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## Chapter 4

# *An Unconventional Career Path in Teaching and Neuropsychology*

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This chapter was an extremely challenging endeavor for two reasons. First, I find it difficult to write about myself. Second, my approach to a career in psychology has followed an unconventional path. I believed as a young person that the methods commonly used to understand behavior were at best insufficient, at worst incorrect. Then, and even now, the path to addressing questions about behavior seemed to me muddled and insufficient. However, since thinking about the mind was a primary motive in my life, I was forced to pursue a previously uncharted road.

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### *Early Years*

In order to explain the present, a reconstruction of some of the past would be useful. I was born to an aristocratic and powerful family in Habana, Cuba. My paternal grandfather accrued wealth in the sugar business, and my maternal grandfather was president of the Bar Association of Cuba. My parents enrolled me in the most prestigious private school in the capital where I excelled in academics, earning the top ranking in each of the grades (as rankings superseded numerical scores). I was driven to school in a limousine and taken care of at home by my nanny. Leisure times were spent at the Habana Yacht Club where one of my grandfathers was, commodore. My mother, who had attended boarding school in Philadelphia, married into another prominent family. My father lost both his father and the anticipated inheritance unexpectedly in a mysterious fire. However, he was to eventually rise through the management of International Harvester of Cuba to a managerial position of significance. Little did anyone expect that more demanding problems for my family were yet to come.

In 1959, Fidel Castro, a disenfranchised student and lawyer, successfully overthrew the corrupt yet relatively stable government of Fulgencio Batista. Within a year, "democracy" had been replaced with the totalitarian regime that to this day continues torturing the human mind and spirit. For our family everything was lost including material acquisitions, freedom, and opportunity. With no knowledge of the English language nor of the U.S. culture, excluding my mother, and only a change of clothes and a total of \$50, we landed in Miami facing an uncertain future. My immediate family crowded into a one bedroom apartment in Miami Beach with my aunt, uncle, and their four children. The disorienting experiences continued when I was placed in a third-grade class with no other Spanish-speaking children. Because no one, even the teacher, understood Spanish, I translated my name to Anthony Bridge. The only thing I did not have to translate, my name, was the only thing I could because I had no knowledge of English.

After struggling in that setting, my parents moved to San Antonio, Texas, where International Harvester had given my father a commissioned job as a salesman. This proved to be an impossible situation because my father had never been a salesman and did not know English. Our total monetary assets had been reduced to a mere 9¢. My father contemplated homelessness before Catholic Charities and several generous U.S. families intervened. Fortunately, my mother began teaching at St. Peter's Catholic School where my brother and I enjoyed tuition-free education for 2 years. Eventually, my parents decided that if we were to be miserable, the best we could do was go back to Florida where a stronger social support existed. Family friends located a bookkeeping position for my father with a prosperous heavy equipment company in Jacksonville, Florida. Of course, numbers extend beyond language barriers and my father was able to succeed despite his still limited knowledge of English. Unfortunately, he experienced a decade of serious medical illnesses including tuberculosis (requiring a year's stay at a sanitarium), lower extremity paralysis (after an unsuccessful operation), and finally a heart attack. My mother held the family together financially and emotionally while working more as a Catholic school teacher. My brother and I continued with a parochial school education trying as much as possible to learn the language, the culture, and this incomprehensible situation into which our family had been thrust.

High school years were spent studying, reading (especially biographies of individuals who seemed to have persevered in the face of adversity; I recall vividly the stories of Edison and Lincoln), surfing, and testing the limits of my parents' patience and society's tolerance to my persevering questioning. In those days, tolerance was not a common societal value and individuals from nonmajority group cultures were not widely accepted.

#### College Experience

My parents encouraged me to pursue further education although resources were simply not there. Interestingly, my high school counselor and most teachers had suggested a vocational track, presumably because of my difficulties with the language, culture, and standardized tests. One particular problem I recall was being bypassed for "honors" classes due to my low scores on intelligence and achieve-

ment tests. Indeed my first intelligence test was administered when I did not know English. In an attempt to be courteous, I smiled a great deal when the "psychologist" posed questions I did not understand. To this day I imagine that the diagnosis must have been "moron but friendly."

