

The other woman

Elizabeth Valentine kicks off our new section on the history of psychology with the fascinating story of Nellie Carey

Sixteen women became members of the British Psychological Society between its foundation in 1901 and the massive expansion of membership in 1919. In the early days women constituted about 15 per cent of the membership, whereas today they are almost 75 per cent. Who were these 16 women? Here is the story of one of them, who graduated a hundred years ago.

Nellie Carey was born in 1886 in Hornsey, London, the daughter of a carpenter and a silk-weaver. In 1905 she entered University College London (UCL), achieving a BSc in psychology in 1908. Following graduation, Carey was employed as a teacher in a London County Council (LCC) elementary school, at a salary of £100 p.a. In 1909 she also re-entered UCL as a research student in experimental psychology, under Charles Spearman's supervision. He introduced her to the Society, to whom she presented three papers, subsequently published in the *British Journal of Psychology* and submitted for a DSc. This work earned Carey the Carpenter Medal, awarded once every three years for a doctoral thesis of exceptional distinction in experimental psychology.

It was worth £20 – a sizeable some of money in those days.

Carey's first study reported on 'An improved colour wheel' (Carey, 1914). Testing colour discrimination in school children using a two-disc colour mixer, she encountered a number of problems, including limited response choice and delay between stimulus presentations. These problems were substantially reduced by using five discs rather than two and employing pegs and spindles in place of screws; the improved apparatus markedly increased judgment reliability.

She went on to publish three papers under the general title, 'Factors in the mental processes of school children'. The first (Carey, 1915a) was on visual and auditory imagery. Carey tested about 150 'lower working class' children aged 7–14 years from LCC schools (at least some of her research was carried out at the school where she was employed as a teacher), on sensory discrimination and memory in different modalities, general ability, and memory for a short story – designed specifically to elicit imagery. Scholastic ability was estimated from school tests and examinations; and teachers rated scholastic intelligence, practical intelligence, painstaking and social status.

Carey took great care to test the reliability and validity of her data, using a variety of methods. Correlations amongst the various measures provided little evidence for imagery types or the value of any objective method of determining them. Neither did the low correlations between imagery and other mental processes lend any support to the function of imagery in 'higher mental processes'. She even suggests that imagery may be detrimental to school studies. As many others have found subsequently, clarity of imagery is unrelated to mental efficacy.

The next two papers, inspired by Spearman's theory of general and specific factors, addressed the issue of factorial structure. The first (Carey, 1915b) employed the same data set with the addition of tests of verbal memory and tactile discrimination. Carey found no evidence for a discrimination factor other than *g* and evidence for only a very small general memory factor. Specific factors were of limited range. Correlations for 15 measures of performance with *g* ranged from .75 for scholastic intelligence to zero for tactile discrimination. Since teachers' estimates of scholastic ability predicted performance in scholastic subjects much better than they did performance on technical subjects, she inferred these latter were relatively independent. A moderate correlation between painstaking and social status suggested that social status is

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dependent on power of application. Given her background, the last two findings may have been of particular interest to Carey.

In the final paper (Carey, 1916), Carey subjected theories of the structure of mental abilities to further test, using examination marks on 10 school subjects for about 500 children. She found evidence for a general factor, a large motor factor (evident in writing, painting and needlework) and a small factor which we might call 'verbal/semantic', evident in composition, reading and spelling tasks. Burt used these data in his 1917 report to the LCC on the distribution and relations of educational abilities.

Carey terminated her registration at UCL mid-session at the end of 1920. She continues to be listed as a

member of the Society up to 1925 but disappears after that. What happened?

One of Carey's fellow research students at UCL was Adolf Wohlge-muth. A native of Berlin, he had emigrated to Britain and ran a sausage-casing business. He entered UCL in 1902, achieving the second BSc honours degree in psychology awarded by the University of London, in 1905. His doctoral research appeared as the first monograph supplement of the *British Journal of Psychology*, a classic on the after-effect of seen movement. According to Flugel (1954), 'he continued work at the college for many years, carrying out research on memory and feeling, and though he was never a member of the staff he was a prominent and influential figure in the Department until his activities were curtailed by an accident during the First World War. He had considerable ability in the construction and use of apparatus and was always willing to "lend a hand"... in this sphere of the Department's activities' (p.25). It seems likely that he helped Carey with the colour wheel. What was this accident during the First World War?

