents with Disabilities and Their Teens”
2005	Martha E. Banks, Ph.D.	“Full Attention to Whole Clients: Maximizing Success by Minimizing Assumptions”
2006	Margaret Brown, Ph.D.	“Past and Present Meet in the RRTC on TBI Interventions”
2007	Alice Marie Stevens, MS	“Multi-trauma and TBI Rehabilitation: Injured Soldiers Returning from Iraq and Afghanistan”

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<sup>395</sup> Karla Carney Menaugh, “Retired Psychology Pioneer Supports KU,” *KU News*, September 23, 1997. <http://www.news.ku.edu/1997/97N/SepNews/Sept23/wright.html> (accessed December 20, 2007).

<sup>396</sup> Beatrice Wright personal files.

Vash and Crew illustrate the link between Beatrice Wright's early work and contemporary attitudes of greater acceptance toward people with disabilities, the rights of people with disabilities, and subsequent social accommodations made for the greatest possible support of people with disabilities when they reference the influence of such works as that of her 1960 book and the research presented in two earlier publications most often named as key research on disability, *Adjust to Physical Handicap and Illness* (1946) and *Adjustment to Misfortune* (1948):

By the later 1950s it was becoming unfashionable to talk about accepting disability. The literature explained to anyone gauche enough to use such language that it did not make sense to expect a person to accept disablement and that the professionals of a prior era had 'laid a bum trip' on disabled people. No one should be enjoined to accept something that meant settling for second-rate hopes and goals. 'Adapting to' and 'coping with' became the preferred terminology ... Actually, it was this thinking that led, in part, to the advocacy revolution ... thus began the shift of emphasis from modification of the person to modification of the world.<sup>397</sup>

Beatrice's own perspective on the most important aspects of her work is related to the *value-laden beliefs and principles* included in the "Preface to the Second Edition" of her book.<sup>398</sup> This is the kind of thinking to which Vash and Crew refer and is in fact a list of rights for people with disabilities. Included within these beliefs and principles are the bases of concepts for which she is most widely known: fundamental negative bias, spread, insider perspective, and coping frameworks.

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<sup>397</sup> Carolyn L. Vash and Nancy M. Crew, *Psychology of Disability* (New York: Springer Publishing Co., 2004), xvii.

<sup>398</sup> Wright, *Physical Disability*, 1983, xi-xvii.

### **Recent Evaluation of Her Conceptual Legacy**

At the same time, a curious, contradictory situation exists, in which although well-known and influential in the field of rehabilitation psychology/counseling, Beatrice Wright also is significantly under-acknowledged in some quarters. For instance, according to Dunn and Elliott, a 2004 survey of the six most frequently recommended books by what was considered a representative sample of American Board of Professional Psychology Diplomates in rehabilitation psychology included no book older than one published in 1987 and made no mention of Beatrice Wright.<sup>399</sup>

Dunn and Elliott are concerned about those findings, asserting that her 1960 and 1983 publications are essential readings for the practitioner. They note the current emphases on financial and political aspects of rehabilitation practices that can distract practitioners from the research heritage of the field and go on to recommend that, “rehabilitation psychologists, whether established or in training, should (re)acquaint themselves with *Physical Disability*. The book and its essential principles continue to be relevant for rehabilitation research and practice.”<sup>400</sup> Alternately, they speculate that her contributions are so classic they have been incorporated within the field and no longer have an identity related to just one person. Dunn goes further in a subsequent article co-authored with Sarah B. Dougherty to argue that the time has come for the positive

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<sup>399</sup> Joseph J. Ryan and Heather Tree, “Essential Readings in Rehabilitation Psychology,” *Teaching of Psychology* 31, no. 2 (2004): 138-140.

<sup>400</sup> Dunn and Elliott, 187.

approach supported by Beatrice Wright, decades before Martin Seligman was identified as founder of positive psychology, to be adapted into what they term a *positive psychology of rehabilitation*.<sup>401</sup>

Research conducted over the past few years for this life history revealed two areas where her contributions seem to be overlooked. First, there is a lack of awareness about the extent of her involvement with writing Fritz Heider's seminal work. This oversight continues, despite Heider's clear description of the collegial manner in which he and she constructed the book included in the "Acknowledgments" section of that book, in his autobiographical comments, in his unpublished oral history, and by autographing her personal copy of his book as, "from one author to the other." At the same time, Beatrice's recollection of her declining Heider's suggestion that authorship include 'with Beatrice A. Wright' because of his immersion in the ideas over the years remains a singular example of how some voices are silenced because of cultural norms perpetuated even by the silenced.

Next, Beatrice Wright's work with and application of Lewinian theory has been ignored in an important way by the Society for Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI), a group closely aligned with the teachings of Kurt Lewin. Each year, SPSSI identifies a recipient of The *Kurt Lewin Award*, described on the SPSSI website ([www.spssi.org](http://www.spssi.org)) in this manner: "Named for the late Kurt Lewin, a pioneer in the

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<sup>401</sup> Dana S. Dunn and Sarah B. Dougherty, "Prospects for a Positive Psychology of Rehabilitation," *Rehabilitation Psychology* 50, no. 3 (2005): 305-311.

science of group dynamics & a founder of the SPSSI, this award is presented annually for ‘outstanding contributions to the development and integration of psychological research and social action.’” While Roger Barker, Tamara Dembo, and Fritz Heider all received this award, Beatrice has not.

Email correspondence with the past three chairs of the Lewin Award committee and the current president of SPSSI did not provide a clear answer as to why she and her work have been ignored thus far. However, Beatrice and I were invited to submit a proposal for presenting a ‘conversation’ about her work at the June 2008 annual meeting. While Beatrice was willing to consider this if it would help my career, I told her candidly that I thought someone of her stature deserved an invitation to present a keynote. It seemed to me that this SPSSI response was yet another slight to someone who deserves better treatment. We ended up declining the invitation.

Kurt Lewin’s daughter, Miriam, speculated that “sexism and politics” are responsible for the oversight of one of her father’s most gifted students not receiving the coveted Lewin Award. Since Beatrice was not ‘one of the boys,’ and since she chose to specialize in rehabilitation psychology rather than social psychology, with its SPSSI affiliation, she was out of the range of their vision.<sup>402</sup> Ironically, the disability movement, the Americans with Disabilities Act, reasonable accommodation, the universal symbol of access for disability, and countless changes for the better in how

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<sup>402</sup> Miriam Lewin, telephone conversation December 5, 2005.

people with a disability were all influenced by her work. Beatrice Wright, therefore, is one of Lewin's most influential protégée in the field of social issues.

Former Beatrice Wright student Henry McCarthy, now a professor at Louisiana State University, also was concerned about the possibility that her contributions to rehabilitation counseling and rehabilitation psychology were being overlooked. His ongoing interest in what he had learned from her and in making sure his own students would gain a similar appreciation of her ideas intersected with a symposium advertising 'the new paradigm of disability,' presented at the 1999 American Psychological Association convention. He attended the symposium that was to be comprised of new ideas constituting the main elements of a five-year National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) strategic plan. It was a startling experience for McCarthy:

My initial reaction to the presentations at the symposium was that I was not fathoming the real message, because the material seemed second-nature to me, a rather unembellished rendition of what I had learned three decades earlier from reading Beatrice Wright's (1960) book in her introductory course in rehabilitation psychology at the University of Kansas and from further mentoring by her. Eventually, the repeated familiarity of the presented elements of the new paradigm led me to confirm the experience of *déjà vu*. This piqued my curiosity and prompted my investigation concerning this instance of either unwitting or uncredited (re)discovery of existing principles and approaches in the fields of rehabilitation psychology and counseling.<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>403</sup> Henry McCarthy, "The Conceptual Legacy of Beatrice Wright: Capturing Its Manifestations in Contemporary Rehabilitation Research and Practice," unpublished report on NIDRR grant #H133F0440024, November 2007, 4.

