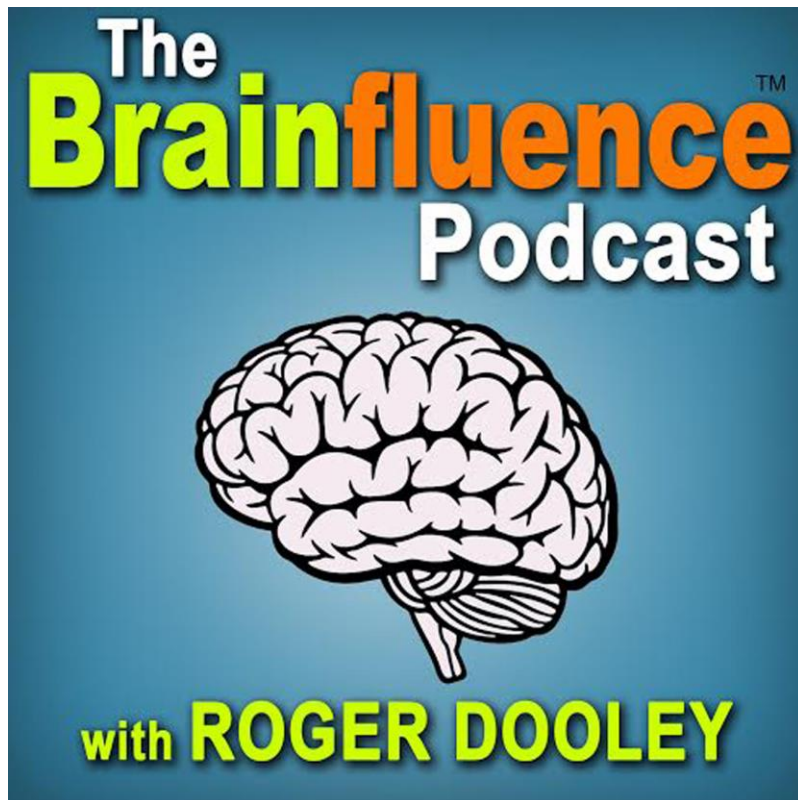


Ep #52: The History of Psychology with Dr. David
Devonis



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Roger Dooley

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Welcome to the Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley, author, speaker and educator on neuromarketing and the psychology of persuasion. Every week, we talk with thought leaders that will help you improve your influence with factual evidence and concrete research. Introducing your host, Roger Dooley.

Roger Dooley: Welcome to the Brainfluence podcast. This is Roger Dooley and today we are speaking to Dr. David Devonis. Professor and program coordinator of psychology of Graceland University in Iowa. He is an officer at Kiron, the international society for the history of behavioral and social sciences. His new book is History of Psychology 101. Part of Springer's psych 101 series. Welcome to the show, Dave.

Dr. Devonis: Hi. I'm glad to be here.

Roger Dooley: I'm going to start off with a question about timing. Psychology has been around for a while in various forms. I guess you could probably trace it's roots back to the ancient Greeks in certainly in the 1800's. There was a lot of psychology going on. You start your book in the 1920's. Why did you pick that as a starting point?

Dr. Devonis: I wanted to build a history that would connect with the recent memory of the oldest members of our profession, I think. That was my aim. I also wanted to have a history that would lead us up the present day. I wanted to write a really recent history. There's a question on how much historical distance to get and looks like the middle distance is about 1927 now. Actually I found a lot of outer references to 1927 in popular culture. Now there's a 1927 animation company out in Los Angeles that does opera

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animations. Phil Bryson, Iowa author, has written a book which is all centered around 1927 as a water shed year, where you think historically there were a lot of things going on in 1927 that make it a one of the more stellar years in the 1920's.

The big Mississippi flood in 1927. Lindbergh crossing the Atlantic in 1927. Then psychology that was the year that the Buck vs. Bill decision came down, in which Justice Holmes said, "Three generations of idiots isn't enough." We've changed to since then, I think. I hope for the better. Those are water sheds for Society and psychology as well.