I attended Florida Junior College at Jacksonville, inexpensive and accessible, while working evenings. During my first semester there, one of my Hispanic friends encouraged me to sign up for a psychology course taught by Dan Hadwin, a consummate humanist. Hadwin offered not only an academic introduction to the fascinating world of the mind, but provided much needed emotional support and eventual career advising. For example, he gave my parents financial information about careers in psychology that to this day I believe was optimistically flawed. I finished the requirements for an Associate in Arts degree in 1½ years and was fortunate to receive a scholarship for further education.

Seizing on the excitement about the study of the mind and the possibility of financial assistance, I decided to pursue studies in psychology at what I thought was the best university in Florida, the University of Florida. The problem was that I did not have a scholarship to Florida. My mother, probably using all the psychology that she could muster, was able to convince my father to support my choice of universities. Due to late decisions, I chanced on enrolling for Donald Dewsbury's Animal Behavior class during my first semester. I was extremely fortunate to have spent my time at Florida working in his laboratory and being tutored both by him and his hard-working graduate students. To this day, I maintain a close professional relationship with Dewsbury. After graduating from Florida in another 1½ years, I took 1 year off to determine what, if anything, I could do with a degree in psychology. I came to realize that further education was highly desirable. Once more, however, no resources were available.

My time during that year was divided among surfing and playing tennis (both of which I still do regularly), working the night shift as a psychiatric technician, and auditing psychology courses at the University of North Florida. I also decided to read everything Freud and Darwin had written since they seemed to be two good resources for answering questions about behavior and the mind. The basic questions about human nature were fascinating, and my life had been a panorama of psychological challenges. Ultimately, I could not think of anything more interesting and exciting than to pursue a career in psychology. My conclusion was that one could actually receive a salary for thinking about the issues that had consumed my life and thoughts.

Unfortunately, plans for further study did not seem to match the realistic possibilities. For example, my GRE scores totaled only about 1,000, which hampered my entrance into doctoral programs. In the early 1970s ethnic minority concerns were mainly restricted to African Americans, and even then, in the most narrow fashion. Also, my father, presumably wanting to keep our family together under adversity, had initially discouraged me from pursuing graduate school in psychology. He believed psychology was a discipline for and about the middle class, something we had not and probably could never attain in this country. Again my mother intervened, convincing him that I should be allowed to pursue my

chosen interests. He acquiesced to the idea of further education and compromised with "no study outside the state of Florida." Hence, applications were limited to Florida schools, although one application was covertly sent to the University of Georgia where there seemed to be good clinical and biopsychology training. Furthermore, Georgia was heavily involved with the Yerkes Primate Research Laboratory, originally founded in Orange Park, Florida (a place that I had become acquainted with during undergraduate years at the University of Florida). I was somewhat uncertain about specific career paths. However, the brain, abnormal behavior, and the adaptability to adversity were fascinating subjects awaiting further study.

### *Graduate School*

Georgia accepted me into their biopsychology program, but I worked in both the clinical and biopsychology programs. Indeed, I basically pursued parallel educational tracks. My master's thesis was supervised by Irving Beiman, a clinician interested in studying abnormal nervous system function, whereas my doctoral dissertation was directed by Lelon J. Peacock, a biopsychologist well versed in both the nervous system and the history of psychology. If there was ever a "schizophrenic" existence, this was it. I would perform EEGs on volunteers from the psychology clinic during the day and perform septal lesions on hamsters during the evening at the psychology department's animal laboratory. Needless to say, the parallel tracks caused a great deal of concern among the faculty and my peers alike, especially because the two programs were at the time not on speaking terms. My goal was to study clinical neuropsychology and "minor" in philosophy. How naive I was because neuropsychology as a career track did not exist; philosophy had no place in psychology during the 1970s; and, of course, I was still having problems with the English language and my finances.

