From Séance to Science
The Center for the History of Psychology Series

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From Séance to Science
A History of the Profession of Psychology in America

SECOND EDITION

David B. Baker and Ludy T. Benjamin Jr.

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Preface to the Second Edition

We are pleased to offer a second edition of From Séance to Science: A History of the Profession of Psychology in America. It is been a decade since the first edition was published and much has changed. Interest in the history of professional psychology has grown. A review of the table of contents of the journal History of Psychology over the last 10 years shows a steady presence of articles on topics related to the history of the profession of psychology both in the United States and abroad. Likewise, numerous reference works such as encyclopedias and handbooks have regularly included entries related to the history of professional psychology. As professional psychology grows and matures this trend will only continue. We have benefited from these new works and they have helped inform updates for this edition.

Changes in professional psychology over the last decade have been substantial and dramatic. The number of mental health providers in the United States continues to grow, as do training programs, models of training, accreditation, and licensure. The provisions of the Affordable Care Act, which are just now being implemented, will certainly create greater access to mental health services. Greater numbers of patients seeking services means more opportunity for professional psychologists, but it also means greater competition among mental health service providers. We have updated much of the final chapter of the book to reflect these developments.

The history of professional psychology has a foundation that is now more than a century old. The rapid social changes that are occurring today will influence the role and course of professional psychology in ways that we cannot anticipate. We can be certain that things are likely to look much different by 2024.
We appreciate the encouragement and support of the University of Akron Press. Our thanks to Thomas Bacher, director; Amy Freels, editorial and design coordinator; and Carol Slatter, print manufacturing and digital production coordinator. A special thanks to Lizette Royer Barton, reference archivist at the Center for the History of Psychology for her work in locating and scanning many of the images used in the book.
Preface to the First Edition

This is a book about the professionalization of American psychology, that is, the birth and development of modern psychological practice in the United States from the 19th century to the present. Professional psychology is not a wholly American phenomenon; American psychology has certainly been influenced from abroad. We have chosen, however, to focus on the history of professional psychology in the United States because this geographic boundary makes the task a feasible one. Further, nowhere in the world has the profession been better received.

Too often much of the history of professional psychology is omitted from history of psychology textbooks that focus instead on the history of prescientific (philosophical) psychology and scientific (experimental) psychology. This book is intended to round out the picture of American psychology's past, adding the history of psychological practice to the story of psychological science.

This book tells the story of psychologists who sought and seek to apply the knowledge of their science to the practical problems of the world, whether those problems lie in businesses, schools, families, or in the thoughts, emotions, and behaviors of individuals. Their stories are told in the context of their times, emphasizing the social, political, and disciplinary factors that have shaped the profession. When the science was inadequate or was missing, these practitioners drew on their own observations and experiences, and on the “art” that is part of the practice of professional psychology, to solve those problems. This is the story of individuals, trained in psychology, who function as school psychologists, counseling psycholo-
gists, clinical psychologists, industrial psychologists, and numerous other specialty labels. These are psychology’s practitioners, meaning that they take the knowledge base of psychology and use it for practical purposes outside of the classroom and outside of the laboratory. These are psychology’s professionals, the individuals who comprise the profession of psychology.

What is a profession? Most people would reply to that question, not with a definition but by giving examples of one of several fields such as medicine or law or engineering or, maybe, teaching. Thus doctors, lawyers, engineers, and others are often labeled professionals, not in the sense of professional as contrasted with amateur, but professional connoting some special occupational expertise. The word “profession” emerged in the 12th century, meaning “a business … that one publicly avows.”1 Thus a person professed, or publicly avowed, an interest in a particular business, a profession. Centuries later profession was a word limited to what were called the three “learned professions,” namely theology, law, and medicine. In the 19th century the use of the word broadened to include other vocations, many of which clearly were not professions.

Do all occupations qualify as professions? Is accounting a profession? What about welding? Or hair styling? Consulting a dictionary does not help very much. One dictionary, whose definition is representative, identifies profession as “1. An occupation requiring considerable training and specialized study: the professions of law, medicine, and engineering. 2. The body of qualified persons in an occupation or field: members of the teaching profession.”2 Does accounting require considerable training and specialized study? What about hair styling? It seems that almost any job requires specialized study, so maybe the defining feature is the “considerable training.” So just how much is “considerable”? And is that a defining issue? Most contemporary definitions of professions would consider welding and hair styling to be trades, not professions. There is still more that a profession entails that is not touched upon in the definitions given above. We prefer a more modern definition of profession such as the following:

a calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive preparation including instruction in skills and methods as well as in the scientific, historical, or scholarly principles underlying such skills and

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methods, maintaining by force of organization or concerted opinion high standards of achievement and conduct, and committing its members to continued study and to a kind of work which has for its prime purpose the rendering of a public service. 3

This definition embodies those components that we see as central to the description of a profession: advanced and prolonged preparatory study; high standards for conduct, often defined as a code of ethics; continuing education so that professionals stay current in the latest theories, skills, and treatments; and provision of a service to the public.