Roger Dooley: Certainly that marked the beginning of the change of an era as you got to then into depression and then ultimately the cycle of war and so on. Explain a little bit about the dual track nature of your book.

Dr. Devonis: I wrote the book to reflect two things. One I wanted to remember the recent history of psychology. We intended when we write histories of psychology tend to give a lot of attention to the past and most histories tend to be two-thirds of the time up through about 1920. That leaves only a little bit of the book to discuss what's really vibrant and the past which is really our past. The one that we are. I wanted to go and make history that was more recent but I also really think that psychology's really big contribution is that effects people.

Then it does have society changing, personal changing effects. I wanted to show that most of our histories tend to be the histories of the people who makes psychology and not the people who are affected by it. I wanted to focus on people as they encountered psychology in their daily

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lives and I wanted to show how and when and where it could have an effect. If psychology is an important feature of life and I think it is. If it's an important subject then it should be able to be recognized by its effects; not just by its creators.

Our histories tend to be histories of makes rather histories of partakers, I guess, you might say, of psychology. That's what I did. I created a family to carry the story along. I picked a family namely ... The origin of my name is ..., but they came from the Ukraine, and they first to act that they did when they came over was to change their name to Black which is the translation. They were Ukrainian Jews. They settled in New York. First generation. The parents died in the influenza epidemic, 1918.

Kids were raised by relatives and the story goes on from there. Picks it right up to the present. Five generations. I wanted to make a graphic novel out of it, but I didn't get a chance to illustrate a book. I just wrote the text.

Roger Dooley: That'd be really interesting. Probably the realities of publishing make that pretty difficult. You break the book into chapter about ten-years each. The content is more or less in narrative fashion as opposed to a biography of each of the significant psychologists of the era. It seems like for each chapter there is a significant shift in focus in the world of psychology. What drives these shifts? Is it individual where some psychologists begin a school of thought that ends up being pervasive or is it more driven by whatever the scientific discoveries of that era create?

Dr. Devonis: I think it's both. I think personalities sometimes determine what the conversations going to be. As a psychologist and as a biographer I have to go and give a lot of

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credence to the idea that people are important in what they do. Their actions make a difference. The reason we have a history of psychology is because one of the great psychologists of the 1920's decided instead of continuing just to do his perceptual works, I would take his great ... edition and write a history of the field and that became the standard history for many years. His name was Edwin Boring.

People can make a difference in what they do,

Roger Dooley: Hope for a not a prophetic name.

Dr. Devonis: ... but the idea, too, is that there has been a steady progress in neuropsychology and in the understanding of the interaction between what the brain can do and what the body can do and the what the person can perceive based on that underlying biological infrastructure. A good deal of the change, the shift in from a behaviorist approach to a cognitive approach was driven, penalized by the much improved neurology that was present by 1955 compared to 1925.

One of the psychologists that's featured in this book is ... He said in 1955, we had in 1925, "Really rudimentary neurology and very bad gin and now we've got much better of both in 1955."

Roger Dooley: Would you say it's fair to say, David, the trend has been toward more research and hard data collection versus theorizing? I think of going all the way to Freud who mostly predates your book, but where most of his information was anecdotal and he came up with his theories from nothing. Now is there a lot more data collection and hard science involved? Or not really?

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Dr. Devonis: I think I categorize the field as a coalition of scientists, applied psychologists and therapists. I think that there's a gradient from science to art and a probably each one of those areas there's a fraction of art. In the science side, certainly there's a lot of hard data collection. You can be extremely hard science there. Psychology doesn't win Noble prizes. There's no Nobel prize for psychology so you can't really call it a science, the equivalent of all Nobel prize winning science. There's certainly people who have contributed mildly to psychology that have won Nobel prizes. They've been mostly physiologists. There's a famous economist, Herbert Simon, who won a Nobel prize.

Roger Dooley: I was at Carnegie Mellon when he was there but sadly I did not encounter him.

Dr. Devonis: There are data driven people but,

Roger Dooley: I would say Conaman too.

