Autobiography of R. A. Katzell

If I had to name the single most important factor that shaped my career I would have to say Circumstance. Or call it, if you prefer, Opportunity, Luck, Chance, or God's will. That is, not to say that other processes don't count. For example, Hard Work. A modicum of talent doesn't hurt, either. And people are of course important, as instruments of circumstance.

But without opportunity, all the effort and planning in the world would count for naught. It is the necessary condition through which other factors must operate. In my view of work performance, Opportunity is a moderator variable which takes on values of 0 or 1.

Speaking of people, as I just did, this conclusion which I draw out of my personal experience coincides with that of two of the major influences in my life. One was a man of science, my principal mentor Douglas Fryer, who early in his career investigated the role of interests in vocational adjustment. Somewhere in his writings, after analyzing a number of case histories, he noted that chance far more than often than plan shaped vocational choice.

And in its small way, my life also affirms the insight of that giant of literature, Leo Tolstoy, who viewed human strivings as but elements in a grand design.

I am of course, to a large degree the psychological creation of those and other teachers: a father who instilled the value of knowledge; a mother who kindly but inexorably pressed for perfection; my first wife, who formed ambition; my present wife, who epitomizes' love and goodness; my Jewish elders, who transmitted an ancient reverence for scholarship. But, as I said, these and other people were the instruments of Circumstance: after all, I didn't choose to be born into a Jewish family. If given a choice, I wonder how I would have opted!

But let me more specifically describe the circumstances associated with my career choices . First, as to how I came to psychology altogether. To do so, I must go back a bit into my family background. I was born in Brooklyn, New York into what I suppose might be termed a middle class family. You must realize that what was middle class in 1919 is different from what it is today. My father owned and managed a small textile factory. A native of Russia, he lived as a youth in Belgium. and France before emigrating to New York shortly prior to World War I. Although his European education carried beyond our secondary school level, he never had the opportunity to complete the engineering training to which he had aspired. My mother was raised in Millville, New Jersey and later New York City and, like most girls of her class at the time, gave no thought to college.

Their mobility aspirations naturally became lodged in their one and only offspring. At the time little Jewish boys were expected to climb the socioeconomic ladder either by entering the family business or a profession. The former route was entertained only if the business was prosperous, which, in spite of his Herculean labors, my father's unfortunately was not. This left the professions. In the limited perspective of most families like mine, this usually meant law, medicine, accounting, or teaching. Professions like chemistry, architecture mechanical engineering, or journalism, were somehow beyond the pole.

My earliest recollection of a vocational choice was that of a judge . This was firmly based on the prognosis of a visitor, who had observed me arranging a group of my five year old playmates. (For years afterward, when asked by kindly adults what I was going to be when I grew up, I would assert, A judge."

Of course, I had not the foggiest idea of what that entailed, but I believed that I would be able to accomplish all sorts of wondrous things, like procuring for my aged grandmother an electric auto and liberation of all the draft horses, a kind of equine Emancipator.)

By age 12, when required to write a school essay on my vocational plans, I had come to realize that one didn't simply become a judge: preliminaries included completing college and law school, and serving a period as a lawyer. So for the following two years, my ambition was to become a lawyer.

Circumstance again intervened. My father, always a hale specimen, succumbed suddenly at age 42 to complications following a simple appendectomy. With the demise of my principal supporter, my career visions at age 14 shifted briefly from law to mendicity, until reassured by my mother that between my father's life insurance and her intended employment I would somehow be able to go to college. However, I now resolved to devote my life to averting additional such tragedies by becoming a doctor. That decision was doubtless abetted by my having recently seen a motion picture, Symphony of Six Million , in which a New York boy became a surgeon who achieved fame in spite of his valiant but vain efforts to save his father's life.

Through high school, I continued to say that I wanted to become a doctor, although my reasons became increasingly vague and perfunctory. I enrolled at New York University's University College partly because a cousin who had attended recommended it as a place to get a good pre medical education, but more because my best friend was going there and, moreover, it had the most attractive campus in New York City (I was not about to leave my mother alone by going to college out of town).

