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(Part Twelve)

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In-Sight People

Editor-in-Chief

(Updated September 28, 2016)

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Athabasca University; University of California, Irvine

Scott Douglas Jacobsen founded In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal and In-Sight Publishing. He authored/co-authored some e-books, free or low-cost. If you want to contact Scott: Scott.D.Jacobsen@Gmail.com, Scott.Jacobsen@TrustedClothes.Com, Scott@ConatusNews.Com, scott.jacobsen@probc.ca, Scott@Karmik.Ca, or SJacobsen@AlmasJiwaniFoundation.Org.

He is a Moral Courage Webmaster and Outreach Specialist (Fall, 2016) at the UCI Interdisciplinary Center for the Scientific Study of Ethics and Morality (Ethics Center), Interview Columnist for Conatus News, Writer and Executive Administrator for Trusted Clothes, Interview Columnist for Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN), Chair of Social Media for the Almas Jiwani Foundation, Councillor for the Athabasca University Student Union, Member of the Learning Analytics Research Group, writer for The Voice Magazine, Your Political Party of BC, ProBC, Marijuana Party of Canada, Fresh Start Recovery Centre, Harvest House Ministries, and Little Footsteps Big Steps International Development Organization, Editor and Proofreader for Alfred Yi Zhang Photography, Community Journalist/Blogger for Gordon Neighbourhood House, Member-at-Large, Member of the Outreach Committee, the Finance & Fundraising Committee, and the Special Projects & Political Advocacy Committee, and Writer for Canadian Students for Sensible Drug Policy, Member of the Lifespan Cognition Psychology Lab and IMAGE Psychology Lab, Collaborator with Dr. Farhad Dastur in creation of the Critical Thinking Wiki, Board Member, and Foundation Volunteer Committee Member for the Fraser Valley Health Care Foundation, and Independent Landscaper.

He was a Francisco Ayala Scholar at the UCI Ethics Center, Member of the Psychometric Society Graduate Student Committee, Special Advisor and Writer for ECOSOC at NWMUN, Writer for TransplantFirstAcademy and ProActive Path, Member of AT-CURA Psychology Lab, Contributor for a student policy review, Vice President of Outreach for the Almas Jiwani Foundation, worked with Manahel Thabet on numerous initiatives, Student Member of the Ad–Hoc Executive Compensation Review Committee for
the Athabasca University Student Union, Volunteer and Writer for British Columbia Psychological Association, Community Member of the KPU Choir (even performed with them alongside the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra), Delegate at Harvard World MUN, NWMUN, UBC MUN, and Long Beach Intercollegiate MUN, and Writer and Member of the Communications Committee for The PIPE UP Network.


Advisory Board

*Interview views do not equate to positions of Advisory Board members.*

*Advisory Board listing alphabetized by first name and relevant hyperlinks active.*

Professor Adele Diamond, PhD, FRSC

Tier 1 Canada Research Chair Professor, Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience, University of British Columbia; Fellow, Royal Society of Canada; Fellow, Society of Experimental Psychologists

Adele Diamond is the Canada Research Chair Professor of Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. She is a member of the Royal Society of Canada and was recently recognized as one the 15 most influential neuroscientists in the world today.

Prof. Diamond is at the forefront of research on ‘executive functions’ and on the brain’s prefrontal cortex on which they depend. Executive functions include ‘thinking outside the box’ (cognitive flexibility), mentally relating ideas and facts (working memory), and giving considered responses rather than impulsive ones, resisting temptations and staying focused (inhibitory control, including selective attention). Prof. Diamond has made discoveries that have improved treatment for two different medical disorders and discoveries that have impacted education, improving the lives of millions of children. Her work has shown that executive functions can be improved at any age, even in the very young. Recently she has turned her attention to the possible roles of traditional activities, such as music and dance, in improving executive functions, academic outcomes, and mental health.

In looking for practical ways to help children develop healthy executive functions, and thus help more children thrive, Prof. Diamond takes a markedly different perspective from mainstream education in hypothesizing that focusing exclusively on training cognitive skills is less efficient, and ultimately less successful, than also addressing students’ social, emotional, and physical needs. She hypothesizes that besides training the skills of interest, it’s important to support those skills by lessening things that impair them (like stress or loneliness) and enhancing things that support them (such as joy and good health). Adele Diamond was educated at Swarthmore (B.A., Phi Beta Kappa), Harvard (Ph.D.), and Yale Medical School (postdoc). Her many awards include an honorary doctorate (Honoris Causa) from Ben-Gurion University, the Bronfenbrenner Award for Lifetime Contributions to Developmental Psychology in the Service of Science and Society, named a “Woman of Distinction” by the YWCA, and named one of the “2000 Outstanding Women of the 20th Century.”
Dr. Aubrey de Grey

*Chief Science Officer & Co-Founder, SENS Research Foundation; Editor-In-Chief, Rejuvenation Research*

Dr. Aubrey de Grey is a biomedical gerontologist based in Cambridge, UK and Mountain View, California, USA, and is the Chief Science Officer of **SENS Research Foundation**, a California-based 501(c) (3) charity dedicated to combating the aging process. He is also Editor-in-Chief of **Rejuvenation Research**, the world’s highest-impact peer-reviewed journal focused on intervention in aging.

He received his BA and Ph.D. from the **University of Cambridge** in 1985 and 2000 respectively. His research interests encompass the characterization of all the accumulating and eventually pathogenic molecular and cellular side-effects of metabolism (“damage”) that constitute mammalian aging and the design of interventions to repair and/or obviate that damage. Dr. de Grey is a Fellow of both the **Gerontological Society of America** and the **American Aging Association**, and sits on the editorial and scientific advisory boards of numerous journals and organisations.
Professor Azra Raza, M.D.

_Columbia University, Medicine, Professor; Myelodysplastic Syndrome Center, Director_

Dr. Azra Raza is Professor of Medicine and Director of the MDS Center at Columbia University in New York, NY. She started her research in Myelodysplastic Syndromes (MDS) in 1982 and moved to Rush University, Chicago, Illinois in 1992, where she was the Charles Arthur Weaver Professor in Oncology and Director, Division of Myeloid Diseases.

The MDS program, along with a Tissue Repository containing more than 60,000 samples from MDS and acute leukemia patients was successfully relocated to Columbia University in 2010. Before moving to New York, Dr. Raza was the Chief of Hematology Oncology and the Gladys Smith Martin Professor of Oncology at the University of Massachusetts.

She has published the results of her laboratory research and clinical trials in prestigious, peer reviewed journals such as The New England Journal of Medicine, Nature, Molecular Cell, Blood, PNAS, Cancer, Cancer Research, British Journal of Hematology, Leukemia, Leukemia Research. She is also the co-author of _GHALIB: Epistemologies of Elegance_, a book on the works of the famous Urdu poet. Dr. Raza has mentored hundreds of medical students, residents, oncology fellows, doctoral and post-doctoral students in the last three decades.

She serves on numerous National and International panels as a reviewer, consultant and advisor and is the recipient of a number of awards including The First Lifetime Achievement Award from APPNA, Award in Academic Excellence twice (2007 and 2010) from Dogana, and Woman of the Year Award from Safeer e Pakistan, CA and The Hope Award in Cancer Research 2012 (shared with the Nobel Laureate Dr. Elizabeth Blackburn).