Dr. Devonis: ... I think theory talks to data and data talks to theory. I think there is still theories out there and there's probably theories that need to be built. As for Freud, Freud will never die. You see denial on the front page of the newspaper every day. Nobody has really explained the neuromechanisms for denial, yet I'd like to see it. I think Freud told us where to look for a lot of Freudables of humans. Theory is important. Data collection is important. They inform each other.

Roger Dooley: Dave from your perspective, while we are on the topic of Nobel prize winners, I frequently recommend Kahneman's book "Thinking Fast and Slow" and, of course, he won a Nobel prize and really contributed a lot to psychology with

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his system one, system two thinking process. You've got folks like ... with his left-right brain duality. There have been other sort of multiple brain theories out there. I know in my work I tend to talk a lot about conscious and non-conscious as a way of helping marketers understand they have to have those conscience appeal factors. The product has to have the right features and benefits and so on to get whatever the customer wants done are done.

There are also those emotional factors and other non-conscious factors involved. From your perspective, you've had chance sort of survey the last century of psychological thinking. Is there one of theory of dual brain or multiple brain that really resonates for you or really works?

Dr. Devonis: I think I like a holistic brain theory the best for myself. I think ultimately it's going to come down to something that we can't even conceive of yet is how well integrated the brain is. There's a new field now called Camatomics, which traces individuals bundles of nerve fibers from one place to another. Very short distances and mostly in mice. The pictures you get of this are just they're indescribably marvelous in terms of the complexity of the wiring. I think in terms of a ... brain theory we are getting, finally getting the good raw materials to be able to really build good theories about the brain.

For me, I don't know, I like the idea of an unconscious. I like the idea of an mischievous and sometimes malevolent unconscious. I'm not anti-Freudian. I teach a Freud seminar. I love this stuff. It's literary. It's literate. It's a foundation spell.

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Roger Dooley: I think to some degree all of these are short hands. At least when used in a business context, you have all these things about selling to the right brain or selling to the lizard brain and that thing. It's a lot more complicated than that. Even the right-left brain split. Clearly, that's not as split as people would have you believe and now you've given process.

Dr. Devonis: You need both sides.

Roger Dooley: Nothing involves just one hemisphere.

Dr. Devonis: You need both sides working together to have a brain. There's information being passed across the Corpus Callosum from hemisphere to hemisphere every time you take a step. Half a brain is going to go and anticipated next step that you're going to take, which is what I think is happening here. There was a guy named Valentino Braitenberg, if I'm not mistaken, who wrote a little piece called "Vehicles" back about 30 years ago, published by MIT Press.

When he tried to describe how you would build a robot that could ambulate. A little car. It's a beautiful treatise on just how integrated the brain is, how much of a symphony it is. Yes, there are things in the brain, which I think you could say or going to get emotion first. Then there are other things which are going to catch the information from reason first that's called the old ...

Ultimately, that's going to be synthesized I remember as a young person saying "synthesis, synthesis." I still think that. I still think that's where it's going to end up. Pitching to one side or the other. I think a balanced approach would be,

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Roger Dooley: The right one?

Dr. Devonis: ...

Roger Dooley: That's definitely something that I try and emphasize that you, maybe certain kinds of products that you're selling a fragrance, you can just use an emotional image and then hope that somehow better associates with the brand and ends up being a sale when they get to the department store but most products really do have to have a multi-dimensional approach and, of course, if you look whether it's in EEG brain wave measurement or FMRI brain scan, you never have half the brain that's lit up and the other half that's just sitting there. There's activity everywhere all the time

Dr. Devonis: It's like a picture of a lightning storms that you see from space. It's a marvelous, marvelous thing and my only regret is I won't live long enough to be able to see how it's going to play out.

Roger Dooley: I think that's probably any area of technical progress. There's always something that's in the future no matter how far you get. It's trying to buy the ultimate computer or you buy the ultimate computer and then a year later, it's not quite as ultimate as it was in the previous year.

Dr. Devonis: I'm okay with futurists. I'm a historian but I like futurists. I like thinking forward rather than to go and clinging on to the past.

