

Chapter 3

The New Psychology in Early 20th Century America

The “new psychology,” so dubbed at the time, was infused with new ideas by a number of the prominent American psychologists at the turn of the century. The most creative and influential of these American psychologists were William James, James Mark Baldwin, James McKeen Cattell, and G. Stanley Hall. These were the pioneers of American functionalism and the mental-testing movement in America, inspired by Darwin's evolutionary theory and by the empirical study of individual differences. On the methodological side, rigorous empirical methods for data gathering and precise quantitative methods for data analysis replaced the more discursive approach of the 19th century. The most valued, but not exclusive, empirical methodology was the laboratory experiment.

Psychology laboratories were first established in American colleges and universities in the final decades of the 19th century by American students returning from their graduate training in Wundt's laboratory in Leipzig (and later, in other German laboratories as well). Wundt's laboratory, its furnishings and the psychological topics investigated there, served as the prototype for these returning Americans, and for the graduate students they subsequently trained in America. However, the American laboratories soon differed from their German prototype and from each other in subject matter and methodology, depending on the ideological inclinations of their founders. Even the psychological clinic, both in academic and psychiatric settings, became a locus for empirical psychological research (Poppstone & McPherson, 1984). Indeed, when the Rutgers Clinic opened in 1929 and with it, the initiation of a graduate program in clinical psychology, it became the first locus for empirical research at Rutgers.

Empirical research quickly became a *sine qua non* in the training of American psychology graduate students in the new psychology, including the requirement that a dissertation be based on an original piece of empirical research. However, when these students joined the professorial ranks in colleges and universities in America, their primary function was usually teaching, not research. Though many did not pursue empirical research as professors, they did infuse the psychology curriculum with “experimental psychology,” which its adherents considered a new scientific discipline.

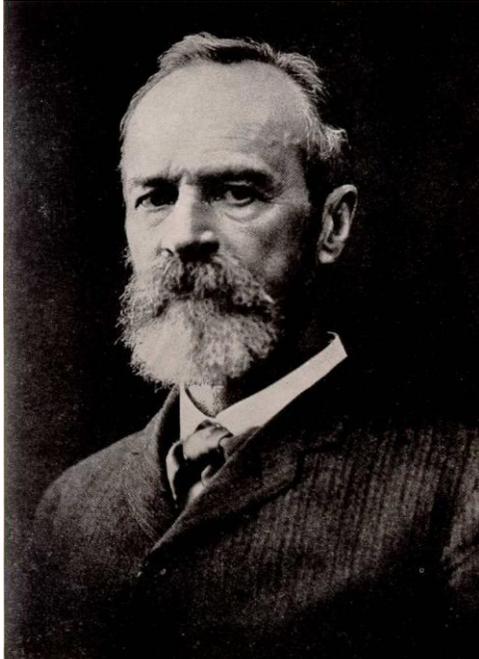
"Institutions" that supported the establishment of psychology as an academic discipline such as national professional organizations and professional journals made their first appearance in the final decades of the 19th century. The first national organization, the American Psychological Association, was founded in 1892. 19th century mental philosophy and psychology certainly had its adherents among some of the charter members of the American Psychological Association. In fact, the first major split in the American Psychological Association was between the experimental psychologists and the philosophers. After about a decade, the philosophers exited the American Psychological Association and formed their own organization (Sokal, 1992). The American Journal of Psychology started publication in 1887, soon followed by other professional journals. American text books, already an established commercial enterprise in this country during the mental-philosophy era, continued to proliferate, now with the more contemporary content of scientific psychology.

Another important institutional support was the establishment of psychology as a separate academic department. The founding of a psychology laboratory often preceded the organizational separation of psychology from philosophy. But psychology as a separate academic department also developed apace, with or without a research laboratory; and graduate students were trained in psychology, with or without a separate psychology department.

The transition at Rutgers

At Rutgers, the transition from mental philosophy to the new psychology and the emergence of psychology as an academic discipline began during the first decade of the 20th century. As already noted in the previous chapter, the first evidence of the new psychology at Rutgers was the listing in the 1904 catalog of William James's (1892) *Psychology, Briefer Course* as one of the texts for mental philosophy. The *Briefer Course* is itself an example of the transition from the old to the new psychology. James opened the text with a definition of psychology's subject matter "as the *description and explanation of states of consciousness as such*. By states of consciousness are meant such things as sensations, desires, emotions, cognitions, reasonings, decisions, volitions, and the like." (pg. 9). This rather static conception of consciousness as a collection of "states" was intended perhaps to make the undergraduate text palatable to many of the psychology professors who, at the turn of the century, were still grounded in the old psychology (Sokal, 1984). However, on the heels of this traditional

definition is James's bold-faced assertion for the new psychology, "**Psychology is to be treated as a natural science** in this book." (pg. 9). The text, itself, was rooted in Darwinian evolutionary theory, with consciousness playing a critical role in the survival of self.