In 2004, McCarthy received a Switzer Fellowship from NIDRR to explore the “work of Beatrice Wright as the progenitor of [the] philosophical approach [that] recognizes that the outcomes of disability are not just determined by the characteristics of the disability or the person who has it, but significantly by the forces in the multi-dimensional environment or ecology within which that person lives and operates.”<sup>404</sup>

### **NIDRR Study**

McCarthy conducted three studies in the course of his research over the next three years and corresponded with me about my life history research occurring over the same time frame. He cited my work several times in his report, and I will be citing his over the next few pages.

The first study in McCarthy’s research involved an evaluation of her contributions by a panel of fifteen academics familiar with Beatrice Wright’s work. Beatrice was invited to respond to the survey, which she did. Next, McCarthy used the Web of Science (WOS) to compile citations of her major publications and analyzed the patterns of reference over both time and academic disciplines. Third, he performed a WOS citation analysis on 35 selected rehabilitation textbooks. Finally, McCarthy spent six days in Madison, conducting interviews, enjoying her personal library, accompanying her to various activities at the retirement center, and talking with family and friends. Indeed, my first two days of interviewing Beatrice occurred between his first and second visits,

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<sup>404</sup> McCarthy, 2007, 2.

and Beatrice provided avenues for us to ‘consult with’ each other electronically over the next several years.

The results of McCarthy’s NIDRR research, presented for the first time at the November 9, 2007, meeting of the American Rehabilitation Counseling Association, in Tampa, Florida, indicated that both her ideas and her research are important legacies. The ‘new paradigm’ is in fact a new appreciation of the well-established Beatrice Wright paradigm. Further dissemination of his work will consist of publications in peer-reviewed journals and presentations at various regional, national and international conferences.

#### First Study: Panel Responses

In terms of ideas, the fifteen academics all responded positively to McCarthy’s questions about conceptual notions constructed by Beatrice Wright and indicated that they made use of her ideas in their own teaching and clinical practice. Six categories of Beatrice’s ideas were identified, in the following descending order of frequency.

The *theory of value changes in acceptance of loss/disability* was identified most often, for its attention to the process by which a person can learn to value the assets one still has other than physical soundness. Next noted were her concepts about perceptual tendencies and beliefs that result in devaluation of persons with a disability, beginning with the *spread* of assumptions about the limitations of a physical disability to include every aspect of a person. The *requirement of mourning* before learning to cope and the differing perspectives of an *insider* from an outsider also were noted. Beatrice’s

emphasis on positive aspects and approaches was cited as well, along with her notion that a *fundamental negative bias* toward disability makes being positive a real challenge for everyone involved. On the other hand, learning how to ‘stop the action of the mind’ by focusing on what people with disabilities can do, accentuating how people with disabilities are more similar to than different from people without disabilities, and recognizing the value of hope all encourage supporting the potential of a person with a disability.

The final three elements viewed by these respondents as important contributions included her Lewinian-influenced explanation of environmental influences on the disability experience, how language and labeling can shape understandings of people with disabilities, and recommendations for egalitarian, ethical practice. Each element was assessed as crucial to professionals in the field. Further, some reported considering her value-laden beliefs and principles to be ‘foundational.’ Says one, “I don’t think it is an exaggeration to state that Beatrice Wright was the mother of psychosocial rehabilitation and that she has had a great influence on the disability rights movement.” Another writes, “I think her concepts are quite timeless. We will no doubt continue to add to them, but I don’t believe we will replace them.” Still another references the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR, U.S. Department of Education, <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/nidrr/about.html>) and notes that, “NIDRR’s long range plan certainly reflects ideas that probably should be attributed to

Bea.”<sup>405</sup> All but one of the respondents praised her positive approach to the work of rehabilitation psychology. At the same time, they did point out three general limitations of her work and three categories of recommendations in research and/or education for extending her ideas into the future.

The first limitation identified by McCarthy’s panel was an assessment of gaps in the content or scope of her theory based on (1) her adherence mainly to field theory, when newer theories might also be relevant, (2) her adherence primarily to physical disability, and (3) her emphasis on acquired disability. The next limitation was more an indictment of the environmental and historical factors that have affected the expansion of utilization of her contributions than of her contributions. McCarthy noted that both an evolving acceptance of reasonable accommodations and the dissension between her and her publishers might be involved. In fact, McCarthy speculates, “Her ethical stance of refusing to produce periodic, minimally revised editions of her book to satisfy the publisher’s need to have a more recent publication date no doubt resulted in diminished dissemination of her work over the years.”<sup>406</sup> Finally, respondents noted the difficulty of testing Wright’s concepts empirically [quantitatively].

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<sup>405</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 15-16, 2006, discussing preliminary copies of raw data collected by Dr. Henry McCarthy through e-mail surveys the spring of 2005.

<sup>406</sup> McCarthy, 2007, 18.

While not unduly critical, one respondent did bring up the question of whether Beatrice understood the shift in disability activism from adjusting to a disability to accepting disabilities: “If there is a limitation in Wright’s work, it is that she never imagined people with disabilities feeling that it is acceptable or legitimate to have a disability, never envisioned a kind of civil rights attitude, and never appeared to imagine that the world was not ‘given’ in a way to which people with disabilities had to ‘adjust’ and accommodate.”<sup>407</sup> In fact, Beatrice’s perspective from the beginning had encompassed a much wider form of activism that would make disability rights activism easier: she sought to rehabilitate society.

Panel respondents went on to agree that *extending her work* conceptually, methodologically or ideologically would require both research and education. They suggested conceptual research on passive versus active forms of disability acceptance in adjustment, as well as both personal and professional responses when non-adaptive behaviors followed the assessment that hope no longer is realistic. Also, they noted, longitudinal studies on the “psychological adjustment to . . . interpersonal management of, and . . . environmental impact of disability.”<sup>408</sup> Methodologically speaking, greater intentionality about including her concepts when constructing graduate school curriculum, expanding internships to non-clinical settings, and incorporating such notions

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<sup>407</sup> McCarthy, 2007, 17.

<sup>408</sup> McCarthy, 2007, 19.

as ‘environment’ into the Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) requirements would help to keep professionals aware of her ideas. As for ideological conversations, several felt it is past time to foster rigorous debates about continued applicability of her concepts, whether to promote them as a profession, and to what extent they are compatible with the current politics of disability.

Consistent with her seeking comment and engaging in conversation intended to elevate the level of thinking, Beatrice reacted graciously to McCarthy’s invitation to respond to these expert assessments of her work. After acknowledging their comments, she reminded them that everyone, including herself, must remember to counteract flawed human perceptions by intentionally thinking of constructive views of the rehabilitation process. Then, she went on to offer twenty-two “Suggestions for Extending My Work” that re-stated or built on her long-held beliefs about improving outcomes for people with disabilities. Every suggestion included a recommended action, including the proposal that every person preparing for certification as a rehabilitation professional “be given a list of values that have special significance for rehabilitation . . . At the oral certification examination, candidates could be asked if there are any values that could well be added or omitted and to explain their view, as a way of ensuring serious consideration of values.”<sup>409</sup> One, but certainly not the only, possibility would be the twenty value-laden principles she had offered in her 1983 edition of *Physical Disability*.

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<sup>409</sup> McCarthy, 2007, 24.

Always the teacher, she additionally emphasized the importance of professionals in the rehabilitation field to consider the following:

How do you personally guard against flawed human perception?

What concepts, if any, stimulated your thinking about barriers, in addition to architectural barriers, in your own work setting that impede rehabilitation goals?

What suggestions do you have, or what actions have you taken, to reduce barriers in your own work setting?

Notice that these questions deal with **action** to redress impediments to rehabilitation goals.<sup>410</sup>

#### Second Study: Patterns of Citations in Academic Journals

McCarthy's second study involved a comprehensive survey of the 8700 journals scanned for the Web of Science (WOS) database to arrive at 34 with the word *rehabilitation*, as applied to the human process, in the title; 18 journals with the word *disability* in the title; and 16 journals with the word *counseling* in the title. Another two journals on *rehabilitation* not scanned for WOS were added to the research. The number of citations for Wright were compared with Constantina Safilios-Rothschild, the textbook author deemed most comparable to her. In fact, it had been written that Safilios-Rothschild's publications, "seem destined to join those of Beatrice Wright (1960) as a

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<sup>410</sup> McCarthy, 2007, 22.

classic in the field of physical rehabilitation and medical care.”<sup>411</sup> Results of the WOS database search of citing sources from 1970 on revealed 496 citations for Wright, more than three times the 145 for Safilios-Rothschild.

