

History of Psychology

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Online First Publication, October 7, 2021. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/hop0000200>

CITATION

Harris, B. (2021, October 7). Eugenics, Social Reform, and Psychology: The Careers of Isabelle Kendig. *History of Psychology*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/hop0000200>

Eugenics, Social Reform, and Psychology: The Careers of Isabelle Kendig

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The psychologist Isabelle Kendig had two careers before earning her doctorate and rising to the position of chief psychologist at St. Elizabeths Hospital in Washington, DC. She began as a eugenic field worker in 1912, focusing on Shutesbury, Massachusetts, where she administered intelligence tests to the locals, collected gossip about their character, and created genealogical charts. When she presented her research to Charles Davenport and other social scientists concerned with social defect, Kendig dissented from eugenics orthodoxy. She was shunned by Davenport, who, in turn, falsified her findings to fit his beliefs. She was then hired by Massachusetts and New Hampshire to survey intellectual disability in each state. Following her work in eugenics, Kendig was briefly a leading figure in feminist and antimilitarist campaigns, including the National Women's Party and the 1924 presidential campaign of Senator Robert La Follette. In 1933, she earned a PhD in clinical psychology from Radcliffe and went on to help guide the field's post-WWII expansion. True to her feminist ideals and with the help of her husband, she juggled marriage, her three careers, and the parenting of four children. She thus serves as a noteworthy member of the second generation of women in psychology in the United States. Using unpublished correspondence between Kendig, her parents, and her future husband, this article offers a rare glimpse of a young feminist struggling to build a career and a life unconstrained by patriarchal norms.

Keywords: eugenics, history of psychology, National Women's Party, Charles Davenport, feminism

In their studies of the second generation of women psychologists, Johnston and Johnson (2008, 2017) identified three ways that those careers differed from the ones of the previous generation (i.e., PhDs conferred before 1904). First, there were more opportunities for women to earn advanced degrees in established graduate programs. Second, there were more chances for women to obtain jobs commensurate with their training. Senior positions in universities, for example, were more open to women. A third feature of the second generation was their greater ability to combine a career with marriage and, perhaps, a family.

None of these achievements came easily. Tenure track academic positions were often denied to a woman by anti-nepotism rules when her husband worked at the same university.

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Portions of this research were presented at meetings of the Eastern Psychological Association and the History of Science Society. I thank Lucia Gill Case for her invaluable help.

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Further, the question of how to combine career, marriage, and family was problematic and was discussed vigorously from the 1920s, through the WWII period, and into the era of second wave feminism (Coontz, 2011; Dresner, 1987; Howes, 1922).

An obvious question for authors of publications such as Johnston and Johnson's (2008, 2017) is what biases might exist in lists of psychologists whose careers they analyzed. One problem with such lists, mostly drawn up by academics, is the greater visibility of those working in universities compared with those employed in clinical settings. The research of the former is more likely to be known to readers of academic journals, and they leave behind students and research collaborators who memorialize their former professors and department colleagues in specialty journals like *American Psychologist* and other prestigious venues. Clinicians may be prominent and help to direct the field, but if they do so outside of academia, they risk being excluded from collections such as that of Johnston and Johnson.¹

Such an overlooked clinician is Isabelle Kendig (1889–1971), known in the 1940s as Head Psychologist at St. Elizabeths Hospital and a leading member of the clinicians guiding the post-WWII field. A life-long feminist, she struggled to combine her work with marriage and family. She began as a eugenic field worker in 1912, studying intellectual disability in families. After marriage and starting a family, she was a political activist in socialist and feminist campaigns. Then, in her 40s she gained a doctorate in clinical psychology and became prominent in that field.

However, because her primary affiliation was always a psychology department in a hospital rather than in a university, and because research was only a small part of her career, she has been largely overlooked by obituary writers and by authors of books surveying women's contributions to psychology. At a national level, she helped to steer psychology in a more clinical direction, but such work does not often receive comparable recognition to basic research in a laboratory. Thus, one could argue for her addition to the histories of women in psychology both because of her unique career path and as a reminder of other notable, but missing, clinicians.

Her significance lies beyond the field of psychology. In each of her three careers, Isabelle Kendig was a noteworthy figure, showing independence of thought, innovative tactics, and a desire to receive credit for her own work. While other women suffered for their feminist views, Kendig managed to survive and prosper—pushing the boundaries of career possibilities for women.²

Thanks to her granddaughter's cache of family letters, it is possible to see how early on, while making the rounds as a field worker, Isabelle discussed with her parents the problems she faced with supervisors who denied her credit for her contributions. Kendig's correspondence also shows her planning with her future husband to maintain separate identities but to coordinate careers. Although a few psychologists of her generation wrote public critiques of the male-centered field of psychology, Kendig's letters illustrate a more private campaign for equality by a young feminist, revealing details rarely, if ever, seen in the history of women in psychology.

¹ Bizarrely, O'Connell and Russo's (1990) survey *Women in Psychology* includes clinicians who were not psychologists (e.g., Karen Horney and Anna Freud), while omitting clinical psychologists such as Isabelle Kendig.

² Although her national role in political causes lasted only a few years and took place before she became a psychologist, this may be as much or more political activism on a national stage than one can find in the background of any contemporary woman psychologist in the United States, which is not to say that other women did not spend more years working for more incremental change in less militant organizations (Ames, 1970; Kessler, 1994).

In addition to her career in psychology, Kendig's work represents a significant footnote in the history of eugenics. Although some secondary sources mention her as a propagandist for degeneracy theory, her fieldwork and writing were more open-minded and critical than that of the stereotypical field worker who passively accepted eugenics dogma (Lovett, 2007; Rafter, 1988; Savo, 2002). And she talked back to Charles Davenport! Revealed in her correspondence is the story of her public dissent from the hereditarian party line at a 1914 conference that Davenport organized, resulting in her being shunned (Kendig, 1914b). In her letters, one can see her independent spirit and resistance to patriarchal scientific authority. Although her dissent has been cited in two sources, its causes and her threat to the eugenics consensus remains unexplored, even though it represents a significant addition to our understanding of the eugenics rank and file (Bix, 1997; English, 2004; Rafter, 1988).

A final reason that Kendig is historically noteworthy is that her career combined enthusiasm for progressive political reform, women's rights, world peace, and the eugenical improvement of society. As historians of science have long noted, eugenics and progressive politics seemed highly compatible to Progressive Era reformers (Gordon, 2002; Harris, 2011; Paul, 2016; Rensing, 2016; Ziegler, 2008). What is rare is seeing this combination of attributes in the biography of a woman in the history of psychology.

Childhood and Education

Isabelle Kendig was born in Chicago in 1889 to Martin Henry Kendig and Clara Jessie Martin (see Figure 1). She grew up in Chicago and was educated at St. Xavier's Academy, a Catholic school. After high school, she attended Cook County Normal School, a teachers college known for its progressive philosophy and connections to Chicago's poor and immigrant populations. She then became an elementary school teacher in the Chicago public schools. In 1910, she enrolled at Oberlin College and graduated in 2 years.

