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Furnham, Adrian



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Biography

Adrian Furnham was born in Port Shepstone in the Union of South Africa. It was the major center of the South Coast of Natal, the home of the Zulu. It had Norwegian, British, and German settlers in the nineteenth century. There was a German church near Oslo Beach. His grandmother joined the Sons of England who met in a shop owned by a Swiss business man. His neighbors were Poles; his mother worked for a Russian doctor who changed his name from Rittenski to Ritten. It was a place of displaced people: of people rejoicing their good fortune with respect to standard of living but very homesick for another place and its people.

Furnham's father was a newspaper man: printer and publisher; his mother a nurse. Like both of his parents, Furnham was an only child. He believes that he got his impulsiveness from his mother and his love of books from his father. He believes that he looks more like his father but has more of his mother's (and maternal grandfather's) body shape. Furnham reports having various noticeable, frequently commented on, habits that he attributes to his upbringing. They are time

conscientiousness, impulsivity, the work ethic, humor, and money consciousness.

However, he believes that he is a child of the baby-boomer generation: neither victors nor prisoners but conditioned by the morals and values and hopes of aspirations of his time. So he believes that he is unlike his parents in many ways:

1. *Ambition*: He believes that he is deeply – but not pathologically – ambitious. He wants to “get on.” He wanted to be a professor before he was 40. He just made it. He wanted to earn as much as the Prime Minister. He didn't. His parents were not at all entrepreneurial. His mother did well being promoted to only one level below the top available in her field. But she was ambitious for him rather than herself.
2. *Exoticphilia/Openness-to-Experience*: He likes the new, the different, and the exotic. His parents were somewhere between afraid of and distrustful of things not solidly Anglo-Saxon. They did not try exotic food or yearn to travel to new places. They expressed little interest in foreign cultures which they were surrounded by.

Furnham, in contrast, enjoys nothing more than a trip to a far-off place off the beaten track. He longs, not for wild barren places like Lawrence of Arabia, but for rather exotic urban landscapes particularly of places caught in time. He rejoices in his close quirky “alternative,” hippy friends. Cultured, compassionate,

and self-critical, they were a breath of fresh air in the arid anti-intellectual Puritanism that was South Africa. They taught him that being different was sometimes a gift rather than a handicap.

3. *Curiosity*: His parents were not particularly curious in the way that Furnham is. They took things at surface value. They were amused by human foibles but did not yearn to understand them. The best his mother did was to read detective novels. And she did so enthusiastically, often devouring five a week, while holding down a full-time job. His father, a good storyteller, enjoyed telling yarns about odd people and their behavior. But they never had a great yearning to understand things.

One day his mother who was studying psychology for a diploma was met by a list of different and contradictory personality theories. "Well?" she demanded of Furnham, sage on all things psychological, "Who is right?" She did not deal in ambiguities.

Education

Furnham was in full-time education for the whole decade on the 1970s who believed that staying at university was a wonderful way to postpone adulthood. At this stage, he has, along with his first degree, three master degrees and three doctorates.

He went to university when he was 16. He was not an amazing precocious child but one whose mother insisted he go to primary school young: over a year younger than the legally prescribed age. He therefore graduated from school around a year and a half younger than his peers.

His mother brought home one of those early Hans Eysenck paperbacks, and Furnham was hooked. The early Eysenck Penguin paperbacks were (and are) easy to read, interesting, and provocative. He read it in one sitting and was captivated. He resolved in fifth form to read psychology rather than math.

Furnham registered for a liberal arts degree, and as a foretaste of his current workaholicism, he did a degree-and-a-half (three majors instead of

two). Even though he was a student at an obscure colonial university registered for Psychology 101, he 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. It was a broad degree and he benefited from this enormously.

Furnham entered the local university (the University of Natal, founded in 1910) in 1970 graduating with three (not the two usual) major subjects (Divinity, History, and Psychology). He then completed an honors degree in Psychology (1973) followed by an MA (1975). He then went to England to complete two further master degrees: M.Sc. Econ at LSE 1976 and an MSc at Strathclyde in Glasgow (1977). Furnham then went straight to Oxford to complete a doctorate in (1981). He later received a D.Sc from London (1991) and a D.Litt from Natal in (1997).

