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PSYCHOLOGY AMONG THE SAINTS: THE DEVELOPMENT OF BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE AT BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

BRUCE L. BROWN AND MARK K. ALLEN

There was a strong interest in psychology at Brigham Young University at the turn of the century; the third president was a psychologist and a number of distinguished psychologists regularly visited the campus. An outstanding young scholar who was destined to become the only Mormon president of the American Psychological Association started a vigorous academic psychology program in those early years, but he left the university because of a controversy over his teachings. Psychology at Brigham Young University developed little from that time until the 1940s. The 1950s were a time of rapid growth and development, expansion of the faculty, and the establishment of doctoral programs.

From its beginning in 1875, the founding fathers intended Brigham Young University to be a Latter-day Saints (Mormon) parochial school, and its purposes have changed little since then. Although the acquisition of knowledge has always been important in Mormon theology, there has also been a skeptical distrust of secular academics. From the beginnings of Mormonism in New York and Ohio, the establishment of a university had been nearly as important to the Mormon church in building Zion as the construction of the sacred temple. But the Mormons envisioned a university that would rise above the worldliness of the secular universities and develop the soul as well as the intellect. These conflicts and convergences between the worlds of faith and academics have been major themes during the one hundred and thirteen years of Brigham Young University's existence.

THE FOUNDING OF BRIGHAM YOUNG ACADEMY AND THE STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

The first university the Mormons organized in the valleys of the Rocky Mountains was the University of Deseret in 1850, and Brigham Young Academy the second. It was founded as an academy in October of 1875 as a normal school for teacher training under Warren Dusenberry, its principal. In April 1876 Karl G. Maeser was made principal. He had been vice-director of the Budig Institute in Dresden, Bohemia, until 1855 when, as a new convert to Mormonism, he migrated with his family to the Territory of Deseret. In the spring of 1876 he was the sole teacher, with only a class of elementary school students, but the next year other faculty were added and the first class for teacher preparation began.

Psychology appears in the curriculum of 1886-1887 with Milton R. Hardy listed as a special lecturer on psychology and mental hygiene. In 1891 the academy acquired an energetic young Mormon scholar, Benjamin Cluff, who had studied psychology and mathematics at the University of Michigan both as an undergraduate and as a graduate student. Cluff taught psychology courses at the academy from 1891 until he left in 1903.

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Although Maeser had hired Cluff and had encouraged his academic aspirations, he was wary of “eastern” training. He told James F. Brown, who would later teach at Brigham Young University and who was thinking of going east to school:

. . . some of our brightest intellects from among our youth that have gone East have suffered themselves to be swamped by the influences of worldly education and flinging away their divine inheritance having endangered the faith of their fathers. I hold that all the knowledge and learning the world can give us is too dearly paid for the loss of one of these precious souls.¹

This tension between the desire for academic excellence and suspicion of worldly learning was to become a major theme in the development of the university.

In 1892, Maeser became chancellor for the Mormon church education system and Cluff replaced him as principal of the academy. The next year Cluff returned to Michigan and completed his M.A. in psychology in 1894. His title was then changed from “principal” to “president.” John Dewey and George Mead were still at Michigan when Cluff was there in 1894. In his letters to George H. Brimhall and Joseph B. Keeler, his counselors who conducted the academy in his absence, he wrote of his work in psychology:

My psychological work is immense. I thought I knew something of this subject but this course I am now getting shows me my mistake. Professor Mead—a German university graduate—is simply a power as a psychologist. Besides this lecture course I am taking a laboratory course in experimental psychology. When I return we can fix up a room and this line of work can be continued, thus giving to all the teachers its benefits.²

While at Michigan he visited other eastern universities with a letter of introduction from President James B. Angell, and he contacted a number of important figures in psychology. Later, as president of the academy, Cluff engaged prominent scholars to come for summer lectures. In 1897 G. Stanley Hall delivered a series of summer lectures on psychology.

In 1900 Cluff led an expedition to South America. While he was away, Brimhall, who was acting president, completed one of Cluff’s projects, bringing John Dewey to the 1901 summer school for ten lectures on psychology and pedagogy.

Cluff resigned in 1903, but not before he succeeded in getting the status of Brigham Young Academy changed to a university. The teaching of psychology was taken over by Josiah Hickman, who also taught physics and some philosophy. Some psychology courses also were offered by the new president, Brimhall.³ Hickman carried out some experimental work in psychology, including a study on space perception in animals that anticipated research on the visual cliff.⁴ But psychology was not the major focus for Hickman, and Brimhall had little formal training in it. Psychology was relegated to its former position as a course in the department of pedagogy. It was not until the coming of Joseph Peterson that Cluff’s vision of psychology at the university as an experimental science would be realized.

