

## **Carolyn Lewis Attneave (1920-1992)**

Carolyn Attneave, who died on June 22, 1992, was undoubtedly the most well-known psychologist of American Indian background and was internationally renowned for her expertise in cross-cultural topics in counseling and psychotherapy and for her pioneering work to extend family therapy to include the social network of the identified client. *Family Networks: Retribalization and Healing* (1973, coauthored with Ross Speck) is considered the most comprehensive and significant presentation of social network therapy for families. The text has been translated into Spanish, Japanese, Swedish, Dutch, and German.

In 1976, Carolyn served on the Special Panel on Access and Barriers to Mental Health Services and the Special Panel on American Indian Mental Health for the President's Commission on Mental Health. Additionally, she was invited to the White House Conference on Families during Presidents Jimmy Carter's and Ronald Reagan's administrations. Carolyn participated in other important conferences that significantly altered and strengthened graduate training programs in psychology.

Carolyn was descended on her mother's side from the Delaware Indian tribes (specifically Lenni-Lenape) and on her father's side from Scandinavia. Born July 2, 1920, in El Paso, Texas, she vividly and fondly recalled spending her early childhood summers with her maternal grandparents on Delaware tribal lands in eastern Oklahoma so that she would not be too detached from her American Indian heritage. Because of her early experiences of living with her grandparents and her deep abiding sense for her Indian background, she strongly believed that she had an advantage in learning the importance of knowing and respecting diversity. This sensitivity and awareness served her well as she pursued her long and remarkable career in a field that was almost totally nonexistent in American Indian communities prior to the 1950s.

A year after receiving a bachelor's degree in English and theater from Chico State College in California, Carolyn was lured from public school teaching by the community school concept advocated by Stanford University, and, in 1942, she began her graduate work at Stanford University. During this period, her interests began to focus on children in the larger context of family and community. In the early years of World War II, she assisted Stanford faculty in investigating the educational needs of Japanese American families who were interned in relocation centers. After the war, Carolyn returned to Stanford, married a kindred graduate student, Fred Attneave, and moved to the University of Mississippi where her husband had accepted a faculty position. In 1952, Carolyn completed her PhD degree requirements from Stanford.

After seven years of marriage and two children, the couple divorced, and Carolyn moved to Oklahoma as the coordinator of community guidance services for the Oklahoma State Department of Health; the service area included seven American Indian tribes. For the next six years, she closely collaborated with physicians, civic organizations, tribal and federal agencies, tribal leaders, and medicine men and women in providing mental health services to the vast population.

In 1968, Carolyn met Salvador Minichin who invited her to come to the Philadelphia Child Guidance Clinic to work with Jay Haley and Ross Speck on ways to refine retribalization concepts using network therapy as an alternative to hospitalization for schizophrenic patients. After working in Philadelphia, Carolyn moved to Boston in 1969 to assist Fred Dahl in coordinating the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health Public Service Career Program. While in Boston, Carolyn became a founding member of the Boston Indian Council, one of the largest Indian centers in the country. In 1970, she founded, wrote, and edited the *Network of Indian Psychologists*, a newsletter created to exchange information about services available to Indian communities. The subscribers evolved into a formal organization, the Society of Indian Psychologists, which is dedicated to the advancement of psychology in American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

In 1973, Carolyn joined Morten Beiser and Alexander Leighton as a research associate and lecturer in the Department of Behavioral Sciences at the Harvard School of Public Health. She and Beiser conducted a baseline study of the mental health needs, service networks, and utilization patterns in the eight catchment areas of the Indian Health Service. The work produced a nine-volume document and ultimately led to Carolyn's collaboration with Diane Kelso on a National Institute of Mental Health-sponsored project to compile an annotated and computerized bibliography of American Indian and Alaska Native mental health research.

Carolyn spent the last 15 years of her distinguished career at the University of Washington as a professor of psychology and director of the American Indian Studies Program. Her impact on her students and colleagues over the years was immeasurable. She said,

Perhaps my influence, if you want to call it that, has been diffused over a wide area...maybe, in the long run, my widely divergent activities and those of my students have created better chances of survival—like dandelions, not little cultivated plants in a garden.

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Reference:

Teresa D. La Fromboise & Joseph E. Trimble (1996). Obituary of Carolyn Lewis Attneave (1920-1992) [excerpt]. *American Psychologist*, 51, 549.