

Remembering Dr. Maxie Clarence Maultsby Jr., Founder of Rational Behavior Therapy

The great psychiatrist created a self-counseling approach that would change how therapy worked forever.

Kevin Brown · Follow · 6 min read · Feb 2, 2025

👤 1 · 🗨️ 1 · 📌 1 · 🔄 1 · 📄 1

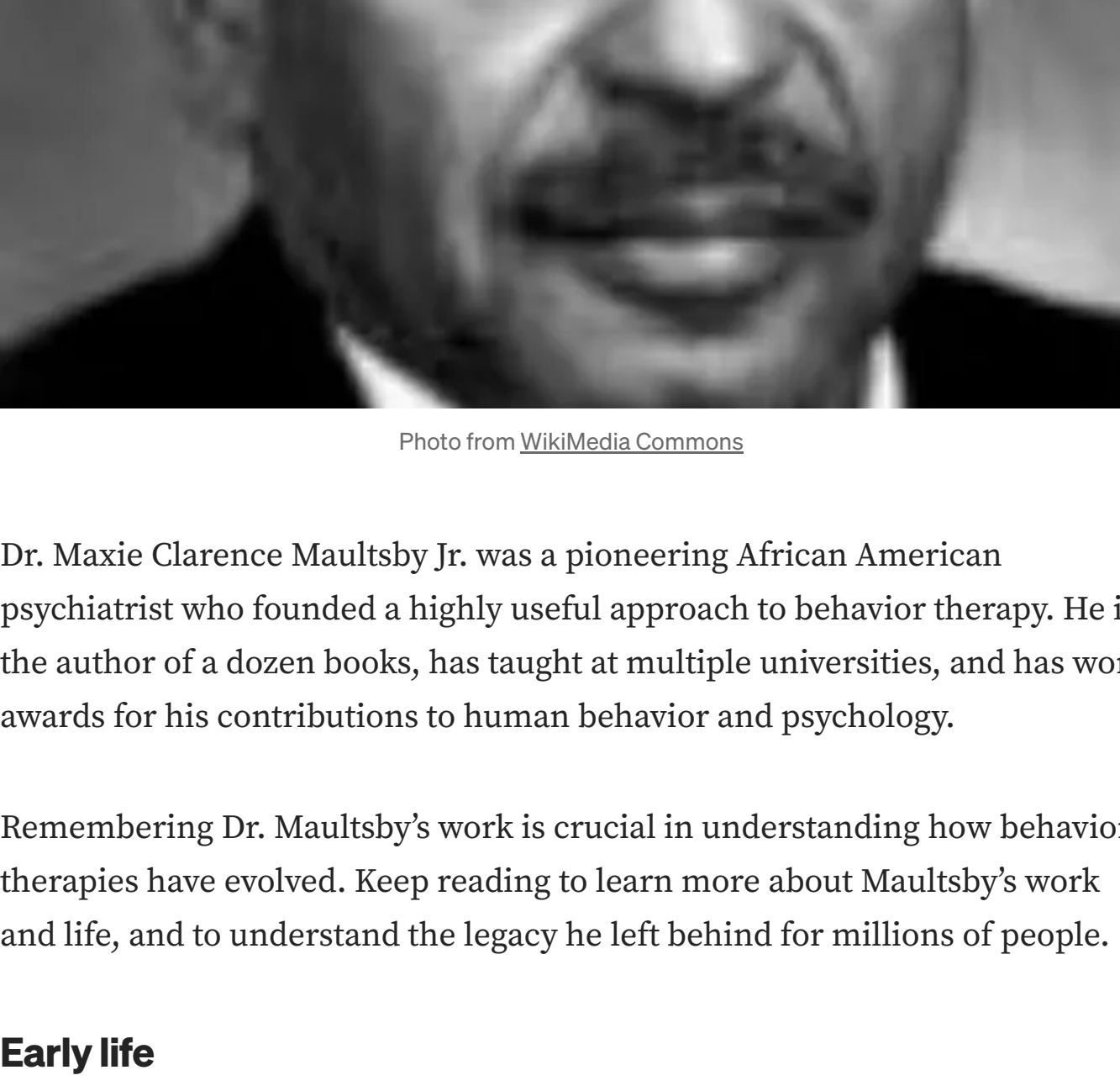


Photo from Wikimedia Commons

Dr. Maxie Clarence Maultsby Jr. was a pioneering African American psychiatrist who founded a highly useful approach to behavior therapy. He is the author of a dozen books, has taught at multiple universities, and has won awards for his contributions to human behavior and psychology.