Without doubt his best experience was at the LSE where he did an MSc in Social Psychology. The whole atmosphere was exciting. The lecturers had a very broad view of education and the discipline of psychology. He maintains contact with a number of the faculty after 40 years.

Oxford was wonderful. It was there he met his wife and where he met a number of who are now his closest friends.

Educators

Furnham had the great good fortune of being taught by brilliant academics. At every university he has attended, he has come across dedicated, clever, and curious (in every sense of the word) teachers. What are the characteristics of the inspirational teacher?

First, there is unbounding *enthusiasm*, even *passion*, for their subject. They show the thrill, the joy, and the sheer pleasure of acquiring skills and knowledge in a particular area. And they are able to communicate this. Indeed, they cannot hide it. You cannot easily fake passion – or at least not over a sustained period. All great teachers are passionate. Work becomes play with them. The motivation is purely intrinsic. They define the very concept of *Flow*.

Second, they are *evangelists*, trying to convert minds rather than achieve exam-oriented goals. They want others to share their joy and passion, believing it is good for them. They really want to communicate the good news. One of the characteristics of the inspirational evangelist is that they never retire. They do not want to and neither do their employees want them to. They are simply too valuable. Further, good administrators know it. They soon become “emeritus” but usually eschew the titles preferring simply to carry on ignoring the passing of the years.

Third, they *set high standards*. Inspirational teachers are not merely benevolent, kindly parental substitutes. They have the highest expectations of people. They do not compromise, but they do encourage. They teach the “hard stuff” but in a way it can be grasped. They understand the learning process and the markers along the way. They are able thus to get the best out of people, and it is often for this that they are profoundly admired. They know what individual pupils are capable of, and they strive to help them achieve their potential.

Fourth, they *update their material*, metaphors, and messages. Every generation needs a different introduction to the discipline. They come with different experiences and expectations. Their hot (and cold) buttons are different. They need to be approached differently. It goes without saying that they have to update their knowledge as well.

Fifth, there is the issue of *adaptation and flexibility*. This means knowing how to “package the brand” differently to appeal to different individuals and generations. The intelligence, social backgrounds, and values of students dictate they have to be addressed differently. Brilliant teachers can and do this.

Furnham has been a lecturer for nearly 40 years starting at Pembroke College Oxford and continuing at University College London. He has tried hard, over this period, to follow the example of those he greatly admires.

Furnham has had many great teachers and colleagues who have changed his life, but he wanted to draw attention to two of them in particular.

Michael Argyle: Furnham’s D.Phil (PhD) Supervisor

Argyle wrote around 250 papers on a variety of topics including body language, religion, money, happiness, and work it was possible to see clear threads and themes which he pursued. He believed that social behavior, even the most ephemeral aspects like eye contact, was law like and that one could be taught the rules of social etiquette to improve communication.

He had no interest in in-depth psychology, psychoanalytic speculation, or grand theories. Nor did he rely on advanced multivariate statistics to reveal hidden patterns in data. His experimental work was novel: he designed simple but illuminating studies. His survey work was also characterized by innovation. He preferred not to rely on standardized questionnaires but designed his own to measure the sort of things that interested him. Indeed, there were no existing measures of the sort of thing that most interested him like happiness.

Argyle never bothered with disciplinary distinctions and could happily move from anthropology to zoology when investigating a topic. His books were always distinctive. They always brought together material in a unique way and offered a new way to look at old ideas. Many remain best sellers.

There were many things rather unique about Argyle. For instance, he advised doctorate students not to read too much initially because it limited their creativity and channelled their thinking into too well-plowed furrows. He was not attracted to theory building often dismissing those he saw as theoretical baggage that imprisoned rather than liberated.

He was not interested in forming a school of thought but was very interested in forming and maintaining a social group. For nearly 30 years, he presided over a very active but heterogeneous group of social psychologists at Oxford. The social group was social in what they studied and how they studied it. In many ways, like all PhD students, they were marked by their doctoral experience and very loyal to Argyle and no doubt to his memory.