I was stunned after my first year of training not to receive financial support from the program to continue studies at Georgia (none was available the first year either). In retrospect, I should have not been surprised. I had just finished receiving a B triple minus (one could not really obtain a lower grade) in sensory physiology from a professor who had begun to date my girlfriend of the time. In addition, my statistics professor had assigned me an incomplete in the first course of a three-course sequence. He very gently encouraged me to pursue another career after my presumably abysmal performance on the final exam. One of the lowest points in my life came when my advisor at the time, Bradford Bunnell, consulted with other faculty members about the decision not to fund my second year. One late Friday afternoon after the spring quarter exams, he uncomfortably told me that "The faculty believe that you do not have what it takes to obtain a doctorate in psychology. . . among other things your command of the English language is not acceptable." I spent the summer months back in Jacksonville, Florida, working the night shift as a psychiatric technician trying to determine what options, if any, were still available. This situation could not be discussed with my parents who were

struggling to support me, nor with my peers, as the entire spectacle was embarrassing and humiliating. Perhaps my father had been right about psychology. I was confused and depressed.

The solution to the predicament seemed to come from nowhere while working one of those never-ending night shifts. I decided that the professors at Georgia did not understand me and worse yet didn't comprehend the important questions of the mind. I inquired from the graduate school at Georgia how quickly one could complete MS and PhD degrees; 3 years I was told. I proceeded to do what ever was necessary to finish in the minimum time, and in 3 calendar years both graduate degrees were obtained. Not only was I financially destitute, but the support from my parents was shaky, and my own emotional strength was buoyed by what I considered, at the time, to be questionable foundations. This was a matter of survival, nothing else.

My master's thesis (clinical) was defended on January 6, 1978, and my doctoral dissertation (biopsychology) was defended the following Friday, the 13th. Along the way, I had established a relationship with a New Jersey-born, Florida-raised nurse who somehow always supported the unusual plans and ideas I had learned to harbor secretly. I had come to the conclusion that it was best not to share such thoughts because, at the very least, they were considered odd, and at the very worst, unattainable. Toward the end of my graduate education, I think she was the only person who believed in me. I doubted anything left to doubt. In the midst of all this turmoil we were married, and slowly plans for the future began to materialize.

### *Early Career Experiences*

On January 16, the Monday after defending my dissertation, I was scheduled to begin teaching functional neuroanatomy at St. George's University School of Medicine in Grenada, West Indies. So after a going away party, we embarked on a journey from hell. After stopping on what seemed every island in the Caribbean, we finally landed in Trinidad late Sunday night, with only minutes to spare for our commuter plane to take us to our final destination in neighboring Grenada. Unfortunately, our dog was impounded at the Trinidad airport, despite prior arrangements with the government's veterinarian. To aggravate matters, I was arrested because of my Cuban citizenship, despite verifiable residence status in the U.S. An intoxicated soldier guarded our makeshift jail while I tried to figure out an "escape" so I could teach the following day in Grenada. We eventually left the compound under the cover of darkness and walked to the airport where we were able to retrieve our dog and depart on another commuter flight, without proper authorization, of course.

The Grenada airport at the time amounted to no more than a small building with a gasoline powered generator to allow for radio contact with incoming airplanes. Culture shock was only beginning. We traveled through the jungle, noticing poverty, despair, and the fact that everyone was Black. After arriving early,

following our immigration ordeal in Trinidad, I went to teach, leaving my wife at our rented house overlooking the ocean. The house had no walls, allowing the sea breeze to enter. The classroom's main access was from the beach; the students were older than I; and "behavior" was not a welcomed word in the medical school curriculum. The year was spent once more reliving how it felt not to fit in. I also spent the year building a neuroanatomy laboratory, and, eventually, an entire medical library. In the latter two cases, it was my responsibility to work with the "architect" and the construction foreman to oversee the actual design and construction of the buildings. Later, the responsibility shifted to acquiring furniture, books, journals, and other materials. The experience was out of a novel, maybe science fiction. I was trying to establish a career in what seemed to me circumstances and a country from another planet. The truth of the matter was that I was close to being correct. During my tenure in Grenada, the prime minister had actually requested funds from the United Nations to establish a permanent landing site for UFOs on top of the island's inactive volcano. Voodoo was much more effective than public relations in running campaigns, marriage was not common, refrigeration was not available, running water was essentially nonexistent, and communication with "civilization" was sparse. Our regular contact with the outside world was via short wave radio.