At Oberlin, she made friends, earned money as a waitress, and was inspired by her studies with sociologist Albert B. Wolfe, who taught courses on socialism and social problems. This was an era in which Oberlin had shifted from helping students find personal salvation to finding a calling in movements for social reform (Barnard, 1969). As Wolfe explained in the journal *Religious Education*, schoolwork should prepare students for engagement with the social problems of the day: disease, slums, poverty, and women's second-class status (Catt et al., 1913; Wolfe, 1914). In so doing, a college education should provide a background in economics and political science that could challenge the middle-class world view of most Oberlin students. Colleges should also inculcate a spirit of collectivism rather than individualism. Wolfe explained as follows:

[Students] today have caught something of the social, as contradistinct to the individualist spirit, and they are unwilling to spend four of the best years of life in attaining a purely individual culture. This situation the college must meet. If it meets it rightly, the place of the college in America will be greater than ever; if it does not, there will be a very great loss, not only to the colleges . . . but to the social well being, which should be the colleges' main concern. (Oberlin College, 1907)

In retrospect, these changes in Oberlin's curriculum were well suited to the young Isabelle Kendig. As she remembered 10 years later, she arrived "in the throes of an adolescent religious experience" (Kendig, 1922, p. 5). Apparently, her friendships and her studies with Professor Wolfe did what he had hoped: transformed her "individual, spiritual upheaval into a consciousness of social problems in need of resolution" (Wolfe,

Figure 1
Isabelle Kendig at 9 Years Old



Note. Image courtesy of Lucia Gill Case.

1914, p. 150).³ Here, Kendig was following a pattern that is well documented for late 19th- and early 20th-century psychologists: the religious enthusiasms of their parents' generation were replaced by a devotion to scientific reform of humankind and society.

Eugenic Field Work

When Kendig graduated from Oberlin in 1912, social reformers were embracing the philosophy and methods of eugenics. Although today the eugenics of the pre-WWII era is popularly associated with Nazism, historians have long shown its appeal across the political spectrum (Kevles, 1985; Paul, 1984). In England, for example, Fabian socialists defined *eugenics* as "the science which deals with all influences that improve the inborn qualities of a race; also with those that develop them to the utmost advantage" (Freeden, 1979, p. 646). This required

³ In a reply to a survey of Oberlin graduates circa 1922, Kendig regretted that she did not find former Oberlin students involved "in the big, significant, fundamental movements of [today]—labor, peace, feminism, etc." (Kendig, 1922, p. 6).

Figure 2*Field Workers in Training, Cold Spring Harbor, New York*

Note. Image courtesy of the Image Archive of the American Eugenics Movement (www.eugenicsarchive.org/eugenics/view_image.pl?id=1655).

environmental reforms “not merely to produce fine babies but to ensure the ultimate production of fine adults” (Freeden, 1979, p. 647).⁴

In the United States during this time, young people participated in the eugenics movement as field workers, who were sent to investigate and catalog heredity “defects” in families and communities (Allen, 1986, 2000; Porter, 2018; Rosenberg, 1997). They were trained by biologist Charles Davenport at the summer school he held annually at the Biology Laboratory in Cold Spring Harbor, New York. The vast majority of these field workers were women, who were valued for having greater tact and intuition than their male colleagues (Bix, 1997). Thus, young women were assigned to investigate cases of nonviolent social problems, such as immorality and alcoholism, serving as “field psychiatrists,” in the words of Davenport (Bix, 1997, p. 632; see Figure 2).

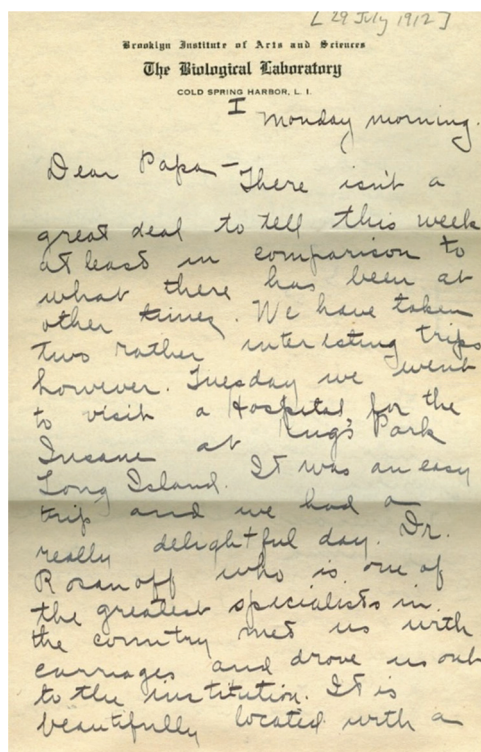
As Nicole Hahn Rafta (1988) noted in her book *White Trash: The Eugenic Family Studies, 1877–1919*, there was a significant power differential between the largely female, minimally credentialed field workers and the male researchers who trained them and used the women’s findings to support their eugenic social philosophy. That was intentional, because the field workers were expected to move on to other pursuits after serving as sociological investigators. Their data were more important than their identities because it served as evidence for the need of state institutions to hire field workers to inspect and inventory those who were considered defectives (Bix, 1997).⁵ This, Davenport knew, would require him to train more field workers, who would generate more data, and the cycle would continue.

⁴ Also, eugenicists were not always promoting the “White race.” See, for example, the neo-Lamarckian, African American eugenics of W. E. B. DuBois (Schuller, 2018).

⁵ The institutions hiring field workers included prisons, regular hospitals, psychiatric hospitals and homes for epileptics and those with intellectual disabilities. Orphanages also hired them to do what today would be the job of social workers: investigating potential foster families.

Figure 3

Isabelle Kendig's Letter Home From Summer School, Discussing Her Job Prospects as a Eugenic Field Worker



Note. Image courtesy of Lucia Gill Case.

Although the individual stories of most field workers remain untold, one young woman whose later career is well-known is Jessie Taft (Rosenberg, 1983), considered the matriarch of modern social work. Taft and Virginia Robinson began as teachers in the Midwest who met in summer school at the University of Chicago in 1908. Four years later, they reunited in New York City while working as researchers on criminality among female prisoners (Fitzpatrick, 1990) under Katherine Davis.⁶ Davis sent them to Davenport's 1912 summer training to learn to investigate families and members of the underclass. After her training at Cold Spring Harbor and work in New York City, Taft returned to the University of Chicago. There, she earned a doctorate and found support of her doubts regarding the usefulness of intelligence tests and simplistic classification schemes for studying social deviance.

In the same summer school class as Jessie Taft was Isabelle Kendig, seven years her junior. Because she had no institution or agency to pay for her training, she borrowed money from her father for her courses. During her studies, she learned that there were more women than positions and that some of her peers had advanced degrees and more experience, putting her at the back of the line for jobs (Kendig, 1912; see Figure 3). Somehow, however, in the

⁶ One of the first women to champion prison reform, going on to become the superintendent of Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in 1901.

fall of 1912 she was hired by Monson State Hospital (formerly called the Massachusetts State Hospital for Epileptics) in Palmer, Massachusetts.

The superintendent of Monson State was Everett Flood, a nationally prominent eugenicist who had recently hosted the second meeting of the Research Committee of the Eugenics Section of the American Breeders Association. At that meeting, a committee was formed—with Flood as a member—to “study and report on the best practical means of cutting off the defective germ-plasm in the American population” (Eugenics Record Office [ERO], 1914, p. 1). His other contribution to eugenics was to sponsor an ERO field worker from the first summer school to investigate the family of an inmate of the hospital. The result was *The Hill Folk: Report on a Rural Community of Heredity Defectives* (Danielson & Davenport, 1912). Its coauthor was Florence Danielson, a Brown University graduate who taught biology to female students at Brown and next collaborated with Davenport on a study of interracial marriage.