On arriving at N.Y.U. in the fall of 1935, and being required to select a program of studies, I opted for pre med largely because it seemed less irrelevant than any thing else I could choose. But, by the end of my first semester, the idea of becoming a college professor had taken root. I still have no explanation of why. No one among my family or friends was in education. Had I read Upton Sinclair's The Goose Step it would have confirmed my impression that this was a field to which Jews would be well advised not to aspire. Perhaps it was because my professors (all men) served as father figures in my young life, which for several years had lacked close contact with an adult male.

In any event, I remember looking up my freshman history teacher one day after class to ask how one became a college professor. That was in the depths of the Great Depression and he, being both sympathetic and untenured, replied with difficulty . But then he added some serious advice and information, which served to strengthen my burgeoning inclination toward that kind of career.

I remained nominally a pre med for a while longer, mainly because I was primarily interested in the natural sciences anyway. I declared Biology as my major, and had visions of doing graduate work in the field.

It wasn't until my junior year that I was exposed to Psychology. In those days, it was not one of the standard subjects. Few of my classmates majored in it and many graduated without even taking the introductory course. I took it because it was required for certification as a secondary school teacher in New York, for by then I realized that I had better hedge my hope of becoming a college professor. I now had three plans in view: preferably to become a college professor of biology, next to become a professional research biologist (probably with a government agency), or, failing the others, to become a secondary school teacher of biology or general science.

As I proceeded through my full year introduction course in psychology, I became increasingly interested in the subject, which was treated with the natural science emphasis of the day. To no small measure, that interest was due to the stimulating style of the instructor, Edwin R. Henry, I supplemented by the fact that the course also featured a lab, afforded an opportunity to get one's hands onto some live data. The intrinsic interest of the course content was also complemented by some extrinsic rewards (de Charms, Deci, et al. please note). These comprised two main sources: top exam grades (high achievement?) and recognition (e.g., Henry bet cigars with other instructors that I would beat their nominees in the course-wide objective final exam). For my senior year, I registered for enough psychology to finish with a minor.

By the last term of my senior year, I began considering doing my graduate work in Psychology, instead of Biology, again with the idea of using it as a springboard to college teaching. What finally decided me in that direction was notification by Fryer, then department chairman, that they were prepared to nominate me for an award in the N.Y.U. Graduate School if I wished to apply. The combination of intrinsic interest, recognition, encouragement, and cash was irresistible.

Because my undergraduate background in psychology was rather scanty, I decided with Fryer's encouragement to take some basic graduate work during the summer of 1939, which preceded my matriculation in the N.Y.U. Graduate School. N.Y.U. did not offer such courses, so I enrolled at Columbia in Experimental Psychology with I.A. Jackson and in Applied Psychology with A.T. Poffenberger.

Those choices were prophetic. Experimental psychology represented my prevailing orientation toward natural science. Applied psychology was a developing thrust at N.Y.U. and I had picked up some of it from Fryer and A Henry. Like most graduate schools at the time, N.Y.U. did not offer a course in it, so I wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to study the subject with Poffenberger, one of its leading exponents.

Henry later became President of APA's Division 14 (1956); his premature death in 19- explains the regrettable absence of his autobiography from this volume.

My With dual interest in experimental and applied psychology was soon to be ideally realized. That fall Fryer received a grant under a program concerned with selection and training of aircraft pilots administered by the National Research Council. I was thrilled to be appointed a research assistant on the project, which had to do with measuring patterns of muscular activity while operating simulated aircraft controls. Not only did the work combine my interests in biological science along with experimental and applied psychology, but it afforded me an honest to goodness job, and at a university, no less! I remember excitedly thinking as I walked to the campus on the morning the appointment was to take effect, Yesterday I was a nobody; after today I will be Somebody . I considered myself to be launched at last on my chosen career. I had recently turned 20.

As I look back on it, I think that my appointment was due not only to my academic qualifications but to my diligent attitude. I have already mentioned my decision to improve my preparation through summer study. Another example was my volunteering to serve as a lab assistant in order to acquire some instructional experience. I feel sure that such conscientiousness was not unnoticed by the faculty. But that was not my motive: I think that I genuinely was concerned with improving my qualifications and fostering my achievement. That motivation has stayed with me the rest of my life, and I have often taken on assignments, paid or unpaid, because I believed that I could learn something from them. I

recall an incident some ten years later when my wife to be asked how I had been able to accomplish so much at my age (she was not unbiased), and I was able to reply, by doing two or three things at once . While that Type A" syndrome doubtless has abetted my career, it also cost me a coronary infraction later in life.