Just as we were getting adjusted to this unusual existence, Cuban troops began infiltrating the island. I was at best minimally assured by the U.S. ambassador to Barbados that, as a U.S. resident married to a U.S. citizen, I would be safeguarded if indeed the political climate deteriorated, which eventually it did. With such "assurances," my wife left for the United States as quickly as possible while I finished the semester in the midst of a crumbling government, eventually departing to the United States in December 1978. Unfortunately, my entry papers were not in order, and my green card was so old it actually was blue. The custom officials at St. Thomas, being in the holiday spirit, played with the dog and did not check my outdated documents, allowing me to illegally re-enter the United States.

Such scrimmages had left me numb, and I decided that I was going to settle down, have children, and try to have a normal career and life. Among other things, I applied to become a U.S. citizen. The limits had too often and too aggressively been stretched. We settled at the beach, and I began my work at Northeast Florida State Hospital, a position my parents had secured through the Cuban psychiatric community. Here the patients spoke English and the psychiatrists Spanish, and here is where I added the "clinical" to neuropsychology, although largely self-taught. The state hospital was a wonderful place to work with a wide range of psychopathology, especially brain-damaged individuals. However, the serious questions about the mind were replaced with demanding clinical responsibilities. During the evenings I taught undergraduate and graduate courses in psychology at the University of North Florida where I had audited courses several years earlier. However, I was not well integrated into the department. All in all, the positions were not a good fit with my goals.

### *Obtaining a Permanent University Position*

After applying to more than 70 academic positions, mostly on the east coast, I finally received invitations to three interviews along the eastern seaboard. I decided against an offer in Miami because it was not clear that the position would be tenure track and, further, I did not want to be known as an Hispanic psychologist from Miami. As far as I was concerned, there were more important issues to consider, and I did not want to focus solely on ethnic minority issues. An opening in New England proved to be more personally challenging. When I questioned the chairman at this prestigious university as to why they were interested in me, he simply said that it was an affirmative action hire. I took this to mean that my ethnicity was substantially more important than my abilities and interests. It was horribly cold outside (February) as well as inside. The University of North Carolina at Wilmington (UNC-W) was, in contrast, a new university located on the coast. I was appointed visiting assistant professor in 1981. I gradually rose through the ranks with a great degree of difficulty and, I believe, misunderstanding, to become a full professor in 1990. The misunderstanding was probably a cultural, possibly intellectual, maybe even personal, misalignment with some of the senior colleagues. It is important to note, however, that two other senior colleagues did "mentor" me and assisted in working around these invisible barriers. I sincerely doubt I would have eventually become tenured if it was not for these two understanding colleagues. One of them, Lee A. Jackson, went on to become our department chair.

UNC-W is a regional university with a strong classic liberal arts focus, both in terms of the mission and student body. The current emphasis appears to be marine and international studies. Of the approximately 8,300 students, 400 are undergraduate psychology majors. Until recently, the Department of Psychology's focus has been exclusively undergraduate, but in 1994 a master's program was begun. The department has expanded to include 22 tenure track professors with several more part-time lecturers from the private practice community. Overall, the university has doubled in size since my arrival in the early 1980s, but resources have become increasingly limited. Nevertheless, our department is highly regarded because of its commitment to both teaching and research.

During my tenure at Wilmington, the focus has clearly been on attempting to establish myself as a credible psychologist with a specialty in clinical neuropsychology, who happened to be an Hispanic. To accomplish this goal, I decided on a three-prong approach focused on teaching, research, and service. I would attempt to establish myself as a very interesting and involved professor who required students to do much more work than usual, with an emphasis on critical thinking skills. Upper level courses would also be introduced to research and writing skills with students having to complete an original study. My own research required the establishment of both a research program and a reputation for doing unique studies involving questions of the mind, often having philosophical foundations. For me, service would be defined in a broad perspective. Finally, I have emphasized service to the profession rather than to the university.

