

## **My Professors**

**David Lester**

### **Cambridge University**

Part 1 of my Cambridge University degree was in Physics and Mathematics, and I switched to psychology in January of my second year.<sup>1</sup> I knew nothing about psychology, and so I got a book, from around 1920 from the local public library to see what I had let myself in for. I had been assigned to Alan Welford as Director of Studies, and he wrote to me to stop reading that book. He advised me to read books by Hans Eysenck instead. I was puzzled. A mathematics book from the 1920s would still be useful. Why not a psychology book from the 1920s?

#### **Alan Welford**

I knew Welford's specialty was aging, but I never took a course from him. We met weekly to discuss my progress, but I don't recall what we talked about or that he set me any assignments. He left soon after my three years at Cambridge to go to a university in Australia.

When I look him up now, I realise that he was a notable figure. He, along with others, started the Ergonomic Society which received a Royal Charter and a scholarly journal *Ergonomics*. The Human Factors and Ergonomics Society of Australia gives an annual Alan Welford Award, and *Ergonomics* publishes an annual Alan Welford Memorial Lecture. This seems to be a pattern in my life in that I often failed to realise how good and occasionally famous my teachers were.

I applied to only two Universities in America for graduate study in 1964, and one was in human factors at Berkeley. They offered me a place and a promise of financial support, but I turned them down. In retrospect, that application must have been influenced by Welford.

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<sup>1</sup> The BA program takes three years.

## **Hans Eysenck**

A mention of Hans Eysenck in America led to raised eyebrows and signs of disapproval. He published a great deal and, if someone criticized his work or ideas, he would immediately have a reply in the journal. He published in many fields (intelligence, personality, and learning theory) and had ideas which became unpopular. For example, he believed that intelligence was determined in part by genetics. And he hated psychoanalysis.

But I have always liked Eysenck. Those books I read by him encouraged me to think that my change of topics was a good move. *Sense and Nonsense in Psychology*, *Fact and Fiction in Psychology*, and *Uses and Abuses of Psychology* were all very interesting reads. I came not to share his ideas, although I have used his three dimensions of personality in my work (extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism), and I have even proposed a physiological basis for them (which remains unnoticed). But I liked his spirit and energy.

He was the editor of *Personality and Individual Differences* for many years and probably made decisions to accept or reject many articles himself without other reviewers. He accepted many of my papers in my early years, which is another reason for me to like him.

On one occasion, he accepted a paper of mine on personality and blood types, but he mentioned that he had a paper related to mine and asked whether I might cite it. I immediately wrote back and apologised for not citing it, and I added mention of it to my paper. He wanted as many citations as possible and, in these days of ResearchGate and Google Scholar, I cannot blame him.

## **Alan Watson**

After the chair of the Department of Experimental Psychology, there were three senior people, readers in Cambridge terminology. Alan Watson was one of the two really brilliant

people I have met. He did not finish his PhD. He said that he widened the mazes in which he ran his rats, and the results changed drastically. This disillusioned him, and he stopped working on his dissertation. In his lectures, he organized the material into a beautiful story as he pieced the results of different studies on learning together (mainly in rats), and he did it without notes.

### **Richard Gregory**

The second senior person was Richard Gregory, also without a PhD, but again who was very clever. Looking him up, I find that was honored by the Queen with the CBE. His topic was perception, and the book I admired was *Eye and Brain*. He was able to explain aspects of perception with simple demonstrations rather than experiments, such as why the world appears to remain stable when you move your eyes. He used to joke that his major ideas came from reading, in German, old scholarly journals from the late 1800s and re-discovering those ideas. (Perhaps it was not a joke.) I remember that he re-discovered a sea creature in the Mediterranean with one light receptor that scanned the visual field, much as television cameras did. He also disagreed vehemently with the ideas of the American psychologist J. J. Gibson, and I found Gibson's ideas boring and Gregory's exciting.