At the state hospital, Isabelle Kendig’s position was “eugenicist.” Her day-to-day work was developing “pedigrees” for as many patients as possible by investigating their relatives’ medical histories and psychological qualities. Her most comprehensive work, and the one that won her great acclaim, was a study of one single, extended family. It began when a boy, a ward of the state, was sent to her hospital for observation. Because the administrators lacked the information about relatives needed for commitment papers, Isabelle was sent to the state records office in Boston to investigate. There she learned that he had three sisters, all wards of the state. All three siblings were members, she noted, of the notorious Pratt family of Shutesbury, Massachusetts—a village 25 miles from the hospital (see Figure 4).⁷

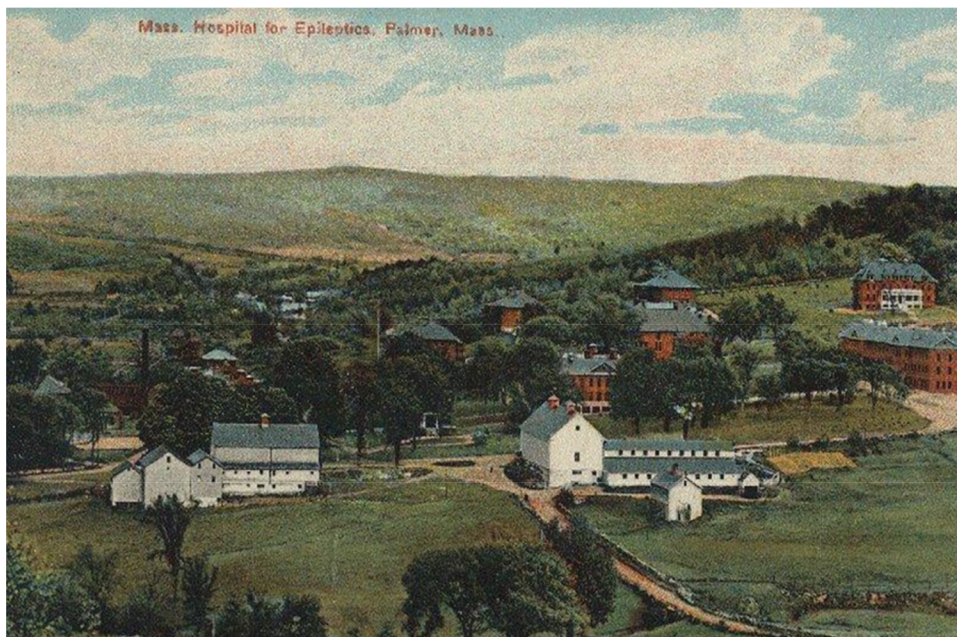
Spending 3 days in Shutesbury and environs, she identified “375 of the boy’s relatives, the majority of whom were reported as alcoholic, immoral and feeble-minded” (Kendig, 1913f, p. 1). To Isabelle and Everett Flood, this family was just the sort of “net-work of degeneracy” that the ERO was created to study and catalog (Kendig, 1913f, p. 1). Unlike her predecessor, she had the time and support to be more thorough in her genealogical research. She would also use the then new Binet test to ensure her assessments conformed to the norms of the burgeoning science of intelligence (Kendig, 1913a; Zenderland, 1998).

The timing of her work seemed excellent. Although eugenic family studies had existed since the 1870s, a new one appeared only every 5 or 10 years until 1912 (Rafter, 1988). In that year, five studies were published, including *The Hill Folk* and Elizabeth Kite’s article, “Two Brothers,” in *The Survey*. As H. H. Goddard had done in *The Kallikak Family*, Kite contrasted two branches of an extended family, one deemed degenerate and one healthy, which she traced back to the early 18th century. New in 1912 was the studies’ emphases on causative factors rather than degeneracy (Zenderland, 1998).

As was typical, Kite’s dysgenic family lived in a rural backwater town, away from positive influence. As Kite explained, the family “lived on a mountain-side [in a hut that was] a hot bed of vice and from its walls has come a race of degenerates.” One finds them as “keepers of houses of prostitution . . . inmates of reformatories and institutions for the feeble-minded . . . criminals of various sorts and . . . feeble-minded not under state protection” (Kite, 1912, p. 1861). Familiar with this literature and its emphasis on rural degeneracy, Isabelle Kendig was understandably pleased to find the Pratts of Shutesbury.⁸ As she commented in a letter to her father, that family seemed part of “the reversal of natural selection. Everyone with any

⁷ Whether Shutesbury deserved its reputation as a den of immorality was debated in the press beginning in the 1880s (Lombardo, 1986).

⁸ Kendig called the family “the Hucks” to preserve their privacy, and perhaps to make them sound less sophisticated and/or intelligent.

Figure 4*The Massachusetts Hospital for Epileptics, Palmer, Massachusetts*

Note. Postcard in private collection. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

initiative moves to the cities, and the degenerates are left to marry endlessly” (Kendig, 1913b; see Figure 5).

From the perspective of only a decade or two later, the idea that a home for people with epilepsy should hire a eugenic investigator would seem misguided. However, eugenicists like Charles Davenport and H. H. Goddard believed that human defects and social ills were inherited and caused by a Mendelian “unit character” (Porter, 2018; Zenderland, 1998). Hereditarian defect could be expressed in diverse forms, such as epilepsy, sexual immorality, or feeble-mindedness, and it would run in families, whose members could be found in poor houses, prisons, and asylums.⁹ Gradually, Isabelle Kendig came to doubt the extreme hereditarian logic of the eugenicists, starting with the concept of unit character.

The Shutesbury Pratts

In June 1913, Kendig reported preliminary results of her work at an ERO conference that Davenport hosted at Cold Spring Harbor, where field workers were allowed to speak (Bix, 1997). She began by explaining that she spent 3 days in Shutesbury, and most of her time there was occupied by studying children related to residents of her hospital. In that work, she

⁹ The flaws in the eugenicists’ logic became increasingly clear to mainstream biologists such as T. H. Morgan, who wrote the following: The pedigrees that have been published showing a long history of social misconduct, crime, alcoholism, debauchery, and venereal diseases are open to the same criticism (i.e., conflating biological and social heredity) from a genetic point of view; for it is obvious that these groups of individuals have lived under demoralizing social conditions that might swamp a family of average persons. It is not surprising that, once begun from whatever cause, the effects may be to a large extent communicated rather than inherited. (Morgan, 1925, pp. 201–202; see also Allen, 2011)

Figure 5*Shutesbury, Massachusetts*

Note. Image courtesy of the Shutesbury Historical Commission.

was “rather horrified” that she could not find the bundle of traits expected to correlate in relatives of adults with epilepsy. “There was no epilepsy, no feeble-mindedness, and no one became insane,” she explained, even when she redoubled her efforts to find these problems (ERO, 1913, p. 45).

More promising was a single family, the Pratts, whose 400 relatives she found while working parttime because of her other responsibilities. “I have a drawer filled with data cards on the Pratts,” she announced, proposing to study the Shutesbury Pratts and their relatives that summer. She hoped to use intelligence tests to see if feeble-mindedness, one of the “stigmata of degeneration,” was present (ERO, 1913, p. 45). Although Kendig has been cited as an example of field workers’ confirmation bias (Lovett, 2007), she worked hard not to let her expectations cloud her judgment. Stressing her impartiality, she said, “There is a great danger of snap judgments. I want to avoid it. We must strive against premature publishing” (ERO, 1913, p. 46). One finding that she announced, and that would persist after careful testing was the lack of feeble-mindedness in the Pratt children.