Dr. Raza has been named as one of the _100 Women Who Matter_ by Newsweek Pakistan in March 2012. In 2015, Dr. Raza was a member of the Founder Group at Jackson Hole, Wyoming, designing _Breakthrough Developments in Science and Technology_ with President Bill Clinton. On December 1, 2015, Dr. Raza was part of a core group of cancer researchers who met with Vice President Joe Biden to discuss the Cancer Moonshot initiative.
Professor Cristina Atance

Associate Professor, School of Psychology, University of Ottawa; Principal Investigator, Childhood Cognition and Learning Laboratory; Editorial Board Member, Canadian Journal of Experimental Psychology

Professor Cristina Atance earned a B.Sc. (Honours) in Psychology at the University of Toronto in 1996 and Ph.D. in Psychology at the University of Waterloo in 2001. She was then a Post-Doctoral Research Associate from 2001-2003 at the Institute for Learning & Brain Sciences at the University of Washington in Seattle. Her research interests lie in cognitive development, and more specifically, future thinking, planning, and theory of mind (ToM) in young children.

She is the Principal Investigator for the Childhood Cognition and Learning Laboratory and an Editorial Board Member for the Canadian Journal of Experimental Psychology. Dr. Atance’s research has been funded by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), and by the Government of Ontario in the form of an Early Researcher Award in 2008.
Dr. Daniel Bernstein

Tier 2 Canada Research Chair, Lifespan Cognition; Principle Investigator, Lifespan Cognition Lab; Instructor, Psychology, Kwantlen Polytechnic University; Inaugural Member, Royal Society of Canada’s College of New Scholars, Artists and Scientists

Dr. Daniel M Bernstein works as the Tier 2 Canada Research Chair in Lifespan Cognition for the Psychology department of Kwantlen Polytechnic University. He is the principal investigator for the Lifespan Cognition Lab. Dr. Bernstein earned his Bachelor of Arts at the University of California, Berkeley, Master’s at Brock University, PhD at Simon Fraser University, and did Post-Doctoral work at the University of Washington. His research interests lie in “belief and memory; developmental metacognition; hindsight bias; mild head injury; sleep and dreams.”
Dr. Diane Purvey

Dean, Arts, Kwantlen Polytechnic University

Dr. Diane Purvey is the Dean of Arts at Kwantlen Polytechnic University. She is the co-editor of Child and Family Welfare in British Columbia: A History (Detselig Press) and, with John Belshaw, the co-author of Private Grief, Public Mourning: The Rise of the Roadside Shrine in British Columbia (Anvil) as well as Vancouver Noir, 1930-1960 (Anvil). Her research interests include the history of deinstitutionalization as part of a Canada-wide project and educational leadership internationally. She is a contributor to Vancouver Confidential (Anvil). A homegrown Vancouverite, Diane attended the University of British Columbia (B.A., Ph.D.) and the University of Victoria (M.A.) and for several decades taught history in various BC colleges and universities.
Dr. Evangelos Katsioulis, M.D., M.Sc., M.A., Ph.D.

Dr. Evangelos Katsioulis, M.D., M.Sc., M.A., Ph.D., works as a consultant psychiatrist and psychotherapist through online psychotherapy and counseling for Psycall. He earned an M.D., Medical Doctor Diploma (2000), M.Sc., Medical Research Technology (2003), M.A., Philosophy (2012), and Ph.D., Psychopharmacology (2015).


Subsequently, Dr. Katsioulis remains a member in over 60 high IQ societies. In addition, he is the president and founder of Anadeixi Academy of Abilities Assessment and World Intelligence Network (WIN), and OLYMPIQ, HELLIQ, CIVIQ, GRIQ, IQIQ, IQID, GREEK high IQ societies.

Dr. Katsioulis writes articles, novels, and quotes including screenplays – ELLHNAS.com (2008) and TI PEI (2009). Also, he contributed to the web advertisement-management of NAMANIC.com and the web development of Charing Cross Scheme in Psychiatry (2006), Charing Cross & St Mary’s Membership of the Royal College of Psychiatrists (2006), and Aristotle University of Thessaloniki – School of Medicine – General Biology Laboratory (2012). He lives in Thessaloniki, Macedonia, Greece.
Rev. Dr. George V. Coyne, S.J.

Emeritus Director and President, Vatican Observatory Foundation; McDevitt Chair, Religious Philosophy, Le Moyne College

Fr. George V. Coyne, S.J., born January 19, 1933, in Baltimore, Maryland, completed his bachelor’s degree in mathematics and his licentiate in philosophy at Fordham University in 1958. He obtained his doctorate in astronomy from Georgetown University in 1962. After several decades on the faculty at the University of Arizona (UA), Coyne became Director of the Vatican Observatory (VO) in 1978. He became the founding director of the VO Foundation (VOF) in 1986. In 1980 he established the VO Research Group in Tucson, AZ. During his time as Director he founded the VO Summer Schools, which over the years have introduced more than 300 students from more than 60 countries to professional astrophysics.
J.J. Middleway

*Member, Order of Bards Ovates and Druids (OBOD); Member, Mankind Project – (MKP UK)*

J.J Middleway is a Druid member of OBOD, where he served for seventeen years as tutor/mentor. He is a Celebrant, delivering ceremonies to mark Birth, Marriage and Death (Naming, Handfasting and Parting), across the full spectrum of society. His ritual and ceremonial work encompasses marking the eight seasonal festivals of the ‘Wheel of the Year’ and is focused on a deep reverence for the Earth along with a laugh and a smile.

He developed and leads regular sessions of Enchanting the Void; a Western form of devotional chanting, geared toward the honoring and healing of the Land. He is an ‘Elder’ of several communities across UK and Europe, as well as leading singing groups and teaching extensively. His earlier claims to fame, were being born and brought up in a neighboring street to Ozzy Osbourne, of playing maracas with The Incredible String Band and of sleeping through two thirds of Jimi Hendrix’s last ever live concert.
Dr. Jonathan Wai

Research Scientist, Duke University Talent Identification Program; Visiting Researcher, Case Western Reserve University

Wai is a research scientist at the Duke University Talent Identification Program and a visiting researcher at Case Western Reserve University. He did his postdoctoral work at Duke University, holds a doctorate from Vanderbilt University, and graduated from Claremont McKenna College. He studies the development of talent and its impact on society. His interests focus on the many factors that contribute to the development of expertise in education, occupation, and innovation. Additionally, he is interested in policy and connecting his work with the larger global conversation.


His public writing has appeared in Psychology Today, Los Angeles Times, Forbes, National Review, Education Week, NPR, Quartz, Business Insider, TechCrunch, The World Economic Forum, and others where his ideas have reached millions. Wai has been profiled in Rotman Magazine, Forbes, Times Educational Supplement, and WSJ Marketwatch. His academic papers have won multiple international Mensa Awards for Research Excellence and he has served on the board of directors of the MATHCOUNTS Foundation. He lives with his wife, son, and cat.
Professor Kirsten Johnson, M.D., M.P.H.

CEO, Humanitarian U; Program Director, Humanitarian Studies Initiative (HSI), McGill University; Assistant Faculty Member, Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, Harvard University; Director, Canadian Consortium for Humanitarian Training (CCHT); Emergency Medicine Physician, McGill University; Assistant Professor, Family Medicine, McGill University; Board Member, International Humanitarian Studies Association

Dr. Kirsten Johnson practices Emergency Medicine at McGill University’s Health Centres, Esthetic Medicine at Julien & Marin Dental Clinic and is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Family Medicine at McGill University in Montreal, Canada. She is Program Director of the McGill Humanitarian Studies Initiative (HSI), Director of the Canadian Consortium for Humanitarian Training (CCHT) and President of the Humanitarian Training Initiative (HTI).