What finally determined the direction of my career, as it did for so many other psychologists, was World War II.

In 1940, 1 learned that the Navy was appointing junior psychologists as ensigns. The winds of war were already blowing, so I decided to apply. However, I failed to qualify on medical grounds, a circumstance which also excluded me from a later military service and permitted me to conclude my doctoral studies by 1943. That year, Ed Henry brought to my attention vacancies for civilians as personnel psychologists in The Adjutant General's Office. Henry was already employed there, and after the war rose to become its chief psychologist. I applied, was appointed, and spent the remaining two years of the war in that organization.

AGO was, in effect, the personnel department of the Army, responsible for devising its personnel policies and procedures, and monitoring their implementation. It had a similar mission as well for the millions of civilians employed by various Army offices, arsenals, warehouses, etc., and it was to that civilian personnel section of AGO, headed by E.E. Cureton, that I was appointed.

This afforded an excellent opportunity to sharpen my research and consulting skills in personnel psychology. My job consisted essentially of visiting various field installations that had indicated an interest in assistance with regard to their personnel selection, placement, and/or promotion program , and helping to devise, validate, and install systems that would be of assistance. Apart from the professional experience, the work contributed to the worldly exposure of the boy from Brooklyn, since it entailed travel to all parts of the U.S. and contact with people from diverse backgrounds.

By the time the War was winding down, I had pretty much decided that I wanted to go back to being a college teacher (I had attained the exalted status of Instructor during my last year at N.Y.U., along with a similar position on a part time basis at the City College of New York). However, I now was clear that I wanted to build on my war time experience and locate a vacancy expressly in industrial psychology. Thus did the world of experimental and physiological psychology lose a member.

In the spring of 1945, I learned of such a vacancy, if memory serves me right, from R. J. Wherry who then was also at AGO. The position was at the University of Tennessee. It sounded promising: they were planning to expand a small department, to build up graduate studies, and to mount a teaching and research program in industrial psychology, in order to keep pace with the growing industrialization of the region. I decided to apply, although the idea of relocating to Knoxville held no personal appeal. After all, the job came first (advice I continue to urge on my students).

The next three years were spent there pleasantly and rewardingly. However, I decided not to refuse a similar opportunity that developed in 1948 at Syracuse University. I think in retrospect that the main reason was the desire of my wife, whom I had married in 1941, to be associated with what we then regarded as a more prestigious institution. As things turned out, it was not a bad decision: as I had hoped, there were more and better graduate students, a larger, more diversified faculty, and better

opportunities for industrial work. But life personally and professionally had been going well for me at U.T., and decision might just as well have turned out to be disadvantageous as otherwise.

Once settled in Syracuse, our marriage, which had shown occasional signs of instability all along, began to deteriorate seriously.

As marital matters continued to worsen, circumstance again intervened this time via Richardson, Bellows, Henry and Co., Inc. That consulting organization was formed late in 1945 by 13 psychologists (plus one accountant), most of whom had been associated with AGO or other government agencies during the War. The idea was to make available to private industry and peace time government the benefits of wartime experience and research in personnel psychology. I had been invited to be one of the founding stockholders and directors, and had been doing occasional work for the organization since its founding.

After the War, Fryer had returned to N.Y.U., which was undergoing revitalization in psychology under the leadership first of Lyle Lanier and later of Stuart Cook. R.B.H. had located its headquarters in New York, so Fryer, also one of the occasionally engaged directors of the firm, found himself increasingly involved in its work while also heading up N.Y.U.'s program in industrial psychology. In 1951, R.B.H. proposed to send Fryer overseas for a year to supervise a major project. I was contacted to come to New York to substitute for him both at R.B.H. and N.Y.U. This I was glad to do, as a way of gaining some valuable experience as well as needed income. The possibility of straightening out my deteriorated marital situation when away from Syracuse also was attractive. So I requested and was granted a year's leave of absence from Syracuse University to undertake that dual assignment.