Remembering Dr. Maultsby's work is crucial in understanding how behavior therapies have evolved. Keep reading to learn more about Maultsby's work and life, and to understand the legacy he left behind for millions of people.

Early life

Maxie Clarence Maultsby Jr. was born on April 24, 1932, in Pensacola, Florida. According to friends and colleagues who wrote of fond memories, his mother, Valdee Maultsby Campbell, worked as an elementary school teacher. His father, Maxie Clarence Maultsby Sr. worked as a turpentine carpenter. Both parents worked at the same plantation.

Turpentine, the liquid oil used for cleaning and resin finishes served as a family's final, desperate grasp for financial relief. In these days, families faced ruin due to the Great Depression. Boys like Maultsby Jr. were pressured to increase the family income. It's interesting, that, given the crisis, Maultsby's mother, Valdee, home-schooled him for the first seven years of his education. Maultsby, nonetheless, went on to graduate from Jones High School in Orlando, Florida in 1949.

Secondary School

By 1953, Maultsby had earned a bachelor's degree from a historically black, yet segregated and tense college. Talladega College once had an administrator who wanted to close the college's elementary and secondary schools, and at a time when the secondary school was the only place for a black student to earn a diploma in the country. Racial tension challenged even the most gifted students, but Maultsby, like many black learners, exited with a high school diploma.

College education and medical work

A coveted opportunity based on Maultsby's potential awaited him after graduation. Maultsby received a scholarship offer from the Cleveland, Ohio research school, Case Western Reserve University, an extraordinary accomplishment. By 1957, Maultsby had earned his medical degree, receiving the title of Doctor of Medicine. For a year, he interned at the Philadelphia General Hospital, then moved back to Florida to become a General Practitioner.

In 1962, Maultsby joined the U.S. Air Force. He served as a medical officer and noticed a concern that would change the trajectory of his career. Maultsby realized his patients had unresolved psychological symptoms. He knew he had the power to contribute to significant change.

After four years in the military, Maultsby departed the Air Force, eager to pursue a dedicated career in helping others. Now, psychiatry was the main focus of his work and would take up the most substantial amount of his time.

Rational Behavior Therapy

After marrying Rossnilda Oliveras-Rodriguez in 1967, Dr. Maultsby completed two residencies through the University of Wisconsin. One was in general psychiatry. The other was in child and adolescent psychiatry. Maultsby then taught, trained, and became a certified sex therapist.

But soon, he would make another life-changing decision. Maultsby began focusing more on psychotherapeutic methods, particularly, behavior therapy, and notably, psychologist Albert Ellis's Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, which was growing in popularity. In 1967, Maultsby befriended Ellis and began studying alongside him. He then completed a fellowship in the therapy, which focused on changing unhelpful thoughts, and later, evolved to address behavioral changes.

Maultsby grew further committed to contributing to behavior therapy. He trained with Joseph Wolpe, a South African psychiatrist, and the German physician, Wolfgang Luthe. By 1970, Maultsby formed his own approach to helping patients called Rational Behavior Therapy. This was the defining term that became attached to Maultsby's name.

Rational Behavior Therapy was a take-home self-counseling approach. Its intention was to help individuals challenge unhelpful emotions and behaviors. Dr. Maultsby rooted his therapy in an emotional self-help process called rational self-counseling. This method put patients in charge of making changes.

Maultsby believed that patients should complete out-of-office homework assignments. By challenging themselves at home, patients could better cope with depression and anxiety symptoms, he asserted. Consequently, they would live better and improve their ability to live independently.

Soon, Dr. Maultsby chose to delve deeper into the therapy. He wanted to expand its uses in psychiatry nationwide. In 1973, he founded The Training and Treatment Center for Rational Behavior Thinking. The organization promoted Maultsby's approach, highlighting the fact that the therapy was about recognizing an obscured, distress-causing problem, then changing how one thought about that problem. Maultsby's therapy was crucial in helping patients understand their thoughts. More importantly, clients learned to change their behaviors in the short-term.

Rational Behavior Therapy proved to be highly influential. The therapy went on to forward a range of critical ideas psychiatrists would accept:

- Clients must learn to become their own self-therapists. (From the book, *Help Yourself to Happiness: Through Rational Self-Counseling*)
- Clients and psychiatrists can support a healthy mindset by using image-based visualization practices. (From the book, *Rational Emotive Imagery*)
- Clients don't need to identify disorders or understand medical terms. (From the book, *Your guide to emotional well being: The handbook of rational self counseling*)
- Clients must come up with their own definition of healthy thinking.
- Clients can appreciate the value of religious, spiritual, philosophical, or existential beliefs. (From the book, *Coping Better... Anytime, Anywhere: The Handbook of Rational Self-Counseling*)

Rational Behavior Therapy was an important contribution, and a subject of which Dr. Maultsby wrote numerous, well-received books. His book of the same title, and his work, helped him inspire American professional football player Larry Wilson's bestselling title, *Play to Win*.