Moreover, McCarthy found that Wright’s appeal is a broad one, across the years, across disciplines, and across national borders. There were more citations of her 1960 book twenty years after its publication than soon after it was published, and it was cited in more than 200 different periodicals outside the helping professions such as psychology and rehabilitation. The same was true for her 1983 edition, with it being cited 398 times in 165 journals outside the fields of psychology and rehabilitation over the more than twenty years since its publication. And, McCarthy writes, “Researchers from Bar Ilan University in Israel and from Gothenburg University in Sweden each produced 16 articles that cited Wright (1983)—more than authors from any other institution.”<sup>412</sup> It was, McCarthy concluded, an impressive indication of how influential Beatrice’s ideas have been, and continue to be.

### Third Study: Citation in Rehabilitation-Related Textbooks

When examining rehabilitation-related textbooks published between 1962 and 2005, McCarthy similarly found both wide-ranging and long-lasting recognition of her

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<sup>411</sup> McCarthy, 2007, 28, citing Theodor Litman, in *The Sociology and Social Psychology of Disability and Rehabilitation*, by Constantina Safilios-Rothschild (New York: Random House, 1970), ix.

<sup>412</sup> McCarthy, 2007, 28.

conceptual contributions to the field. The most frequently referenced ideas were attitudes about disability, value changes in accepting disability, and adjustment/adaptation to disability. And, her notions of the social construction of disability, of spread, of the requirement of mourning, of the insider-outsider perspectives, of helping and of disability research all were included in rehabilitation-related textbooks. The concept of coping vs. succumbing was judged to be the most readily grasped, in part because she was so realistic about the need people may have for ‘time out’ from a positive framework to deal with the natural frustration that attended adjustment to disability. McCarthy concluded from this study of Beatrice’s influence on rehabilitation-related textbooks that,

... our research analyzing textbook references to the conceptual contributions of Wright confirmed her influence as both trail blazing and continually relevant to the fields of rehabilitation counseling/psychology. The recognition of her legacy within this academic source of knowledge diffusion was shown to be broad, deep, and universally positive. Its breadth was reflected by the diverse concepts that were attributed to her or explained by reference to her publications. It took 45 different keyword categories to represent the topics of the 362 citations of her work that were extracted from the textbooks scanned. The depth was indicated by the number of different publications of hers (n=27) that were cited in textbooks from 1962 to 2005. Finally, her favorable recognition was clear and consistent. Not a single citation discussed a downside or disconfirmation of her numerous propositions and perspectives; only a few questioned the adequacy of the original formulation of the definition or explanation of the many concepts she and her co-authors introduced.<sup>413</sup>

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<sup>413</sup> McCarthy, 2007, 35.

## Discussion of Findings

McCarthy arrived at three conclusions about Beatrice Wright's work that confirm what Dunn and Elliott discovered and my research has shown: her conceptual contributions are "(1) mysteriously under-acknowledged; (2) pervasively infused into disability issues to the point of seeming either not needing attribution or not readily attributable to one person; and (3) increasingly appreciated."<sup>414</sup> When McCarthy asked Beatrice what she made of the first two conclusions, of her work being under-acknowledged and yet so pervasively infused that attribution was affected, she replied:

You ask how I account for that. Well, it's pretty much the culture—anything old is passé. Part of it is computers that lend themselves to resurrecting bibliographies; you can retrieve every reference within a period, so why go back further than two years? There is also the issue of crowding the graduate curriculum with all manner of things that are not conceptually fundamental upon which to build, because there is so much to learn today, or so it appears. For example, the course in history and systems of psychology isn't given anymore. We have an enormous literature, probably ten times more journals in the field than when you [McCarthy] were a graduate student. So how can you read everything? You can't, so you concentrate on a couple of journals and a couple of years. Period. Another thing is the hurly-burly of life today, the pressures on the job and elsewhere, in contrast to forty years ago. So there is not enough time to just sit and think. That is one thing I find with reading some of the literature: it is not thoughtful. There may be an increase in knowledge, but not in understanding.<sup>415</sup>

*There may be an increase in knowledge, but not in understanding.* This is the kind of conversation one has with Beatrice over dinner, or when walking through a

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<sup>414</sup> McCarthy, 2007, 36.

<sup>415</sup> McCarthy, 2007, 38, citing a personal communication from Beatrice Wright, dated June 9, 2005.

farmers' market, or while exercising in her retirement community's wellness center. It is as though she cannot think other than multi-dimensionally, broadly and deeply. She understands, and accepts to a degree, the twin realities of having made her mark in the field and of nevertheless disappearing into the mists of time.

#### Rediscovered by Some

At the same time, she is delighted with the current resurgence of interest in her and her ideas. She did lament a bit about agreeing during a weak moment to write the *Foreword* to a recently published and already favorably reviewed manual on coping with chronic illness and disability. After all, her weakened eyesight requires that she read with a magnifying glass or under the magnifier she has next to her computer. So, going through even a few pages takes considerably more time than it did in the past. Yet, she took seriously her commitment to the editors, and composed a thoughtful essay, reminding readers that,

... sensitization to the pitfalls of flawed human perception allows the professional to shift to a viable coping approach. The goals, to reduce limitations and suffering and to improve the quality of life of the individual, are best served by drawing upon the insider's perspective and active participation, with the support of underlying values.<sup>416</sup>

Though published nearly half a century after appearing in her first book, these premises are as relevant now as they were then. Especially now, as we continue to send troops into wars that promise no end and are producing casualties with long-term injuries

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<sup>416</sup> Beatrix A. Wright, "Foreword," in *Coping with Chronic Illness and Disability: Theoretical, Empirical and Clinical Aspects*, eds. Erin Martz and Hanoch Livneh (NY: Springer Publishing Company, May 2007), xiii.

of the like we've not seen before, we are well-advised to approach issues related to people with disabilities in the manner she suggested.

Another recent recognition includes publication of a 1973 article Beatrice wrote on "Changes in Attitudes Toward People with Handicaps" in the newest edition of a second highly regarded clinical handbook.<sup>417</sup> Her article included a history of how attitudes toward people with disabilities changed in this country between 1948, when the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and 1972. In it, she presciently noted the need to stay alert in protecting any gains realized in that short span of time:

There is no guarantee that the right of each individual to respect and encouragement in the enrichment of his life will increasingly be honored, or that people with handicaps will increasingly have an important voice in influencing conditions that affect their lives. Although we can confirm that the changing attitudes described above are durable insofar as they are regarded as expressions of basic human rights, we must also recognize that they are fragile insofar as they are subject to the vicissitudes of broad-sweeping social and political circumstances. The lives of handicapped people are inextricably a part of a much wider socio-economic-political and ethical society affecting the lives of all people. It is therefore essential for all of us to remain vigilant to protect and extend the hard-won gains of recent decades and be ready to counter undermining forces.<sup>418</sup>

The energy and passion in her text are stirring to read even thirty-five years after their first publication. She's pleased that her words have been given the opportunity to

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<sup>417</sup> Arthur E. Dell Orto and Paul W. Power, *The Psychological and Social Impact of Illness and Disability*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (NY: Springer Publishing Company, 2007): 520-528.

<sup>418</sup> Beatrice A. Wright, "Changes in Attitudes towards People with Handicaps," *Rehabilitation Literature* 34 (1973): 354-357, 368.

speak anew. And, as McCarthy's research demonstrated, citations of her work in textbooks and journals has doubled, and in some cases even tripled, over the past twenty years.<sup>419</sup> She also has been re-discovered as an engaging keynote speaker, serving in that capacity over the past two years at the University of Iowa, the University of Memphis, and the University of Tennessee.