AUSPICIOUS BEGINNINGS

Brimhall shared Cluff’s dream of making Brigham Young into a real university and he continued to recruit the best Latter-day Saint scholars who could be found. During 1907, which was marked by optimism, both the physical facilities and the faculty were expanded. Four of the best trained and most influential faculty came from 1907-1909: Joseph Peterson (Psychology) and his brother Henry (Education) in 1907, Ralph

Chamberlin (Biology) in 1908, and his brother William H. (Philosophy and Psychology) in 1909.

Joseph Peterson came as "Instructor in Psychology," the only Ph.D. on the faculty when he arrived. His doctorate was from the University of Chicago where he had studied under James Rowland Angell and had been assistant to John B. Watson.

Ralph Chamberlain had a Ph.D. (from Cornell), Henry Peterson an M.A. from Harvard, and William H. Chamberlin had received graduate training at Harvard and the Universities of California and Chicago. The four were united in their determination to transform the new college into a full-fledged university. Ralph Chamberlin described the promise and excitement of the campus in 1909:

Conditions were seemingly promising in this institution at that time. It had been chosen for development as a university, to head the Church schools, and to be, in particular, a center of training of leaders and teachers for the other institutions of the system. In line with this policy several well-trained men had already joined the faculty and were developing departments that had attracted students of exceptional earnestness and calibre. It was understood that the policy would be to include in the faculty as rapidly as possible the best scholars in the Church.⁵

Joseph Peterson introduced new courses, broadening the offering to a total of nine courses in general and in experimental psychology. He expanded the library to include such journals as *Psychological Review*, *Psychological Bulletin*, and the *American Journal of Psychology*. He followed up his dissertation research on auditory phenomena⁶ with a series of studies at Brigham Young and was promoted in 1908 to full professor. In a 1909 paper⁷ and again in a 1910 paper⁸ he had a sharp exchange with Titchener on the mediation of combination tones by the middle ear. Peterson and others systematically observed "autokinetic movement" of a light on one of the mountains east of the university, and he later published these observations.⁹

Although by disposition an empirical scientist, he was acutely interested in theory. In those days a dominant topic was the nature of consciousness. Peterson explained that:

. . . consciousness is, after all, the prime object of the study of psychology, but it is taken as a 'given'. It is one of the postulates of psychology as the law of acceleration is of physics. No one attempts to explain gravitation in any ultimate way. How it operates is the question for science, not what it is.¹⁰

Although Peterson had been associated with Watson in his early development of behaviorism, he rejected the two fundamental tenets of behaviorism: atomism and the mechanistic principles of association. He also differed with these beliefs in holding that consciousness is an important and crucial issue in psychology. But his version of consciousness was a sophisticated one, even by current standards. He avoided "mentalism" in his discussion of such things as personality and consciousness:

The naive view that some entity sits behind the eyes somehow and looks out upon the objective world has given way to a more functional conception of personality. . . . Now by personality we mean our total unified experience.¹¹

He went on to explain that the "self" is the sum total of our experiences. His approach was functionalistic, organismic, and Darwinian in that he emphasized the role of behavioral adaptations in the evolution of life. In two papers¹² written specifically to the Mormon scholarly community, Peterson was particularly critical of phrenology (which had been promoted by some members of the faculty) and other pseudo-scientific approaches to the explanation of human behavior.

A CONFLICT OF VISIONS: THE MODERNISM CONTROVERSY

The Petersons and the Chamberlins were popular with the students, and their lectures before the Teachers Association and other campus organizations were well received. William Chamberlin and the Peterson brothers were members of the theology faculty in addition to their academic departmental responsibilities. In their theology classes they sought to reconcile contemporary secular learning with Mormon doctrines. In 1909, the year of the Darwin centennial, Ralph Chamberlin gave a number of addresses in which he sought to demonstrate that the doctrine of evolution, if properly understood, argues for a process of rational creation.¹³

The four men attracted a large following among the students and even many of the faculty. Their theology classes were among the most popular on campus. But their content was contradictory to Mormon doctrine. They were essentially in agreement with the position referred to as "higher criticism,"¹⁴ which held that the Bible is essentially a collection of myths and folklore that evolved over time, with little credence given to such things as the flood, the Red Sea miracle, or the Garden of Eden story.

