

# ...with Chris Cullen

Emeritus Professor of Clinical Psychology, Keele University, and winner of the Society's Lifetime Achievement Award

## One moment that changed the course of my career

After completing my PhD I was a research assistant to a psychiatrist at Bryn y Neuadd Hospital in Llanfairfechan when the Head of Psychology, Chris Gathercole, asked if I would train to be a clinical psychologist. As I had no other plans, and I wanted to stay in North Wales for the climbing, I agreed.

## One inspiration

My first maths teacher at North Manchester Grammar School, although he inspired me not towards psychology but towards the outdoors. When I was 11 he took a group of us hiking, from Hayfield to Edale in the Peak District. I was hugely embarrassed at school because we were very poor, three boys and my mum living a hand-to-mouth existence in a post-war prefab. My grandfather had bought me a pair of black boots for school, and these were the only footwear I had for the hike. At Edale Cross

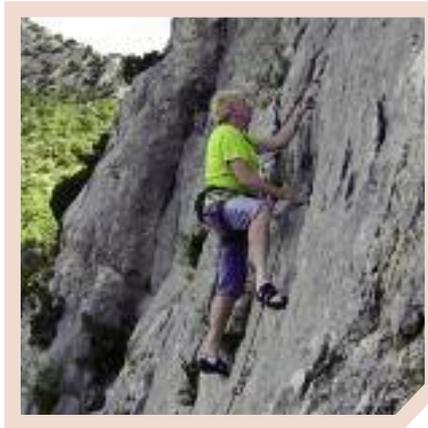
Mr Milburn gathered the other children around me and said 'The boots which Cullen is wearing are what you all need for hiking'. I almost died with pride, as this was the first time I had ever had anything the other kids didn't have.

## One cultural recommendation

George Orwell's *Coming Up for Air*, first published in 1939. Although I didn't appreciate this when I first read the book, it is a nice example of the importance of 'accepting the things I cannot change; having the courage to change the things I can; and needing the wisdom to know the difference', Reinhold Niebuhr's serenity prayer which captures essential elements of modern third wave therapies.

## One hero from psychology

B.F. Skinner, a much maligned and misunderstood giant



Chris Cullen  
c.cullen@keele.ac.uk

amongst psychologists. When I was a PhD student at Bangor he phoned and asked if I would care to meet him at the Russell Hotel for afternoon tea. Having never been to London, I didn't appreciate how long it would take to drive down the A5 in an old Citroën 2CV, but the journey was worth it for a few hours with a quiet and thoughtful man, discussing how radical behaviourism addressed issues such as thinking and dreaming.

## One podcast

First broadcast as *Four Thought* on Radio 4 on 19 June 2011, but still easily available, Professor Steve Jones on the legacy of Francis Galton, addressing the nonsense of statements such as 'scientists have discovered the gene for...'. His comments are just as applicable to statements such as 'psychologists have discovered the part of the brain which is responsible for...'

## One thing that psychology has achieved

We have managed to achieve a degree of recognition among the public-at-large, even though often misrepresented, for our understanding of behaviour in a wide range of fields, and most educated people know that psychology rather than psychiatry is the source discipline.

## One alternative career path

I still spend most of my time in the hills or thinking of being there. A life rock climbing, ice climbing and ski mountaineering as a guide would have been interesting, but I wonder if I would have had the skill or patience required.

## One piece of advice for aspiring psychologists

Remember that as long ago as 1921 R.S. Woodworth was warning us against 'menacing psychological nouns', where we transform verbs such as remembering into memory, seeing and hearing into sensation, and thinking into thought. Then we go hunting for the things we have just invented, instead of studying the activity denoted by the verbs we started with.

## resource

'The open learning materials I produced with Dr Martin Campbell, Professor James Hogg and others at the University of St Andrews. Covering areas such as challenging behaviour, sexual abuse and how to engage people with intellectual disabilities in outdoor activities, these have been used by hundreds of staff across the UK.'

## coming soon

Articles on ethics, the psychological study of scientific thought and behaviour, medically unexplained symptoms, and much more...

Send your comments about *The Psychologist* to the editor, Dr Jon Sutton, on jon.sutton@bps.org.uk, +44 116 252 9573 or to the Leicester office address

To advertise *Display*: ben.nelmes@redactive.co.uk, +44 (0)20 7880 6244

Jobs and *www.psychapp.co.uk*: giorgio.romano@redactive.co.uk, +44 (0)20 7880 7556

## contribute

Think you can do better? Want to see your area of psychology represented more?

See the inside front cover for how you can contribute and reach 50,000 colleagues into the bargain, or just e-mail your suggestions to jon.sutton@bps.org.uk