He left Cambridge soon after I did and ended his career at the University of Bristol University, His Wikipedia page is impressive! It turns out that he studied and wrote a book on the first blind person to have his sight restored, which I read at the time. That individual died by suicide after a year or so. My first brush with suicide.

### **Alice Heim**

Alice did have a PhD. She supervised what we call in America my senior thesis. It was on an intelligence test (the Shaw Blocks Test) which does not penalize creativity. She published

my research as a one-page note in *Psychological Reports* in 1964, which started me on my 1,000 notes in *Psychological Reports* and *Perceptual and Motor Skills*. Blame it on Alice!

I kept in touch with her and, when I went back to Cambridge to be examined for my PhD in social and political science, I stayed at her house. She was very old but working on a book on memory loss in old age (*Where did I put my spectacles?*). She has over 30 articles in PsycInfo and a book which I liked, *Intelligence and Personality*, in which she argued that intelligence was better viewed as a personality trait.

### **The Others**

Oliver Zangwill was the chair of the department, a neuropsychologist, and a Fellow of the Royal Society. I knew him only because he interviewed me when I switched from physics to psychology and approved the switch. I also attended his lectures (I attended every lecture given by the department in my 1½ years there). He never looked at the audience (of about 40 of us), and students at back would hold up lighted matches to see if he would notice them. He never did.

Lawrence Weiskrantz was American and the third senior person in the department. PsycInfo indicates that he was still publishing as of 2017. His Wikipedia page is impressive too, with many discoveries and honors. He too left Cambridge and ended up at Oxford University. However, for me, he gave the first lecture I had in the department, and he was a physiological psychologist. His lecture left me wondering whether I had made the right choice to switch. My notes from that lecture contained the word *emigdala*, and it was a year before I found out that he was referring to the *amygdala*.

The department was a Department of Experimental Psychology: learning perception and physiological psychology primarily. But one day in the department's library, I saw a book *Clues to Suicide* by Edwin Shneidman and Norman Farberow. I browsed through it and, at the end,

there are 33 pairs of suicide notes, one genuine and one simulated. I should have tested myself to see how many I could distinguish correctly, but I did not. It seemed to me to be obvious which were the genuine ones, and some moved me to tears. Serendipity indeed!

### **Brandeis University**

Alan Welford and I had never heard of Brandeis University, and we had no idea that it was primarily a Jewish university. But they offered me a fellowship (\$3,000 a year) to live on and free tuition. I was not given the Wien Fellowship for foreign students (that went to John Benjafield from Canada), but instead a Charles Revson Fellowship. Revson was the CEO of Revlon Cosmetics, and so I always urged people to buy Revlon to support my fellowship.

I applied to Brandeis because they had sent a flier to the Cambridge psychology department. We looked up the faculty, and we had heard of none of them, including Maslow. The department had 12 faculty, 4 in humanistic psychology, 4 in clinical psychology and 4 in experimental psychology, and the rumor was that the three groups never spoke to one another!

### **Jerome Wodinsky**

Jerry was the as brilliant as Alan Watson at Cambridge. He taught learning and, because he did not offer a graduate course, I audited his undergraduate course. From a few notes on the back of an envelope, he would produce a brilliant lecture. Jerry was unusual in that he hung out with the graduate students. He would have coffee with us in the cafeteria (the Castle). I remember him once teasing an elderly graduate student saying, "Fred, how many Israeli soldiers would it take to defeat the Viet Cong? A thousand? Two thousand?" He drove a convertible and had it fill with snow one winter because he forgot to put the roof back up. He was the only faculty member we called by his first name.

Jerry published occasionally but had lots of unpublished studies. His scholarly and academic life seemed always to be in a muddle. He hadn't even got his grades in from his previous job at the New School.

### **Ricardo Morant**

Rick was the chair of the department, and his field was perception. One summer, we worked with him on a project in Boston to teach illiterates to read. He told us to call him Rick, but I never could. (The project seemed to be failure on the tests we gave pre and post the teaching, but I remember one elderly man signing his name for the first time in his life, and we all had tears. And one woman told us that, for the first time in her life, she could tell the number of the bus approaching the bus stop and didn't have to ask someone else what the number was.)