So, is psychology a profession? 4 Psychology meets all of those criteria. The field certainly requires considerable training and specialized study. The doctoral degree is considered the minimal level of education and training for the practice of psychology by the American Psychological Association (APA) and by almost all of the 50 states that license the practice of psychology. That degree requires four to six years of graduate study, that is, education beyond the baccalaureate level, and for many professional psychologists includes a full-year internship in a professional setting, such as a hospital or counseling center. For professional psychologists to be licensed there are additional requirements beyond the doctoral degree, which usually include passing an examination administered by the state licensing board and undergoing one or more years of supervised practice, that is, guidance by an already licensed psychologist or psychologists. Most programs that train professional psychologists in the mental health-related fields seek APA accreditation, a stamp of approval that certifies that the doctoral programs meet a minimum standard of quality in education and training. Professional psychologists may seek additional credentials indicating special expertise by meeting the standards of the American Board of Examiners in Professional Psychology (ABPP), which awards diplomas in 12 different specialty areas, such as clinical psychology, industrial/organizational psychology, counseling psychology, school psychology, health psychology, and forensic psychology.

Psychologists subscribe to a code of ethics, in some cases as prescribed by the states in which they practice or, if they are APA members, by the Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct, published by the APA.
and updated most recently in 2010. Many states require, as a condition of relicensure, that psychologists complete a certain number of hours of continuing education, generally by completing workshops on specialized techniques. The APA, through its Education Directorate, coordinates a national program of continuing education for psychologists, reviewing and approving agencies that offer such training.

Finally, psychological practice exists to serve the public by, among other things, providing psychological evaluations and psychotherapy to individuals, families, and groups. Accreditation of doctoral training programs in clinical, counseling, and school psychology, as well as state licensure of practicing psychologists, exists to ensure an acceptable level of training of these professionals for the consuming public.

In summary, practicing psychologists have considerable advanced study and training, they are licensed in all 50 states, they abide by a published code of professional ethics, they keep abreast of new developments in the field through continuing education, and they exist to serve the public. Thus we would state unequivocally that psychology is a profession.

In discussions of the profession of psychology today, its origins are generally assumed to be in the science of psychology that reached American universities in the 1880s. And that is the profession that is the focus of this book. However, there was a profession of psychology that predated the modern one, a profession of the 19th century whose practitioners sought to provide individuals and businesses with many of the same services supplied by professional psychologists today. We will discuss these early American “psychologists” in the opening chapter, where you will learn why ‘getting your head examined’ was big business in the 19th century.

We devote the next four chapters to the four principal professional specialties recognized by the APA in 1981: clinical psychology (chapter 2), school psychology (chapter 3), industrial/organizational psychology (chapter 4), and counseling psychology (chapter 5). As you might imagine, the histories of these fields are interconnected; thus, the specialties are not as clearly differentiated as the labels might make them sound. Some of the history of professional development is common to all four fields. Much of that history is discussed in chapter 2, because it is the first of the specialty chapters to be considered, yet some common material also appears in the
other chapters when it seems more appropriate, or when repetition seems important for clarity.

In 1917, 25 years after the founding of APA, the membership of the association numbered 307. Of that total, only 16 members (about 5%) were engaged primarily in the application of psychology outside of universities. For the first half century of American psychology, those psychologists engaged in college teaching and research outnumbered their colleagues in practice. That picture, however, changed dramatically after World War II. Today it is estimated that there are 174,000 psychologists in the United States. Among that number, approximately 93,000 are employed principally as psychological practitioners.

This story of the development of the psychological profession is both a remarkable and a fascinating one. We follow it to its 21st century present in the concluding chapter, where we describe the development of additional practice specialties and several related professional issues, such as managed care, prescription privileges for psychologists, and practice guidelines.

Professional psychologists today play many roles, working in corporations, hospitals, military services, schools, courtrooms, clinics, counseling centers, prisons, and in independent, also called private, practice. We begin our history in the first chapter with several case studies typical of this work.
Consider the following three case studies. First, a boy in Patterson, New York, was taken by juvenile court authorities to a psychologist for assessment. The psychologist examined him and told the authorities that his test results indicated that the boy had a strong disposition to steal. That information proved crucial to the juvenile justice system because the boy had been caught stealing on several occasions.

