

## IN MEMORIAM

## William T. McKinney, Jr., MD 1937–2022



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*Neuropsychopharmacology*; <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41386-023-01544-0>



Shortly after Bill McKinney joined the faculty of the Psychiatry Department at University of Wisconsin in 1969, he was appointed to the scientific staff of the Wisconsin Regional Primate Research Center by then director, Dr. Harry F. Harlow. A comparative psychologist, Harlow had already received international acclaim for his pioneering studies of social-emotional development in rhesus monkeys. Dr. McKinney's interests were similarly informed by comparisons across species.

Harlow's research had long been influenced by John Bowlby's emerging ideas about attachment, in large part the product of an extended professional friendship between Harlow and Bowlby. Given McKinney's impeccable academic credentials, Baylor (BA), Vanderbilt (MD), psychiatry residency at the University of North Carolina (2 years), and Stanford (1 year, so he could work with David Hamburg, MD, and Jane Goodall, PhD), and his keen interest in developing animal models of depression [1], Bill McKinney soon became an integral part of the research team, focusing on early

social relationships among rhesus monkeys growing up in Harlow's lab.

That team also included a young Steve Suomi [2], who would become Chief, Laboratory of Comparative Ethology at NIH/NICHD for 35 years (1983–2018). Suomi recalls how the research group at the Primate Center enthusiastically welcomed McKinney, and how well Bill contributed to a sense of equality that permeated the entire team. Harlow, McKinney, and Suomi even found time for humor in their work. See the final paragraph of *Monkey Psychiatrists* (1972) in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*.

McKinney directed a series of studies documenting the behavioral and biological consequences of various social disruptions, then evaluating the efficacy of different pharmacological interventions, and subsequently characterizing the complex ways differential early experience can affect the behavioral and biological features of both disruptive and interventive outcomes in rhesus monkeys throughout development.

This ambitious research program reflected a degree of active collaboration between psychological and psychiatric investigators unheard of at the time. Just as Harlow had with Bowlby, so did McKinney have an extended professional friendship with Robert Hinde, as did Suomi with Hinde and also Patrick Bateson.

The choice of McKinney in 1975 as the next chair of psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin Medical School led to the possibility of an era in psychiatry based on a truly comprehensive biological approach. Within two years of McKinney's appointment, George Engel published his still famous article in *Science* (1977), "The need for a new medical model: a challenge for biomedicine," describing his statement as, "a blueprint for research, a framework for teaching, and a design for action in the real world of health care." The model is known as the "biopsychosocial model."

Six months following publication, Bill hosted what we believe to be the first virtual conference in psychiatry. Prearranged with Dr. Engel, we invited a UW faculty panel including Dr. McKinney, a child psychiatrist (Anderson), a family psychiatrist (Whitaker), and an ethologist (Hailman) to discuss the biopsychosocial model with an audience of faculty and residents. The conference was videotaped, then mailed to Dr. Engel, who thereupon videotaped his response, mailing it back to us, and finally Engel's remarks being played to a follow-up conference at Wisconsin three months after the original.

Less than a decade later, in his Adolph Meyer Lecture at the American Psychiatric Association (1986), Bowlby proposed just such a model as McKinney's appointment had anticipated, calling his model, "developmental psychiatry," published (1988) in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*. Bowlby's approach was based on ethological principles, described by Konrad Lorenz, Niko Tinbergen, and other ethologists of the time, particularly their focus on attachment and other social bonds. Famously, Bowlby expressed concern regarding, "the physiological psychiatrists who have improperly kidnapped the label 'biological psychiatry.'"

The timing of McKinney being chosen chair at a major research university was at the transition in most psychiatry departments in the United States from a psychoanalytic approach to a biological one. As a department chair, clinician, researcher, and supervisor of

Received: 30 January 2023 Accepted: 30 January 2023

Published online: 14 February 2023

residents, he nevertheless made time to read Bowlby's, *Attachment*, the first of his three volume set, with an interested first-year resident, reviewing one chapter at a time for an hour each week through all seventeen chapters.

To our knowledge, such dedication to an idea, and committing hours sharing that idea with a future psychiatrist, is extraordinary for a department chair – then or now. This dedication of his led to future publications including titles, “The overlapping territories of psychiatry and ethology [3],” and, “Ethology: the natural model [4],” as well as multiple symposia at psychiatric meetings, including sixteen at the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry Annual Meetings [5], the citation referring to the initial one.

Harlow, McKinney, and Suomi were comparative psychologists and psychiatrist who contributed greatly to the study of developmental psychopathology over seven decades. Nevertheless, the medical and psychiatric worlds mostly stayed the course, adopting neither Engel's “biopsychosocial model,” nor Bowlby's “developmental psychiatry.” Bill McKinney's legacy is very much alive, however, in his colleagues and students.

William T. McKinney, Jr., MD, became a member of the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology in 1979. He was a Fellow

Emeritus of ACNP. Bill McKinney's career, efforts in research, teaching, writing, and advocating for a comprehensive biological model were extraordinary, as was the man.

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