Morant was good to me. In my fights with the faculty of the department, he would call me into his office, sit me down and look for a solution (or a way around) the problem. I used to threaten to quit, saying I could get a PhD from Cambridge and didn't need them (which I eventually did, getting my second PhD). My major fight was with my first advisor who was threatened by the fact that I was publishing many articles while still a graduate student. He had a rule passed saying that graduate students would have to get each article approved by the faculty before submission. My argument was that I had published more than he had, and so he needed approval too. Rick's solution was to have a friend who had just earned her PhD (Denise Thum) approve my articles. Denise ok'd the first paper I showed her without reading it, and then I stopped showing them to her.

MA degrees were given as consolation prizes when the department threw you out, but I wanted to earn an honest MA. The rules said that one could submit published papers for an MA, so I submitted my paper in *Psychological Bulletin* on the fear of death along with a few others.

When the university asked Rick to sign the form, he was astounded. “You didn’t have to do that,” he said. “We would have given you an MA.” But he made up a title and contents, and I was awarded the MA. I was the only graduate student to do that.

### **Marianne Simmel**

Marianne was the granddaughter of Georg Simmel, the German sociologist. Marianne was a warm person, and I remained friends with her after she retired, often visiting her at her home on Cape Cod. Her main interest was phantom pain, and she re-worked the data from a couple of studies that she had conducted into paper after paper. She shepherded two students to their PhDs (John Benjafield and Claire Golomb), quite an achievement in that department where few students finished their studies.

I remember her also for two things she said to me. In England, I had been the top student until my BA when, instead of getting a *first*, I got an *upper second*. or 2-1. (They awarded only one first in psychology that year. I have checked on him, and he’s never published!). With a 2-1, I could have stayed at Cambridge for my PhD. (With a 2-2 or lower, one had to go to a provincial [red brick] university.) Now that I wasn’t perfect, all I wanted at Brandeis was to pass. After one qualifying exam, Marianne said to me, “You passed, David, but you should have done better.” I acknowledged her criticism but, back in the graduate student lounge, rejoiced that I had passed.

The second thing that Marianne said to me? I commented once that Maslow had only one good idea in his life. Marianne said to me, “David, if you have one good idea in your life, you will be very happy.” I’m still waiting for that one good idea!

Which brings me, at last to Maslow.

### **Abraham Maslow**

Although we had not heard of Maslow at Cambridge, I quickly learned how famous he was. He refused to teach graduate students because, he said, they were too arrogant, and so I audited an undergraduate course with him. He taught the course on utopias with a historian, Frank Manuel. Manual was a noisy energetic teacher, often hitting the table with his trouser leg. (Manual had only one leg, and so one trouser leg was free.) In fact, Manual dominated the seminar, and Maslow was content to let him do so.

Because I had been in that course, Abe asked me to be his TA for his undergraduate course on eupsychia. On one occasion, the students told Abe he was talking too much and that he was to remain quiet during discussions until they asked him a question. He let them do this for a few classes, and then took over again.

One another occasion, the students asked him to clarify a point. He had said that people were inflexible in one lecture but that they were inflexible in another lecture. Abe said that child rearing shaped us in many ways. He said that, if he had been born in Germany, he might have come to accept many fascist views. But in many ways, especially as far as genetics and physiological processes were concerned, we were inflexible. For example, he said, one day when his wife was out, he tried to breast feed his infant daughter. He held her to his nipple but, not only didn't it feel good to him, but also she didn't get any milk.

There was panic in the students. They did not know how to respond. Was this funny? Or was it serious? They kept looking at one another, but no one laughed, so they concluded that it was serious, and they all bent over to write notes. For myself, in the corner at the back, I clapped my hand over my mouth trying to mask my laughter. If one student had laughed, they all would have joined in. An example of the social comparison process. I couldn't wait to get to the graduate student lounge and tell the others the story.