What she did not say was that she was being pressured by Everett Flood to create a document like “the Hill Folk,” although the Pratt family seemed “a rather different thing from any that have been done so far.” The reason, she wrote to her father, was that “the Pratts come of Pilgrim stock, they are scattered all over the State, and some branches have attained considerable eminence” (Kendig, 1913d, p. 2). Meanwhile, Isabelle was the only field worker who traveled across the state and sat in on clinical conferences at the new Boston Psychopathic Hospital, where children constituted 40% of the cases seen (Jones, 1999; Kendig, 1913c). As Kendig learned from the staff, poor nutrition, poor housing, and a host of environmental factors competed with heredity as the cause of psychological disability (Lunbeck, 1995).

As she had proposed, Kendig lived in Shutesbury for the month of July among the families she was studying. With an assistant, she administered Binet tests and compiled family

histories and made genealogical charts. The following month, she investigated relatives who had moved away. In the fall, she assembled her data and was invited to present a paper, illustrated by individual genealogies and a huge family tree of the Pratts that was 75-ft. wide, at a meeting of the State Conference of Charities and Correction in Northampton.

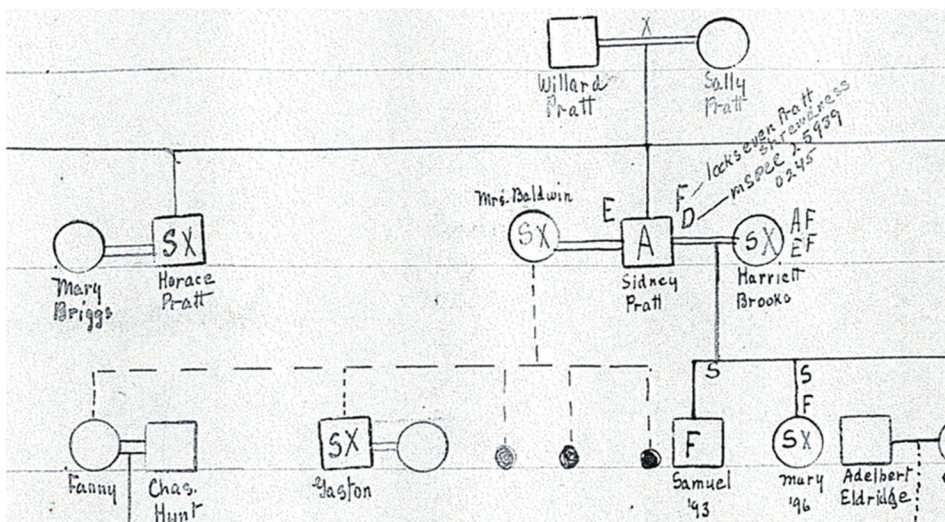
Although secondary sources have quoted Kendig to make her sound prejudiced and condemning, her paper actually showed her to be mostly open-minded and honest, even if her eugenic enthusiasm compromised her final conclusions (Lovett, 2007; Savo, 2002). She began by saying that many members of the Pratt family were reported as alcoholic, immoral, and feeble-minded, acknowledging that the local gossip could be true or false. She wanted to study them and their environment and the towns where other relatives settled. She did so because she believed that “under a new environment, different traits of character might possibly assert themselves” (Kendig, 1913f, p. 1).

In presenting her case, Kendig departed from a dogmatically genetic viewpoint toward the social problems in a small New England town. As she explained, “heredity is a factor [that] a study of the [genealogical] chart will suffice to show. The problem, however, reveals a complex to which not one but many causes have contributed” (Kendig, 1913f, p. 2). Furthermore, the amount of defect in the population was so much lower that Shutesbury was “by no means a counterpart of any of those which have been published in the past few years” (Kendig, 1913f, p. 2). Compared with the Kallikaks, Jukes, and Hill Folk, Shutesbury lacked “gross feeble-mindedness” and had less crime and fewer wards of the state (see Figure 6).

The most prominent social problems she found in her month-long stay were alcoholism and sexual promiscuity. The promiscuity she described in great detail, citing case after case of what she called “marital adventures”—family members switching partners and women bearing children from multiple and sometimes unknown fathers. Alcoholism was equally prominent, she noted, so much so that it and promiscuity were known locally as Pratt traits. The problem with such findings was that the Pratts were not considered feeble-minded or of low social standing. Rather, the whole town showed a little bit of the traits of the Pratts.

Figure 6

Portion of Pratt Family Tree



Note. Image courtesy of the American Philosophical Society. Note Kendig's reference to sexual immorality (SX) and to the Pratt family quality of shrewdness.

Furthermore, the Pratts were healthy and long-lived, with “iron constitutions.” Few were impoverished. Instead, they were known as shrewd in business, and one held a significant town office. Contrasting with the Jukes and Kallikaks, Pratts were often prosperous, some owned automobiles, and they tended to have pleasant looking houses¹⁰ Although she did not say it directly, Kendig was providing evidence to contradict the eugenicists’ view that social ills appeared in bundles, symptoms of an underlying genetic defect. She was also joining reformers like William Healy, who rejected heredity as the primary cause of children’s social deficiencies (Healy, 1915; Jones, 1999). Although the small-town ways of Shutesbury seemed foreign to Kendig, she seems to have not been blinded by class bias, noting that the Pratts had come from a prominent New England family.¹¹

Turning to feeble-mindedness, Kendig explained that she could not find it in the young children she tested. What she found was that the older a child, the worse they performed on the Binet. Her tentative explanation on the underperformance of the older children and adults was that the test “demands a rather wide general experience” that was lacking in Shutesbury (Kendig, 1913f, p. 13). For example, when a Pratt was given the question, “My neighbor has just received some singular visits, a doctor, a lawyer, and a priest have called. What is happening there?” their response was “It’s a fight.” “This is all that their limited experience suggests,” she noted, and “it was the response I received again and again” (Kendig, 1913f, p. 13). Remarkable for someone with no psychological training, she was articulating a criticism of intelligence tests as measuring social deprivation rather than intelligence (Okrent, 2019; Zenderland, 1998). This began as a minority position among intelligence testers, asserted by psychologists Grace Fernald, J. E. Wallace Wallin, and Guy Whipple in 1913—the same year as Kendig’s presentation (Zenderland, 1998).

Despite her skepticism about the validity of the Binet test with older children and adults, Kendig’s report followed H. H. Goddard’s logic in defining a “moron” as someone who was more dangerous because she or he did not look abnormal. The result were conclusions prejudiced against the unfortunates being studied. More specifically, a smaller percentage of the Pratts showed defects compared with other populations in the literature, and those who did scored at the high end of the range of feeble-mindedness. But that meant, Kendig asserted, that the Pratts were “peculiarly a borderline case and its danger to society [is therefore] more insidious and its problems the more difficult to handle” (Kendig, 1913f, p. 2).

