

*“Freud Bashing” in Psychology: A History*

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Most psychoanalytic scholars and historians agree that psychoanalysis and related approaches have held a precarious place in American psychology throughout its history since the introduction of Freud’s ideas to the U.S. Typical explications of this marginalization focus on psychoanalysis’ past and present failure to become a scientific branch of psychology, on psychoanalysis’ professional and cultural self-isolation or on internal theoretical wrangling. Other historians of psychoanalysis highlighted the significant impact of European anti-Semitism, the Holocaust, and psychoanalysts’ migration to the U.S. on psychoanalysis as a distinct discipline in America (Aron & Starr, 2013; Frosh, 2015; Kuriloff, 2014). Authoritative histories of American psychology and the American Psychological Association (APA) claim psychology’s supposed receptivity to psychoanalysis and psychoanalysis’ own failure to become part of the field (Green & Cautin, 2017; Pickren & Rutherford, 2018). Undoubtedly, reception of psychoanalysis within the formal discipline of American psychology is multi-causal. However, one of the origins of psychoanalysis’ exclusion not discussed in this history is the foundational role of Darwinian-based eugenics and eugenic-based epistemological principles in formation of American psychology.

Among the dominant influences on American psychology at the turn of XX century was eugenics, a Darwinism based science of racial or human betterment (Bashford & Levine, 2010; Lombardo, 2013; Tucker, 1996). In the U.S. eugenics is directly responsible for enforcements of

racial segregation, Jim Crow laws, anti-Semitic and xenophobic immigration policies, involuntary sterilization of women and girls, racial and gender-based vocational discrimination, enforcement of miscegenation laws, heteronormative sexual purity campaigns, and other oppressive social practices (Bashford & Levine, 2010; Black, 2003; Lombardo, 2013; Stern, 2015; XXX). History of eugenics in the U.S. is routinely minimized or denied (Guthrie, 2004; Tucker, 1996).

Undoubtedly, psychoanalysis and psychoanalysts were also complicit in not questioning cultural assumptions central to eugenics (Aron & Starr, 2013). Psychoanalytic scholars, starting with Freud, promoted ideologies related to eugenics, including elevation of certain groups and behaviors to “civilization” while relegating others to being “primitive” (Brickman, 2017; Clarke, 2003; Frosh, 2013; Said, 2003; Tate, 1996). However, psychoanalysis also widely diverged from eugenic assumptions and eugenic psychology sciences. In fact, Freud’s and psychoanalytic theorizing on the centrality of human relationships, social context, and history were viewed as contrary to Darwinism (Cordon, 2012). Freud’s work was primarily influenced by the evolutionary theory by French biologist, whose work pre-dated Darwin, J.B. Lamarck (Slavet, 2006; Sternger, 2006). Specifically, Lamarckian theory emphasized key role of the environment and social context in evolutionary development, providing a foundational framework for psychoanalytic approaches to understanding human differences (Gadjev, 2004; Slavet, 2006).

The origins story of psychoanalysis in the U.S. shifts when viewed through the historical lens of eugenics. G. Stanley Hall, who invited Freud and his colleagues to the U.S. in 1909, may have been interested in ideas represented by psychoanalysis primarily because of its disconcerting popularity in Europe (Cordón, 2012; Hall, 1917ab; 1927). Hall (1917b) authored books such as *Jesus, the Christ, In the Light of Psychology*, in which he further proclaimed that

the “Freudian theory of therapy... is mistaken” (p. 12), because individuals, rather than being “cured by the very modesty” based on moral (religious) counseling, would have their “morality” destroyed by psychoanalysis (p. 13). Hall, who was an avowed eugenicist, in his writings warned Americans against the supposed dangers posed by “rapacious Jews” who in his view were “destroying” Western civilizations precisely through their radical theories (Hall, 1889, p. 54). In his introductory article as an editor of one of the first American journals of psychology-- the *Journal of Applied Psychology*-- Hall (1917a) announced that it was important for the U.S. psychology to “draw any lesson... from the present war, in which the great Nordic race... is committing suicide” (p. 9) by specifically warning American psychologists against the “revisionary conceptions of Freud...that it is... normal for man at times to plunge back and down the evolutionary ladder” (p. 12). In his scientific autobiography, Hall (1927) decried that the psychoanalytic focus on “sex” in addition its “rapid growth” made it a non-scientific “cult” despite Hall’s claims that he was open to the concept of the “unconscious” (p. 412). When Freud (1953) described his visit to the U.S. as a “plague,” he may have referred to reactions he received from eugenicists like Hall, which branded Jews along with psychoanalysis as unfit and parasitic.