As the year was drawing to an end, R.B.H. proposed that I stay on permanently, although Fryer was returning to resume his previous relationship with them and N.Y.U. I was by then heavily involved in some interesting projects, principally with General Electric as a client, which I was reluctant to discontinue. Also I learned that Syracuse was not yet prepared to effect a sorely needed integration of its fragmented faculty and programs in psychology. So the move was made permanent, although with Fryer's return my association with N.Y.U. was reduced to occasional teaching of a graduate course in industrial psychology as an adjunct associate professor.

By now my substantive interests had become strongly oriented toward applied social psychology to what more recently has become known as organizational psychology. I was now working on leadership and supervision, on employee attitudes, on community relations, and on work motivation. This movement was by no means idiosyncratic, since the whole I/O field had been growing in that direction and away from the differential psychometric tradition which had been dominant between the two great ways. That growth illustrated a thesis which I advanced in 1964(?) at an APA symposium chaired by the editor of the present volume. My contention was then (and still is) that I/O psychology undergoes fashions which reflect the cultural ambiance of the times--that it (like I suppose most or all other fields of knowledge) follows, more than it leads, intellectual developments. I therefore counseled my colleagues that, being aware of this, we should more deliberately devote at least some of our attention to futurism, to anticipating problems, needs, opportunities and directions in the years ahead. Even if we don't do this collectively, it is something which young psychologists should in their individual professional lives attempt to do. Let's not just be ripples stirred by the times, but parties to making the waves of the future.

By this time (1952) my wife and I had decided to dissolve our marriage, it not having been helped by our relocation. I was still occasionally returning to Syracuse to complete work on a sponsored research project, and on those occasions was associated with a young female psychologist who had been an administrative assistant while I was director of the University's Psychological Services Center. She now claims that she had made herself indispensable. In any event, after my divorce in 1953, Mildred and I were married, whereupon she became known as Kitty . She later completed her doctorate in psychological measurement at Columbia, and is currently a staff consultant at the Psychological Corporation and also a prominent member of Division 14 of APA.

Some have counseled against marrying a person in the same profession, but our experience would lead to the opposite conclusion.

The experience at R.B.H. was priceless. It embraced the gamut of issues, covering selection, performance rating, individual appraisal, job analysis and evaluation, leader behavior, training and development, employee and managerial attitudes, work motivation, and community relations. Clients were diverse; in addition to G.E., they included Esso Standard oil, Seagrams Distillers, Pillsbury, Mills, Standard Pressed Steel, Architectural Tiling, Mesabe and Iran Range Railroad, and several government and military agencies. The problems ranged in level from immediate application to long range R & D. Some even lent themselves to publication. The variety of challenges confronting a practicing I/O psychologists constitute a cogent argument for breadth of training and experience. We are perhaps the last generalists in an increasingly fragmented discipline.

Like all jobs, this me had its drawbacks in addiction to its assets. As a vice president and member of the firm's management, I had to concern myself with meeting a payroll in addition to technical problems; also, work frequently involved protracted periods away from home. And the constant pressure on a consultant to be billable meant that there was insufficient time to renew intellectual capital by extensively reading the technical literature.

Nevertheless, the plusses continued to outweigh the minuses, and I remained in this post for a period of six years without growing restless. This time, it was my Alma Mater (in more ways than one) which intervened. Fryer had died a few years before and they decided now to rebuild the doctoral program in Industrial Psychology, one of the nation's oldest. The plan was to develop a cooperative program of research and education between the Graduate School of Arts and Science and the School of Engineering, and I was invited to head it up under a joint appointment between the two schools. Although the salary fell short of what I was earning at RBH, I accepted anyway, thereby confirming Maslow's prepotency theory of motives. Throughout my years in industry, I had always thought of myself as a professor on leave, and this seemed like an ideal opportunity to return. The year was 1957.

The decision was a sound one for me. My career has flourished reasonably well, I think; I have a sense of fulfillment and job satisfaction; on the behavioral level, I have decline overtures regarding possible moves elsewhere.

There remain three more things I'd like to tell pertaining to the following two decades plus: my areas of research and scholarship, my involvement in professional affairs, and my stint as department head.