Dr. Johnson’s research has focused on genocide, child combatants, sexual gender-based violence and conflict-related mental health and psychosocial support. She is involved in humanitarian professionalization, working on the development of competencies for training, education and certification of humanitarian responders globally. In 2010, Dr. Johnson was awarded the Segal Centre’s Janusz Korczak award for her work on protecting the rights of children in conflict and the Award of Excellence for her work in global health by the College of Family Physicians of Canada. She was recognized as one of Canada’s Top 40 Under 40 in 2011.
Dr. Maryanne Garry is a Professor in Psychology at Victoria University, and the Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Research. For nearly 20 years, she has studied a puzzle of memory: how is that otherwise intelligent, rational people can remember things they never really saw, or experiences they never really had? Professor Garry’s interests in applying science to the law predate her interest in memory research or even in psychological science. Her undergraduate degrees are in Forensic Science and Chemistry. Professor Garry received her PhD in 1993 from the University of Connecticut, and did postdoctoral research at the University of Washington under the direction of Professor Elizabeth Loftus, the world’s foremost researcher on human memory distortions.
Paul Cooijmans

Administrator, Giga Society; Administrator, The Glia Society

Paul Cooijmans founded GliaWebNews, Young and intelligent?, Order of Thoth, Giga Society, Order of Imhotep, The Glia Society, and The Grail Society. His main high-IQ societies remain Giga Society and The Glia Society. Both devoted to the high-IQ world. Giga Society remains the world’s most exclusive high-IQ society with a theoretical cutoff of one in a billion individuals. The Glia Society, founded in 1997, is a “forum for the intelligent” to “encourage and facilitate research related to high mental ability.”

Cooijmans earned credentials, two bachelor degrees, in composition and in guitar from Brabants Conservatorium. His interests lie in human “evolution, eugenics, exact sciences (theoretical physics, cosmology, artificial intelligence).” He continues administration of numerous societies, such as the aforementioned, to compose musical works for online consumption, to publish intelligence tests and associated statistics, and to write and publish on topics of interest to him.
Paul Krassner

Founder, Editor, and Contributor, The Realist

Paul Krassner published *The Realist* (1958-2001), but when People magazine labeled him “father of the underground press,” he immediately demanded a paternity test. And when Life magazine published a favorable article about him, the FBI sent a poison-pen letter to the editor calling Krassner “a raving, unconfined nut.” “The FBI was right,” George Carlin responded. “This man is dangerous — and funny, and necessary.” While abortion was illegal, Krassner ran an underground referral service, and as an antiwar activist, he became a co-founder of the Yippies (Youth International Party).

Krassner’s one-person show won an award from the L.A. Weekly. He received an ACLU (*Upton Sinclair*) Award for dedication to freedom expression. At the Cannabis Cup in Amsterdam, he was inducted into the Counterculture Hall of Fame — “my ambition,” he claims, “since I was three years old.” He won a Playboy Award for satire and a Feminist Party and in 2010 the Oakland branch of the writers’ organization PEN honored him with their Lifetime Achievement Award. “I’m very happy to receive this award,” he concluded in his acceptance speech, “and even happier that it wasn’t posthumous.”
Richard G. Rosner

Member, The Giga Society; Member, The Mega Society

Rick Rosner has written for Remote Control, Crank Yankers, The Man Show, The Emmy Awards, The Grammy Awards, and Jimmy Kimmel Live! He has also worked as a stripper, a bouncer, a roller-skating waiter, and a nude model. In a TV commercial, Domino’s Pizza named him the World’s Smartest Man.

He was also named Best Bouncer in the Denver Area by Westwood Magazine. He has received eight Writer’s Guild Award and Emmy nominations and was named 2013 North American Genius of the Year by The World Genius Registry. He lives in Los Angeles, California with his wife and daughter.
Dr. Sally Satel, M.D.

Lecturer, Medicine, Yale University; W.H. Brady Fellow, American Enterprise Institute

Dr. Sally Satel is a resident scholar at AEI and the staff psychiatrist at a local methadone clinic in D.C. Dr. Satel was an assistant professor of psychiatry at Yale University from 1988 to 1993 and remains a lecturer at Yale. From 1993 to 1994 she was a Robert Wood Johnson policy fellow with the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee. She has written widely in academic journals on topics in psychiatry and medicine, and has published articles on cultural aspects of medicine and science in numerous magazines and journals. She has testified before Congress on veterans’ issues, mental health policy, drug courts, and health disparities.


Her recent book, co-authored with Emory psychologist Scott Lilienfeld is Brainwashed: The Seductive Appeal of Mindless Neuroscience (Basic, 2013). Brainwashed was a finalist for the 2013 Los Angeles Times Book Prize in Science.
Professor Sven van de Wetering

Head/Professor, Psychology, University of the Fraser Valley

Dr. Sven van de Wetering works as an Instructor for the Psychology Department of University of the Fraser Valley. Dr. van de Wetering earned his BSc in Biology at The University of British Columbia, and Bachelors of Arts, Master of Arts, and PhD in Psychology from Simon Fraser University. His research interest lies in “conservation psychology, lay conceptions of evil, relationships between personality variables and political attitudes.”
Professor Wayne Podrouzek

Instructor, Psychology, Kwantlen Polytechnic University; Associate Professor, Psychology, University of the Fraser Valley

Dr. Wayne Podrouzek works as an Instructor for the Psychology Department of University of the Fraser Valley and instructor in the Psychology Department of Kwantlen Polytechnic University. Dr. Podrouzek earned his a Bachelor of Arts in Child Studies and a Bachelor of Science (Honours) from Mount Saint Vincent University, a Master of Arts from Simon Fraser University, and Ph.D. from Simon Fraser University under Dr. Bruce Whittlesea.
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Overview

*In-Sight Publishing* began fall, 2014. It publishes ebooks, for free and charge, and operates in independent and public interests rather than for private gains, and is committed to publishing, in innovative ways, ways of cultural, community, educational, moral, personal, and social value that are often deemed insufficiently profitable. It operates inside and outside of the bounds of non-profit/not-for-profit. *In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal* began fall, 2012. It publishes interviews, articles, and issues. It operates inside the bounds of non-profit/not-for-profit. It equates to the first independent interview-based journal in the world. All informal statuses.

Open, General Acknowledgement and Appreciation

*In-Sight Publishing* and *In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal* exist because of three identifiable sectors of support: academics, contributors, and readers. Therefore, all time and effort does have identifiable people, groups, and organizations. Each earned acknowledgement and appreciation for single or continuous, individual or group, contribution in the construction of *In-Sight Publishing* and *In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal*. Many of them without mention of name contributed time and effort to the production of the journal. Some with provision of interviewee recommendations, connection to the interviewee, assistance in social media, social networks, and academic circles, photography or portraits, time for considered and comprehensive responses to questions, and assertive, constructive, and positive feedback too. Finally, and greatest, readers give the most support. For every person, group, and organization involved in this project, we express deepest gratitude to all types of direct or indirect assistance from every side for contributions to this initiative. Your effort, interest, and time support independent publishing purposed for the encouragement of academic freedom, creativity, diverse voices, free speech, and independent thought.

