

...with Stephen J. Ceci

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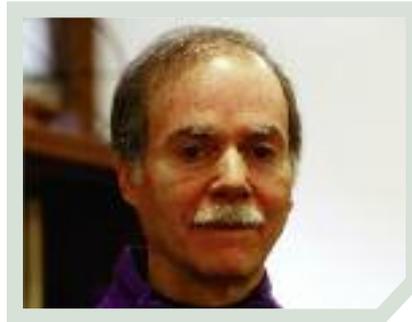
One inspiration

I was in graduate school in the US when I began reading the work of a British psychologist named Michael Howe. We struck up a correspondence and I ended up doing my doctoral research at Exeter under his guidance. Mike taught me a lesson not only in psychological science but also in humanity. He and his family were just what a struggling postgraduate student needed. I'll forever be grateful to them, and to the British system and its generosity toward me.

One moment that changed the course of your career

As a new PhD I had taken an academic job at a Midwestern state university in the US. Along with a slightly more experienced colleague, I undertook what was at the time a very controversial

experiment. To say that my senior colleagues were not enamoured with this study is an understatement. As a result of the fallout, I ended up taking a post at a better university – ironically, one that awarded me with early promotion, in part, because of this study. When I look back at the 35 years I have spent as an academic, this early decision to change jobs looms most important. It set up a cascade of largely positive events that I believe would not have occurred if I had remained at my former university. Life is often a matter of chance encounters, random stochastic processes, and who you happen to sit next to.



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One thing that you would change about psychology

Our field is no longer what I consider to be rationally organised. There has been enormous blurring of disciplinary lines; the most interesting literature on topics such as the influence of early stress on brain development is being done by economists, sociologists, neuroscientists and psychologists. Psychology needs to think more expansively, broadening our training to include econometric models, sociological theory, etc. We risk becoming less influential if we stick to traditional lines.

One challenge you think psychology faces

Our insularity prevents us from answering some very

important research and policy questions [see box below].

One nugget of advice for aspiring psychologists

If you are repelled by the constant pressures of being a postgraduate, then get out now. Try something else. This is not the career for you; it only gets more intense – prepping lectures, grading, doing research, preparing grant applications, etc. Few individuals can withstand the continual dissatisfaction of doing something undesirable; it is no indictment if this is not for you.

One proud moment

I've been very fortunate and have been the recipient of many awards and honours, probably the most significant being the lifetime career awards of the Association for Psychological Science (APS) and the APA. Being on the dais in Los Angeles to receive the James McKeen Cattell Award in 2005 stands out.

One problem that psychology should deal with

We really need to get serious about the way we generalise from our samples to the relevant population. I am as guilty as the rest. I have depended on samples of convenience (university students or children attending local schools) who are demonstrably unrepresentative of the populations to which I would like to generalise the findings. The public has a right to know if claims they read in the media truly generalise to the target population. And our habit of stopping with randomised assignment should be the beginning, not the end.

resource

'At Cornell I co-teach a course called "Six Pretty Good Books" with three colleagues from sociology, politics and economics. (We've been funded to develop this into a MOOC in the coming months.) We provide a comparative analysis of books such as Pinker's *Better Angels*, Gladwell's *David and Goliath*, Gilbert's *Stumbling on Happiness*: the authors Skype with our students. It broadens our perspective... we ignore the other social sciences at our peril, as they are making very important contributions to the same topics we are addressing, such as the influence of poverty on cognition, the structure and impact of social networks, antecedents of violence, etc.'

coming soon

Articles on prejudice and stigma; video game violence; non-clinical paranoia; living with food allergy; psychologists who rock; and much more...

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