She repeated this logic in her report’s conclusion. The Pratts, she said, “belong to a distinctly high-grade class of F[eeble-minded], and even then can only be recognized after close study” (Kendig, 1913f, p. 14). Indeed, she admitted, “one still might doubt the justness of the classification and evidence of the tests themselves” (Kendig, 1913f, p. 14). But their immorality and alcoholism “place the family irrevocably within the ranks of the socially unfit” (Kendig, 1913f, p. 15). In other words, the social ills shown by the Pratts became significant only when (a) the Pratts were studied carefully and (b) the ills could be attributed to feeble-mindedness. Once that was done, their problems became characterological, she asserted, and they became a problem in public health and social welfare. In closing she totaled up the costs that local towns paid for the Pratts who needed public relief.

¹⁰ A Pratt was the town’s most famous early member, and the Pratt family had a monopoly on making baskets into the 1930s, when it was noted in the WPA guide to Massachusetts (Federal Writers’ Project, 1983).

¹¹ What bothered Kendig was not so much the social class of some of the Pratts but their apparent lack of middle-class morals. Because reviewers of this article raised the issue of race, it should be noted that the Pratt family was Caucasian, as were the other residents of Shutesbury (Shutesbury Historical Commission, personal communication, May 21, 2021).

At the Northampton conference, Kendig emerged as a local star of the eugenics movement, bringing sociological diligence and the trappings of science to bear on the problems of the day. She was helped by an advance mailing of circulars promoting her work by Harvey Baker, a prominent reformer and the first Judge of the Boston Juvenile Court. Following her talk, audience members descended upon her with admiration and requests for advice on their own research. She was praised by social service administrators and the two faculty members who taught sociology at Amherst and Smith colleges, one of whom was F. Stuart Chapin, a champion of the new, scientific version of sociology (see Chapin, 1914).

After her talk, an admiring administrator asked Kendig to consult for the state of New Hampshire, which was planning to conduct a state-wide survey of intellectual disabilities.¹² This was an attractive alternative to her job of cataloging social dysfunction, which left her with a sense of powerlessness. "Here I see all the evil," she wrote to her father, "but have no power to remedy it" (Kendig, 1913e). Isabelle had also clashed with Everett Flood, who encouraged her to study the Pratts and then undermined her work when it won statewide acclaim but did not contribute to the quotas of patient genealogies at his institution.

Surveying Feeble-mindedness

In May 1914, Kendig resigned her hospital job and spent the next 7 months in a well-paid, privately financed position with the New Hampshire Children's Commission. Although she was described in a report as a "field worker," her job was to coordinate a survey of the intellectually disabled as an administrator as well as a tester of individuals. The result was "The Feeble-minded in New Hampshire," a 27-p. section of the annual report of the Children's Commission to the state legislature (New Hampshire Children's Commission, 1914). Based on Kendig's survey and her personal work in the field, her report stressed the large percentage of intellectually disabled girls and women in almshouses and state farms who bore illegitimate children and who often presented with syphilis. Highlighting the case of a teenage girl, unable to care for herself and repeatedly jailed for public drunkenness, Kendig argued for an alternative to jail: custodial placement in the existing State School for the Feeble-minded or in a larger institution yet to be created. The report also advocated for special classes for the intellectually disabled in regular schools and rejected sterilization for ethical and practical reasons.¹³

Although Kendig's work in New Hampshire and Massachusetts might suggest that she was part of a united eugenics movement, she maintained her independence of thought and willingness to stand up to figures like Charles Davenport (Bix, 1997). This was illustrated in June 1914 when she presented her paper on the Pratt Family in an invited address delivered at the annual ERO conference, held at Columbia University. According to an acquaintance in attendance, Kendig's paper received "more applause than anything else" presented on that day. However, Kendig wrote to her father that the conference was

very peculiar There was more antagonism to Davenport than I ever before heard expressed. . . . Most of it apparently rolled off his back like water . . . but my shafts evidently stuck, for he challenged one point in my paper . . . [and] didn't speak to me again during the entire conference. (Kendig, 1914b)

¹² Here and elsewhere in this article the term *intellectual disability* is substituted for the early 20th-century term *feeble-mindedness*. They are not the same, however, because *feeble-minded* included qualities that later psychologists would not classify as part of intelligence (e.g., moral judgment).

¹³ Although Isabelle wrote the report, she was robbed of authorship by the same imperious administrator who characterized her as a simple field worker (Streeter, 1915).

Figure 7
Isabelle Kendig in 1914



Note. Image courtesy of Lucia Gill Case.

The following day, during a field workers' discussion session Davenport chaired, Isabelle observed that "he called on everyone else in the room but me . . . it was very amusing." (Kendig, 1914b, p. 1; see Figure 7).¹⁴

The exact disagreement is difficult to reconstruct, but her full report on the Pratt family was consistent with her 1913 assertion that large clusters of eugenic traits did not always correlate as the hard-liners insisted. Davenport had the last word, however. In the December 1914 issue of *The Journal of Heredity* he included a long paragraph on her study of the Pratt family. Its focus was a quote he attributed to her but that Isabelle never either wrote or said and that contradicted her observation that the Pratts were generally prosperous and not considered social inferiors. Davenport wrote, "There, in an isolated and unfavorable environment,' Miss Kendig says, 'they intermarried and multiplied, till today their blood has impregnated the entire community and rendered the town a byword for shiftlessness and poverty, for alcoholism, immorality and feeble-mindedness'" (Woods et al., 1914, p. 552).¹⁵

¹⁴ Davenport's behavior seems consistent with his character. As Garland Allen noted, he was known for "his silent, almost secretive manner, his lack of humor, [and] his inability to accept criticism" (Allen, 2000).

¹⁵ The same quote appeared a few months later in *The Eugenics Review*, attributed to Kendig but plagiarized from the Davenport-created quote in the *Journal of Heredity* (Hamilton, 1915).

The other way that Isabelle dissented at the New York meeting was her agreement with the prominent eugenicist Walter Fernald, who said in a discussion session that “eugenics had dealt long enough with degenerative heredity and [efforts] should be [aimed at] regenerative work.” Replying in agreement, Kendig said, “I for one would never be content to spend my life in tracing the morbid and pathological, but . . . it was so hard to get financial backing” for positive eugenics (Kendig, 1914b, p. 2).

Wanting to distance herself from assessing pathology, in 1915 Isabelle completed her transformation from field worker to administrator. In the spring she took a job as Executive Secretary of the League for Preventive Work in Boston. This was an umbrella organization of twenty social service agencies, later called the Boston Council of Social Agencies. Because Boston led the country in developing social work as a profession and academic specialty, Kendig’s job put her in the center of a network of prominent clinicians, educators, and philanthropists.¹⁶

The League had been formed to coordinate efforts at social reform, beginning with “a campaign to lessen feeble-mindedness.” (League for Preventive Work, 1916, p. 1). In April 1916 it published *Feeble-minded Adrift*, which Isabelle wrote. That pamphlet argued for the building of a third state school for the disabled. Using vivid case studies, Isabelle described the problem of those who lived in institutions designed for other social problems: poorhouses, prisons, hospitals for the insane. A survey of prisons and reformatories, for example, showed that a quarter of prisoners were intellectually disabled. Mental hospitals, in turn, held 520 intellectually disabled patients statewide (League for Preventive Work, 1916).