Design and Development

- **Phase 1**, August 1, 2012: foundation with “Independent Interview-Based Undergraduate Journal” status.
- **Phase 2**, January 1, 2013: production capacity increased with “Tri-Annual” status.
- **Phase 3**, January 1, 2014: stricture removal, both implied and actual, based on “Undergraduate” status through cessation of “Independent Interview-Based Undergraduate Journal” status and instantiation of “Independent Interview-Based Journal” status.
- **Phase 4**, January 1, 2014: increased presence through incorporation of social media.
- **Phase 6**, January 1, 2015: inclusion of footnotes and bibliographic references in full PDF issues, and Chicago/Turabian (16th Edition) and Harvard reference styles, and creation of the ebooks section for the first stages of construction of *In-Sight Publishing*.
- **Phase 8**, April 1, 2015: creation of “Academic” and “Casual” sections for ebook publications. “Academic” includes footnotes, bibliographic references, and reference styles. “Casual” does not include footnotes, bibliographic references, and reference styles.
- **Phase 9**, May 1, 2015: inclusion of footnotes and bibliographic references in website interview publications.
- **Phase 10**, July 1, 2015: incorporation of common reference styles such as American Medical Association (AMA), American Psychological Association (APA, 6th Edition, 2010), Brazilian National Standards
(ABNT), Chicago/Turabian Author-Date (16th Edition), Chicago/Turabian (16th Edition), Harvard, Harvard (Australian), Modern Language Association (MLA, 7th Edition, 2009), and Vancouver/ICMJE reference styles in website interview publications in addition to one complete list of 27 reference styles (manual insertion without access dates)


- Phase 12, September 1, 2015: previous Letter of Appreciation appreciations moved to Acknowledgements and Appreciation. Major appreciations remain in Letter of Appreciation. In addition, the refinement of interview layout on the website: interview title, interviewee image/photograph/portrait/sketch, abstract, keywords, common reference style listing, interview title, bibliography/references/reference listing, footnotes, appendix 1: complete reference style listing, and license and copyright; refinement to interviews in full issues: interview title, interviewee image/photograph/portrait/sketch, contents, abstract, keywords, common reference style listing, interview title, bibliography/references/reference listing, appendix 1: complete reference style listing – if any, other appendices including tables, figures, and images, and license and copyright. Footnotes for each page remain in their respective page. An update to ebook inside cover with respect to mandate and copyright. All informal statuses.

- Phase 13, September 22, 2015: revision to format of the online publications, introduction of appendices for photographs, transformation of bibliographies/references/reference list into bibliography, removal of common reference style listing, and introduction of citation style listing in place of complete reference style listing.

- Phase 14, November 1, 2015: Amazon purchase transition with total proceeds to co-authors and In-Sight Publishing and In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal; EBSCO contract signed by Scott Douglas Jacobsen and EBSCO to proliferate In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal for formal institution distribution from the P.D.F. issues.

- Phase 15, January 1, 2016: EBSCO co-sign completion with over 150 entries at the time; officiation of the In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal with continued information status of In-Sight Publishing.

- Phase 16, February 1, 2016: In-Sight Publishing “academic” books have consistent “casual” counterparts; “academic” will be free on the website to encourage independent thought with footnotes and bibliographic references for personal research, and casual will be for charge with half of interview funds given to the interviewee (and the other half to In-Sight Publishing efforts towards cultural, community, educational, moral, personal, and social value); some e-books will not include the delineation between “academic” and “casual.”

- Phase 17, May 1, 2016: Update and refine contents for Amazon Kindle products for In-Sight Publishing.

- Phase 18, September 18, 2016: attain and maintain 18-member Advisory Board with 1 Editor-in-Chief for the individual interview publications, free and low-cost e-books, and full journal issues.

- Phase 19, November 1, 2016: develop and implement early stages of novel venue for solo and collaborative article publications and interview publications in both academic and casual formats outside of the journal through In-Sight Publishing as hyperlinks compatible with P.D.F., Kindle, and iBooks.

Near future phases will incorporate donations, paid ebooks, and ebook listings. Far future phases will develop from re-design and transformations of In-Sight Publishing and In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal.
Journal Overview

In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal

In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal exists as the first international independent interview-based journal. Submissions remain international and interdisciplinary for interviews, articles, and others. Individual publications throughout the year: January 1 to May 1; May 1 to September 1; September 1 to January 1, and so on. Each publication on the 1, 8, 15, and 22 of the month. Tri-annual full issue publications on “Spring,” “Summer,” and “Winter”: January 1, May 1, and September 1, respectively.

General Philosophy

Where imperatives, utility, and virtues interrelate, and where accuracy/authenticity implicates honesty, credibility implicates integrity, fairness/balance implicates justice, and news judgment implicates prudence, honesty, integrity, justice, and prudence converge on the ethical utility in the moral imperative of truth. Truth necessitates honesty, integrity, justice, and prudence. Academic freedom permits the possibility of truth; academic freedom necessitates destitution of dogma or obfuscation. An ability to question anything, pursue implications, and express these implications in spite of harbored biases and fear of backlash. All without alteration or omission to discover knowledge. In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal aims to attain academic freedom through its core interview format.

Format, Overview

In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal formatted by subjects or ideas per issue. Each issue divides into interviews (A), submissions (B), and responses (C).

Sections ‘A’, ‘B’, and ‘C’


Subject Issues

- Interview sections contain only experts from one discipline with emphasis on a subject, e.g. “Psychology,” and so on. Submission sections contain only experts from one discipline with emphasis on a subject, e.g. “Psychology,” and so on. Contribution exceptions permitted with sufficient reason sent to the Editor-in-Chief.
Idea Issues

- Interview sections contain many experts from many disciplines with emphasis on an idea, e.g. Women in Academia, Outliers and Outsiders, and so on. Submission sections contain many experts from many disciplines with emphasis on an idea, e.g. Women in Academia, Outliers and Outsiders, and so on. Contribution exceptions permitted with sufficient reason sent to the Editor-in-Chief.

Frequency

- Individual publications throughout the year: January 1 to May 1; May 1 to September 1; September 1 to January 1, and so on. Each publication on the 1, 8, 15, and 22 of the month. Tri-annual full issues publications on “Spring,” “Summer,” and “Winter”: January 1, May 1, and September 1, respectively. Frequency dependent upon material quantity and completion dates. Multiple delayed completions will accelerate the publication rate until issue fulfillment.
Interview Guidelines (‘Section A’) 

An overview of the interview process for this section. Interview submissions not accepted from external sources.

Research

- Preliminary research required for interview solicitation. If interview consent obtained from interviewee, a typical, but not absolute, minimum of one to four weeks for comprehensive research. This includes purchasing, acquiring, and processing articles, audio-visual material, books, interviews, social media material, and their respective synthesis to produce questions.

Consent

- Interviewees either provide written or verbal consent based on an interview request. Written or verbal consent relate to the interviewee having the power to deny/accept the interview, and for final decision of publication as a single interview on the website or in the full issue publication with all other issue-interviews in PDF and on the website. It remains casual in consent. See Copyright for information on ownership of publications.