William James

William James of Harvard, was one of the leading figures in the new psychology. His *Psychology, Briefer Course*, based on his classic tome, *Principles of Psychology*, was widely adopted as an undergraduate text for psychology. (From the American Journal of Psychology collection of signed photographs.)

The first listing of a course in "psychology" at Rutgers was in 1906. Also in 1906, the department changed its name from "Logic and Philosophy" to "Logic and Mental Philosophy," reflecting perhaps an increasing emphasis on the psychological component of the department. The 1906 psychology course, titled *Elementary Psychology*, was described in the catalog as follows:

This course is designed to give the student a knowledge of the operations of the mind, with a view to determining their laws, or the essential facts and fundamental laws of the mind. The aim is to make the student acquainted with the normal human mind, showing its dependence upon the nervous system. Emphasis is laid upon the mental processes important to intellect and character. (pg. 58)



William Chamberlain was the first to teach a course in psychology at Rutgers in 1906, replacing the course in mental philosophy. This rather fetching photo of Chamberlain was taken during one of his missions in India for the Dutch Reformed Church. (Photo courtesy of the Rutgers University Archives.)

This course was taught by William Chamberlain (1862-1937), who arrived in 1905 as Collegiate Church Professor of Logic and Mental Philosophy. He was a graduate of Rutgers College (1882) and the New Brunswick Theological Seminary (1886). His career, both before and after his brief tenure (1905-09) as Professor of Logic and Mental Philosophy, was more in missionary work for the Dutch Reformed Church than in academia, although he was also instrumental in founding a college in India and serving as its president.

Although Chamberlain's academic training was grounded in the old psychology, the texts he used were clearly a departure from mental philosophy. In 1906, Chamberlain switched from the James text used the previous year in the mental philosophy course to Halleck's (1895) *Psychology and psychic culture* (and then back to the James text for the Elementary Psychology course in 1908). Halleck's text included the rudiments of the physiology of the nervous system as well as "chapters on the application of psychological laws to the cultivation of the mental powers" (pg.5). Reuben Halleck (Yale, MA), a high-school teacher and principal with considerable teaching experience in psychology, presented the new psychology "in as plain and interesting a manner as possible" (pg.5), a style which may have led to Chamberlain's choice in 1906 of the text for his undergraduates.

Professor Marvin, Rutgers pioneer psychologist



Walter Marvin came to Rutgers in 1909. Under Marvin's leadership psychology gradually established itself as an important academic discipline at Rutgers. Well informed about conceptual and methodological innovations in the new psychology, he continually updated his courses and other pedagogical activities of his department. (Photo courtesy of the Rutgers University Archives.)

The leadership of the Department of Logic and Mental Philosophy was taken over by Walter Marvin (1872-1944) in 1909, following Chamberlain's departure. After receiving a B.A. from Columbia University in 1893, Marvin pursued graduate study in philosophy in Germany, first at Halle with Benno Erdmann (also the advisor of James Angell (1869-1949) — one of the founders of American functionalism), and then Bonn (following Erdmann's move there) where he received his PhD in 1898. The title of his dissertation, *Die Giltigkeit unserer Erkenntnis der objectiven Welt* (The validity of our knowledge of the objective world), suggests a philosophical, rather than an experimental thesis. Still, he was very knowledgeable about the new psychology, and successfully carried a dual identity of philosopher and psychologist throughout his career at Rutgers. He published in philosophical and psychological journals, and was a member of both the American Philosophical Association and the American Psychological Association (Rutgers first member).

Rutgers College entered a period of growth in the first decade of the 20th century, under the leadership of its new president, William Demarest. The expansion of academic programs was more notable in the sciences, in agriculture, and in education than they were in the humanities and social sciences. Graduate courses were offered in departments that had the requisite faculty and resources. The humanities and social sciences generally did not yet have such resources, and continued as one-man departments for almost a decade (McCormick, 1966).

Logic and Mental Philosophy was such a one-man department, and Marvin, as able as he was, could do little to develop a graduate program in his department. Still, during his first dozen years at Rutgers, he single-handedly brought the new psychology to the undergraduate curriculum, while continuing to teach the philosophy courses.

A chronology of his steady efforts for over a decade follows.