The report also presented cases of foster children whom it labeled feeble-minded, immoral, and promiscuous. Such children, Isabelle explained, would be turned out of their foster homes when they turned 21, prime childbearing age. Anticipating her later career as a clinical psychologist, Kendig mixed vivid, individual profiles with statistics for larger groups in need and the institutions in which they could be found. Special homes for the intellectually disabled would, she argued, provide vocational training and segregated housing.

Spreading the word about her findings, Kendig lectured on “the problem of feeble-mindedness” at venues as diverse as Boston’s Old South Church, the Boston Children’s Friends Society, and a three county suffrage conference held in Northampton—a stronghold of the suffrage movement (Equal Suffrage Conference, 1915; Suffrage address by [Isabelle] Kendig, 1915; Glacklin, 2020).¹⁷

Marriage, Family, and Comradeship

In 1915, while involved with the League for Protective Work, Kendig married Harold Gill, a recent Harvard MBA who would become a prominent criminologist. In the early years of their marriage he was a developer, businessman, and editor of trade magazines, first in Boston and then in Chicago (Taylor, 1989). A year before they married, Isabelle and Harold made elaborate plans to allow each of them to have a career, a viable home life, and children. Previously, she had expressed to her mother her desire for a marriage with equal rights:

¹⁶These included Ida Cannon, founder of the field of medical social work and a member of the League’s Board of Directors.

¹⁷From today’s viewpoint, combining enthusiasms for eugenics and suffrage may seem odd, but both movements promised social reform and the empowerment of women, initially based on a Lamarckian view of heredity (Gordon, 2002). Charlotte Perkins Gilman, for example, blamed women’s lack of rights for creating hereditary defects in their brains (Ziegler, 2008). Also, the eugenic benefit of residential institutions was not as prominent in talks like Kendig’s as vocational education, the reduction of alcoholism, the reduction of unwanted births (often creating orphans), and the protection of young women from sexual predators.

It is a funny world truly. Marriage and motherhood seem to me the only normal life—to which every woman has a right . . . What I rebel at is hitching marriage and motherhood to a life of domestic service. The man can have husbandhood and fatherhood without a string—why not the woman. I'll never be “domestic” in a thousand years, but I can certainly hope for the other [marriage without domestic labor]. (Kendig, 1914a)

Looking for models of egalitarian relationships, she praised a fellow field worker who was engaged to be married and wanted to keep working, “in contrast to the parasitic existence Mrs. Hodskins leads [married but not working]” (Kendig, 1914a). She also praised religious missionaries because

the woman has her work outside of the home just as the man has his—doubly ideal because they have a common work—yet the woman is not denied wifehood and motherhood because she isn't harnessed to the washtub and the kitchen. It's all wrong to make the woman pay in uncongenial drudgery for such privileges. (Kendig, 1914a; see Figure 8)

As Isabelle and Howard each laid out in correspondence to their parents, the plan involved working in the same field so that their reading and studying and work would be more efficient. Practically, it meant that the wife would conduct research, much from home if they had infant children, and the husband would work in the office. In a perfect world they would both be hired and be on salary. “We want to work for the joy of comradeship,” she explained to her

Figure 8

Isabelle Kendig and Howard Gill in Atlantic City, 1918



Note. Image courtesy of Lucia Gill Case.

mother (Kendig, 1917). To avoid the wifely double bind, they would hire household help for cleaning and such chores. To avoid financial dependency, they would “establish an equal partnership, and to share equally whatever money husband and wife earn.” As she explained to a journalist in 1922, this succeeded “when she was earning more than her husband, when she was earning less, and when she earned nothing at all” (Haskin, 1922, p. 4).

As Howard wrote to Isabelle’s parents, “[Isabelle] and I are planning a life that to many people looks very unusual. It is not the least conventional, tho . . . to us it is ideally normal. She is planning to carry on her work and I mine, we both working to make our lives count for the most in every way. To many people this sort of plan cannot be reconciled with the happiest, best sort of a home; but we are hoping to be able to show that it will mean a happier, stronger, truer, finer home” (Gill, 1914).

In 1916, their plan for collaborative work drew them both to the psychology of law and business. Isabelle quit her Executive Secretary job and took MA psychology courses at Radcliffe as well as law courses. In doing so she ended her involvement with social work and eugenics. As she had noted a few years earlier, she would have had to get a PhD in biology to stay in eugenics and to be independent of administrators like the ones who had interfered with her work or took credit for it.

For the next few years, Kendig held positions as researcher and associate editor for the business magazines that Howard edited and published. Their first son was born in 1917, a second in 1919, and a third in 1921. Thus, the years 1919 through 1921 were what she called her “housekeeping years” in a response to the Oberlin alumni office.

Child Rearing and Political Organizing

In 1920, Isabelle and family moved from Chicago to Washington, DC. After giving birth to her third child in 1921, she held staff jobs at various progressive political organizations. Her first employers were a feminist and a pacifist group, the National Women’s Party [NWP], and the National Council for the Prevention of War.

In the Women’s Party, she was a field organizer and its legislative and organizational secretary. She lobbied and helped organize local groups in the South and created equal rights propaganda [her term] for a national audience (Swain, 1984). She also created the NWP’s Councils for various professions and its Homemakers’ Council—a forum in which policies on marriage and family could be created (Haskin, 1922; Paul, 1975). As Johnston and Johnson noted, psychologist Ethel Puffer Howes was a 51-year-old “domestic revolutionary” who used the *Women’s Home Companion* in 1923 to promote domestic egalitarianism (Johnston & Johnson, 2017). At the same time, young Isabelle Kendig was pursuing the same goal for the NWP—a feminist political party trying to broaden its membership and influence (Cott, 1984; see Figure 9).

In the Washington office of the NWP, she worked her way up from volunteer to chair of membership, bringing order to the chaotic record keeping that afflicts such groups. As Alice Paul remembered Isabelle, she was an organizational demon who created a card system that was in use long after her departure (Paul, 1975). Improving the Party’s organization was a key task as it shifted from fighting for women’s suffrage to lobbying for equal rights in all areas of women’s lives.¹⁸

¹⁸ The history of the NWP is complex, and the organization changed significantly during the early 1920s. Although it can be characterized as feminist, its brand of feminism became increasingly narrow and it failed to follow up on initial efforts to include African American women (Cott, 1984). Kendig’s subsequent involvement in the LaFollette campaign put her in the company of prominent women who had been in the NWP but departed over the course of its evolution.

Figure 9*Isabelle Kendig and Leaders of the National Women's Party*

Note. Image in the public domain.

After her work in the Women's Party, Kendig took a job with the antimilitarist National Council for the Prevention of War as a researcher and author. She began by writing a pamphlet on the 1923 World Conference of Educators, organized to advance collaboration between national groups of teachers in the post-WWI era (Kendig-Gill, 1923). She then surveyed how war was portrayed in history textbooks and wrote a critique that activists could use to argue for less militaristic schools (Kendig-Gill, 1924).

In the spring of 1924 Kendig gained national recognition as a founder and Executive Secretary of the Women's Committee for Political Action [WCPA]. This national organization of socialists, feminists, and antimilitarists was founded to make sure women's interests were represented in preparations for the election of 1924. Its founders were prominent veterans of the National Women's Party, plus other progressives including journalists and authors (e.g., Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Frieda Kirchwey).