A recent gratifying recognition for Beatrice appeared as a full-page ad inside the back cover of the December 2007 issue of *The American Psychologist*. The APA was announcing its collection of *Essential Historical Books in Psychology* that numbered more than 200 titles now available through that organization. The ad further stated that, "This collection of archival books in psychology once defined and continues to influence the way we conceptualize and experience the world. Books by some of the most influential writers in the field—Maslow, Freud, Hall, Carmichael, and more—are included." A *Sampling of Authors and Titles* included in the collection follows with the likes of Charles Darwin, William James, Fritz Heider and Kurt Lewin, with "Beatrice A. Wright, *Physical Disability: A Psychosocial Approach*, Second Edition" being among the chosen sixteen. She is the only woman listed in the ad. Telephoning to share the news with me, she described 2008 as shaping up to be a very happy new year, indeed.<sup>420</sup> I told

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<sup>419</sup> McCarthy, 2007, 40.

<sup>420</sup> Beatrice Wright telephone call December 19, 2007.

her I thought ‘the boys’ were traveling in good company, and we enjoyed a chuckle at the notion that she’s finally receiving her due.

Of course, Dunn and Elliott already had noted the significance of her book, *Physical Disability*, in their concluding remarks:

The work’s impact and importance go beyond the intellectual and the academic because it helped to shape the clinical orientation of a generation of practitioners. . . . The book and its essential principles continue to be relevant for rehabilitation research and practice. Indeed, the dynamic changes that we see in the general population, in their health concerns, and in the available institutions promoting health and well-being now requires us to reconsider ways to form alliances congruent with Wright’s (1983) value-laden principles that preface her second edition.<sup>421</sup>

These ideas, which “took root” in Iowa<sup>422</sup> nearly seventy years ago, now are foundational to a global understanding of people with disabilities, as well as other groups facing discrimination, and to the tenets of rehabilitation psychology. They, and the lives Beatrice Wright has touched, attest to the lasting impact of her work.

McCarthy concluded his grant report to NIDRR with an observation that many would refer to Beatrice Wright as “mother of rehabilitation psychology.” He acknowledged that the sobriquet sounds more than a bit ‘hokey.’ At the same time, he confessed to thinking that the title was pretty apt. He’d experienced her as such, and “two characteristics associated with motherhood, nurturing and nudging, seem best to capsulize her substance and style. Whether directed to the personal or professional level

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<sup>421</sup> Dunn and Elliott, 187-188.

<sup>422</sup> Wright, *Polskie Forum Psychologiczne*, 99.

of activity, her message is quintessentially positive and encouraging, but always subtly yoked to the observation that we need to keep improving.”<sup>423</sup>

These maternal traits do not outweigh her intellectual capacity, however, for McCarthy also noted that she has generated ideas so complex they cannot be tested and quantified by experienced researchers. By the same token, she has the ability to refine those ideas and communicate them to laypeople and practitioners alike. Therefore, he called her “Theorist and Thinker,” in addition to “Mother.” Beatrice has talked about her preference for a legacy, and it combines all of the traits McCarthy identifies:

I would like to be remembered as someone who tried to direct her scholarly work toward the application of scientific understanding to problems that matter in the lives of people in the real world. As a caution against remaining immersed in interesting problems as such, I offer my students the following reminder: “Don’t get stuck with the problem; move on to the solution.”<sup>424</sup>

### **Feminism**

Beatrice’s experiences have not always been in harmony with second wave feminism; at best her relationship with members of the women’s movement can be described as an uneasy one. She still remembers feeling put off by what she experienced as reverse discrimination being practiced by some women in the KU community in the 1970s:

The feminist movement came in, and I think I told you that though I supported it with my growing awareness of discrimination, basically

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<sup>423</sup> Henry McCarthy, 2007, 42.

<sup>424</sup> Hollingsworth, Johnson, and Cook, 387.

discrimination, and role constriction against women, I didn't go all the way because they didn't take into account discrimination against men. I was aware of how men also were constrained by roles and oppressed by the burdens that they had to endure, if you used the strong word "oppressed." And then, I think I told you of my efforts to get both women and men together for better mutual understanding of each others' issues, and to no avail.

Instead of dividing people into categories, I tend to prefer to blend them into one category, apropos of my discussion with you about who are and who are not the non-disabled? So, too, what I felt uncomfortable with about some in the women's movement was the feeling that they were pitting themselves against the men. And, here I had a loving husband, an adored father, two sons, and a beloved brother. I couldn't accept the feeling of being pitted against the men. And, it wasn't long before I became aware of the constraints men were facing in our society, and I told you about three valiant attempts that unfortunately did not catch on, to influence both the women's movement and a subsequent men's movement. So, I think that was the reason why I never became involved with the women's movement.<sup>425</sup>

The three experiences to which Beatrice refers represent attempts, both before and after moving to Wisconsin in 1995, to bridge what she saw as an unnecessary and unhelpful polarity between the genders. She recounted them during a breakfast conversation on February 15, 2006, in response to an item on the CNN morning news.

One try at engaging with feminists occurred at KU when only women were nominated to serve on the Board of the Women's Center. She argued that the Board would become wiser if some men sympathetic to the cause of women were included on the Board, rather than having women only. Unmoved by her asking, "Hasn't the time come for working together?," they approved the all-woman slate. Another example she

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425 Beatrice Wright interview February 15-16, 2006.

cited was in her Madison church, where women and men had their own interest groups. She asked if one of the men could arrange to have his group invite the women for one meeting, at which each gender would present one issue, not as adversaries but for the purpose of mutual understanding and resolution of resentment. There was no support for her suggestion. Finally, she recalled an unpleasant interaction with feminist activists that occurred in 1999. Invited to speak on women's issues at a retreat for progressive thinkers that had been organized by her son Erik, she again asked, "Hasn't the time come for women and men occasionally to meet together?" She was, in her words, 'jumped on.'

At the same time, Beatrice took sexism seriously and did what she could to address it. She wryly recalls that an exasperating, time-consuming part of revising and expanding her book for its 1983 re-issue was making the language inclusive. Doing so was important to her, however, because of the impact that language has: "after all, sexist language is another example of diminishing one group in favor of another."<sup>426</sup> Beatrice describes how her family of origin provided an excellent example of gender equality: "I grew up in a family where my mother was a partner with my father in working together in their hardware store. That must have been one major influence on me, the idea that women could share in earning a livelihood. Then, when my father became ill, my mother took over."<sup>427</sup>

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<sup>426</sup> Beatrice Wright interview October 11, 2007.

<sup>427</sup> Beatrice Wright interview February 15-16, 2007.

## **Unfinished Work**

As for unfinished work, Beatrice continues daily to address disability issues, as well as to confront ageism. When she visited China in 1988, she went to “The Beijing Medical Research Institute of Health Recovery for the Aged,” at which she interviewed a Council member of the institution and President of the First Social Welfare Service. She noted that the recently opened institution intended for elderly diplomats, their spouses, and retired government officials who lacked children to care for them was barrier-free. Residents could come and go as they wished, and medical care was available. However, she noted, there was a class distinction:

The residents pay a fee, although I was not clear about how much comes from their own pockets. The size and furnishings of the rooms vary according to the amount of fees paid. The rooms for overseas Chinese were especially well furnished. The varied quality of the accommodations is another example of the growing inequity in China.<sup>428</sup>

While visiting another facility in Quanzhou, she noted that caring for the elderly appeared to be integrated into a residential community, a practice she compared to what transpired in her own homeland:

Although in the United States there are instances of integration of people with disabilities within regular apartment and housing complexes, to my knowledge, this does not occur in the case of the frail elderly. What we do have are community programs, such as meals on wheels and ring-a-day, that help people to remain in their own homes, but this is not the same as an integrated care facility. Application of the integration notion would

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<sup>428</sup> Wright, “The Place of People with Disabilities in Chinese Society,” 1988, 14.

require consideration of the feasibility of placing nursing homes within regular apartment and housing complexes.<sup>429</sup>

Beatrice now lives in what she deems ‘the gold standard’ for residential retirement living because of the services offered and the readiness to welcome people living in the general community. Yet, she does not always agree with decisions made by management. Such was the case when apartments on the top three floors of one of the buildings were elegantly refurbished and enlarged in order to appeal to more affluent potential residents. Beatrice objected to setting them apart from other apartments by designating them the “Park Apartments,” believing that highlighting class-elitist distinctions was inconsistent with the mission of the retirement community. Market practices, however, prevailed, and she did not succeed. Nor did she succeed in correcting the omission of a thirteenth floor when floor were numbered 12, 14, and 15, arguing that foolish superstitions ought not be perpetuated. She had been assured that her views would be considered. When attending an open house with Beatrice in October 2007, though, we heard a marketing agent explaining to well-dressed potential residents that the upper floors had amenities the lower floors did not and that the 13<sup>th</sup> floor had been skipped as a floor designation because of its unlucky connotation. She threw up her hands in dismay. But, knowing Beatrice, I suspect they have not heard the last of her suggestions. She is, after all these years and experiences, still the H.A.W. activist who knows a trick or two that few others can replicate.