John B. Watson, another pillar of American psychology and a eugenicist, was also a vocal voice in disparaging Freud and psychoanalysis. In his commitment to an exclusively animal-based, experimental and control (“social engineering”) based vision of psychology, Watson’s (1914) Behaviorist Manifesto was an open call toward the goal of having psychoanalytic interests in “introspection” and “consciousness” rooted out from American psychological sciences. According to Watson, American psychology had to become a “purely objective experimental branch of natural science,” holding firmly to its eugenic goal “of

prediction and control of behavior” (p. 1). This form of psychology, Watson stated, “recognizes no dividing line between man [human] and brute [animal]” (p. 1).

Watson (1919, 1928), like Hall, acceded to several of Freud’s points, including the idea that early childhood is an influential developmental time, although, unlike Freud, Watson insisted that childhood was a time to “socially engineer” happy and efficient people that resisted behaviors related to feeble-mindedness (e.g., lack of emotional and behavioral self-control). Watson’s public and private correspondence showed open disregard for psychoanalysis, branding it as “voodooism” (Watson, 1924, p. 18). Moreover, following their sadistic experiments on an infant they called “little Albert,” Watson and Reyner (1920) mocked psychoanalysis, saying that some day in the future [little] “Albert’s fear” would not result in an analysis of the little boy attempting “to play with the pubic hair of the mother” (p. 317) rather than his laboratory-conditioned fears. Notably, Watson and Reyner (1920, 1928) themselves openly discussed their experimentations on erogenous, including genital, areas of orphans and children in their scientific investigations, claiming that infants’ craving for certain types of human touch resulted in their vulnerability to feeble-minded dependency and subsequent adult incapacity to control sexual urges. For example, in their summary of Little Albert experiments, Watson and Rayner (1920) discussed plans: “to “recondition” [fear] by showing objects calling out fear responses (visual) and simultaneously stimulating the erogenous zones (tactual). We should try first the lips, then the nipples and as a final resort the sex organs” (p. 16).

Like Hall (1927), Watson (1912) called psychoanalysis a “cult” (p. 916). Like Hall, Watson (1930) routinely discussed that psychoanalytic scholars were highly prolific in their scientific output but that this work was unequivocally mistaken. According to Watson, psychoanalytic scholarship was

Indeed the awe-inspiring--number of volumes and papers and journals produced by Freudians and post-Freudians in, the last 20 years would fill a good-sized room. And yet the behaviorist, as he reads through this great mass of literature cannot but feel in it a lack of any central scientific viewpoint. Not until his own genetic studies, started less than 10 years ago, began to bear fruit, did it become apparent to the behaviorist that he could simplify the problems of emotion and apply objective experimental methods to their solution. (p. 108)

Continuing in his updated classic text the *Behaviorism*, Watson (1930) declared:

I venture to predict that 20 years from now an analyst using Freudian concepts and Freudian terminology will be placed upon the same plane as a phrenologist. And yet analysis based upon behavioristic principles is here to stay and is a necessary profession in society to be placed upon a par with internal medicine and surgery... This will be the equivalent of diagnosis. Combined with this will go unconditioning and then conditioning. These will constitute the curative side. Analysis as such has no virtue, no curative value. New habits, verbal, manual and visceral, of such and such kinds, will be the prescriptions the psychopathologist will write. (p. 243)

These summaries of writings by early leading American psychologists, who were also adherents of eugenics, highlight the impossibilities of psychoanalysis' acceptance within the field.