A goal of the WCPA was to create a strong female presence within a larger group: the Conference on Progressive Political Action (CPPA), founded by leaders of the railway unions to advance working class causes in the 1922 elections (Cott, 1988). In advance of the CPPA's July 4, 1924 convention, the leaders of the WCPA held their own meeting. There, prominent feminists, pacifists, and socialists gave speeches on the issues of the day and how they affected women. Led by Wisconsin Socialist Meta Berger, conference attendees also began to organize local branches of progressive women that would have a presence at the upcoming

CPPA convention. That meeting would launch a Presidential campaign for Robert (“Fighting Bob”) La Follette, and the women of the WCPA wanted to join that campaign as it emerged (Cott, 1988).

Consistent with Berger’s grass roots strategy, Kendig and other Washington progressives founded a “La Follette for President Club,” during a meeting at the Typographical Temple, with Isabelle elected Vice President. At the meeting, she explained that the WCPA was “accomplishing among liberal women what the auxiliaries formed by the Republican and the Democratic parties are doing among the conservative women” (“Local La Follette Group Unshaken, 1924).

In her memoir Meta Berger described her first meeting with Isabelle and testified to her importance in the feminist and progressive politics of the 1920s. It was when Berger had come to Washington to start work to promote the La Follette candidacy:

There was a knock on [my] office door and in came a gorgeous creature, young, beautiful, with a crown of two braids of auburn hair topping her head and introduced herself as Isabelle Kendig . . . [she] asked me what we were intending to do, organize another progressive group? And didn’t we know that an office force was already at work doing the identical thing. After some conversation with Isabelle . . . I went with her to her office and from that moment worked hard lining up the forces for the new effort. (Berger & Swanson, 2001, p. 150)

At the July convention of the CPPA, the preliminary work of Isabelle and her feminist comrades seemed to pay off. Before the meeting began, she was appointed to the credentials committee, an important gatekeeping role that made her “among the hardest worked members of the convention” (Hauser, 1924; p. 3). She was also elected to the CPPA’s National Committee and in its appearance in a newspaper photo from the convention her physical positioning is significant. Within that committee she was welcomed to the leadership table, literally, by key figures in the worlds of politics and social causes. Sitting to her left was Morris Hillquit, a lawyer and founder of the Socialist Party. To his left was Harriot Stanton Blatch, daughter of Susan B. Anthony and a feminist leader in her own right. Although it is difficult to see in the photo’s reproduction, Isabelle was serious, youthful, and stylishly dressed—qualities that made her stand out. The picture’s caption conveyed the group’s goals: “The board of strategy in the war on the Democratic and Republican Parties” (see Figure 10).

A notable event in the history of socialism and labor in the U.S., the convention launched the third-party Presidential candidacy of Senator La Follette. Isabelle and her husband joined the campaign, she as the Executive Secretary of the Women’s Division—into which the WCPA dissolved itself.¹⁹ After the election, she wrote a postmortem in *The Nation*, a widely read left-liberal weekly. Based on her experience in the campaign, the CPPA, and the WCPA, she argued for separate women’s organizations in reform movements. In La Follette’s Progressive Party, she explained, women were never given independent responsibility or funds for key activities. “In general,” she explained, “when the history of the emancipation of women is written, this period will be known as the period of her *Vice-Chairmanship*” (Kendig, 1924b, p. 544).

Upon the postelection dissolution of the La Follette Women’s Division, activists including Meta Berger tried to replace it with a National League for Progressive Women—with Isabelle as General Secretary (Cott, 1988; Stevens & Goldlust-Gingrich, 1995). That was not

¹⁹ Although Kendig and other women were included on the CPPA National Committee, the Progressive Party did not give equal representation to women, and female candidates for Congress on their ticket failed to succeed (Cott, 1988).

Figure 10*The National Committee of the Conference for Progressive Political Action*

THE BOARD OF STRATEGY IN THE WAR ON THE DEMOCRATIC AND REPUBLICAN PARTIES:
MEETING OF THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE

of the Conference for Progressive Political Action in Cleveland on the Eve of the Naming of La Follette for President. At Opposite Sides of the Table, Left to Right: William M. Johnson, Chairman, and Arthur Holder. Seated, Left to Right: H. F. Samuels, Miss Ethel Smith, T. C. Cashan, Miss Elizabeth Christman, James H. Maurer, Miss Elizabeth Hauser, Miss Isabelle Kendig, Morris Hillquit, Mrs. Harriot Stanton Blatch. Standing, Left to Right: E. J. Manion, Edward Keating, D. B. Robertson, Basil Manley.

Note. Image in the public domain. Isabelle Kendig is seated fourth from the right.

fully successful, but as she told the Oberlin alumni office, she spent 3 years (1925–1927) in “an office of my own in Washington, [doing] legislative work for various organizations” (Kendig, 1932). These included the American Civil Liberties Union, which she served as its Washington Representative. In that role she organized a campaign to oppose a bill for the registration and deportation of aliens and testified before the relevant Congressional committee (“Deportation of Alien Criminals, Gunmen, Narcotic Dealers, Defectives, etc.” 1926).

Kendig also worked hard to maintain an identity separate from her husband’s. In 1926, soon after the birth of her fourth child, Oberlin College made the mistake of sending her a draft of her entry in the alumni catalog, listed as Mrs. Howard Gill. She responded as follows:

I am sorry, but I object strenuously to being indexed or appearing under the name of another person anyplace [and] certainly not in my own College Catalogue. The essence of ‘keeping one’s own name’ is not that it appears in parentheses after the name of another individual of the opposite sex but that it appears as the basic name, and any other is parenthetical. Since I never use Mrs. Howard B. Gill, I prefer it not to appear at all . . . anyone using [Mrs.] followed by a man’s name is going . . . through the world like Chinese women. In China it is as rude to ask a woman’s name as [was] formerly to ask her age here. (Kendig, 1926, pp. 1–2)

Two years earlier she had said, “No, I have no legal separation from Mr. Gill; I am still very much married. However, I am a ‘Lucy Stoner’ and use my own name, not only professionally but for all purposes” (Kendig, 1924a, p. 1).

When she was representing the ACLU at a Congressional hearing, she was introduced as Isabelle Kendig and was grilled by a less than sympathetic congressman: “I understand that

Figure 11
Isabelle Kendig in 1924



Note. Image courtesy of Lucia Gill Case.

you are married, so what is your husband's name?" She replied, "That [Isabelle Kendig] is my name." She was then asked, "You are not married?" to which she replied "I am giving you my own name." At that point the Chair stepped in to ask, "That is the new order of things, is it?" She replied, "That is the new order, Mr. Chairman" ("Deportation of Alien Criminals, Gunmen, Narcotic Dealers, Defectives, etc." 1926, p. 73; Figure 11).²⁰

Back to Boston Then Return to Washington

While Isabelle was serving as a lobbyist, her husband became a consultant on prison labor for state governments and the U.S. Department of Commerce. This led to his appointment in 1927 to create an experimental, more humane prison in Norfolk Massachusetts and serve as its warden (Johnsen, 1999). He and his family moved back to Massachusetts and Isabelle resumed the graduate studies in psychology that she had begun a decade earlier. She enrolled in Radcliffe's clinical master's program and received her M.A. in 1930 at age forty (Kendig, 1930). Her thesis provided an

²⁰ In an interview with Ellen Goodman, Kendig said that she initially acceded to her husband's request that she be called Kendig-Gill, but after 8 years she "couldn't stand the weight of it" and reverted to Kendig (Goodman, 1970). According to Alice Paul, in Washington in the 1920s she was initially known as Sally Gill, but one day she said, "From now on, I'm going to be Isabelle Kendig; please call me always that" (Fry, 1972–1973).

interesting transition from her political work of the 1920s to her career in clinical psychology that began in the 1930s. Although no copy survives, it was a psychological analysis of how individuals develop radical and conservative political viewpoints (Kendig, n.d.).