Many parents, ecclesiastical leaders, and some faculty members viewed these new directions with concern. Some would remember Maeser's 1892 warning about the dangers to the Mormon church school system posed by those who were steeped in the Eastern philosophies. It would be a mistake, though, to suppose that this was simply a case of infiltration by unbelieving scientists and philosophers. In coming to the university all four men avowed their loyalty to the Mormon church and its beliefs and viewed their task as harmonizing secular and spiritual knowledge.

As we shall see, although Joseph Peterson was the first experimental psychologist to leave Brigham Young University under circumstances such as these, he was not the last. There seems to be a zeal among experimental psychologists for their particular scientific *weltanschauung* that does not have survival value in a religious academic institution. It could be of interest to compare the history of psychology at Brigham Young to that of other church-related academic institutions. Undoubtedly this conflict is not unique to Brigham Young.

Horace H. Cummings, the superintendent of the Mormon church school system visited the campus often in 1910 to talk with the faculty and administration in an attempt to calm the situation, but to little avail. President Brimhall also tried to solve the problem with negotiation and was initially supportive of the four faculty members.

Cummings reported to the General Church Board on February 3, 1911, saying that the professors "seem to feel that they have a mission to protect the young from the errors of their parents," that he had warned them "not to press their views with such vigor," and that after the warning the teachers seemed even more "defiant in pushing their beliefs upon the students."¹⁵ On February 11 Joseph and Henry Peterson and Ralph Chamberlin were invited to a hearing in Salt Lake City. The board resolved that the services of the three teachers were to "be dispensed with unless they change their teachings." Some effort was made by Brimhall and others to persuade them to change their position and stay at the university. None did. The three left at the end of that school year while William Chamberlain continued to try to establish psychology as an empirical science, but with what seemed to him to be a withdrawal of administrative support; in 1916 he also left the university.

Joseph Peterson went to the University of Utah but was one of fifteen faculty members who resigned during the "crisis of 1915."¹⁶ From there he went to the Univer-

sity of Minnesota where he became Chairman of the Psychology Department, and then to George Peabody College in Nashville. He published widely on sensory processes and learning theory. In all, he published over a hundred articles in professional journals, and several books, including a classic text on mental testing.¹⁷ In 1934 he was elected president of the American Psychological Association. He gave his presidential address in 1935 on learning theory.¹⁸

THE LEAN YEARS

It was many years, perhaps well into the 1960s, before the Psychology Department attained an academic level comparable to what Peterson had established in his few short years at Brigham Young at the beginning of the century. After William Chamberlin's departure in 1916 psychology was reduced to two courses, and they were moved back to the Department of Education. M. Wilford Poulson began teaching psychology that year, assisting Professors of Education James L. Brown and L. H. Peterson. These were financially austere times at the close of World War I, and the entire university program was cut back substantially.¹⁹

It is one of those interesting turns of events that the next attempt to revive psychology as an experimental science was from President Brimhall's own son, Dean R. Brimhall. He taught intermittently at Brigham Young between 1914 and 1921 while completing an M.A. (1915) and later a Ph.D. (1920) at Columbia. The psychology offering was again expanded, taught by Brimhall, Poulson, and Brown. Unfortunately Brimhall's intention to revive experimental work in psychology did not come to fruition. A year after completing his doctorate he left for an appointment in New York City.²⁰

After Brimhall left psychology was again closely tied to the Department of Education. Hugh M. Woodward, Professor of Education became Chairman of the Psychology Department in 1921. Poulson was a psychologist, but the others teaching the psychology courses (Brown, Woodward, and Ida Smoot Dusenberry) were specialists in education.

Poulson had a B.A. from Brigham Young (1914) and an M.A. from the University of Utah (1919), with additional graduate work at the University of Chicago. Like Joseph Peterson, he was strongly influenced by Harvey Carr at Chicago. Poulson returned from a year at Chicago in 1923 to become Professor of Psychology and chairman of the department.

For the next fourteen years M. Wilford Poulson was the Psychology Department, with some assistance from Ida Smoot Dusenberry. Her primary work was in the Education Department, but she also taught courses in developmental and educational psychology. Poulson had an additional year of graduate work at Berkeley and Stanford in 1939-1940, but never completed a Ph.D. He holds the record for the longest tenure in the department as well as the longest term as chairman. He was primarily a teacher rather than a researcher, but that was not unusual for then the faculty often taught as many as fifteen to twenty credit hours. Mark Allen, one of Poulson's early students, remarked that he "was a man of very high academic standards and his teaching was most rigorous, exacting, and, to some, very stimulating."²¹ Poulson organized the Psychology Club in 1930, and it continued until it was replaced by Psi Chi in 1955. Together with Dr. Arden Frandsen of Utah State Agricultural College he was responsible for organizing the Utah Psychological Association in 1947.