Eugenics and its values appear to have been swiftly disavowed by most American psychologists as the recognition of Nazi eugenic-fueled atrocities entered into U.S. popular consciousness (Tucker, 1996). Moreover, in post World War II U.S. the practice of psychotherapy became more prevalent and known but was mostly associated with psychiatry (i.e., often synonymous with psychoanalysis) (Bakan, 2013; Hale, 1995). Rather than engaging

exclusively in testing and behavioral control manipulations, significant number of psychologists turned toward the practice of psychotherapy, including psychoanalytic, humanistic-existential, and client centered (Freedheim et al., 1992). However, academic psychology remained focused on animal experimentation, laboratory experiments on children and adults, on testing and measurement, and on studies differentiating disorders and mental health conditions via large scale data collections (Green & Cautin, 2017; Pickren & Rutherford, 2018).

In addition, many leading American psychologists continued to promote eugenic sciences (Guthrie, 2004; Tucker, 1996). For example, in the landmark Supreme Court Case *Brown vs. Board of Education*, substantial evidence for maintaining racial segregation was provided by H.E. Garrett, Columbia University psychologist, the founding member of behavioral genetics, a long time director of the eugenic Pioneer Fund, and the president of APA in 1946 (Tucker, 1996). Behaviorist B. F. Skinner (1953, 1956, 1961) continued to proclaim that animal models of behavior held the only explanatory scientific power because human beings were too difficult to control in experiments, and that human factors (e.g., relational or social concerns of participants) interfered with acquiring supposedly accurate results. Skinner added to attacks on Freud and psychoanalysis, predicting that psychoanalysis, as a non-experimental non-animal-based discipline, would decline and die. Skinner (1961) decried psychology's move away from academic laboratories into communities and clinics, insisting that "it is possible that theories of behavior derived from the clinic or from field studies, rather than from the laboratory, are on the wane. A strict Freudian psychology, for example, is no longer stoutly defended" (p. 242). In an escalated assault on psychoanalysis, behaviorist Wolpe (1981) proclaimed in an *American Psychologist* article that not only that psychoanalysis has been scientifically proven to be ineffective but that psychoanalysis is "an immoral practice and a social blot on the psychological

profession” (p. 163). “We are all tainted” by permitting psychoanalysis to exist, Wolpe (1981, p. 163) declared, demanding that psychoanalytic treatments or training be banned and that behaviorism be instituted as its leading treatment modality and academic empirical focus.

Critiques and dismissals of Freud and psychoanalysis have not waned among academic psychologists who occupy significant leadership positions within discipline’s organizations such as APA. Recent assaults emanate from M. Seligman (2002, 2006, 2011), who progressed from learned helplessness experiments on caged dogs to becoming the founder of “positive psychology.” Seligman’s (2002, 2006, 2011) writings rely on openly eugenic sciences and neo-Darwinism (e.g., Pioneer Fund supported T. Bouchard) and re-introduce the eugenic idea that only “character and heredity” account for “what people do” (Seligman, 2011, p. 104). Thus, Seligman’s writings invariably involve attacks of Freud and “his legion of followers” (Seligman, 2002, p. 66). Seligman (2002) complains that “Freud’s philosophy, as bizarre as it sounds when laid out so starkly [the idea that past individual and social conflicts influence people’s lives], finds its way into daily psychological and psychiatric practice” (p. xii). Moreover, Seligman (2006) decries the continuation of psychoanalytic approaches to clinical care as mercenary and as “preposterous” because despite “many thousands of patients have had hundreds of thousands of sessions, psychoanalytic therapy as not been demonstrated to work for depression. (p. 11). Seligman’s (2006) summary of psychoanalysis mirrors the attacks on psychoanalysts by Hall and Watson: “You want to have sex with your mother. You want to kill your father. You harbor fantasies that your newborn baby might die—because you want him to die. You want to spend your days in endless misery” (p. 11). Seligman like other contemporary anti-psychoanalytic writers continues to use eugenic-fueled stereotypes that psychoanalysis focuses exclusively on sex and violence, or that psychoanalysts are avaricious (Shedler, 2010).