In recent years my substantive interests have centered around two subjects. The principal one concerns worker motivation, attitudes, and satisfaction. I have already explained that this interest took

wing in the post War Zeitgeist of democracy and humanitarianism. That interest has persisted in me for more than 25 years, although, more recently it expanded to comprehend organizational in addition to into a group and job related factors.

The second focus took hold in the mid 1960's and remains somewhat active. I refer to psychological problems associated with employment of disadvantaged groups, especially problems of selection and motivation. As in the case of the first topic, my involvement in this one was also stimulated by external circumstances. Like most psychologists, I was always ideologically opposed to discrimination against people on grounds of race, religion, sex, or national origin. And, like most of them, I did nothing in my professional work to implement that attitude. My consciousness of these issues was raised by many events, but let me mention, just three principal ones.

First, when I became head of the N.Y.U. Psychology Department in 1963, the departmental administrative assistant was a Negro women named Gustavia Pagan. Her involvement in the burgeoning civil rights movement served to heighten my awareness of and interest in the psychological, as well as moral dimensions of the issues.

Second were conversations initiated by my colleague, Richard Barrett, regarding the question of whether selection techniques such as psychological tests were in fact equally valid and fair for use with various ethnic groups. Recognizing that the issue was important both technically and socially, and that there was little published research evidence bearing on it, we decided that we would attempt to obtain a grant for an investigation of it. This support was given by the Ford Foundation for a study compiling and analyzing relevant data already available in company records. The results were published in 1968 in a monograph entitled Testing and Fair Employment, co authored with our collaborators J.T. Kirkpatrick and R.B. Ewen, and probably the first comprehensive survey of the subject. The principal implication, that employment tests may not always work the same way in all ethnic groups, still stirs controversy among psychologists. Whatever the final answer, I'm glad that we helped bring the issue to light.

The third event was an invitation issued in 1967 by Richard Shore of the U.S. Department of Labor to join a panel to advise on the content of an order on how personnel testing should be conducted in order to comply with Title VII of the Civil Rights Act Of 1964. The Labor Department later established a standing Advisory Committee on Testing and Selection, which I co chaired with Howard Lockwood. That Committee played an important role in drafting the OFCC testing orders of 1968 and 1971, as well as the more widely known EEOC guidelines of 1970 in collaboration with William Enneis. These were the beginnings of a series of involvements in various committees, advisory groups, consultancies, and court cases concerning testing in relation to equal employment opportunity.

Another aspect of my life at N.Y.U. took place between 1963 and 1972, when I served as Head of the Department of Psychology. Stuart Cook, who had been instrumental in rebuilding the Department from 1950 to 1963, decided that after all those years it was time to fulfill a family commitment to locate in the wide open spaces, which New York could not quite provide. I accepted with some misgivings the proposal of the search committee that succeeded him. I knew that it was a massive administrative responsibility, with a faculty of some 40 fulltime members, about 200 doctoral students several hundred undergraduate majors divided between two centers, plus sundry research programs, clinics, shops and other fulcra of activity, each with its associated agenda, staff, finances, and problems; to do this would necessarily entail a major reduction in my teaching and research activities, including severing my tie with Engineering. But someone had to do it, and no well qualified alternative was in view, so I decided to

give it a try. I also had a vague idea, like Douglas McGregor did when he took the Antioch president, that it might serve as a kind of laboratory for testing my views on organizational psychology. Besides, there is something irresistible, I suspect, about heading the department where one was once a student!

The assignment turned out to be even more of a challenge than I had thought. During the first part of my tenure, opportunities abounded to obtain much needed funding for programs and facilities. Accordingly, I found myself embroiled in applications, site visits, and negotiations both within and outside the University. Fortunately there was some tangible payoff to all this, which, of course, was additional to the normal administrative routines. A major building was renovated and equipped so that the Department at long last had first class laboratories, offices, and classrooms; a number of visible, active people and also some very promising juniors were recruited to the faculty; grants were obtained or received for graduate training in several specialty areas; some important research was funded and completed; the undergraduate program was revised, etc. In short, we built on the solid foundations of a good department that had been constructed during the post War years.

As the decade of the '60's was drawing to a close, a new set of challenges emerged. This was the period when America was greening , when faculty and students everywhere were questioning the established order and N.Y.U. was no exception. Administrators (including chairmen) were beleaguered by innumerable perplexing issues over and beyond those with which they normally had to deal.