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<sup>429</sup> Wright, “The Place of People with Disabilities in Chinese Society,” 1988, 21.

## CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSION

### Her Professional Legacy

For nearly two-thirds of a century, Beatrice A. Wright has enjoyed a satisfying professional career in the field of rehabilitation psychology. Her status as the only surviving doctoral student of Kurt Lewin, in addition to being one of only two U.S. female students to receive their doctorates under his tutelage, is noteworthy. No one else still living can provide us with firsthand accounts of what it was like to conduct research with and be taught by him and other giants in the field at that time. As noted earlier, her recollections have been taped and transcribed, and they will be forwarded to her archives when this project is completed.

In some ways, her experiences seem fantastical, more like a collection of special movie effects from *Forrest Gump* that artificially inserted her into documented historical events than a true accounting of what transpired. Yet, Beatrice Wright actually did interact collegially with Margaret Mead about the familial power structure of an Iatmul, and she actually did take part in landmark research about democratic teaching and food eating habits. She also really did participate in Abraham Maslow's preliminary research on a hierarchy of needs and really did audit Carl Rogers' classes as he honed his non-directive counseling techniques. And, she in fact both did work around a state's nonsensical anti-nepotism rules and directly challenged professional peers in the rehabilitation field to remember their heritage of activism by speaking to them from the highest levels of literal and symbolic power.

Henry McCarthy's recent and significant evidence-based research on the impact Beatrice has had on generations of rehabilitation specialists stands on its own, and it amply recognizes her work as a scholar, a researcher and a teacher whose legacy cannot be over-estimated. What it does not do, nor was it intended to do, is to look at her work from the perspective of her gender. That has been the purview of this life history. As noted earlier, Beatrice understood the difference between McCarthy's work and mine when she wrote that, "I . . . think your dissertation will give more attention to my story and contributions as a woman, than e.g., Henry McCarthy's evidence-based report to NIDRR."<sup>430</sup>

Beatrice's gender has influenced, and even determined, the trajectory of her professional life. Being subjected to an academic dean's lecture on how to be a good wife by sacrificing one's education was normative for a woman in the 1940s, and the memory of that disturbing experience has stayed with Beatrice for more than sixty-five years. She wonders what would have happened had she not had such a supportive husband, for she surely was not the only timorous female graduate student to hear that view. Likewise, interrupting one's research to breastfeed a baby or tend to a toddler's needs or adapt to the discomforts of pregnancy was how she and other women of her generation managed to construct a framework for merging their professional and personal lives. Finally, she and other educated, competent women endured years of banishment

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<sup>430</sup> Beatrice Wright October 30, 2007, email correspondence.

from their professional calling through such social and political restrictions as anti-nepotism rules. She has no regrets about marrying and having a family, for husband and children have been her greatest priority. Yet, Beatrice acknowledges that things would have been different had she been a man.

At the same time, as painful as her discriminatory experiences have been, they also have contributed a sense of authenticity to her work. Such gender-based adversities have required Beatrice to adjust to and make the most of things, which in turn has heightened her appreciation of what other marginalized groups experience and of what reasonable accommodations might look like. That she managed to thrive despite such barriers is an important addition to our collective understanding of the past.

Through the course of conducting this research project, it has become clear that one of Beatrice Wright's greatest contributions is her advocacy of the oppressed, most particularly people with disabilities. Her influence on the Disability Rights Movement has been substantial, for her research and theories provided the foundation for subsequent actions, policies, and laws. Because she believes that all people need respect and encouragement, she models acceptance of others through her own behavior, and she offers suggestions about how others can develop a similarly positive approach.

Another impressive contribution is reflected by appreciative former students and others in the field of rehabilitation psychology around the world: she was and is a highly regarded teacher. Henry McCarthy and I agreed in October 2007 that while we may have

been researching her life and words, she was teaching us more than we possibly could have anticipated.

And yet, there is no distinguishing Beatrice the person from Beatrice the professor or mother or wife or friend or psychologist or the individual born more than ninety years ago to devoted parents. Her life has formed her ideas, and her ideas have shaped her life.

### **Research Implications of this Life History**

As a hospital chaplain and clinical pastoral educator, I have spent the past twenty years teaching students to read what we in the profession of institutional ministry call the most sacred text of all: *the living human document*. Doing so requires setting aside, as completely as possible, presuppositions and assumptions about another's life experiences when listening to that person's account, and then entering as fully as possible into what is being shared. Concurrently, however, the threads of other people's stories, complete with contradictions and agreements, must be gathered and then all stories shaped into a narrative ultimately comprised of both communal memories and individual recollections. So it is with this life history, an account that to some will be interesting simply for its content. Yet, the data also can be helpful to others seeking a fuller account of the interplay between Beatrice's life and her work than has been previously available.

Perhaps most significantly, this life history was conducted and completed with Beatrice's supportive cooperation. Therefore, it provides a base of information for future historical reference that is as close to the original source as possible. As both a historical record of one professional woman's accomplishments at a time when women often were

discouraged from achieving what she achieved and as a firsthand account of how rehabilitation psychology came into being as a discrete field, this research may be of interest to researchers in gender studies, the history of rehabilitation psychology and counseling, the disability movement, and pastoral ministry. Beatrice may have had much in common with other women of her time, but she also forged a personal destiny that included a successful marriage, successful parenting, and a successful professional career. Additionally, every effort was made to retain in this life history what might be described as the ‘sound’ of Beatrice’s voice in passages taken from transcribed interviews, so that readers might experience a bit of the vitality she brings into any encounter.

This research also has resulted in several corrections to the current body of knowledge about her and her times. First, a search of primary documents revealed two publications naming Beatrice about which she was unaware. One was an acknowledgment by Kurt Lewin of her contributions to the report on changing food habits research that had been conducted in Iowa.<sup>431</sup> Beatrice was unaware of either the publication or Lewin’s recognition of her contributions until provided her by this researcher in 2005. The other was Beatrice’s discovery that, unbeknown to her, an article she wrote had been published in 1942.<sup>432</sup> It had been an exceptionally busy year for her,

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<sup>431</sup> Lewin, 1943, 36.

<sup>432</sup> Lewin, 1997, 381.

what with living in Ohio, commuting to Iowa to finish her Ph.D., and then moving to Pennsylvania to teach at Swarthmore College while Erik served in the Navy shortly after WWII began. Surprised and delighted when presented with an electronic copy of this article, Beatrice noted that now her C.V. would need to be updated.

Next, seeking to confirm whether another woman was studying with Lewin when Beatrice arrived at the University of Iowa in 1938 led to searching out all of the women Ph.D. graduates from the University of Iowa during the time that Lewin was on staff. Careful examination of acknowledgment pages in the two dozen dissertations completed by those women revealed that only two thanked Kurt Lewin for his guidance: Beatrice Ann Posner Wright and Mary Martha Gordon Thompson. Lewin's later reference to Thompson's work<sup>433</sup> confirmed the likelihood that she also was one of his doctoral students. This information corrects assumptions, based on Lewin's biography,<sup>434</sup> that Beatrice was his only U.S. female doctoral student who earned the Ph.D. and could lead to future research on the essentially unknown Thompson from the time she earned her doctorate in 1940 until she died in 1996.

Another important addition to the current body of knowledge about Beatrice Wright and the field of psychology is recognizing the depth of her contributions to Fritz Heider's *Interpersonal Relations*. Again, careful reading of primary documents, in this

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<sup>433</sup> Lewin, 1997, 375.

