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Henry Leland (1923–2013)

Henry Leland, an advocate extraordinaire for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), passed away on his 90th birthday, February 13, 2013, at home with his wife of 34 years, Sherrie Ireland. Henry was a risk taker and change agent. In the 1960s at Parsons State Training School in Kansas, Henry and his colleagues focused on adaptive behavior, with its emphasis on current functioning in real-world environments as a way of assessing and intervening in IDD. This was a radical departure from the medical model and a pivotal concept for education, rehabilitation, and diagnostics.

Leland was born in New York City on February 13, 1923, the son of Ida Miller Leland, a Polish immigrant, and Aaron Sapiro, a son of Lithuanian immigrants. His parents met in a Jewish orphanage in San Francisco, and he was raised in Palo Alto, California, where his political activism took root. Henry often said that his grades were poor because “I didn’t have time for school, there was always an election or a strike.” He worked in a cannery as an undercover union organizer. His university education at San Jose State was interrupted by the draft. Henry served with the 882nd Tank Destroyer unit, which was instrumental in the liberation of the Augsburg concentration camp. He had an epiphany riding in a troop carrier up the Alps at springtime: “If I get home, I need to get into a profession that helps people.”

Henry lived in Paris from 1948 to 1952 and earned a PhD degree in psychology from the Sorbonne. His Lewinian dissertation, “Personality & Political Behavior,” was welcomed because all work by Kurt Lewin was banned during the occupation. The Sorbonne had a profound influence on his development as a psychologist, professor, and clinician. He said, “Thanks to the Sorbonne, I taught from my soul and not from a textbook.” Key professors included the philosopher Merleau-Ponty, Lagache, Wallon, and Zazzo.

Henry was drawn into the field of IDD through work in New York state, where he directed the 1952 to 1953 census of children with IDD. He then worked in institutions for the intellectually disabled from 1954 to 1970 as a clinician and researcher. These institutional experiences led him to become a passionate advocate for community living for all people with intellectual disability. Henry lived through the period of deinstitutionalization and saw the closing of two institutions in the Columbus, Ohio, area—warehouses for thousands of persons with IDD. As a new graduate student in 1972 in my first class with Henry, I was incredulous when Henry said, “We need to tear down institutions brick by brick. They are useless.” I could not imagine his vision, but 25 years later they were gone and his vision was reality.

Henry was deeply connected to his family, friends, and students. He believed in people’s ability to find a niche for themselves and to find ways to succeed, and he infused this confidence into the people around him. This Rousseauian

orientation, combined with his ability to listen carefully and ask just the right question at the right time, fostered initiative and scholarship in his graduate students. Kurt Malkoff echoed many of those students expressing “gratitude for his guidance and mentorship.”

His tenure as a professor in the Department of Psychology at Ohio State University (1970 to 1993) fulfilled a childhood dream of teaching. He was more proud of the 67 PhDs he mentored, from 31 states and countries, than his 66 publications! As Chief of Psychology at the Nisonger Center, he spent decades working on adaptive behavior and play therapy. There, Leland developed an interdisciplinary curriculum for clinical graduate training in IDD, later recognized by the National Registry, and his pioneering research in adaptive behavior led to an internationally used scale.

Henry strongly supported the practice of psychology. He was instrumental in establishing certification for psychologists in the state of Kansas (1967), served on the Ohio Board of Psychology (OPA) from 1995, was its president from 1989 to 1990, and served in the governance of APA. He received numerous state and national awards, including the Edgar Doll Award from Division 33 of the American Psychological Association for outstanding contribution to science and clinical treatment of individuals with IDD.

He was a skilled clinician and developmentalist, and his application of play therapy to affect specific outcomes in children with IDD was far ahead of its time. Henry followed the Boulder model intuitively. He expected, and taught, his graduate students to be excellent clinicians, solid researchers, scholars, and advocates for persons with IDD and their families. He held clinical work in community settings in very high regard, and his students have held major positions in university and state agencies. Some of his protégées include Marilyn Deutsch, Gayle Kranz, Terry Masey, Sally Rogers, Chin Chin Ho, Regina Gunsett, and Daniel Maruzek.

Henry’s legacy is reflected in the current *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.) definition of IDD, in which severity levels are defined by a person’s current adaptive capacities rather than their IQ scores. It is reflected in the fact that many states in the country have no institutions at all for persons with IDD because community living and working are now the standard. It is reflected in the social justice actions supporting persons with IDD in prisons and on death row. It is reflected in the empirically supported and widely accepted practices involving service delivery to young children with IDD and their families through use of play strategies. Claudia Marueno spoke for many when she said, “A great hero is gone.”

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