Abe was on my dissertation committee. My original thesis advisor had thrown me out after I had complained about the rule he had passed about graduate students publishing. I then turned to James Klee who agreed to be in charge of my already-written thesis. John Senden and Abe were on the committee, along with Irving Zola, a sociologist. Senden wanted changes in my dissertation, but I made a plea. I said that, in published articles, one had to lie. You pretended that you knew your hypothesis before you ran the study, and you left out parts that were in conflict with your hypothesis. Since your PhD dissertation was unpublished, you could be honest and detail the false steps you made and the wrong turnings you made on the journey. Zola was delighted. "David," he said. "Don't change a word." In fact, one chapter moved to an appendix, and that was all.

When I went in to Abe's office, he was lying on his couch, and I sat in his chair. "David, I would never write a thesis like this," he said. I had a mild anxiety attack. "But who am I to tell you how to write *your* thesis. I think you will be a good psychologist. Are you happy with your thesis?" I said that I was. "Well then, I am too," and he signed it. Abe was one of the few psychologists who lived according to his theoretical ideas.

### **George Kelly**

I was lucky that George Kelly, another leading personality theorist, retired from Ohio State University, and came to Brandeis. I took his graduate student seminar which was, of course, on his theory of personal constructs. I admire his theory, but I do not believe that it is correct. Nonetheless, I have incorporated some of the ideas in the theory in my own subself theory of personality, especially the idea of having propositions and corollaries in a theory.

Kelly was strict in his professional and personal views. One story was that he had the junior faculty over to his home, and my hated original advisor made the mistake of lighting a

cigarette before realizing that there were no ash trays anywhere in the room. When he came to Brandeis, Kelly brought a graduate student who liked his theory with him (Jack Adams-Webber). In the seminar, Jack and a few others who clearly liked the theory sat quietly, while others challenged the theory. At an early meeting of the seminar, Kelly said that he did want his disciples to hear the criticisms and that he wanted to split the seminar into two seminars – those for him and those against him. Those for him objected. They said they wanted to hear the criticism and Kelly's response to them. So we stayed together. So much for Kelly's idea of *constructive alternativism*!

My thesis consisted of several studies on suicide, and I used Kelly's RES Test in one of those studies, but I did not want Kelly on my committee.

### **My Dissertation**

My entering group of eight graduate students was the last group at Brandeis to be allowed to choose their own topic for their dissertation rather than being assigned to work on a professor's research. Although I was running rats for fun on research into exploratory behavior (and later received a NIMH small grant for the research), I chose *suicide*, the influence of that serendipitous event at Cambridge.

Morant suggested we get Edwin Shneidman to be the outside reader on my committee, an idea I vetoed. I had had two interactions with Ed. Once he called the department and asked to speak to me. I was astounded. He told me that he liked my research on suicide but that I needed clinical experience. My wife at the time and I later visited Ed at his NIMH office (where he ran a section on suicide research). He started by focusing on my wife. What did she study? Perception, and he took off his glasses. The meeting went on in that tone, until he said, "Ok, kiddies. That's all." He loaded me with reprints of his work and sent us on our way.

At conferences, Ed always knew that I did not like him. He could have helped me in many ways in my career, but never offered to do so. When Antoon Leenaars proposed a *festschrift* for Ed, Ed rejected the idea of having me write a chapter. If my chapter had been included, it would have been the only one which took Ed's ideas and enlarged on them. In the chapters that were included, the authors talked of their own research, not Ed's. I published my chapter in a journal and sent a copy to Ed, noting that it had been written for his *festschrift*. As he lay dying, bedridden at home, I talked to him a couple of times on the telephone. After all, his book had shaped my scholarly career, and his ideas and research were ground-breaking. Sometimes I can forgive, He admitted that he had been wrong to reject my chapter.