Late career

Dr. Maultsby's late career was where people saw his insights prominently, as the pioneering doctor would work a number of highly respected positions. In 1979, he became an assistant professor at the University of Kentucky. He also worked at the university's Adult Outpatient Psychiatry Program. In 1987, after working with cancer patients, Maultsby became the director of Columbia, South Carolina's Bryan Psychiatric Hospital. Later, he became the director of the Southern Nevada Adult Mental Health Services clinic in Las Vegas, Nevada.

In 1989, Maultsby was appointed Chairman Professor of Psychiatry in the College of Medicine at Howard University in Washington, D.C. In 2004, he received the title of Emeritus Professor. The position solidified the respect Maultsby's colleagues held for him for years. He remained a member of the Howard University faculty until his retirement in 2004.

In 2011, Dr. Maultsby became professor of the psychiatry training program for residents at the nearby Saint Elizabeth's hospital in D.C. He died on Sunday, August 28, 2016, surrounded by his family in Alexandria, Virginia.

Dr. Maultsby's career was one of prestige and success. He was an Elected Distinguished Life Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association. He was a recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Association of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapists. Maultsby was also recognized as one of 33 black pioneers in Charles H. Epps' book, *African American Medical Pioneers*.

Legacy

Dr. Maultsby's decades-long career represents work that is proven to be among the finest and most influential of all American psychiatrists. His contributions to scholarly research in various academic journals resulted in vast improvement and positive changes in people's lives, including his patients and their families.

Mental health experts and students alike remember Dr. Maultsby for his commitment to psychiatric excellence, as his thorough, highly comprehensive self-counseling approach inspired commanding changes to cognitive-behavioral therapy. His desire to help others has only increased the value of his contributions, paving the way for a bright future for those who believe in the power of changing people's lives.

Kevin Brown writes on mental health. For more, follow Kevin on X at @kevinbwriting.

Psychology · Psychiatry · Human Behavior · Mental Health Awareness · People

Written by Kevin Brown · 48 followers · 70 following · Experienced freelance mental health writer. Nonfiction/fiction ghostwriter. Human work-in-progress and soon-to-be published author.

Responses (1) · Write a response · What are your thoughts?

Edgerp · Apr 21 · A life well lived in service to others. Thank you for your years of guidance and inspiration and the "not so gentle" push leading to a career in Medicine. Rest in eternal peace Cousin. Edger V Potter Jr MD CMD FACR

2 · Reply

More from Kevin Brown

5 Surprising Facts About Avoidant Personality Disorder · Hope for the Fearful: 5 Surprising Facts About Avoidant Personality... · AVPD causes intense fear and longing, but the truth about this disorder suggests there...

Jun 9, 2023 · 4 · Feb 26, 2021

How Therapists Help Quiet Clients Improve Their Emotional Health · Avoid These Five Mistakes to Live Your Best Life With Depression · Nearly half of American college students once used drugs. But substance abuse ruins...

Dec 21, 2022 · 50 · 1 · Apr 13, 2023

See all from Kevin Brown

Recommended from Medium

In Invisible Illness by Morgana Clementine · If I'm Invisibly, Why Don't I Have Meltdowns and Shutdowns? · And other questions as I reclaim my anger and heal from trauma as an AuDHDer

4d ago · 1.1K · 14 · 10 Gaslight-Resistant Phrases Every Woman Needs to Survive... · How to Disarm, Dismantle, and Defend Your Sanity As a Woman

4d ago · 1.1K · 3

I Relapsed—Addiction Is a Cunning Beast · The Rage of a Lifetime of Sacrificing Your Neurodivergent... · After three months, twenty-five days, and seven hours of sobriety, I'm back to day one

May 11 · 5.1K · 130 · When survival no longer demands keeping quiet but speaking up

4d ago · 1K · 22

I Have A Weird Theory About Gen Z's Premature Aging · BREAKING—Ukraine Loses Another F-16, But Scores 3 Kills... · Hear me out...It might actually be environmental.

3d ago · 1.4K · 21 · This loss is the third confirmed F-16 crash in Ukrainian service since the jets began...

3d ago · 2.8K · 11

See more recommendations