1910-11. Marvin offered two courses in psychology, with modern texts and these course descriptions in the college catalog:

Psychology

The purpose of this course is to describe and to explain the common facts of human mental life. The course consists of three parts: a descriptive psychology giving an account of the types of mental states, a physiological psychology describing the structure and function of the nervous system correlated with mental life, and finally a dynamic psychology explaining the chief laws that determine the connection between our sensations, feelings, thoughts, acts. (Thorndike's *Elements of Psychology* and James's *Psychology, Briefer Course*)

The Psychology of Cognition

This course aims to give, at some length, an account of the evolution of intelligence and cognition in the animal race and in man, and, briefly, a study of the psychological factors in the development of science, and an examination of some recent theories of knowledge, especially of pragmatism. The student's reading is discussed in preceptorial conferences. (Hobhouse's *Mind in Evolution*, James's *Principles of Psychology*, Thorndike's *Educational Psychology*, and selections from recent writings of pragmatists)

Marvin also offered two introductory philosophy courses that covered philosophical antecedents of psychology such as the Greeks, Descartes, Leibniz, Royce, Berkeley, Hume, and Spencer.

1912-13. Marvin replaced the course in cognitive psychology with the following *Advanced Course in Psychology*, which now included topics from several fields of psychology:

This course consists of a study of various problems selected from different branches of psychology. It includes the following topics: The evolution of intelligence and cognition in the animal race and in man; some major problems in functional psychology, such as attention, analysis, association, the influence of special training upon general ability, imitation, and fatigue; and a few problems in applied and in social psychology. The student's reading is discussed in preceptorial conferences. (Thorndike's *Animal Intelligence*, James's *Principles of Psychology*, and selected articles and chapters from recent psychological writings.)

In his use of James's *Principles* as a text, Marvin was introducing his students to a more comprehensive and advanced corpus of James's psychology. Marvin's other favorite texts were the works of Edward L. Thorndike (1874-1949). Thorndike is perhaps most well known for his path breaking work on animal learning, described in his *Animal Intelligence*, one of the texts for this advanced course. Thorndike made other notable contributions, including his *Educational psychology*, used by Marvin in his 1910 course on cognition.

1913-15. Marvin expanded the Advanced Course to two semesters. In 1914, he selected the following two topics for the John Parker Winner Memorial Prize in Mental Science:

- (a) Examination upon C. L. Morgan's *Animal Behavior*.
- (b) Subject for Essay: *The Nature of the Imitative Response*.

and for 1915 the topics for the Prize were:

- (a) Examination upon James's *Principles of Psychology* (omitting Chapters 1, 3-8, 15, 20, 28).
- (b) Subject for Essay: *Hypnotism*.

With Marvin's 1914 choice of Morgan's *Animal Behavior* for examination, he was introducing students in psychology to the new objectivism that would soon emerge as a major force in American psychology. Conwy Lloyd Morgan (1852-1936) was one of the pioneers in England in research on animal behavior. His canon, *The Law of Parsimony*, which he enunciated in his book to counter the excesses of anthropomorphizing, continues to be cited in the history of psychology as an influential caveat.

This was the decade in which American behaviorism emerged and soon incorporated research in Pavlovian conditioning into its objectivist methodology--and the non-human animal into the laboratory. Interestingly, psychoanalysis was viewed initially with interest by G. Stanley Hall and other pioneers in America's new psychology, but later cast by experimental psychologists as an antithesis to a scientific psychology.

1917-18. In the 1917-18 catalog, several required groups of courses

are listed for the undergraduate degrees of A.B., Litt. B., and B.Sc., among them a group labeled Philosophy, Psychology, and Education. This is noteworthy in its identification of Psychology as a distinct topic. Also, in the Education department, Professor Elliott now taught a course in Educational Psychology, modern in content and with Thorndike's *Educational Psychology, Briefer Course* as the text, with additional "readings from Thorndike's *Educational Psychology*, three volumes, and from the periodical literature."

On Marvin's urging, Thorndike's test of intelligence was used briefly after the war to appraise the academic potential of incoming freshman, the idea being to use it eventually to select applicants and thereby reduce student attrition, referred to then as "mortality." Marvin also enjoyed a personal/professional relationship with Thorndike, and used him as a consultant in this enterprise. However, the test was never actually used for freshman screening.

In 1918 the department changed its name from Logic and Mental Philosophy to Philosophy and Psychology. The Elementary Psychology course was expanded into two semesters, with its chief subject matter being "the nervous system and its integration, habit formation and its control, individual mental differences and causes and control, and mental hygiene", and for the Advanced Psychology course "a more extended study of subjects selected from those of the elementary course and in addition a study of selected topics from social, applied, and abnormal psychology."