The Psychology Department grew to two full-time members in 1937 when Jack R. Gibb, a former student of Poulson's, arrived with a Ph.D. from Stanford University. Gibb was an excellent teacher and had a strong influence on a number of students dur-

ing his time at Brigham Young. He left in 1946 for Michigan State University. He became heavily involved in National Training Laboratories and the emerging sensitivity training movement. Many of Gibb's friends and former students at Brigham Young were influenced by him, and sensitivity training became a major thrust at the university from the late 1950s to the present. The sensitivity training emphasis on strengthening and improving interpersonal relationships was seen by many as very consonant with the Mormon emphasis on strong families and the doctrines connected with "the building of Zion," a utopian community of peace and brotherly love. Group dynamics and leadership training are areas of major emphasis in the current program in the Psychology Department, and a strong department of organizational behavior has grown from these roots.

THE POSTWAR BOOM

In 1946 Mark K. Allen joined the Psychology Department, with primary responsibility for the university counseling service. The next year, at his request, he was assigned to fulltime teaching. Allen had studied testing under Lewis M. Terman and Maude A. Merrill at Stanford. He also had considerable experience in applied clinical settings, having served as assistant superintendent and psychologist at the Utah State Training School (for the retarded) at American Fork from 1932. Allen had for many years arranged tours of the facility for Poulson's classes, and in later years it grew into a strong practicum for the university's clinical program.

In 1951 Ernest L. Wilkinson became the new president of Brigham Young University and immediately set about making sweeping changes including an aggressive expansion of the physical facilities and a strong emphasis on hiring only Ph.D.s. Poulson was released from the chairmanship of the Psychology Department and Asahel D. Woodruff, an experienced administrator and well-known education professor became temporary head. A year later Mark Allen became acting chairman with the assurance from Wilkinson that "you can never be department chairman unless you get that Ph.D."²² Allen reports that one day when he met the president on the sidewalk he said, "Mark, when are you going to get that damned degree?"²³

In 1952 Robert J. Howell, a new Ph.D. from the University of Utah, joined the psychology faculty. This was the beginning of a time of rapid growth in the university. Enrollments were up and many more staff were needed. By 1955 there were seven Ph.D.s on the psychology faculty with Allen as chairman (having now completed the dissertation at Stanford).

Two years later, the department moved into the newly built Smith Family Living Center, with a statistical laboratory, counseling and observation rooms, and an area for group dynamics research and experiential learning (sensitivity training) classes. By this time group dynamics, sensitivity training, and organizational psychology had become major areas of interest among the social psychologists and a core of a clinical faculty had been assembled to develop a clinical program. This program was approved by the board of trustees on June 28, 1958, and was opened to students in the fall of 1958. Approval came in February 1962 for establishing a clinic, and the clinical program was finally granted accreditation by the American Psychological Association in June 1971.

For a time in the early 1960s the Benjamin Cluff tradition of eminent summer visiting professors was revived. Ernest R. Hilgard came in 1962 and George A. Kelly in 1963.

At Brigham Young the psychology faculty has not been evenly distributed across the areas of emphasis within the field. By far the majority from the early 1950s to the present have been, broadly speaking, either clinical or social psychologists. It was not

until the coming of Paul W. Robinson in 1969 that the department could boast a permanent experimentalist. The five card-carrying experimentalists between Joseph Peterson and Paul Robinson (Robert M. Peterson, 1950-1957; Frank Wilkinson, 1955-1960; Henry Drewes, 1957-1959; D. Chris Anderson, 1965-1968; and H. Kent Merrill, 1966-1969) lasted for only two to seven years each. Clearly, the department has had difficulty in attracting and keeping good experimental psychologists. It was well into the 1970s before experimental psychology (biological, behavioral, and cognitive) became a strong element of the department.

CONCLUDING COMMENT

Almost from Brigham Young's beginning one can observe an ambivalence about behavioral science. There has been a particularly strong interest in psychology at the university, but coupled with a suspicion of the secular doctrines that have dominated the field.

In the early years of the university psychology played a major role. Cluff, the third president, saw experimental work in psychology as basic to the role of a university, and many early distinguished visitors to the campus were psychologists. In addition, experimental psychology was one of the first areas of serious scholarly research at the university, as Joseph Peterson began his pioneering work here.