Conducting

- Interview form depends on interviewee preference: email via Microsoft Word or Open Office file, in person, phone call, question set, or Skype. Most prefer question sets in email via Microsoft Word or Open Office. Most questions mix standardized and specialized formats. Standardized for consistency of journal format. Specialized for relevant-to-interview questions. All questions have design to elicit in-depth and full responses from interviewees.

Editing Stage One

- Editing consists of the interviewees original interview with minimal editing to keep the intended meaning and message of the interviewees intact, even where certain answers may contain controversial or ‘politically incorrect’ statements, opinions, or information.

Editing Stage Two

- Interviewer sends draft back to the interviewee to confirm the originally intended meaning and message seem sustained to the satisfaction of the interviewee. If the interviewee requires any further alterations, omissions, or edits, the interviewer repeats the cycle of edit to confirmation of accuracy of message and meaning to re-edit until the interviewee evaluates the final version of the interview as sufficiently accurate to their intended meaning and message. Any major editing consists of corrections to grammatical and/or spelling errors. This editing aims to optimize the correspondence between the interview and the interviewees intended message and meaning to the satisfaction of the interviewee.
Submission Guidelines (Section ‘B’)

Material

- Contributor status access restricted to undergraduate students, graduate students, instructors, professors, and experts. Each submission considered on appropriateness of grammar and style, comprehensiveness, coherence, and originality of content.

Scope

- Depending on the issue, the accepted submissions consists of articles, book reviews, commentaries, poetry, prose, and art.

Submission

- It must not have publication or pending publication elsewhere. For exceptions, sufficient reason should be sent to the Editor-in-Chief along with the material. For written scholarly material, it must be in 12-point font, Garamond, double-spaced, and with APA or MLA formatting. Length of material ranges from 2,000 to 7,500 words. Material should be sent to the following:
  - Scott.D.Jacobsen@Gmail.com
Response Guidelines (Section ‘C’)

Responses to interviews (‘A’) or essays (‘B’) must have the following format:

Material

- Preferable for respondents to have experience or expertise in area relevant to interview or essay content.

Scope

- Response material should relate to current or prior issue on specific points in one essay or article.

Submission

- Responses must have the following format: APA format, Garamond, 12-point font, double-spaced, citation of interviewee and each ‘Question-and-Answer’ section of response (maximum of 5), and reference list of relevant articles, books, prior interviews, watching of video material, reading of social media material in APA. Length of material should range from 500-1,000 words; exceptions will have consideration with appropriate reasons provided to the Editor-in-Chief. Material should be sent to the following:
  - Scott.D.Jacobsen@Gmail.com
Research Ethics

*In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal* does not answer a research question. Interviews hold total control over final published responses for as accurate a representation as possible of an interviewee as possible. Hence, zero mandatory ethics board consent necessitated by its operation. Monetary detachment removes constraint by an institution or individual for published content, despite academic positions or alma maters for the Editor-in-Chief and Advisory Board. Please see *Internal and External Funding* for monetary information.

Internal and External Funding

Scott D. Jacobsen provides complete internal funding *In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal*. All internal funding includes purchasing of articles, books, chapters, prior interviews, video material, social media material, and all marketing efforts of *In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal*. In the case of external monetary funding, only monetary funding not restricting academic freedom for *In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal* will have consideration. At this time, *In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal* operates with internal funding from Scott Douglas Jacobsen with the addition of one website renewal donation from Richard G. Rosner.

Attachments

Attachments means constraints or restraints through functioning out of institutions or groups. For instance, an institution or group would consist of a university, an agency, a think-tank, and/or an interest group of some form. *In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal* functions autonomous from any institution or group. This provides total freedom of content for consistency with principles of operation for academic freedom.

Advertising Policy

All advertising for the journal exists as open-access for any individual. See ‘Open Access’ for more information.

Open Access

*In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal* exists as open access for online contents, where any content *In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal* becomes accessible for reading or downloading to any interested individual/group.
Letter of Appreciation

Outsiders and Outliers continues into its twelfth issue. I extend appreciation to the following: Dr. Adele Diamond, Ph.D., FRSC; Dr. Aubrey de Grey; Professor Azra Raza, M.D.; Professor Christina Atance; Dr. Daniel Bernstein; Dr. Diane Purvey; Dr. Evangelos Katsioulis, M.D., M.Sc., M.A., Ph.D.; Rev. Dr. George V. Coyne; J.J. Middleway; Professor Kirsten Johnson, M.D., M.P.H.; Dr. Maryanne Garry; Paul Cooijmans; Paul Krassner; Richard G. Rosner; Dr. Sally Satel, M.D.; Dr. Sven van de Wetering; Dr. Wayne Podrouzek; the previous Advisory Board members; and to the interviewees – Marissa Torres Langseth, Kirk Kirkpatrick and Rick Rosner, Dr. Darrel Ray, Dr. Oren Amitay, Ben McDonald and Howie Slugh, Dr. Rick Mehta, Michael McDonald, and Raymond Dennis Keene - for the thoughtful responses.

Also, I express gratitude and respect for the Athabasca University, Simon Fraser University, The University of British Columbia, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, University of California, Irvine, Fort Langley Library, and Surrey Public Library librarians. I appreciate all assistance in collaboration necessary for required sufficient comprehension of new disciplines, research, and interviewees involved in this project coinciding with improvisatory and comprehensive feedback in the past ad into the present.

Above all, I - for those who know their contributions in innumerable aspects - reciprocate the genuine love to the utmost.

Scott D. Jacobsen
Editor-in-Chief, In-Sight Publishing
An Interview with Marissa Torres Langseth, B.S.N., M.S.N. (Part One)

Interviewer: Scott Douglas Jacobsen


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Abstract

An Interview with Marissa Torres Langseth, B.S.N., M.S.N. She discusses: PATAS; inspiration for its founding and titles; HAPI; effective strategies for advancement of the humanist movement; books; wedding ceremony as a non-believer; irreligious ceremony; difficulties and problems of community; younger generations’ difficulties; experience for men and women non-believers, the differences; notable education and social initiatives by HAPI; cynical use of political language to demonize non-believers; HAPI demographics; heroes and heroines; last talking to Paul Kurtz; Harris and Dawkins; women’s rights and religion, and women and religion; acknowledgement of an issue; secondary citizenship; fears for younger generations of women and girls; Noam Chomsky’s analysis of the media; denigration sourced in religion for women and girls; Margaret Atwood and the Robber Bride quote; those happy for Marissa’s potential failure; contributing to HAPI; common narrative of lives threatened; and tragic story for someone who came out as a non-believer.

Keywords: HAPI, humanism, Marissa Torres Langseth, PATAS, Philippines.

1. Scott Douglas Jacobsen: So let’s start from the top. What was your family background regarding geography, culture, language, and religion?

Langseth: I was born in San Antonio, Nueva Ecija. It’s part of Luzon.

We are of course Catholics. We were poor. So, I was born poor and then at the age of 5 my father, who was a soldier then, was moved to Cebu.

Cebu is in the middle part of the Philippines; it’s an island. And of course my mother is so religious, she
goes to church almost every day. And this is why I see that religion is a poison. It’s dangerous to society because people will go to church instead of working. They would ask for food and money from the church. I mean from God not from the church.

We speak Tagalog in the Philippines. I speak different languages because I’ve been to so many places. Culturally speaking, religion is a big, huge part because it’s like e Sunday, my mother would kick me to go to church.

She would buy new clothes for me so I could go to church. It’s like she would force us to go to church even if there are no new clothes. She would force us. If you won’t go, you have to be kicked several times and be woke up to go to church.