Embarking on doctoral work, she studied and conducted research at the Harvard Psychological Clinic under its charismatic director Henry Murray, who became a lifelong friend. As Murray's biographer described, she was a prominent member of a group of Harvard researchers that included future leaders of the field of clinical and personality psychology. It included Saul Rosensweig, Robert White, Jerome Frank, Erik Erikson, and Isabelle Kendig—the only woman so named (Robinson, 1992). Supervised by Murray, she conducted her dissertation research on obsessive-like processes in undergraduates and received a PhD from Radcliffe in 1933 (Kendig & Shevach, 1937; Kendig, 1937a, 1937b, 1937c, 1937d; Kendig-Gill, 1933; Murray, 1938). While she worked on her dissertation, Kendig taught at Pine Manor Junior College and supervised psychological testing at a progressive school, The Cambridge School.

In 1934, Kendig's husband was fired after a political struggle over the humanistic policies at his prison (Barry, 1934). He and Isabelle returned to Washington, DC, and in 1936 she became a psychologist at St. Elizabeth's Hospital—only the second hired. She worked her way up from research psychologist to assistant psychologist (in 1938) and finally to chief psychologist in 1942.²¹

To sociologists, St. Elizabeth's is known as the setting for Erving Goffman's (1961) *Asylums*, a portrayal of mental hospitals as antitherapeutic prisons (Grob, 1995). Although the hospital when Kendig arrived was known for its overcrowded wards, in the mid- to late 1940s it was recovering from years of neglect. Acute patients could now participate in an innovative program of group therapy and dance, for example, and write for the hospital newspaper (Gambino, 2013). Therapeutically, it was a place where the clinical staff integrated biological and psychological approaches, guided by a philosophy of psychiatric liberalism (Gambino et al., 2011; Summers, 2019). Thus it was a fine setting for Kendig's expertise in assessment, supervising a psychological staff and doing some testing herself—as she did with the poet Ezra Pound, St. Elizabeth's most famous patient during WWII (Gillman, 1994). While at St. Elizabeth's, she taught at Catholic University and George Washington University, in its medical school and department of psychology, and was remembered as someone who taught new courses and kept the department up to date with developments in psychological testing and psychoanalytic theory.

In the 1940s, Kendig published widely on assessment and psychopathology and completed a book on intellectual deterioration in schizophrenia that had been begun by William Alanson White, former superintendent at St. Elizabeth's (Kendig, 1949; Kendig & Richmond, 1940). In it she wrote about the Binet test (and its successor the Stanford-Binet) for the first time in a quarter century. In doing so, she showed sensitivity to the tests' limitations and struck a generally positive tone about the patients' chances for improvement.

As important as Kendig's contributions to the literature was her role in helping guide the post WWII expansion of clinical psychology. At the end of the war, old prejudices against clinicians in academic departments were ending (Capshe, 1999). Interest in clinical careers was booming and in 1949 the U.S. Public Health Service sponsored a meeting to plan clinical graduate programs and their relation to university curricula and scientific standards. At that meeting in Boulder, Colorado, Kendig represented St. Elizabeth's in a distinguished (and 84% male) group that created a model that guided clinical education in university departments for

²¹ The move allowed Kendig's husband to re-establish his career in criminology, beginning as an assistant to the director of federal prisons (Johnsen, 1999).

Figure 12*Isabelle Kendig Circa 1955*

Note. Image courtesy of Lucia Gill Case.

decades (Baker & Benjamin, 2005). Three years later, the APA created an Education and Training Board to standardize both undergraduate and graduate studies and Kendig was one of five members selected to develop standards for practicum training (Cook & Raimy, 1952). Closer to home, Kendig served as the second President of the Washington DC Psychological Association and her contributions included guiding it through consideration of whether to lobby for licensing the practice of psychology (D. C. Health Leaders, 1948; Taylor & Stirling, 1993; Figure 12).

After a dozen years at St. Elizabeths, Kendig became Chief Psychologist at a VA hospital near Madison, Wisconsin, where her husband had a visiting professorship. When they returned to the DC area, she became Chief Psychologist at the Baltimore VA for three years.

She continued to publish her research (e.g., Kendig, 1954) and in 1955 she became a Research Supervisor at the National Institute of Mental Health, a post she held for five years. She retired from full time work in 1960; continued as a researcher (Kendig, 1963), and fully retired in 1964 at age 74. She died in 1971.

Conclusion

To justify a focus on a single individual, this article asserts that the career of Isabelle Kendig shows an unusual blend of dissent from orthodoxy, feminism, and balancing family and

career. As a dissenter within the field of eugenics, Kendig is notable mostly because of her struggle against reductionist orthodoxy—revealed in private correspondence. As previously noted, others also developed qualms about Charles Davenport and his program, and the field of biology eventually repudiated his simplistic analyses (Morgan, 1925). Likewise, the ethnocentric biases that Isabelle Kendig found in the Binet tests later became known to the public and within psychology (Zenderland, 1998). What Kendig's story contributes to existing accounts of this period is the early, dissenting voice of a female worker in the field, conveyed to family and friends but suppressed at a conference and distorted in print by Davenport and his loyalists.

While Kendig's eugenic dissent was noticed only by Charles Davenport and her fellow field workers, her feminist activism found a national audience, briefly putting her in the center of a movement to combine antimilitarism, women's rights and challenges to the socioeconomic status quo. In contrast to female academics' challenges to norms of domestic life (e.g., by Ethel Puffer Howes), Kendig was part of a grander, socialist program to restructure society. Both the socialists and the academics agreed, however, that women's captivity within the nuclear family must end. After her participation in that effort, Kendig remained a feminist in spirit but traded her career as a political activist for one in clinical psychology (Josefek, 1970).

As a member of the second generation of women psychologists, Isabelle Kendig also seems noteworthy for a career that was similar to that of many of her peers, but different in its late start and origin in applied work. As did others, she worked hard to combine marriage, motherhood and prominence in her chosen specialty—clinical psychology. She did so while avoiding the penalties that others suffered, such as relegation to either a marginal academic position or to applied work that was less satisfying or was subservient to males. Although her clinical doctorate and career outside of academia kept her off lists of women in the history of psychology, the portability of her career allowed her to move when her husband's career called for it.

Compared to many of her peers, Kendig benefited from not being married to an academic—which would have subjected her to antinepotism restrictions. Her success came from the timing of her doctorate and from her working her way up, not on a tenure ladder but in clinical settings. The reward was becoming Chief Psychologist at a nationally prominent hospital while pursuing teaching and research. That made her a leader among those charting the future of her field. Although Kendig moved two or three times to accommodate her husband's career, her own career did not suffer. She never settled for less than a Chief Psychologist position—having learned in her 20s the perils of being subservient in clinical and administrative settings. How much she worked for women's equality at St. Elizabeth's and within the Veteran's Administration is unknown, but she was clearly a model of success for women in clinical practice and administration.

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Received November 9, 2020

Revision received June 28, 2021

Accepted July 1, 2021 ■