<sup>434</sup> Marrow.

case Heider's oral histories, reveals that she did more than assist him in getting his work published: she collaborated in producing yet another groundbreaking book. That is something Heider appeared to have comprehended at the time and even sought to make clear. Given the times, his was a generous and gallant gesture.

A final significant aspect of this life history is that it provides a basis for comparing contemporary responses to veterans injured in combat with the World War II responses to veterans that influenced Beatrice's professional direction. Since 2003, the United States has waged two wars in which combatants are sustaining—and surviving—injuries more devastating than at any other time in recorded history. At the same time, injured veterans and their families report inadequate resources designated for the treatment of wounded combatants unsatisfactory responses to their needs. Passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act and heightened awareness of disability issues means that some things have changed since WWII. Yet, unmet needs and a lack of urgency for meeting them remind us that some things have not changed so much after all. Because it provides a base of reference against which to assess the progress we've made as a nation in meeting the needs of people with a disability, their families, and their communities, her work is as relevant today as it was sixty years ago.

Moreover, the details of how she and others conducted their landmark research provide us with the sense of immediacy that only a 'thick' description can. Beatrice didn't just analyze the grief, anger and bravado of injured young men whose lives had been turned upside-down; she imagined what might make their experiences more

constructive. The *living human documents* whose voices she empowered to make a difference then still speak their truths, through her and this record of her truths, to make a difference now.

### **Her Personal Journey**

A framed, rectangular black and white photo enlarged to 30 inches high by 36 inches wide hangs approximately seven feet up on the wall in Beatrice's kitchen. One cannot enter the room without noticing the happy faces of a man and child looking up at something. The man captured so timelessly in that moment of intimacy and reciprocal love is M. Erik Wright, beloved husband of Beatrice, holding their first-born grandson, also named Erik. Another photo of a youthful, pipe-smoking M. Erik next to an equally youthful Beatrice serves as her computer wallpaper, and his gentle smile photographically graces a number of other locations in her home. He clearly still is a major part of Beatrice's life, not only a memory of the past. Through more than forty years of being a part of her life, he was her "main support and helpmate in meeting our family's needs and in helping me work out ways so that I could continue my work in psychology."<sup>435</sup> She has coped and gone on with her life since his death, but she has not forgotten their years together. Likewise, she misses her parents, her sister, and her twin brother Sidney, who died in May of 2005. She doesn't lose sight of these losses, either, but chooses to make the sadness easier by remembering the good times they shared.

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<sup>435</sup> Heppner, Wright, and Berry, 656.

Beatrice is fond of saying, “You can always do something,” and that, truly, summarizes how she responds to life, whether the circumstance is as daunting as the death of a loved one or as simple as the domestic issue of running out of milk (that’s when she several years ago discovered that breakfast cereal is very tasty in orange juice). Most recently, she has been involved with issues related to her living community, which recently was re-named Capitol Lakes, because of a corporate sale.

All three of her children remain in close contact with Beatrice. Colleen, now a retired psychologist who conducted research on body image and obesity, currently is a recognized artist whose framed prints and photographs adorn Beatrice’s walls. Erik is an internationally acclaimed professor of sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Woody is a biomedical researcher and distinguished professor at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School. Erik’s books are carefully shelved in his mother’s living room, and the highly creative chandelier made by Woody in high school hangs over her dining room table, casting beautifully-shaped shadows onto the ceiling when it’s lighted. Drawings by children and grandchildren are framed and proudly displayed, along with other of their creations because, says Beatrice, the creations of her children activate her endorphins. Out on her tiny deck, the “Driftwood Memorial” from Lawrence perches on the top shelf of an iron *étagère*. While the original bird’s nest had to be replaced by others that have blown away, the driftwood remains and has aged into a smooth, silvery work of natural art.

“I told you we’d have a ball!” That’s the last thing Beatrice recorded on the final audiotape of our interviews on February 16, 2006. While we had two more sessions in 2007 that were crammed with conversation, activities and reminiscences, and while we have continued to correspond and talk through the completion of this dissertation, her remark remains a fitting reminder of the gift of self and sharing she so generously has given me over the course of nearly three years. When this stage of the process is over, we plan to sit in her living room, look out her wall of windows facing the lake, and sip wine to celebrate as I hand-deliver her copy of the bound dissertation that brought us together in 2005. Then, we’ll go to dinner, where we’ll talk a mile a minute about politics, family, and a myriad of other topics.

Yes, Beatrice, we have had a ball, and I thank you.

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## APPENDIX

## Email correspondence

### Account #1

<b>To</b>	<b>From</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>
Beatrice	Sheryl	April 21, 2005	Follow up 4/20 phone conversation
Amy Skinner	Sheryl	April 22, 2005	Courtesy re BW contact
Sheryl	Amy Skinner	April 22, 2005	Thanks but no thanks
Amy Skinner	Sheryl	April 25, 2005	Founders of Rehab Psych
Beatrice	Sheryl	April 29, 2005	Changing Food Habits
Sheryl	Beatrice	May 1, 2005	Food Habits; call me Beatrice
John Thomas	Sheryl	May 2, 2005	Thanks for intro to Beatrice
Beatrice	Sheryl	May 2, 2005	Personal details about self
Sheryl	Beatrice	May 3, 2005	Disclosure of Unitarian belief
Beatrice	Sheryl	June 15, 2005	Follow up about July visit
Sheryl	Beatrice	June 15, 2005	Reservations at guest lodging
Beatrice	Sheryl	June 20, 2005	Flight arrangements for July visit
Sheryl	Beatrice	June 20, 2005	Meet at information desk
Sheryl	Erik Wright	June 20, 2005	Driving directions to BW home
Erik Wright	Sheryl	June 20, 2005	Confirmation of driving directions
Beatrice	Sheryl	June 21, 2005	Follow up
Beatrice	Sheryl	June 29, 2005	Arrival details, cell number
Beatrice	Sheryl	July 12, 2005	Acknowledgement of flowers
Sheryl	Beatrice	July 12, 2005	Request of CV; Barker visit
Beatrice	Sheryl	July 14, 2005	Give love to Barkers; CV attached
Beatrice	Sheryl	July 14, 2005	CV won't print
Beatrice	Sheryl	July 14, 2005	UTMC IS blocking CV
Beatrice	Sheryl	July 14, 2005	Success! Barker visit
Beatrice	Sheryl	July 18, 2005	Follow up of Barker visit
Tom Lewin	Sheryl	July 25, 2005	Request for info about Kurt Lewin
J. Trempala	Sheryl	July 25, 2005	Lewin conference in Poland
Sheryl	J. Trempala	July 26, 2005	Respond after vacation
Sheryl	Beatrice	August 8, 2005	Confirmation of 9/11 visit
Beatrice	Sheryl	August 9, 2005	Update on September visit
Sheryl	Beatrice	August 10, 2005	Request for equipment during visit
Beatrice	Sheryl	August 29, 2005	Follow up on upcoming visit
Beatrice/Lucy	Sheryl	August 29, 2005	Beatrice itinerary; Barker visit
Trempala	Sheryl	September 15, 2005	Lewinianum Presentation (cc BW)
Sheryl	Beatrice	September 16, 2005	Thanks again for K'ville visit
Sheryl	Beatrice	September 18, 2005	Next visit to Madison
Sheryl	Trempala	September 20, 2005	Lewinianum Presentation
Trempala	Sheryl	September 20, 2005	Thanks