In 1913 Wohlge-muth married his housekeeper, a French widow, Clemence Morrelet. However, the marriage was not a happy one. 'They lived unhappily together and were always quarrelling' (*The Times*, 13 September, 1918, page 2, column F). Wohlge-muth provides a hint, as he confesses in his book: 'The year I was 46 years of age was one of great importance to me, so to speak a new epoch began in my life, and in that year the number twenty-seven played a great rôle. However, as Freud says on a similar occasion, "the details are of too intimate a nature to allow of publication"' (Wohlge-muth, 1923, pp.214–215). Carey was 27 years of age that year. According to *The Times*, in the year of his marriage, Wohlge-muth had taken

a flat in St Pancras because it was near the reading room of the British Museum. Here he was visited by 'Miss X', a woman he had met at UCL, who came there once or twice a week to discuss scientific subjects; but there were no sexual relations with her.

Things came to a head in June 1918. A row ended with Clemence shooting Adolf in the back. She was remanded in custody, proclaiming in court the following day, 'It is all because of the other woman that I did it.' She was under the impression

"Here he was visited by 'Miss X', a woman he had met at UCL...there were no sexual relations"

that her husband was consorting with another woman and was about to leave her for this other woman. The surgeon was unable to remove the

bullet but Adolf recovered sufficiently to attend the trial at the Central Criminal Court in September. Clemence was acquitted on the charges of wounding her husband with intent to murder or to do him grievous bodily harm, but found guilty of unlawful wounding, and sentenced to six months' imprisonment.

There may not have been any sexual relations between Wohlge-muth and 'Miss X' in 1918, but on Christmas Day 1921, a daughter, Joan, was born to Adolf Wohlge-muth and Nellie Carey (having changed her name by deed poll to Wohlge-muth) in West Hampstead. By 1923 the Wohlge-muths had moved to a large Victorian house (now converted into six flats) in Shortlands, near Bromley, Kent. Here, a son, Bryan, was born in 1929.

The Wohlge-muths attended a number of meetings of the Medical Section of the Society, particularly when phobias were the topic of discussion. They were present for Morton Prince's paper "Meaning" and "setting" in relation to pathological states – A theory of phobias' in 1924, for Adolf's own presentation on 'The "synthesis" of an anxiety neurosis' in April the following year (Wohlge-muth, 1925), Anrep's on 'Conditioned

responses and anxiety neurosis' in 1928, Adler's in 1931, and Money-Kyrle's symposium on phobias in June later that year.

They must have been a powerful intellectual partnership, proud of their academic achievements and champions of science. Adolf was highly critical of what he considered to be pseudo-science. In 1924, following claims by Gilbert Murray and Lord Balfour concerning telepathy experiments, he wrote to *The Times* chastising the Society for Psychological Research for not enlisting the help of trained psychologists in investigating telepathic phenomena. In his book on psycho-analysis, he describes the Oedipus complex as a 'ridiculous assumption', stating that psychoanalysis, rather than being, as commonly believed, the royal road to the patient's unconscious is the royal road to the psychoanalyst's unconscious. 'The psychologist aims, as it were, at an aseptic treatment, whilst the psycho-analyst indulges in deliberate infection' (Wohlge-muth, 1923, p.245).

In 1936, following Clemence's death, Adolf and Nellie were finally able to marry – 30 years after they had first met. Six years later, Adolf died at his home, aged 73. Nellie died at the same age, in 1960, at her son's home in Shenfield Green, Essex. Interestingly, he adopted his mother's maiden name as his surname.

I Elizabeth Valentine is Emeritus Professor of Psychology at Royal Holloway, University of London, and an Honorary Research Fellow at UCL. e.valentine@rhul.ac.uk.

Welcome to the page

Historical investigations not only expand our knowledge of the events that have shaped psychology; they are often richly entertaining stories that allow empathetic insights. Knowledge of the history of psychology enables us to make better-informed decisions today.

This new format in *The Psychologist* will be devoted to the promotion of historical exploration and the dissemination of the knowledge thus gained. We are looking for historical studies that reflect on and discuss personalities, events, apparatus, publications or concepts that have influenced the development of any aspect of psychology. Contributions to the page will not be restricted to British psychology and no preference will be accorded to historical insights concerning the Society. Articles which cross international boundaries or reveal common roots will be particularly welcome.

To discuss potential contributions to the 'Looking back' section, e-mail me on j.perks@staffs.ac.uk.

Julie Perks, Associate Editor