The Peterson group controversy has in many ways become a culture-defining event for the university, and a theme that has touched many later events. The primary conflict was not between the content of their primary disciplines and Mormon doctrine, but between their religious teachings and the doctrines of the church. But their views on evolution and theology were not unrelated to their training as psychologists, biologists, and philosophers. When it occurred, the conflict had reverberations throughout the Mormon community nationwide. Reference to it could still be found in the addresses of church and university leaders as late as the early 1970s. In some ways it is symptomatic of what is most unique about Brigham Young University.

Perhaps it is not only a historical accident that the university has had a shortage of experimental psychologists over the years. At least three others have, as Peterson did, come to the university only to leave again within a year or two, and for reasons not unrelated to his. There may have been something in the training or temperament of experimental psychologists, especially in the doctrinaire era before the pluralism of the cognitive revolution, that made it difficult for them to adjust to a church-related university, particularly one like Brigham Young with a strong sense of mission and a unity of purpose.

NOTES

1. "Karl G. Maeser to James E. Brown," 30 May 1892, Karl G. Maeser Papers, The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints, Historical Department, Salt Lake City, Utah.
2. "Benjamin Cluff to Joseph B. Keeler and George H. Brimhall," 9 October 1893, Benjamin Cluff Correspondence, Brigham Young University Archives, Provo, Utah.
3. See Mark K. Allen, *The History of Psychology at Brigham Young University* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Psychology Department, 1975), chaps. 3 and 4, for a fuller account of the development of psychology at the university during the Cluff years, including courses taught, texts used, and so on. See also Ernest L. Wilkinson, *Brigham Young University: The First One-Hundred Years* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), vol. 1, pp. 211-329, for a general account of the university during that period.
4. Josiah E. Hickman, "Space Ideas in Lower Animals," *White and Blue* 3 (1900): 86-87.
5. Ralph V. Chamberlin, *Life and Philosophy of W. H. Chamberlin* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret News, 1925), p. 137.

6. Joseph Peterson, "Combination Tones and Other Related Auditory Phenomena," *Psychological Monographs*, 9 (1908): xii + 136 pp.
7. Joseph Peterson, "Titchener on Helmholtz's Explanation of Combination Tones," *Psychological Bulletin* 6 (1909): 397-399.
8. Joseph Peterson, "Do Combination Tones Originate in the Middle Ear?" *Psychological Bulletin* 7 (1910): 169-173.
9. Joseph Peterson, "Some Striking Illusions of Movement of a Single Light on Mountains," *American Journal of Psychology* 28 (1917): 476-485.
10. Joseph Peterson, "Science vs. Pseudo Science," *White and Blue* 13 (1909): 21.
11. Joseph Peterson, "The Meaning and Growth of Personality," *White and Blue* 14 (1911): 225.
12. Peterson, "Science vs. Pseudo Science," p. 21; and "The Blessings of Science and the Evils of Pseudo Science," *Utah Educational Review* 4 (1911): 13-14.
13. Ralph V. Chamberlin, "Darwin Centennial Speech," 12 February 1909, *Ralph V. Chamberlin Papers* (Salt Lake City: Archives of the Utah State Historical Society).
14. Andrew Dickson White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (New York: D. Appleton, 1897); Lyman Abbott, *The Theology of an Evolutionist* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1897); Lyman Abbott, *The Life and Literature of the Ancient Hebrews* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1901); Rudolph Otto, *Life and Ministry of Jesus According to the Historical and Critical Method* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Co., 1908); Thomas Huxley, *Science and the Hebrew Tradition* (New York: D. Appleton, 1914).
15. Minutes of the Historical Department (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints, Historical Department), 3 February 1911.
16. Allen, *The History of Psychology*, pp. 78-83.
17. Joseph Peterson, *Early Conceptions and Tests of Intelligence* (Yonkers, N.Y.: World Book Co., 1925).
18. Joseph Peterson, "Aspects of Learning," *Psychological Review* 42 (1935): 1-27. Joseph Peterson died in 1935. Harvey A. Carr, his mentor, wrote a biographical tribute for him that appeared in *Psychological Bulletin*, 32 (1935): 754. His former student Lyle H. Lanier also wrote a biographical tribute that appeared in the *Psychological Review*, 43 (1936): 1-8. *Psychological Monographs*, of which Peterson had been editor, published an issue in his memory with a complete list of his publications, a biography, and papers in his honor: Lyle H. Lanier, ed., "Peterson Memorial Number," *Psychological Monographs* 50 (1938): v + 237 pp.
19. Wilkinson, *Brigham Young University*, vol. 1, pp. 442-445.
20. Allen, *The History of Psychology*, p. 93.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 121.