Roger Dooley: Dave, after I hear you mentioned a lot that you had a lot of respect for Timothy Leary. I was in college back then and I was definitely familiar with him as cultural icon at that time. I guess, why do you feel that he played an

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important role in the history of psychology? Which I guess I would have consider more of a pop culture type icon than somebody who influenced the direction of the field.

Dr. Devonis: It goes back to what I was saying about psychology being a coalition, a mixture, a synthesis of different approaches, of different ways of knowing, different ways of understanding the world. Really it just seems to me to be so quintessentially embodies the things that go into psychology that make it interesting field that it is. There is some person who really considered the whole of life I think a blood sport, and he wanted to be on the football team of the military academy, but he short-circuited. He got drummed out of there.

He saw life in real physical terms and he took it that way. He took it very openly. He had a Berkeley degree in clinical psychology, one of the earliest modern clinical psychology degrees, 1950. Wrote an eminent textbook and it's still being used as a theory, interpersonal theory or inter-personality theory. By 1957, he was at the top of psychological game, top of the research game, working in clinical psychology at the very beginning at Kaiser Permanente's clinical psychology empire out in California, working with all the beginnings of computer programming and understanding personality.

Then everything changed. Everything changed because his life changed. His wife committed suicide and his life completely turned around. He turned to his friends and ultimately he had an epiphany experience with drug. I'm not selling drugs here, but I'm saying that that phenomenology of having that brain-changing, life-changing experience really gets pretty close to a

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dimension that it's really hard to catching data, but it's really easy to talk about it in terms of some people call it religious experience, some people call it insights, some people call it falling in love.

I don't know what you would call it, but Leary had that vision, his mind was capable of being a lot more than we think that it is. He came straight out of that strict scientific stuff. His PhD advisers and all of his undergraduate advisers came right out of the classic Harvard 1930s experimental psychology. There you have a person who became America's LSD guru and ultimately became one of the earliest apostles of the internet. He was probably 10 years in advance in terms of talking about cyber culture from when it really burst.

Roger Dooley: Right. For sure.

Dr. Devonis: He was a brilliant man, a poet, a futurist and I'm not recommending this either, but we talked a lot about society and bad social stuff and how we imprison people. There was a person that actually went to prison a couple of times. I somehow respect that person not necessarily because they went to prison but because they lived life that large that they had to had many experiences. As a psychologist,

Roger Dooley: Right... not that we don't want to have that experience ourselves, but definitely ... Let me know-

Dr. Devonis: I don't want to recommend it, but it happened. That's the brief experience that you might want to see in a psychologist. I can't approach that.

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Roger Dooley: Right, few people can with at least that level of learning and knowledge. Let me here change gears a little bit, Dave. Evolutionary psychology. What do you think about that? I know that occasionally, I see marketers citing that I've used that on some of my stuff, where Jeffrey Miller wrote entire tomes spent about how our consumer buying behavior is driven by this basic evolutionary principles like mating principles.

Seems like it all comes down to mating and sex, or at least a lot of it does. Looking at it from your perspective or you've collected the data for the last century, where does evolutionary psychology fit into the scheme, if at all?

Dr. Devonis: There are very interesting people working in the field and I am absurd after I finished writing this account or the history that that was one of the areas that probably could have used a little bit more, could have featured a little bit more because it is there. I think that I tended to go and downplay it because my early training in this was that thinking in terms of heredity was less appropriate than thinking in terms of learning with that child of the 1960s and 1970s in that regard.

I don't have any objections to evolutionary psychology. I was around when socio-biology had first emerged, but I think that I really respect more the people who are doing really good cross-species work than comparative psychology works of people like Robert Sapolsky, working with the booms and stress. People like ..., working empathy and chimps. Those are the areas where I think that we're learning the most in terms of that.