### *Teaching Psychology*

Teaching, for me, has been dichotomized into two types of courses—the introductory course to psychology and everything else. I chose to teach Introduction to Psychology for several reasons: (a) I enjoy turning students on to psychology; (b) The course forces me to keep abreast with the entire field, and (c) A general course forces me to focus on basic questions about the mind that are often forgotten when one specializes. To this date, some of my best professional moments have come from discussions with first year students about basic psychological questions. My upper level courses always revolve around two topics—disordered behavior (with an emphasis on physical/neural problems) and the history and theories of psychology. The history course provides a forum for the more philosophical questions about psychology within a scholarly and historical context. The other courses allow me to pursue a strong biopsychosocial approach to understanding human behavior, especially abnormal behavior. I have always taken great pride in teaching outside the classroom, including the laboratory and clinic. All my research students, whether undergraduate, graduate, or postdoctoral, have published with me. In my experience, the laboratory is a unique place for further learning and the stimulation for additional education. Additionally, all research students have pursued advanced careers in such areas as law, medicine, biology, and psychology. These students have always been my colleagues as I relied on them much more than they will ever imagine. To this day, their criticism and collegiality remain important to me.

### *Research Opportunities*

My research has focused on understanding how biological, psychological, and cultural factors play a role in mediating human brain function. After exploring several measurement variables, my focus shifted to biological factors, namely antipsychotic or neuroleptic medications. The psychological issues I have typically emphasized have been the effects of perception and awareness in mediating the control of higher cortical functions, such as problem solving. These two lines of research required the use not only of “normal” subjects but clinical ones as well. The need for clinical subjects presents challenges in a university liberal arts setting. Finally, cultural issues have been important in my research. For example, I have been interested in how culture, especially the Hispanic culture, modulates the expression of brain function and dysfunction.

To pursue this line of research I needed the assistance of colleagues with larger populations of Hispanics. Fortunately, I was able to secure visiting professorships at the Universidad de Madrid and also of Grenada, in Spain. I had previously been unsuccessful in establishing research collaborations in Puerto Rico, through the American Psychological Association's Visiting Psychologist Program, and Argen-

tina, through a Fulbright Scholar award. These colleagues were more interested in pursuing behavioral and psychodynamic interests.

My research career has always focused on the presentation and eventual publication of research studies. To date, I have presented numerous studies at professional and scientific meetings in North America and abroad and over 100 of my articles, 48 chapters, and 6 books have been published, mostly in English. Also, I co-established Plenum Publishing Corporation's book series in neuropsychology (15 to date) with Cecil Reynolds of Texas A & M University, and the journal *Neuropsychology Review* (4 volumes to date) with Gerald Goldstein from the University of Pittsburgh.

In recent years, questions of mind and brain have become very important to me. Clearly, the most unusual opportunity to answer such questions has come in the form of working with Roger Sperry, psychology's only Nobel Laureate. Between 1992 and his death in 1994, I worked closely with Sperry in his emphasis on the study of consciousness and values. To accomplish this we stayed in close contact via telephone and fax, and I visited him at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena every 3 to 4 months. Currently, I am assembling a festschrift of his former doctoral and postdoctoral students. At the 1994 meeting of the American Psychological Association (APA) to be held in Los Angeles, approximately 45 collaborators from nine different countries and spanning five decades of teaching and research will present research that has been spawned by Sperry's ideas.

### *Service to the Profession*

My service has been directed toward the profession of psychology, in general, and clinical neuropsychology in particular, although I have pursued both in parallel tracks. For psychology, I chose to participate at the state level where I began my involvement as a member of the Program Committee of the North Carolina Psychological Association. After agreeing to co-chair the committee several years later, my co-chair moved to the South Pacific and left me with the formidable task of developing the conference by myself. After chairing several successful conferences I was elected president of the organization. With the able assistance of Sally Cameron, executive director, several changes were instituted including the establishment of the North Carolina Psychological Foundation. I went on to serve as its Founding President and also to acquire a building and a permanent home for both organizations through the acquisition of a \$350,000 gift.