Beatrice	Sheryl	September 27, 2005	Pictures from K'ville visit
Sheryl	Beatrice	September 28, 2005	Acknowledge px; October visit
Miriam Lewin	Sheryl	September 29, 2005	Research on Beatrice
Sheryl	Trempala	October 10, 2005	Beatrice email address
Trempala	Sheryl	October 10, 2005	Thanks for info; Beatrice's e-address
Sheryl	M. Lewin	October 19, 2005	Research on Beatrice; ML feminism
M. Lewin	Sheryl	October 25, 2005	Response and requested contact info
M. Lewin	Sheryl	November 11, 2005	Telephone interview questions
M. Lewin	Sheryl	December 12, 2005	Follow up to telephone interview
Beatrice	Sheryl	December 29, 2005	February visit
Sheryl	Beatrice	December 29, 2005	February visit
Beatrice	Sheryl	January 12, 2006	February visit
Sheryl	Beatrice	January 12, 2006	February visit
Beatrice	Sheryl	January 26, 2006	February visit; Father's health
Sheryl	Beatrice	January 26, 2006	February visit accommodations
Beatrice	Sheryl	January 26, 2006	February visit follow up
Sheryl	Beatrice	January 26, 2006	Set up Pat Cautley visit
Beatrice	Sheryl	February 2, 2006	SW request to re-examine dox
Sheryl	Beatrice	February 2, 2006	February visit "Stigma" question
Beatrice	Sheryl	March 13, 2006	Hello; follow up to February visit
Sheryl	Beatrice	March 13, 2006	Deaths of friends; best to Kronick
Sheryl	Beatrice	March 31, 2006	Sending "Intellectual Progeny"
Beatrice	Sheryl	June 6, 2006	Hello after daughter's wedding
Sheryl	Beatrice	June 6, 2006	Next visit; birth of 1 <sup>st</sup> great-grand
Bert Raven	Sheryl	June 15, 2006	BW absence from SPSSI
UK Psych	Sheryl	June 19, 2006	KU Oral histories
Sheryl	UK Psych	June 19, 2006	No oral histories here
Beatrice	Sheryl	June 21, 2006	Copy of PlainViews article
Sheryl	Beatrice	June 23, 2006	Reminder of 'person first'
Beatrice	Sheryl	June 23, 2006	Acknowledgement of language gaffe
Sheryl	Beatrice	June 24, 2006	Ok; take care of self
KU Psych	Sheryl	July 10, 2006	Direction to oral histories
Sheryl	KU Psych	July 10, 2006	Refer to KU Archivist
Sheryl	Beatrice	July 17, 2006	Slow Down and Dance poem
Beatrice	Sheryl	July 18, 2006	Thanks and Raven follow up
Sheryl	Beatrice	July 18, 2006	Shontz 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation
Beatrice	Sheryl	July 18, 2006	Ask Raven about Lewin Award
Sheryl	Beatrice	July 18, 2006	Different direction; sexism
B. Schulte	Sheryl	July 31, 2006	KU chancellor who ended nepotism
K. Deaux	Sheryl	July 31, 2006	SPSSI relationship with Beatrice
Beatrice	Sheryl	July 31, 2006	Sending DVD, Deaux contact
Sheryl	Beatrice	July 31, 2006	Thanks & agree with Deaux contact

Sheryl	Beatrice	August 2, 2006	Henry McCarthy contact info
H. McCarthy	Sheryl	August 2, 2006	Request to see report data
Beatrice	Sheryl	August 2, 2006	Notice of McCarthy contact
Sheryl	K. Deaux	August 3, 2006	Agree to telephone interview
K. Deaux	Sheryl	August 3, 2006	Follow up to telephone conversation
F. Cherry	Sheryl	August 3, 2006	Contact per K. Deaux suggestion
Sheryl	McCarthy	August 4, 2006	Share data; request SW research
Sheryl	Beatrice	August 11, 2006	Receipt of DVD
Sheryl	B. Schulte	August 14, 2006	Oral Histories at KU
B. Schulte	Sheryl	August 15, 2006	Order 3 oral histories
Sheryl	T. Shaw	August 16, 2006	Oral histories on way
Sheryl	F. Cherry	August 16, 2006	Follow up on SPSSI
T. Shaw	Sheryl	August 17, 2006	Thank you
Sheryl	Trempala	August 17, 2006	Lewinianum Program
F. Cherry	Sheryl	August 18, 2006	Thanks; request Raven, SPSSI info
Sheryl	Beatrice	October 26, 2006	SW dad; Woody's illness
Beatrice	Sheryl	October 29, 2006	Response re Woody's diagnosis
Sheryl	Beatrice	December 29, 2006	'Never forget' chain mail
Beatrice	Sheryl	December 29, 2006	Thank you; are you well?
Sheryl	Beatrice	December 29, 2006	Update on Austin visit
Sheryl	Beatrice	January 29, 2007	Cell phone brain damage article
Sheryl	Beatrice	February 7, 2007	Anesthetic link to Alzheimer's
Beatrice	Sheryl	February 7, 2007	Follow up; next visit
Sheryl	Beatrice	February 7, 2007	May visit
Beatrice	Sheryl	April 16, 2007	May visit
Sheryl	Beatrice	April 16, 2007	Confirm May visit
Beatrice	Sheryl	April 16, 2007	May visit details
Sheryl	Beatrice	April 16, 2007	Confirm May visit details
Beatrice	Sheryl	May 2, 2007	Upcoming visit; KU oral history
Sheryl	Beatrice	May 3, 2007	Visit confirmed
Sheryl	Beatrice	May 21, 2007	Congrats on new grandbaby
Sheryl	Beatrice	June 9, 2007	Thanks for pictures
APA	Sheryl	June 12, 2007	Canon of distinguished books
Sheryl	Beatrice	June 12, 2007	Current APA President name
Beatrice	Sheryl	June 14, 2007	Thanks, will be in touch
S. Brehm	Sheryl	June 14, 2007	Canon of distinguished books
Sheryl	S. Brehm	June 14, 2007	Canon of distinguished books
S. Brehm	Sheryl	June 14, 2007	Relay regards to BW; will follow
Beatrice	Sheryl	June 14, 2007	Forward of Brehm response
Sheryl	S. Brehm	June 14, 2007	"Give Beatrice a hug from me!"
Beatrice	Sheryl	June 14, 2007	Relay Brehm sentiments
Sheryl	VandenBos	June 14, 2007	APA distinguished canon mess

VandenBos	Sheryl	June 14, 2007	Request for original 100
Sheryl	S. Brehm	June 14, 2007	Convey regrets to Beatrice
Sheryl	S. Brehm	June 14, 2007	VandenBos in charge of responding
Sheryl	VandenBos	June 14, 2007	SW may not names; file lost
VandenBos	Sheryl	June 14, 2007	Thanks, offer to help reconstruct
Beatrice	Sheryl	June 15, 2007	Forward canon correspondence
Sheryl	H. McCarthy	June 26, 2007	Request for research summary
H. McCarthy	Sheryl	June 26, 2007	Acknowledgement; submit date?
Sheryl	H. McCarthy	June 27, 2007	August 15 deadline
H. McCarthy	Sheryl	June 27, 2007	Confirm August 15 deadline
Sheryl	Beatrice	July 3, 2007	Letter of objection to VandenBos
Beatrice	Sheryl	July 3, 2007	S. Brehm e-address; letter to APA
Sheryl	Beatrice	August 4, 2007	Consult re VandenBos letter
Beatrice	Sheryl	August 7, 2007	Missing file no longer secret
Sheryl	Beatrice	August 8, 2007	DIP Award
Sheryl	Beatrice	August 8, 2007	Receipt of Comps
Beatrice	Sheryl	August 9, 2007	Set up phone conversation
B. Schulte	Sheryl	August 13, 2007	Roger Barker Oral history
B. Major	Sheryl	August 13, 2007	Request for SPSSI info
H. McCarthy	Sheryl	August 20, 2007	Paragraph
H. McCarthy	Sheryl	August 20, 2007	B. Major email
Sheryl	B. Major	September 2, 2007	Response, will help if can
Sheryl	B. Schulte	September 5, 2007	Barker Oral history
Sheryl	I. H. Frieze	September 5, 2007	Beatrice nom for Lewin Award
Sheryl	K. Lafferty	September 13, 2007	Oral histories ready
I.H. Frieze	Sheryl	September 14, 2007	Thanks and nomination
Sheryl	K. Lafferty	September 20, 2007	Review request for permission to use
K. Lafferty	Sheryl	September 20, 2007	Request to use permission
Sheryl	K. Lafferty	September 20, 2007	Archivist permission form
K. Lafferty	Sheryl	September 20, 2007	Citing KU oral histories
Sheryl	K. Lafferty	September 20, 2007	Permission forms
K. Lafferty	Sheryl	September 20, 2007	Faxed permission forms
Sheryl	H. McCarthy	September 22, 2007	Switzer Research Report
H. McCarthy	Sheryl	September 23, 2007	Response
Sheryl	H. McCarthy	September 23, 2007	Next two dox
H. McCarthy	Sheryl	September 24, 2007	Edits
Sheryl	H. McCarthy	September 25, 2007	Abstract and Refs
H. McCarthy	Sheryl	September 27, 2007	Feedback
Sheryl	H. McCarthy	September 28, 2007	Permission to cite
H. McCarthy	Sheryl	September 28, 2007	Bickenbach reference
H. McCarthy	Sheryl	October 1, 2007	Sharing my research on Beatrice
Sheryl	B. Schulte	October 3, 2007	Citing oral histories