There were many sides to Argyle, at one stage the fourth most cited British Psychologist. On the

other hand, he was the epitome of the English gentleman: polite, slightly formal, and kind. He knew about social rules and obeyed them carefully. But he was also a fun-loving maverick. He described his hobbies as “utopia speculation” and “playing the goat.” He was almost child-like in his playfulness and love of school-boy jokes and humor.

What did Furnham learn from him? He learned that it was OK, indeed desirable, to “plough new field,” to start out on new areas of research. He learned what was required of a good doctoral supervisor. He learned to be cooperative with other academics. He learned to work hard and play hard.

Hans Eysenck: Furnham’s Role Model

Furnham met Hans Eysenck while doing his PhD. Once Furnham became a lecturer, he made contact and would cycle from his office to Eysenck’s office (6 miles) two or three times a year to work in their excellent library and have tea with him. Eysenck impressed Furnham enormously with his intellect, courage, and foresight.

It has been argued that Eysenck’s approach to science was characterized by very specific principles. He always argued, even at a time when this was deeply unfashionable, that there was a physical/biological basis to personality. He maintained that taxonomization was the beginning of science and that personality research could not proceed without it. He insisted on a hierarchical model with highly specific behavioral responses at the lowest level, leading up to broad habitual responses at the facet level (e.g., sociability, liveliness, and excitability) and culminating into three giant super-factors at the apex of the hierarchy. He was one of the earliest theorists to advocate a biologically based theory of personality and to promote a continuous theory refinement approach in order to link up specific stimulus properties with general personality functioning.

Furnham became an Eysenckian through his books and papers. He started using his tests during his PhD and became an enthusiastic psychometrician. Furnham et al. (2008) suggested five reasons

why these measures have stood the test of time: parsimony, explanation of process, experimentation, wide application, and continuous improvement and development.

His Modest Contribution

Furnham is not sure if indeed he is a personality psychologist. In fact, he reports being uncertain as to what type of psychologist he is, if indeed he has to be labelled at all. This has caused his department consternation over the years. Furnham has been labelled an applied, differential, economic, health, occupational, and social psychologist at different times. He is, however, a BPS chartered occupational and a chartered health psychologist. Furnham thinks his personality and upbringing has led him to be curious about all sorts of issues within and outside the discipline.

Furnham has always been interested in personality psychology. This was first stimulated by a brilliant lecturer (Bruce Faulds) who lectured him as an undergraduate. In his 2nd year, Furnham had a Wednesday afternoon psychometric class that involved students doing a test and the following week analyzing it. This was done very thoroughly in a 3-h session. Furnham completed projective techniques, standard personality tests, and the rod-and-frame in a dark room, as well as tests of artistic and musical ability. The instructor was an enthusiast and the test library was well stocked. As a result, to this day, Furnham knows about a very wide range of tests from obscure psychoanalytic projective techniques (Blackies Pictures), through tests of aesthetics (the Meier Art test) to more standard tests.

Furnham was always interested in the relationship between personality and social psychology doing his PhD on the topic. This experience led him to become more interested in differential psychology as he became aware how powerful personality and intelligence factors are in determining so many life outcomes from income to longevity (Furnham 2008).

Some Themes

Psychometric housekeeping and reviews:

Furnham has done a number of reviews where he looked at developments and progress in various personality tests, some very old. These are always very extensively quoted, even though they are not meta-analyses, but they attempt to be comprehensive and critical reviews of the major (extant) literature over a set period. Occasionally he has updated these reviews. Three examples may be Tolerance of Ambiguity (Furnham and Ribchester 1995; Furnham and Marks 2013), Belief in a Just World (Furnham 2003), and the Protestant Work Ethic (Furnham 1990). Perhaps the most extensive has been his review of Locus of Control measures (Furnham and Steele 1993). Furnham's interest has been in documenting different scales supposedly measuring the same thing and comparing their psychometric qualities. There seems to be more interest in developing new scales in the hope of eponymous fame than testing and improving those tests which already exist.