Second, there was the case of Harriet Martineau, who suffered from depression. She was socially withdrawn, lacked energy, and often didn’t eat. She had seen several physicians who had prescribed drugs for her treatment, but the depression continued. After five years of unsuccessful treatments, her physician expressed hopelessness that she could ever be cured. On the advice and recommendations of some friends, Martineau went to a psychologist, Spencer Hall. After four months in treatment with Hall, Martineau pronounced herself cured, her energy and zest for life restored.

Finally, there was the case of Charles, whose childhood was an unhappy one. Because of family debts he began work in a factory at the age of 12. Deprived of a formal education, he sought to teach himself. Eventually he obtained a job as a reporter for a small newspaper. Like many young men he was uncertain what he wanted to do in life. A psychologist who examined him said that he had a reflective intellect, had great powers of observation, was a shrewd reasoner, had a considerable mastery of language, and displayed great wit and humor. The psychologist noted that his temperament and talents were well suited to success as a writer.

Each of these vignettes describes actual cases in which psychological services were being used. In the first case, examination of the boy deter-
mined that he was a thief. In the second case, Ms. Martineau was cured of her depression. And finally, a vocational assessment of Charles indicated that he might have success as a writer. Yet, in fact, no psychologists were involved in any of these cases, at least no psychologists as we would define them today, because each of the cases just described took place in the mid-1800s, long before the science of psychology arrived in America.

The “psychologist” in the first case was a phrenologist who measured the bumps on the skull of the young boy to discover that the brain area said to be responsible for “acquisitiveness” was quite large, thus indicating his propensity to steal. In the second case, Ms. Martineau was treated by a mesmerist who used techniques similar to hypnosis to eliminate her depression. Finally, in the third case, Charles’s face was examined by a physiognomist, someone who judged an individual’s personality and intellect based on the person’s facial features, a pseudoscience known as physiognomy. Actually Charles’s face was not examined in person when he was a young man. Instead, the physiognomist studied it from a photograph when Charles was in his 50s and had already written *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, and *Great Expectations*. Thus armed with such knowledge, it was perhaps easy for the individual to predict that Charles Dickens had the temperament and talents to be a successful writer. In the pages that follow, we discuss these pseudoscientific approaches that are part of the history of psychological practice.

This book is a historical account of the development of psychological practice in America, that is, the history of psychology’s evolution as a profession. America is not the only place where a profession of psychology developed, but it is the focused locale of this history, selected in part to make this history a manageable one. It is estimated that there are more than 174,000 psychologists in the United States today and that the great majority of those work in some kind of applied setting, including many in independent practice. There are clinical psychologists, counseling psychologists, school psychologists, industrial/organizational psychologists, forensic psychologists, health psychologists, sport psychologists, educational psychologists, consumer psychologists, engineering psychologists, media psychologists, geropsychologists, community psychologists, and environmental psychologists, to name most of the applied psychology specialties.
Having Your Head Examined: Phrenology

The 21st-century psychological specialties owe their origins, in large part, to the emergence of scientific psychology in the late 19th century. Yet it is clear that many of these practice activities existed in the 19th century, before there were psychological laboratories and scientific psychologists. These early practitioners sometimes used the label “psychologist”; more commonly, however, they were known as phrenologists, physiognomists, characterologists, psychics, mesmerists, mediums, spiritualists, mental healers, seers, graphologists, and advisers. There were no licensing and certification laws at the time, so all who wanted to offer “psychological” services did so and could call themselves anything they wanted.

It is important to grasp the significance of these precursors to modern psychology. Too often the current understanding of psychology’s history is that “there was a science of psychology and it spawned the practice of psychology.” But clearly there was a practice of psychology, if not a profession, long before there was a science. Indeed one can find evidence of psychological interventions dating to the beginnings of recorded history. That there have been individuals throughout human history who sought to treat psychological problems or advise about psychological questions should not be surprising. When there have been human needs, there have been individuals willing to meet those needs. Today we expect professions like medicine, nursing, and psychology to be based on the sciences that underlie those professions. Yet all of those professions existed before there was science. Such services were needed and so individuals offered their potions, their rituals, their laying on of hands, and their advice to bring aid to their clients. Thus the story of the profession of psychology is one that is thousands of years old. For our purposes here, however, we will begin the story in the 19th century.

As we have noted, in the 1800s in America, individuals were engaged in exactly the kinds of psychological activities in which professional psychologists are engaged today. The theories are different and the methods are different, the education and training are different, and there are contemporary laws that regulate psychological practice for protection of the consumer. Yet the practitioners of the 1800s were engaged in the same “helping” activities, trying to assist people to enjoy success, health, and happiness in school, in the workplace, and in everyday life. This chapter