1922-23. The term "behavior" is used for the first time in a course description in the college catalog, reflecting the growing influence of behaviorism in American psychology. The introductory course is described as follows:

Elementary Psychology

An elementary study of human behavior, especially of inborn nature and its control, of habit formation and its control, of individual mental differences, their causes, measurement, and control, and of mental hygiene.

Marvin's primary role at Rutgers was now changing from teaching philosophy and psychology courses to college administration. In 1921, he was appointed Dean of the Faculty, a position that he accepted with some initial reluctance, feeling "that his calling in life was teaching."

Important changes in the organization of the emerging university took place during Marvin's tenure as one of its key administrators. In 1924, the Board of Trustees adopted the title of Rutgers University to encompass its various colleges and schools. With that, the name of Rutgers College was changed to The College of Arts and Sciences. Marvin was the first Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences – also referred to as the men's college – a position he held until his death in 1944. (The College of Arts and Sciences was again called Rutgers College in 1967, and in 1972 became co-ed.)

The women's college and Marvin's successor

In 1918, The New Jersey College for Women was established with Mabel Smith Douglass as its first dean. With Rutgers College as an all male college, the mission of the new college was to meet "a long-existing need and widespread desire in New Jersey" for higher education for women. In its early years, NJC (as New Jersey College for Women was typically abbreviated) relied on Rutgers College faculty to teach its courses.

Marvin was the first professor to teach psychology at NJC. However, the growing demands of his administrative duties meant that he needed to replace himself for the teaching duties at Rutgers College and NJC. The most immediate step he took in 1922 was to hire Sidney Cook (1892-1944).

Cook had an MA from Yale when he arrived at Rutgers. In his letter (4/28/22) to Cook, Marvin offered Cook an appointment as Instructor in Psychology with duties "...entirely in Psychology and entirely undergraduate. The major part of it will be in Rutgers College and a minor part in the College for Women..." In 1926, Cook was promoted to assistant professor and continued to teach at both the men's college and NJC. This arrangement continued until 1929, at which time Cook's appointment was moved to NJC as Head of its Department of Philosophy and Psychology. This appointment at NJC came with a promotion to associate professor. (We take up his career at NJC in the next chapter.)

Cook was a broadly trained psychologist. After his BA from Yale in 1915, he spent a year doing graduate work in experimental psychology at Cornell with Titchener. His graduate work was interrupted with military service in WWI. After the war, he resumed his graduate work at Yale. His major interests also shifted from Titchener's experimental psychology to individual psychology and, especially, to mental measurement. He received an MA at Yale in 1921, a year before he moved to Rutgers College. He

resumed his graduate work at Columbia University while maintaining his teaching responsibilities at Rutgers, and received his PhD from Columbia in 1928. He also obtained sufficient clinical training at the New York State Hospital for the Insane to be appointed in 1924 as School Clinician for New Brunswick's Board of Education.

In a letter (12/17/26) to John Thomas, president of the University, Marvin proposed that Middlesex Hospital in New Brunswick (now Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital) and the University "cooperate in the forming of a psychological clinic. Dr. Rothchild [psychiatrist associated with Middlesex] reports to me that the authorities of the hospital will welcome the establishing under the auspices of the Department of Nervous Diseases, such a psychological clinic. In this psychological clinic the Department of Psychology will be asked to do the mental measuring." Marvin also described in this letter that he and Cook had already been providing a psychological service to the school system in making "psychological measurements" of the children. President Thomas approved of the affiliation with the Hospital (12/20/26), his only hesitation being "expenses which may later be involved, particularly in the time of the members of the Department of Psychology." In his response (12/21/26), Marvin assured the president that the clinic would "cost the University nothing in either time or money....The clinic will be our laboratory in which students are taught to give tests. Hence, the actual testing will be done by students under the direction of an instructor."

When Marvin referred to the "Department of Psychology" in this correspondence he was apparently still referring to a component of the Department of Philosophy and Psychology – Cook essentially – and not to the autonomous psychology department founded two years later in the men's college.

Marvin was also very supportive of Cook's efforts to modernize the psychology curriculum in basic scientific psychology. However, evidence of Cook's special interests in mental testing and in clinical work was also reflected in the course content. They are reflected in the course descriptions that appeared in the 1927-28 catalog:

Elementary Psychology

An introduction to the main problems, principles and laws of psychology. The factors which influence mental adjustment to the environment. Maladjustments and their causes. Heredity, instincts, emotions. Psychiatric studies and the case method are used.