I didn’t understand then but when I was in grade 5, when I discovered science, I began to ask the questions, “Why are we here? What is our purpose?” Nobody could answer me.

2. Jacobsen: What were some pivotal moments in early life or past grade 5 that you can remember?

Langseth: Pivotal moments, I would say in grade 5, it’s science. When I was looking at the stars, I would imagine who made this. I was asking questions already in grade 5. And then in high school, I could not understand why I could not get gifts from Santa Claus when I was a good girl.

So, I did my experimentation, no my research. Why is it that Santa Claus doesn’t give gifts to poor people? Now, I understand it because their parents are poor. So, I applied that to God. Why is it that God does not bless the poor people? So, maybe, there is no God.

3. Jacobsen: What were some mystical or supernatural or transcendental beliefs that you had while growing up a “good girl”?

Langseth: I didn’t have any superstitious beliefs. I was one of those who was always going against the grain. For example, the number 13 is not bad for me. It’s not bad. People believe that you should not eat because during Ramadan Muslims celebrate and they don’t eat, right?

In the Philippines, we have a holy week. You’re not supposed to eat for 3 days, or eat a little bit. I didn’t follow that. I didn’t get sick or have any issues. Because it was stupid not to eat.

4. Jacobsen: What were some other early moments of moving towards an irreligious orientation or non-belief in God?

Langseth: There was one time when a priest in the military, we lived in a military compound. There was one time when that priest was trying to rape me. Of course, I’m good in running, so I ran away.

Why is it that these supposedly good people would try to touch other women, other girls? The part that made me turn to irreligion was when I was in Saudi Arabia, when I worked in Saudi Arabia, I worked there as a registered nurse.

I saw the different culture in Saudi Arabia. They’re Muslims there, and how they treat women. They’re treated like animals, like secondary citizens. Men were eating in a restaurant and the women were outside waiting for them.

And in fact, it’s just so different. So I said if there were a God, why is it that the people in Saudi Arabia are worshippers another God named Allah? And then the highlight of my irreligiosity is 9/11 in 2001.

I saw the 2nd plane surgically slash into the 2nd building. So I thought if there were a God, why can’t he stop that?

5. Jacobsen: What was the emotion running through you when you saw the plane hit the tower?

Langseth: It was terrorism, of course. That if there were a God, why can’t he stop these kinds of atrocities? Why can’t he? So I said to myself, “People who would still believe in God at that time. It’s just so unreal to believe at that time really.”

Because it was preventable. That was not an act of nature. It’s not like a typhoon or earthquake. It’s preventable. It is a human invention, a person. I looked at that plane blow up the twin towers. If there were a powerful human being or a God, he could have stopped that, right?

6. Jacobsen: Why move to New York of all places, the United States in general?

Langseth: I was hired as a registered nurse in Cebu and they were hiring for New York City. That’s why I’m here. In fact, it’s the best place in the world. I’ve been to so many places and it’s the best place. I retired here two years ago from my job.

7. Jacobsen: Why did you pursue the post-masters in nursing?

Langseth: I want freedom. I don’t want to be dependent on anyone. When you are a nurse practitioner, when you have that post-master degree leading to being a nurse practitioner, you are free to practice.

You do not need a doctor to be on top of you or screaming at you and telling you what to do; you do it. There is what you call an equivalence. We’re like doctors in a way. We’re independent.
There’s freedom to practice wherever you want, whatever specialty you want. And of course the pay is high compared to just a registered nurse.

8. Jacobsen: Also, it’s not a profession that will necessarily go out of demand too.

Langseth: [Laughing] We are so much in demand, believe me. I still get a lot of calls and invites to apply to them. It’s always in demand, especially since there is a shortage of doctors in the USA.

9. Jacobsen: You founded the Philippine Atheism, Agnosticism and Secularism Inc. (PATAS)?

Langseth: Yes, I started it in February, 2011, but it used to be the Philippine Atheist and Agnostic Society. They just changed that recently, the name.

10. Jacobsen: What was the inspiration for founding it? Why those three labels: Atheism, Agnosticism and Secularism?

Langseth: My inspiration was PATAS. PATAS means equality in Tagalog. That is why the first society I founded was named PATAS. I want people to see us as equals, not secondary citizens because we are atheists. Equality, not only because I stand for equality for all human beings, like LGBTs and people who are poor, they don’t have human rights because they are poor.

That’s the reason why I named it PATAS. Of course, it’s no longer in existence, but it’s still PATAS to them as they changed the S to secularism instead of society.

11. Jacobsen: Also, you founded the Humanist Alliance Philippines International, or HAPI.

Langseth: Yes, because when I left or when I decided to leave PATAS in November of 2013, I found myself waking up at night and I couldn’t sleep. I said if I leave and don’t do anything, this group will eventually die.

So, I need to do something because I love to be happy and I want to be happy. I’m always happy. I said, “I will name it HAPI because I want it to spread and I want to share my happiness.” I’m a member of American Humanist Association, for a long time. I said, “How come nobody even have made a society called HAPI? It starts with H. It stands for Humanism.”

Then I crowdsourced: what the name should be? But I already had something in my mind like humanist, like it was supposedly the Humanist Association of the Philippines. The P for Philippines, obviously, and the I for international.

They said alliance is better. This is why it became the Humanist Alliance Philippines International. But if you call it HAPI, it’s a positive acronym. And there’s a music, it’s also happy. I purposively launched it in January, 2014, so that people will say HAPI New Years with HAPI. It’s called strategy [Laughing].

12. Jacobsen: What have been some of the more effective strategies for advancing the humanist movement?

Langseth: Number 1, I was always looking out for someone who can manage children. Or who has children, so we can feed them. That is a come on, so that people will see that we are good: we are good without God. We feed children, because the children, are our future.

So, I found Jamie. She has 200 kids. This was effective. We started feeding them in December of 2014 because it took a long time to find them. We have to interview. In fact, I asked around and she came to us.

It’s so funny. She came to us because she saw HAPI members during one of our stints. One of our LGBT stints. She spoke to them and these people at the stint. We were so nice and they gave her food. And that was the reason why she said, “When I go back to Manilla, I am going to look for HAPI.”

At the time it was coincidence and blessing you might say. We were looking for somebody like her. Then we found the children, we started in September 2014 and then it was bi-monthly, every 2 months.

That was for me just a come on because I am visionary. My vision is to attract these kids, to feed them, to make them feel we are not evil people and then finally the highlight of this is when we introduce literacy projects.

Like, for them, how to read, how to do some science work, and introduce some technology, I donated a computer to them so that they can look up our website instead of going to church. And we are successful because Jamie, the person in charge of these children, is now agnostic.

Sometimes, she says she’s atheist, but she’s agnostic, because at this time she still goes back and forth. So, that is the highlight. We are for education. Because when I was a kid, that’s what the pastors do. They call us.

I was in high school. After school, they would invite us to go to one house and feed us, give us food and then they talk about religion, of course, there. Their God, and this and that. So, this is the way, maybe, but ours is better because we don’t impose.

It’s up to them to listen to us or not, but it’s genuine feeding of kids because these kids don’t get enough
nutrition because they’re poor. It’s the slum area. We went there last June.

