
Kenneth S. Bowers (1937–1996)

Kenneth S. Bowers, one of the world's preeminent hypnosis researchers and an important contributor to personality and cognitive psychology, died of a brain tumor on July 4, 1996. A scholar of unusual breadth, he was renowned for his searching theoretical and ingenious experimental work.

Bowers was born in Chicago, Illinois, on September 20, 1937, to E. Keith Bowers, an insurance agent, and Blanche Bowers, a music teacher; he had one brother, Kris. Bowers received the Bachelor of Arts degree in philosophy and a Doctor of Philosophy degree in clinical psychology (1964) from the University of Illinois. At Illinois, he was influenced primarily by William Gilbert, his dissertation director, and by Don Dulaney, a cognitive psychologist with an interest in unconscious processes.

Along with his wife, Patricia Gregg Bowers, also a clinical psychologist, Bowers joined the recently founded University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada. He devoted his entire career to Waterloo, rising to the rank of Associate Professor in 1968, and that of Professor in 1974, and played an indispensable role in the development of that department's highly successful and internationally recognized graduate program in clinical psychology.

Hypnosis was (and remains) an ideal investigative arena for a person who is fascinated by philosophical issues such as free will and the mind-body problem. Beginning in 1966, Bowers produced a highly influential stream of empirical and theoretical contributions to the understanding of hypnosis. A formative influence was Ernest R. Hilgard, in whose laboratory at Stanford University he was a Visiting Scholar twice; he was also the Hilgard Visiting Professor at Stanford in the fall of 1983. Bowers devoted much time and wisdom to the Society for Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis, serving a term as its president. In this and in many other capacities, he became widely trusted and respected for his sound judgment.

In recognition of his scholarly and professional contributions, Bowers received many awards from that society over the years, including best research paper (1967, 1968, and 1970), best theoretical paper (1973, 1978, and 1992), the Bernard B. Ragsinsky Award for leadership and achievement in the field of hypnosis (1988), and the Presidential Award (1995). In 1989, Bowers received the Morton Prince Award for distinguished contribution to the development of hypnosis in the science and profession of psychology, presented jointly by that society and the American Board of Examiners in Psychological Hypnosis.

A very lucid and persuasive writer, Bowers published more than 50 journal articles, 20 book chapters, and two books. One of the books, *Hypnosis for the Seriously Curious* (1976), is still widely regarded as the best general introduction to hypnosis. Many of his research contributions involved the application of Hilgard's neodissociation

theory of divided consciousness to the understanding of a wide range of hypnotic phenomena, including posthypnotic suggestions, hallucinations, analgesia, and amnesia. Bowers delighted in cleverly designed experiments in which neodissociation theory was tested against its social-psychological competitors. However, in the last few years of his life, he turned increasing attention to what he thought were problematic conceptual inconsistencies in neodissociation theory. In the process, he advanced his own theory of "dissociated control" in hypnosis, arguing that hypnosis alters underlying control processes, such that subsystems of control are released from higher executive processes and activated more or less directly by hypnotic suggestions. Bowers also had considerable influence on other hypnosis theorists, provoking them to clarify and to elaborate their own positions.

Bowers's interest in such themes as person-by-situation interactions and unconscious influences on behavior—both important issues in hypnosis—threw off creative sparks that landed in other areas of psychology. Indeed, in his best-known work, published in the 1973 *Psychological Review* and later named a "Citation Classic," he discussed the trait-situation debate in personality. Against both polarized views, Bowers argued for an interactionist alternative in which situations are as much a function of the person as the person's behaviors are a function of situations. This conception broke a logjam in personality theory and pointed the direction for subsequent investigation of the many ways in which people evoke, select, behaviorally manipulate, and cognitively transform the situations to which they, in turn, respond.

Likewise, Bowers's interest in unconscious processes later led him to investigate a neglected problem in cognitive psychology: the positive role of intuition in problem solving. In a clever series of experiments, he showed that people can guess which of two problems is solvable, even though they are unaware of the solution itself. In contrast to the dominant view among cognitive psychologists that intuitions are mainly a source of inferential errors, he demonstrated that informed guesses can contribute to the process of creative discovery.

A major theme in Bowers's career was his emphasis on the philosophical foundations of inquiry as the common basis for both research and clinical practice. He was a firm believer in searching, careful conceptual analysis; he once remarked about some admirably precise but conceptually arid experiments, "Anything not worth doing, is not worth doing well." In his teaching, he tirelessly emphasized that researchers and clinical practitioners deal with the same underlying epistemological problems and that their spheres of inquiry ideally complement and illuminate each other. Throughout his career, the forging of vital and generative

interconnections between scientists and practitioners was a major concern for him; his 1996 *Psychological Bulletin* article on memory and repression, appearing just before he died, is a moving testament to this concern.

As a person, Bowers exemplified some of the best qualities of a scientist. He could be searchingly critical of others' ideas and research and, at the same time, could convey deep respect for them. He loved scientific debate. He was unhesitant about taking clear and even passionate stands on important issues; later, if he turned out to be wrong, he admitted so gracefully and with no ill will. He was selflessly generous to his students and colleagues with his insights, ideas, and advice.

Kenneth S. Bowers is survived by his wife, Patricia Gregg Bowers, and their three sons, Jeffrey, Peter, and Kevin.

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