

...with Adrian Furnham

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One moment that changed the course of your career

My mother bringing home one of the early Eysenck Penguin paperbacks which were (and are) easy to read, interesting and provocative. I read it in one sitting and was captivated. I resolved in fifth form to read psychology rather than maths.

One thing that you would change about psychology

Specialising too early. When I was a student at an obscure colonial university we had to read Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*; Fromm's *The Art of Loving*; and Lorenz's *King Solomon's Ring* as preparation for the first year. I would add to that list Gregory's *The Intelligent Eye* and the new book by Lilienfeld et al., *50 Great Myths of Popular Psychology* to get some idea of the breadth and range of the subject. One needs to learn that no behavioural issue is the exclusive province of one branch of psychology.

One thing psychology has achieved

I teach students from many areas – medical and business students, economics and philosophy students. What I have noticed is that my students acquire multiple skills others don't. They are numerate and literate; they can critique theories, arguments and analyses; they know how to gain access to knowledge. And, by third year they can take a 'hot off the press' article from a top journal and understand its message and see its flaws. We do some things right.

One memory of South Africa

Being taken to the local mental hospital by a supercilious and unpleasant lecturer in abnormal psychology to see and interview 'real mental patients', including a number who had had a lobotomy. I recall how easy it was to spot a

schizophrenic and near impossible a psychopath.

One persistent challenge

Overcoming the scientist/practitioner divide in all areas of applied psychology. Practitioners soon become out of date and are driven by the



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agendas of their clients, companies and institutions. Scientists pursue journal impact factors and their h-index with little or no regard to the applicability, usefulness. You can see this in

the learned societies (e.g. APA, BPS) which many academics view as largely pointless semi-trade unions and so start their own societies (e.g. EPS, APS).

One nugget of advice for aspiring psychologists

Beware becoming a fashion victim of the latest statistical or methodological craze. Do three things to become well known: First, devise and validate a good test (of any sort); Second, do a few good meta-analyses and/or systematic reviews (and update them); Third, start, or try to get hold of a large longitudinal population sample to look at causal effects over time. That will do wonders for your citations and advancement.

One final thought

I argued 30 years ago, in the *Times Higher*, that I had the best job in the world. A don's job offers flexi-time and flexi-topic... you can follow your passions, write books and papers on anything that takes your fancy and make work your hobby; you are always surrounded by young, talented, forward-looking students; having respect-worthy, if not always supportive, peers some of whom are remarkably gifted; and a very light touch from the university bureaucrats. That still remains true, though the shadows of managerialism and centralism are changing the latter benefit.

More answers online at www.thepsychologist.org.uk

resource

Furnham, A. & Bochner, S. (1986). *Culture Shock. Psychological Reactions to Unfamiliar Environments*. Methuen.
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