The convention was also my ambition because that would be the culmination of my leadership in the Philippines because I was ready to retire. The second highlight is the book, *From Superstition to Reason* is now in Amazon, EBAY and Barnes and Noble. But we get very little royalties. It is also available in kindle.

13. Jacobsen: Is there a plan to expand not only the number and type of books on associated topics but also to increase outreach through publication of ebook platforms such as Kindle?

Langseth: That is the plan. However, again, I have retired, so that task has been passed on to the next leaders. The ebook and, maybe, Amazon, I don’t know what their plan is, but I heard something like that. But who knows?

It took me 5 years to produce this book to be honest with you. It started in 2011 when I started with PATAS. I asked people to submit stories so they can have something. My inspiration for that was a book. I forgot the title. It’s like ‘50 Stories of Atheism in the USA.’

I want to copy that, so we started collecting. But it’s difficult for Filipinos to submit things, to submit articles. It will take them a month or two. The sense of urgency is not there. I am Westernized already.

I used to be like that, so I understand. That’s our culture. I did an article now; they will give it to you after one month. If I need an article, I will give it to you tomorrow. Because that sense of urgency is already in me. I’m Westernized. I’ve been in the USA since 1990.

Jacobsen: Also, you’re a nurse and live in New York.

Langseth: Yes.

Jacobsen: These are important factors about living in the United States.

Langseth: I used to work 3 jobs, 3.

Jacobsen: I believe it.

Langseth: While taking my masters, I got married on top of that. How lucky could I be? It varies a lot.

14. Jacobsen: What are some differences in the wedding ceremony that you as a woman take into account as a non-believer – with planning and getting ready?

Langseth: When I got married, I was still a closet atheist. So, I went through the motions. If you see in my primary, in my first FB page, I have some wedding pictures there. That’s why I added you. That’s my husband. I went through all the motions because I was closeted then.

15. Jacobsen: And if you were to do it over again in terms of having an irreligious ceremony, how would you do it?

Langseth: I would do it on the beach. In fact, we had our renewal of vows in a cruise ship in 2006. I would do something like that. It was the captain of the ship who renewed our vows. I would do something like that.

16. Jacobsen: What are some of the difficulties as atheists and agnostics and secularists and humanists as a community? What are some of the problems of community that we have generally?

Langseth: Generally, they think that us atheists are not good people; we are demons, evil people. We eat children. But to be honest with you, I have not felt that way here in New York City. Maybe, because I am in a different city and my neighbours are all diverse.

My neighbour on the right. She is a non-devout Muslim. She accepted me. I told her, “I don’t believe in God.” She accepted me as a human being. The one in the front, they’re Chinese. Of course, they don’t believe in God, the Chinese.

So in my neighbourhood, I live in an upscale neighbourhood in Queens. You cannot see homeless people running around. We’re not near a train station. Everyone has a job. Maybe, it’s because it’s my neighbourhood is why I did not feel any stigma, but in the Philippines it would be different.

In fact, Jamie told me she has to hide her being irreligious now. Of course, she goes to Church only upon pressure from her husband. But with me, I still go to church. It’s not pressured from my husband.

I go with him because I love my husband and that is one form of showing him how much I love him and how much I respect him. And the pastor is friendly with me.

Jacobsen: That always helps.

Langseth: Yes [Laughing], they’re nice people in the church. This is a Dutch Reform Church in Queens. It’s an older population. They’re nice. In fact, I even told them, “I don’t believe.” They said, “That’s okay. You’re here with us.” [Laughing].

17. Jacobsen: What about from the outside, while in the Philippines? For the younger generations, based on self-importance that you’ve been told just in conversations with them – as you’re one of the organizations that have them, what have been
their difficulties? What have been their trials and tribulations?

Langseth: I have read in one of the forums that some of them when they put N/A or not applicable, none, or no religion in their application in their job application: they will not get hired. That’s unfair. This is why I made PATAS because I want equality in everything.

If these people put atheist or no religion, they still should be hired based on their credentials, not because of their religion. And it’s so frustrating when I see some job applications they would say religion, “Catholic only.” That’s just so discriminatory.

18. Jacobsen: In some universities, they have covenants or faith pledges.

Langseth: That’s funny. Also, in the Philippines, they look for a certificate of confirmation, or baptism, and for the parents’ certificate of marriage and certificate of how do you call that? Baptism. Would you believe that?

19. Jacobsen: It’s the easiest course to pass. Statistically, the experience of women non-believers will probably be a little different for men non-believers. Is this true and what are some of the differences that you can note?

Langseth: Again, with me, I can’t experience much because I’m in New York City, but, because when you’re a woman in the Philippines; they think if you are irreligious, then you are a woman of ill-repute. That’s how Filipinos think. They equate being religious to having moral values.

I have a nephew in Missouri. I didn’t know that he was like me. But when I spoke to him, I asked him questions. He said, “If there were a God, he is useless. Because I prayed a long time for so many things. They did not come” [Laughing].

He’s a kid. So, what do you expect? kids like him are open to the fact that instead of praying and asking via going to church. Why not work? So, you get what you want. There’s a lot of irreligious people. My husband is also agnostic because he does not believe in life after death.

20. Jacobsen: So if Christian, a very here-and-now Christian, what are some of the more notable educational and social initiatives that HAPI has done?

Langseth: I have launched something as my retirement project: SHADE. Secular, Humanist, Advocacy, Development, Education, or SHADE, of course, it’s HAPI SHADE. With that, we have two cities that are active.

One is in Cebu. I met them. It’s called HAPI COMPRE in Cebu (Comprehensive Science High school). Would you believe that? I went to their school and presented something to their principal. One of the administrative personnel in their school as well. They accepted me so warmly.

I was like them. This is in the Philippines. This is in Cebu. HAPI COMPRE has 20 students who would help clean up the street. Their recent project was cleaning the street. Afterwards, 20 kids, they clean up the streets and then to show good will to the neighbourhood they would be fed with simple food, nothing fancy.

And then, of course, this is science school, so you expect these children to be intelligent. These people have chosen also during the general assembly. I was not in the general assembly in Cebu. That was in 2016, so that was last years. They said their questions were out of this world and these kids.

They are our future. They are future scientists. So, I was happy to make a special event for them while I was in Cebu. We had lunch. We had unlimited ice cream and chocolate from the USA. Guess what, I took them to my mini library in the 2nd floor.

They read most of the books there, maybe 95 percent. They’re all irreligious books. That was my style. I said, “Who wants to read?” So, they went with me. They went up and the most read book was From Superstition to Reason, from HAPI There were 3 books about me.

One is, of course, our own HAPI book. Number 2 is Godless Grace. I was presented there as one of the contributing authors to Humanist Paths by AHA. I’m a member of AHA. They also got my story, so a lot of these kids. They have read about me.

Now, they realize I am godless. I tell them face-to-face. Their teacher is also a militant atheist and an open atheist. I ask him, “My God, these kids. They’re going to read about you!” He said, “That’s okay. They know all about me.”

So, that was the highlight in Cebu. Then when I was in Bacolod, I cried because they launched a HAPI SHADE event with the school. It’s called Jamie Elementary School. So, there are 2. We are not just in the street; we are in academia.

The first one was in the Lyceum Debate Society of the Philippines. So, we are going to academia, but I would prefer elementary and high schools because these children – I don’t like to say, but they are malleable.

I hate to use the word brainwash because we were all brainwashed when we were children. But what I’m
saying is, we can always direct them or make them realize that there’s an option to religion: it is Humanism.