I have also become involved with the APA in several capacities, mostly in education and minority issues. Within education, I served on and later chaired the Committees for Undergraduate Education (establishing the St. Mary's conference; see McGovern, 1993), and Continuing Education (formulating the concept of mandatory education for licensed psychologists). I was later elected to and eventually chaired the Board of Convention Affairs (and APA's 101st convention in Toronto). In Minority Affairs, I served as chair of the Awards Committee for the Minority Fellowship Program, directed by James Jones. In addition, I served on

the Board of Directors for Division Two (Teaching of Psychology) of APA by chairing its Undergraduate, Ethnic Minority Affairs, and later the Fellows Committees. In Division 40 (Clinical Neuropsychology), I served as a Member-at-Large and Ethnic Minority Liaison to APA. Additionally, I was also involved in the issue of prescription privileges by participating on APA's Board of Directors' Task Force on Psychopharmacology and chairing another related task force, for the National Institute of Mental Health. Finally, I served the National Academy of Neuropsychology as chair of the annual conventions during the late 1980s and eventually became the organization's 12th president.

### *Clinical Service*

Interspersed with these academic pursuits, I have been fortunate to develop a successful practice in clinical neuropsychology. Initially I ventured alone, later joining a neurologist, and then settling for about 7 years with a gregarious group of doctoral-level psychologists. Recently, I merged my practice with a large multidisciplinary medical practice as the only nonphysician doctoral-level health provider. The practice formed a department of neuropsychology that is currently being expanded. Both in and outpatient services to neurologically impaired individuals are provided alongside board certified physicians in a very collegial fashion.

One unique aspect of the practice has been the focus on research. Patients have for a long time comprised a rich source for ideas as well as research volunteers. Further, several of my more able undergraduate students (e.g., Heather Griffith) have worked as technicians in the practice after graduation and prior to entering graduate school. As an outgrowth of our discipline's difficulties with reimbursement and scope of practice, I eventually became involved with the process of coding clinical services. Recently, I was invited to join the American Medical Association's Advisory Committee for the Current Procedural System—the first time a psychologist has been involved in this process. Further, I have been working with the Health Care Financing Administration, a federal agency that establishes guidelines for health care in the United States, to insure that a greater understanding and acceptance of psychology and neuropsychology is achieved by the health-care community.

### *Conclusion*

Although my career journey is not over, and although there is more to reveal, I have tried to present the highlights of my unorthodox approach to psychology. A basic assumption has been that my professional development is but a reflection of my personal life. Teaching, research, and service to psychology have been the basic pillars in my quest for understanding the mind. The obvious direction for me has been to understand behavior better by studying brain disorders within a biopsychosocial context. Underlying this approach is the question of consciousness and adaptability.

I believe not only that I have chosen an unconventional career path, but the outcomes have, at times, been difficult to handle. Also, I have chosen to focus on

my family that now includes three children, a difficult task alongside an active career. Further, my base of operations has been a regional university not typically geared for a professional life such as mine. Hence, one may wonder how all of this could have happened. My accomplishments are probably due to a combination of factors. My family has always been extremely supportive, and I believe that the university has allowed me unusual flexibility, including the opportunity to develop a private practice. Earlier in my career I thought that establishing myself at a regional, and then relatively small, university would be detrimental, and it was never my intention to stay at UNC-Wilmington for more than 3 to 5 years. However, as my career developed, the base of operations seemed to become much less important than other factors such as quality of life and flexibility. Also, being a political refugee from another country encourages one to work extremely hard and take very, very little for granted. Finally, I have tried to develop a creative, energetic, and sustained plan to accomplish my goals.

Surprisingly, many of my initial goals have been accomplished and successes and notoriety have followed, something I have been totally unprepared to handle. As a consequence, for the last 2 years my focus has been on an intellectual and personal re-charting of the unconventional path I began many years ago. Having established myself, both professionally in psychology and personally in the United States, has freed me to pursue the important questions about the mind that I began considering as a young person.

I chose a career that would reflect my life and fulfill my intellectual curiosity. My questions about the mind appear unanswerable, but the process of questioning has been exciting. The rewards have been immeasurable. I can only hope that when it is all said and done, I can satisfactorily answer the question Roger Sperry always asked, "Have I made a difference?"

### *Reference*

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