Elementary Psychology (continued)

A further study of the problem of mental adjustment. Analysis of the individual. Intelligence; its causes and measurement. Mental testing. The learning process. Vocational guidance. Practical applications of psychology.

Advanced Psychology

Problems and technique of psychological investigation. Construction and use of apparatus. The use of tests. Reading in special fields. Reports. Essay.

Advanced Psychology (continued)

Special study of some particular field of psychology. Each member of the class will work out a problem under the supervision of the instructor. Clinical studies and field work. Essay.

To cover the philosophy courses, Marvin also needed relief as his administrative duties grew ever more demanding. In 1928, one of Marvin's philosopher colleagues at Columbia, Dr. Thomas Munro, joined the Rutgers faculty, the first year as a visiting associate professor. Munro offered several new philosophy courses, the descriptions of which would clearly bolster a modern, scientific psychology, i.e., Logic and Scientific Methods, Contemporary Philosophy, and Philosophical Issues in Present-day Thought. (Rutgers College 1928-29 catalog.)

Also of note is that Ethics and the Philosophy of Religion, a course taught by Marvin for years was dropped from the philosophy curriculum in 1928. More generally, the courses in religion that identified Rutgers as a Christian college, and other courses designed for students preparing for the ministry were already on the wane following the end of WWI. As Rutgers moved closer to the state for financial support in the 1920's, coupled with a variety of secular pressures, it also severed all ties with the Dutch Reformed Church by amending the charter to eliminate every denominational reference and by no longer requiring that any fraction of the Board of Trustees be members of the Church (McCormick, 1966).

Rutgers growing pains and identity crisis

The decade following the end of WWI were turbulent years for Rutgers as it underwent a transformation from a college to a university. Sharp differences emerged within the leadership of the institution and made this transformation, difficult at best, even more onerous.

A basic conflict was that of the identity of Rutgers. Was Rutgers to retain its traditional foundation as a private school, seeking some necessary

financial support from the state, but retaining its autonomy from state oversight, or was it to be the state's university? The designation for the first time as the State University of New Jersey by the state's legislature in 1917 suggested the latter as Rutgers' identity, while a name change to Rutgers University, authorized in 1924 by the Board of Trustees, implied the other identity. The identity crisis continued when, in 1925, Rutgers new president, John Thomas, though sympathetic to the "traditions of historic Rutgers" announced that the university was to be identified as the State University of New Jersey, in line with its being the land-grant college of the state (McCormick, 1966).

The identity issue, along with problematic financial support on the state of New Jersey for existing academic programs and for continuing growth (a rather conservative state in its support of higher education), continued for the next two decades. The depression and World War II exacerbated the growing pains of the university. It was not until after the war that the identity of Rutgers was resolved, that of the state's leading public institution for higher learning with the name, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.

Another issue that met with sharply contrasting views was the overall organization of the university with its constituent colleges, as well as the internal structure of the various colleges. Just how autonomous were the several colleges to be: the College of Arts and Sciences, New Jersey College for Women (1918), College of Agriculture (1914), College of Engineering (1914)? What role was the faculty to play in the governance of the university? On one side was Leonor Loree, an influential alumnus on the Board of Trustees and a successful business man, who argued that the university was a business and decisions were to be made accordingly, e.g., no small classes, no limits on a faculty member's teaching load, increased use of graduate students to teach courses, etc. (McCormick, 1966). (Sound familiar!) On the other side were the faculty, and an academically oriented president, Demarest. (Dean Marvin played an important role in the deliberation of these and other issues, heading up committees and preparing reports for Board of Trustees.) Finally, there was the question about which colleges and departments were to be favored for growth?

The financial problems that beset the University in the 1920's, occasioned by inadequate support from the state, were likely responsible for Marvin's choice in 1922 of a junior person to replace him in psychology. There is no evidence that Marvin even searched for other possible candidates

when he hired Cook. Psychology also suffered in not being one of the disciplines favored by the University for development in the 1920's. While history, political science, and economics were given several new faculty lines, psychology was staffed by Cook, and occasionally by Marvin. The growth of a modern psychology curriculum, started by Marvin in the previous decade, was temporarily stalled.

To be sure, psychology's presence in the Rutgers curriculum became more salient during the 1920's. In 1925, Psychology was listed separately (from philosophy) as one of the minors, and in 1926 Psychology appears in the curriculum of several majors: business, journalism, pre-legal, education.

Psychology's undergraduate offerings increased dramatically with the establishment of a psychology department in the College of Arts and Sciences in 1928. The establishment of the Psychological Clinic at Rutgers in 1929 and a growing number of psychologists there and in the University also made possible the beginning of graduate work in psychology. We take up these developments in the next chapter.

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