B. Schulte	Sheryl	October 3, 2007	Citing oral histories
Sheryl	B. Schulte	October 3, 2007	Credit line when citing oral histories
Sheryl	H. McCarthy	October 5, 2007	Revisions, updates
H. McCarthy	Sheryl	October 5, 2007	UT Culture Corner bib; SPSSI docs
Sheryl	H. McCarthy	October 5, 2007	B. Major paradox
Beatrice	Sheryl	October 6, 2007	Forward of Perlman SPSSI emails
Sheryl	Beatrice	October 19, 2007	Receipt of roses
H. McCarthy	Sheryl	October 25, 2007	Permission to cite unpublished work
Sheryl	Beatrice	October 30, 2007	Receipt of Mangione article
Sheryl	Beatrice	November 4, 2007	Receipt of Perlman & SPSSI info
Sheryl	Beatrice	November 21, 2007	Happy Thanksgiving
Sheryl	Beatrice	December 29, 2007	Fact check; request for MMGT info
Sheryl	Beatrice	December 29, 2007	Marian Radke-Yarrow info
Sheryl	Beatrice	December 30, 2007	Marian Radke-Yarrow Google
Sheryl	Beatrice	December 31, 2007	Response to request for MMGT info
Sheryl	Beatrice	January 8, 2008	American Psychologist back cover
Beatrice	Sheryl	January 8, 2008	Fact check
Sheryl	Beatrice	January 8, 2008	Send questions
Beatrice	Sheryl	January 9, 2008	Questions, January 10 phone call
Sheryl	Beatrice	January 10, 2008	8:00 p.m. ok

Account #2

<u>To</u>	<u>From</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>
Sheryl	H. Spangler	July 12, 2007	Interview about Beatrice research
H. Spangler	Sheryl	July 14, 2007	Agree to telephone interview
Sheryl	H. Spangler	July 16, 2007	Request for photos/date for interview
H. Spangler	Sheryl	July 17, 2007	Photos on way
Sheryl	H. Spangler	July 17, 2007	Spangler phone number
Sheryl	H. Spangler	September 14, 2007	Agree to send copy of publication
D. Perlman	Sheryl	September 21, 2007	SPSSI recognition of Beatrice
Sheryl	D. Perlman	September 25, 2007	Thanks, suggestions
D. Perlman	Sheryl	September 26, 2007	Thanks, request for venues
Sheryl	D. Perlman	October 4, 2007	2008 Annual meeting ideas
Beatrice	Sheryl	October 6, 2007	Forward of Perlman emails
L. Mangione	Sheryl	October 15, 2007	Request for out of print interview
Sheryl	L. Mangione	October 15, 2007	Will send
Sheryl	L. Mangione	October 15, 2007	Out of print article sent
L. Mangione	Sheryl	October 16, 2007	Thanks and update on Beatrice
H. Spangler	Sheryl	October 22, 2007	Request help finding Lewin students

Sheryl	H. Spangler	October 23, 2007	Agree to help; will be in touch
Sheryl	H. Spangler	October 26, 2007	Referral to U of Iowa Alumni Assoc.
H. Spangler	Sheryl	October 26, 2007	How to reach Alumni contact
M. Lillard	Sheryl	October 26, 2007	Alumni Assoc. re Lewin students
Sheryl	M. Lillard	October 26, 2007	Can't release info without names
M. Lillard	Sheryl	October 26, 2007	Don't know names; referral for help?
Sheryl	M. Lillard	October 26, 2007	Rude, capital letter NO
Sheryl	U of Iowa Lib	October 26, 2007	Request Lewin women student info
M. Lillard	Sheryl	October 26, 2007	Apology, won't bother again
D. Ford	Sheryl	October 27, 2007	Request archives Lewin student list
U of Iowa Lib	Sheryl	November 11, 2007	Request 1935-44 Lewin grad names
Sheryl	N. Diederichs	November 12, 2007	No such list; commencement progs?
N. Diederichs	Sheryl	November 12, 2007	Yes; Request 1936-45 programs
Sheryl	N. Diederichs	November 14, 2007	120 pages on way; limit reached
N. Diederichs	Sheryl	November 17, 2007	24 women PhD grads
N. Diederichs	Sheryl	November 18, 2007	Minton Oral histories
Sheryl	N. Diederichs	November 19, 2007	Referral to hire research assistant
Beatrice	Sheryl	November 22, 2007	SPSSI Annual Meeting forms
Sheryl	Beatrice	November 23, 2007	Willingness to try new SPSSI format
Beatrice	Sheryl	November 23, 2007	Theme of SPSSI meeting
Sheryl	Beatrice	November 24, 2007	Focus of possible workshop
Beatrice	Sheryl	November 25, 2007	Fact check on Swarthmore Kohler
Sheryl	Beatrice	November 26, 2007	Fact check; follow up on SPSSI
N. Diederichs	Sheryl	November 26, 2007	B. Thoms contact, hiring assistant
B. Thoms	Sheryl	November 26, 2007	Re hiring a research assistant
Sheryl	B. Thoms	November 26, 2007	Working out details
C. Baldwin	Sheryl	November 26, 2007	Terms of hiring for research
B. Thoms	Sheryl	November 26, 2007	Hiring of C. Baldwin
Beatrice	Sheryl	November 27, 2007	SPSSI 300 word description
C. Baldwin	Sheryl	November 27, 2007	Clarification on research work
Beatrice	Sheryl	December 1, 2007	Fact check on DIP Award
C. Baldwin	Sheryl	December 3, 2007	Clarification on material copies
C. Baldwin	Sheryl	December 6, 2007	Acknowledgment pps ok; archivist?
D. McCartney	Sheryl	December 13, 2007	Lewin female students
Sheryl	D. McCartney	December 13, 2007	Acknowledgement pages all we have
Beatrice	Sheryl	December 14, 2007	Mary Martha Gordon Thompson?
Sheryl	C. Baldwin	January 18, 2008	Wright & Thompson dissertations
Sheryl	C. Baldwin	January 18, 2008	Thompson Obituary information
Sheryl	H. Spangler	February 12, 2008	Draft of article
Sheryl	H. Spangler	February 12, 2008	Request for BW photos
H. Spangler	Sheryl	February 14, 2008	Draft approval, photos

Account #3

<u>To</u>	<u>From</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>
Beatrice	Sheryl	October 15, 2005	Dad's Health Status
Sheryl	Beatrice	October 16, 2005	Keep me posted
H. McCarthy	Sheryl	August 20, 2007	Beatrice research
Sheryl	H. McCarthy	August 25, 2007	Beatrice research
H. McCarthy	Sheryl	August 31, 2007	Bea's intro
Beatrice	Sheryl	September 3, 2007	Lewin Award & October visit
Beatrice	Sheryl	September 21, 2007	October visit
Sheryl	Beatrice	September 22, 2007	October visit

## VITA

Sheryl Lee Wurl is an ordained Unitarian Universalist minister and ACPE certified clinical pastoral educator. She earned a B.S. in Education and an M.S. in Education from Northern State University in Aberdeen, South Dakota, and an M.A. in Pastoral Ministry from the University of San Francisco. She earned the PhD in Education at the University of Tennessee in 2008. Born and raised in South Dakota, she plans to retire near her children and grandchildren (wherever that might be) and continue conducting historical research.