Even more noteworthy are continued attacks on psychoanalysis by those who openly adhere to eugenic-based epistemological and social values. For example, Eysenck (1985), known for his promotion of eugenics and Galtonian emphasis on heritability of personality traits, openly attacked psychoanalysis for its theories of social and relational origins of personality. Eysenck was praised by one of the most racist eugenic XX psychology scholars Rushton (2001) for both the promotion of “the biological bases of personality” (p. 32) and for replacing “psychodynamic dogma” with “an empirically tested and scientifically based psychotherapy—now called ‘cognitive-behavioral therapy’”(p. 35). Similarly, in his current promotion of evolutionary Neo-Darwinist psychology Pinker (2018) expressly vilifies the work of leading psychoanalytic theorists such as Fromm, Lacan, Derrida, Marcuse, and Fanon, calling them anti-scientific “prophets of doom” and “morose cultural pessimists” whose work is a “disaster” that shows evidence of “suffocating political correctness” (p. 406). In turn, Pinker (2018) celebrated Galton and eugenics, stating that these have been merely maligned and unjustly discarded by those who supposedly follow an “anti-scientific propaganda” (p. 400).

Even more troubling is the centrality of eugenic-based American psychology to White supremacy movements, which also disdain psychoanalysis. G. Whitney, a behavioral geneticist, one time president of the American Behavioral Genetics Association, and an American psychologist, wrote the Forward to one of the most infamous and influential contemporary White supremacy books--David Duke’s (1999) *My Awakening*. In this introduction Whitney singled out “Freudian psychoanalytic theory” as one of the most problematic “dogmatic belief systems” (p. 9, 11). Duke (1999), who referred to multiple scientific studies produced by psychologist to justify his racist and eugenic positions, dedicated an entire section of his book to decrying the

“Freudian assault” on American psychology as a form of “the Jewish onslaught” and an “attack on our [American Christian] cultural values” (pp. 207-209).

Since its inception to today psychoanalysis has often stood in opposition to openly eugenic epistemological values and practices, especially in American psychology. Anti-Semitism, which was central to eugenics, also has served as an explicit and implicit rationale for vehemently rejecting psychoanalytic theories by both eugenic-influenced American psychology scholars and eugenic psychology consumers (i.e., David Duke). Because of their past and present dominance in the field of psychology, the impact of their anti-psychoanalytic rhetoric appears to be widespread both within and outside the discipline. It is possible that these socio-historical foundations of vilifying psychoanalysis underlie the most dominant rationales for its exclusion. Specifically, continued reduction of psychoanalysis to an exclusive focus on supposedly perverse forms of sexual desire and aggression reflects neither the entirety of original Freudian theory nor contemporary psychoanalytic traditions yet is maintained within the field (Aron & Starr, 2013; Hale, 1995; Phillips, 2014; Shedler, 2010). Moreover, despite long-standing and voluminous scholarship by psychoanalysts, starting with Freud, psychoanalytic empirical evidence and clinical utility are dismissed, minimized, or openly disparaged within organized American psychology (Shedler, 2010). These prolonged biases may point to implicit social values in relation to human experience, embedded in American psychology itself (e.g., the minimization of social context, the denial of social oppression and the reluctance to discuss the dynamics of human sexuality beyond hetero-normative and procreative). Akin to other forms of social prejudice, affectively charged hatred toward psychoanalysis may point to the specious unconsciously held prejudices, which fuel secondary rationales of its exclusion: continued enactments or unconscious replications of older histories may also be visible in disciplinary

attitudes and actions toward psychoanalysis as unscientific, “Jewish,” or cult-like (Aron & Starr, 2013; Frosh, 2015; Cushman, 1999; Shedler, 2010). Recognition of these historical and contemporary disciplinary side-lining of psychoanalysis may be helpful to psychoanalytic field itself in developing new strategies for resisting and addressing the varied forms of exclusion.