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In terms of saying that we have a, I don't know, a cave-person personality or something like that. I don't know. We're pretty well evolved right now, I would think.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, although there's quite a bout of interesting data showing that particularly men, their behavior is affected significantly by, for instance, an image of an attractive woman. Whether it's their buying behavior that risk aversion or willing just to take on more risk that can be affected by these, a very simple little cues. There's definitely a nugget of something there. It's a-

Dr. Devonis: Yeah. You can't deny that. That goes all the way back to birds do it, and the bees do it. That's got to be happening right way. It's a human culture and our human system. I don't know. I don't read extensively in evolutionary psychology, so I can't really say. I sometimes think of myself as a person who appeared ... and then have very much of an evolutionary past, but the things that we like, the things that we need, the sweets, the warm sun, the fences that we put up, I would imagine that it's very plausible than-

Roger Dooley: There's the nature versus nurture debate. Nature plays a role. I think it's more of a question of percentage where some folks want to give it all the credit and others none of the credit, but the reality I'm sure is somewhere in between.

Dr. Devonis: There were extremists when I was coming up in the field. I think it's a lot more new ones now. For my historian's perspective, I would say, we know absolutely nothing about what happened 3,500 years ago and before that. We just don't know. We don't know anything about that. That's a complete blank. I encourage my students and I

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encourage anybody to go and try to figure out what it might have been like to be a human being circa ... Just pick a year. A hundred thousand years ago, and then try to envision that.

It's really hard to do actually because there aren't a lot of conceptualizations of it.

Roger Dooley: Very, very little evidence of that era.

Dr. Devonis: We tend to want to project, historians never should predict into the future, but private citizens and psychologist can try to imagine futures. I don't see any objections to that. I think we should probably be trying to imagine the ancient past, too, a little bit better before we then progress further with theories. We should try to get some data and we need to verify what we think.

Roger Dooley: Hey, Dave, let me ask you one last question here. It puts you on the spot. I think, reading through the book, I only spotted one psychologist in your book that I've had as a guest in the podcast so far. That's Robert Cialdini. Among the living psychologists who are still out there and have something to say, particularly perhaps about business or marketing, who should I be trying to book for the show based on your survey of the field?

Dr. Devonis: I don't know. You probably book yourself. You're already there. I agree with you about Robert Cialdini. I don't know anybody who's done a lot more than that. I know some people who done some ... I don't know. There are people out there working in media now, who might be useful to talk to. There's this fellow in Iowa, whose name is, I believe Marshall Poe, written a history in communications who might has insights on the importance of media. I

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think that anybody who's looking at multi-tasking, multi-dimensional type of information processing that we have to do now would be good,

I don't know how active Donald Norman is now, but Donald Norman would be a person-

Roger Dooley: Actually, I do. I have him on my list. He has tentatively agreed to be on it. We need to schedule that. His emphasis on the psychology of user experience and design is really awesome. He's really an icon in the field now.

Dr. Devonis: I've mentioned him in here, peripherally. You can't get everybody. Robert Cialdini, he got actually more than a cameo picture, because I think actually that his psychology, his system is what we're going to remember. The 80s and 90s, bye. I've never a lot heard good psychologists out there.

... could probably, would be a good interview, too, because he's talked a lot about how people, once they've gotten into a groove, they tend to go and stay in it and how people get into that kind of flow-

Roger Dooley: Flow state.

Dr. Devonis: Flow state.

Roger Dooley: . Yeah, we've done one segment on flow. Definitely that's a good thought. I encourage our listeners, too, if they have any suggestions. Once this is up, draw up by the Show Notes page RogerDooley.com and add your own suggestions in the comment of psychologists or other guests that you'd like to be on the show. For now, what I'd

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like to do is remind everybody that we're speaking with Dr. David Devon, he's a professor and a program coordinator in psychology in Graceland University, and the author of a new book "History of Psychology 101".

Dave, how can people find your book and your stuff online?

Dr. Devonis: Go to the Sprinter website, Sprinter Publishing Company in New York. Get a series of reviews and a sample chapter there. You can also find it on Amazon.

Roger Dooley: We will link to those places in the Show Notes page at RoogerDooley.com/podcast. Dave, thanks for being on the show.

Dr. Devonis: Thank you, Roger. It was a pleasure.

Thank you for joining me for this episode of the Brainfluence Podcast. To continue the discussion and to find your own path to brainy success, please visit us at RogerDooley.com.