
Beatrice H. Barrett (1929–2003)

Beatrice Helene Barrett died peacefully at home in Lincoln, Massachusetts, on September 4, 2003. Born in Cincinnati on December 8, 1929, she was the spirited scion of a patrician Cincinnati family. Barrett began her undergraduate career at Smith College but completed it at the University of Arizona (1950), where her precocity and independent thinking won the respect of faculty members in both philosophy and psychology. She received her master's degree in psychology at the University of Kentucky (1952) and her doctorate at Purdue University (1957), where she focused on measurement and clinical assessment. In 1954, she accepted a position in psychiatry at the Indiana University Medical School, where she became chief psychologist of the Children's Outpatient and Consultation Service in 1957. She trained residents in psychiatry and pediatrics while conducting research at the Institute for Psychiatric Research at Indiana University and maintaining a private practice.

At Indiana, Charles Ferster, who had managed B. F. Skinner's pigeon laboratory at Harvard and who later established a laboratory for studying child schizophrenia at the Institute for Psychiatric Research, influenced Barrett. Through Ferster she met Ogden Lindsley and accepted a position with him at the Harvard Medical School Behavior Research Laboratory at Metropolitan State Hospital, cofounded by Lindsley and Skinner. There she learned laboratory human free operant behavior analysis and became part of the pioneering network of operant conditioners at Harvard and Columbia Universities.

Barrett's first published operant conditioning study ("Reduction in Rate of Multiple Tics by Free Operant Conditioning Methods," 1962) demonstrated reduction in clinical symptoms using laboratory apparatus; it was reprinted in seven collections of experimental and applied behavior analysis. At Harvard, clinical assessment and diagnostic prescriptive analysis emerged as a primary driver in her research. In Lindsley's lab, as well as in the Behavior Prosthesis Laboratory, which she founded at the Fernald State School (1963) with grants from the National Institute of Mental Health and the National Association for Retarded Children, she used free operant conditioning procedures and multiple-channel cumulative response recording in longitudinal studies of more than 100 multihandicapped institutional residents. Her more than 35,000 hours of continuously recorded laboratory data included mentally retarded individuals from an enormous range of diagnoses, etiologies, symptoms, IQs, and categories.

Unlike most early operant conditioners who used replication across individuals to derive general principles of behavior, Barrett used laboratory methods to detect individual and group differences in response to standard learning conditions and changes in those conditions. Barrett then used the laboratory data to prescribe clinical and educational interventions. Much of her published work, and many more unpublished analyses, demonstrated the extraordinary sensitivity of response rate measures in conjunction with systematic manipulation of functional components in the contingencies of operant behavior. Those data, and the methods that Barrett developed to analyze and display them, laid the foundation for what she conceptualized as equivalent to a medical laboratory for diagnosis and prescription in the remediation of behavior deficits and excesses.

Barrett was an outspoken proponent of using response rate measures in education and clinical practice. She influenced countless professionals and nonprofessionals through lectures and presentations, activist participation in organizations, and service on editorial boards—often with blunt criticism of the status quo. In the 1960s and 1970s, she was a rare woman in a mostly man's world of experimental science, and she served as a role model for women throughout her career. Many colleagues in behavior analysis acknowledge her as among the most precise and elegant writers in the field. Her meticulously crafted publications remain valuable today for students, researchers, and practitioners.

In addition to her scientific work, Barrett spoke out against glib generalizations and superficial policies. In the 1970s when the normalization principle became a driving force in treatment of the handicapped, she cautioned that deinstitutionalization policies could do more harm than good in the absence of careful measurement and systematic design of environments and instruction for communication of handicapped learners. She championed skill building when many of her colleagues focused on elimination of undesirable behavior. The classroom that she founded adjoining her laboratory was the first of its kind for institutional residents and served along with the laboratory as a point of contact for hundreds of professional visitors, student research projects, and outreach efforts. She was among the first to train parents in behavioral methods and promoted teaching procedures that were revolutionary in their time.

Barrett's pioneering activism won enthusiastic support from parents' organizations, some with their volunteer manual labor, and by the Massachusetts Psychological Association, which awarded her the Ezra Saul Psychological Service Award in 1979. The Standard Celeration Society, home of Precision Teaching, awarded her a Lifetime Contribution Award in 1997 for her contribution to frequency-based research and educational technology. She was a fellow in Divisions 12 and 25 of the American Psychological Association. Barrett was also a member of the Association for Behavior Analysis, the Association for the Advancement of Behavior Therapy, American Association for Mental Deficiency, and a Trustee or Advisor to many organizations.

Her final publication, *The Technology of Teaching Revisited* (2002), is an extraordinary distillation of concepts, history, and future implications. It is available from the Cambridge Center for Behavioral Studies along with her publication list and the proceedings of a 2003 International Association for Behavior Analysis symposium in her honor at www.behavior.org/member_news/readers_room.cfm

Barrett is survived by her brother, Richard Barrett, of Washington, DC. For psychology, her legacy includes funds for the Beatrice H. Barrett Endowed Research Program for Neuro-Operant Relations at the University of North Texas. Beyond psychology, Barrett was deeply involved in and financially supportive of ballet, modern art, and conservation of wildlife and the natural environment.

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