These two sets of incremental burdens enlivened my life, but they took even more time and attention away from my primary professional concerns than I had been prepared to give. Although I always kept a finger in some scholarly project or other, it was usually at the expense of what I should have been devoting to other things (like my health and recreation); moreover, the quality was not always what I would have wanted it to be. When in the early 170's a third type of challenge arose on the horizon--the financial crunch on higher education--I decided that I had had enough of administration and that it was time to get back to being a full time gentleman and scholar. However, although I am sometimes wistful about what might have been had I been able fully to pursue my technical work during those nine years, on balance I feel that they were useful. I learned a lot about managing and about human nature is in vivo, and still derive considerable vicarious satisfaction from the attainments of my department and students.

The final set of activities that might be worth describing are those concerned with professional affairs. Although they amounted to something of a groundswell during my N.Y.U. period, my earliest involvement was when, as a graduate student in 1941, 1 joined the American Psychological Association and attended my first annual convention. It was memorable in numerous ways. For one thing, it was held at what was then Pennsylvania State College, and entailed my furthest journey from home via a 7 hour bus trip. Also, as Fryer's protg, I was introduced to several of the luminaries of the era, including R.S. Woodworth and R.M. Yerkes; APA's total membership then was less than a tenth of what it is now, and only a few hundred attended the convention. I avidly attended many of the sessions (I still do this some 20 conventions later, although maybe less avidly); one that still comes to mind was a symposium concerning the uses of factorial designs and analysis of variance--it's hard to realize that they were then still novelties.

After the war, I gradually became more active in professional societies, as a program participant (e.g. at A.P.A.'s final campus convention in 1950, again coincidentally at Penn State), as a committee member (my first was as Chairman of the New York State association's committee on ethics in 1949), as a

diplomat and later examiner of the American Board of Examiners (it may be of small historical interest that I was the first person to be boarded in I/O psychology via examination, also in 1949; earlier diplomats were all "grandfathers"), and as an association officer. The last may be worth further commitment, since, by touching on my presidency of Division 14, it closes the circle of this autobiography.

It may be instructive to consider, in terms of my career, how one gets elected president of a professional organization. Basically, I think, there are two routes. One is a political" one, that is by rising through: the ranks of service, gaining visibility and indebtedness along the way. This is the route that brought me in 1958 to the presidency of the New York State Psychological Association: starting with the aforementioned chairmanship of the ethics committee, I served in such capacities as secretarytreasurer of the Personnel Division, member of the Board of Directors, and co-chairman of the New York inter-society council on legislation.

The other is the professional route. It involves doing some professional things which bring one favorably, to the attention of one's colleagues. In the case of my election to the Division 14 presidency, I had published or read a number of papers by 1960. But while these may have been a necessary condition to my election, I don't believe that they were sufficiently dramatic either in number or impact--to have been sufficient. Two things happened which did generate additional visibility. I was asked to prepare the chapter on industrial psychology for the 1957 Annual Review of Psychology; since that was only the eighth volume in the series, authorship of one of its chapters was even more distinctive than it is today. A year or two later, the Division 14 program committee chaired by Mortimer Feinberg set up a session in which I, as a representative I/O Psychologist, was grilled by Mike Wallace. Wallace at the time had a popular TV show in which he did that kind of thing with various guest personalities . That APA session drew an overflow crowd, and I gather that I gave a pretty good account of myself and of the field.

On the basis of my experiences, I commend to budding I/O psychologists active involvement in the affairs of their professional societies. You can thereby have added impact on the development of your profession, you can learn a lot, and you can make contacts that may benefit your employer, colleagues, and students.

On re-reading this account of my life, I was reminded of a remark of Vernon Gomez, Gomez, better known as Goofy, may be remembered by some of you as a stellar pitcher on some of the great New York Yankee teams of by gone days. Once when asked by a reporter for the key to his success, he replied clean living--and a fast outfield.

That remark succinctly sums up the lesson of my life. To some extent, our achievements are attributable to a "fast outfield"--the people and events which constitute what earlier I called circumstance. But they also require some hard work and deprivation: Gomez's clean living .

"Goofy" indeed.