Test development: Over the years Furnham has developed a number of tests. Sometimes he has simply adapted ideas to make specific tests like his Economic Locus of Control measure (Furnham 1986) and the Organisational Attributional Style Questionnaire (Furnham et al. 1992). He also developed the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire which he worked on with his PhD student Dino Petrides and the High Flyer Trait Inventory which he worked on with his colleague Ian Macrae (Macrae and Furnham 2014). Indeed, Furnham's most quoted publications are with Petrides, and the measure has been enormously successful (Petrides and Furnham 2000a; b; Petrides and Furnham 2001; Petrides et al. 2003; Petrides et al. 2008). Furnham and his colleagues have spent a great deal of effort in the pure psychometric work checking factor structure, internal reliability, etc. but also struggling to find appropriate behavioral measures to check the predictive and construct validity of the tests.

The relationship between tests of preference and power:

Furnham has long been interested in the relationship between those two great pillars of differential psychology which have never had a very close relationship. Personality psychologists and those interested in intelligence seem to have drifted apart, yet the early differential psychologists like Cattell and Eysenck were always aware of both playing an important role in all behaviors. Furnham gave his *International Society for the Study of Individual Differences* presidential address on this topic. He worked on this topic for years, and still does, ably assisted by some of his most talented PhD students (e.g., Chamorro-Premuzic and Furnham 2003a; b; Moutafi et al. 2003).

Self-appraisal and awareness: From the very beginning, Furnham was interested in the ability of people to predict their own personality and intelligence scores. Although his early research was on self-awareness about personality, he has published many studies on self-estimated intelligence (Furnham 2001; Furnham 2016a). These studies have yielded various consistent findings. *First*, males of all ages and backgrounds tend to estimate their (overall) general intelligence about 5–15 IQ points higher than do females. Always those estimates are above average and usually around one standard deviation above the norm. *Second*, people believe these sex differences occur across the generations: people believe their grandfather was/is more intelligent than their grandmother, their father more than their mother, their brothers more than their sisters, and their sons more than their daughters. *Third*, sex differences are cross-culturally consistent. While Africans tend to give higher estimates and Asians lower estimates, there remains a sex difference across all cultures. *Fourth*, the correlation between self-estimated and test-generated IQ is positive and low in the range of $r = 0.2$ to $r = 0.5$ suggesting that you cannot use test scores as proxy for actual scores. *Fifth*, with regard to outliers, those who score high on IQ but give low self-estimates tend nearly always to be female,

while those with the opposite pattern (high estimates, low scores) tend to be male (Storek and Furnham 2013; Swami and Furnham 2010; Szymanowicz and Furnham 2013).

Dark side: It was Robert Hogan who introduced Furnham to the dark side personality research based on the concepts found in DSM-III. He had the brilliance and insight to see that the personality disorders scheme offered a wonderful opportunity to study misbehavior at work. Furnham had used his Hogan Development Survey in many studies and was very fortunate to get large amounts of very good quality data from friends serving as consultants. Furnham has also written two books on this topic (Furnham 2010, 2015) and many papers. His interest is the paradox of how and why people with certain dark side characteristics get selected and promoted (Furnham 2016b; Furnham et al. 2012a, b, 2013, 2014). My students love this research and I have three at the moment working on these topics.

Conclusion

Furnham was delighted and honored to be asked to write this contribution. He is currently working on two books: one on the Psychology of Disenchantment and the other on New Perspectives in PsychoBiography. So far he has published two books this year: a second edition of his book on leadership (Pendleton and Furnham 2016) and a third edition of his quirky alternative textbook (Furnham and Tsivrikos 2016). Furnham has published 92 books and over 1,200 peer-reviewed journal articles: surely a sign of a workaholic.

Furnham has noticed how some great psychologists seem to “disappear” from the literature soon after their death, while others thrive. He is not sure why this is the case: but he hopes to be the latter.

Finally, he must acknowledge that whatever he has achieved academically it has often been because of the help of various mentors, colleagues, and graduate students, as well as those mentioned above. Among the mentors, he must mention the brilliant Robert Hogan whose wit, wide reading, and courage has always impressed

and helped him. Of his colleagues, he needs especially to mention Barrie Gunter, Chris McManus, Alistair McClelland, and David Pendleton. However, it has been his various PhD students over the years who have helped him most. He needs to mention Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic, Dino Petrides, Viren Swami, Luke Treglown, and Simmy Grover.

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