So, these kids are the HAPI COMPARE. These kids are so bright. When I ask them what Humanism is all about, they know what it is from the word human. Of course, trust in human beings but they are still children; they still say believe in God.

Finally, when I straight faced them, “Humanism, we don’t believe in supernatural beings.” They were not shocked. They were not shocked at all. So, I have an inclination to believe that we are Godless, or mostly Godless, but some are maybe apathetic to religion.

21. Jacobsen: To reflect on the recent, one to two years in the United States, there has been cynical use of political language to demonize non-believers. Do you notice this too?

Langseth: Honestly, I have not felt that. I have not felt being demonized. Although, there was one time only I would say when I was still working. I worked with one of the biggest insurance companies in the world. It’s United Healthcare.

During the meetings, I told them that I was an atheist. I don’t believe in God. They were not as friendly and as welcoming to me. But I didn’t mind it because I’m confident about what I do and I don’t depend on them.

For me, it did not affect me whether they are friendly or not. They didn’t like me because I told them I don’t believe in God. But who cares? That’s my attitude. In fact, with my patients when I talk to them, they say, “What? I pray for this one.”

I said, “We don’t have to pray. We have to go to surgery. Sorry, I’m straightforward.” I didn’t get any backlash. I never got sued for my atheism. There were no parents, no relatives. No patients have sued me for letting them know this is the best plan, the best option.

Because that’s how I always talked in my practice. I’m objective and don’t take things personally. If they don’t listen to me, that’s fine, but they always take my advice. For example, if a patient needs to go to the hospital or needs surgery, they always follow. They always agree to my medical advice.

22. Jacobsen: What are the demographics of HAPI?

Langseth: It’s mostly concentrated in Manila, Metro Manila. Because some islands, some of them are poor. They would need extra effort. They would need to put food on their table rather than do activism in Humanism.

Lately, we only have one or two active people there. In Cebu, we have many active people. In fact, some of them are not active because they always say, “I’m busy. I’m working.” Metro Manila has a lot.

Also, the distance of the commute is better. So, we have more in Metro Manila. This is why we have HAPI Con in Manila. That is one of the many reasons too. Although, it’s more expensive, but the attendance is more when we do it in Metro Manila than in Cebu or other places.

23. Jacobsen: Were some personal heroes or heroines presenting there for you? People who are giving a message about Humanism or speaking on a topic within a humanistic framework that you admire, or the person has gone through something and have come out stronger and you also admire them for that.

Langseth: My hero is Richard Dawkins. In 2011, I went to a convention because of him in Cambridge, in Massachusetts. In my first FB page, you can see my page. A convention with Richard Dawkins. I have so many pictures.

And that was the reason why PATAS was effective because they saw I was serious in promoting PATAS in the Philippines. I went out of my way to go to this convention. Everything is from my pocket anyway. The seed money from PATAS and HAPI is from my pockets.

Anytime I go and attend conventions, it is from my pockets. I have never utilized any donations from them. In fact, I am the biggest donor when I started PATAS. They cannot move without my donation. When I started HAPI, they cannot move without my donation. Finally, we got a little bit of wind and windfall, so we were able to have better events. Richard Dawkins inspired me. I would have met Christopher Hitchens, but he died before I met him.

I was going to meet him in Melbourne, Australia. I went there to see him. I was going to see him at the global atheist convention but he died before that convention. I have met Dan Barker. He’s also one of my inspirations. Of course, Paul Kurtz at Columbia University.

Jacobsen: Yes.

Langseth: We were chatting before he died, would you believe that? He said Marissa I’m going to see you and we’re arranging to see each other. He was going to New York City in Colombia for that convention and I said good, I’m going to see you. And the next day he died.

24. Jacobsen: So you were one of the last people to talk to him?
Langseth: Yes, we were chatting a lot. He’s one of my idols. I’ve read a lot of his books about Humanism. I kept a few over here. Of course, I gave some away; I have a lot of these books. About neo-Humanism, this is the reason why I am promoting a lot about educating the kids, the young, because of him.

The true humanist, according to him, has compassion for educating the children. That’s what I got it from him, Paul Kurtz. But Richard Dawkins made me militant. I read *The God Delusion*.

25. Jacobsen: Was this around the time that you saw, or not long after seeing the towers hit, the books came out a little bit after? Some argue the movement started at that time with Harris and the Dawkins.


26. Jacobsen: Do you feel religion is friendly or unfriendly in general towards women and women’s rights?

Langseth: If we take the positive parts, like what my husband said, if we take the positive parts of religion or Bible or whatever it is, it’s a good thing. However, there are too many things that are not right. It creates a lot of confusion, religion.

It has created a lot of confusion with me. When I was small, I would say if we go to Church for money, to ask God for money, what is it? It’s like magic, we think it’s like magic. Religion is poison in so many ways.

There are a lot of families who think that they can do evil things to their children because of religion. One example is my mother. My mother could not accept that my sister is a lesbian. So, she arranged for someone to kill my sister.

And that made me so angry with not only her, but with religion. Because she was too brainwashed. She was told by her priests and friends that it is a sin to be a lesbian. This is the reason why I’m empathetic to LGBT rights.

And I’m straight as can be. Because I don’t want people to think that they’re not human beings. A lot of the religious people in the Philippines dehumanize the LGBTs. You must have heard of a trans being killed and gay people being bashed.

Jacobsen: Of course.

Langseth: Even in New York, I’ve read of that too.

27. Jacobsen: The follow up of that is the denialism of it. It happens. To have a conversation about something, there has to be an acknowledgement of the issue. There are many social mechanisms, sometimes political, to stop the conversation even starting, by stopping any acknowledgment of it: of the killing of trans, of the demonizing of gays, and so on.

Langseth: Because they have not seen it, maybe, and have not felt it. I have felt it. That’s my sister. Even now, there’s still a lot of struggle with reproductive rights, especially in the Philippines. Unfortunately, it’s because they see women as secondary citizens and not equal to them.

28. Jacobsen: What do you mean by secondary?

Langseth: Secondary citizens meaning there’s no equality. The women are not equal to men. In fact, men have higher salaries in the USA than women. And how, you are just a woman. You stay there, you produce children. You shouldn’t have rights like me. And that is still ongoing, especially in the Philippines. Look at our president.

Jacobsen: Both, the United States and Duterte.

Langseth: Yes, they’re like brothers.

Jacobsen: Two peas in a pod.

Langseth: Yes, two peas in a pod. But Duterte, it’s because of their upbringing. Those men should be higher, it’s like patriarchal society. Men are better than women. They were brainwashed like that. But it’s still a struggle, unfortunately. It is still a struggle.

In fact, the reproductive health bill, it took them 10-15 years to pass that law. Until now, it’s not being implemented. It’s like pulling teeth.

29. Jacobsen: What are your fears for the younger generations of women and girls?

Langseth: My fear would be this culture of rape and women are like playthings and women are treated like sexual objects. I hate that with a passion. When I see ads displaying women, for example, coke ads or cigarette ads. They show women instead; what advertisement is that?

30. Jacobsen: I agree with Noam Chomsky’s analysis of the media. The theory in economics is to have a rational consumer making rational choices with their purchases through the money that they’re using. However, there are funded marketing campaigns and organizations devoted to making irrational consumers making irrational choices.

So, you have these two things coming together, especially with representation and presentation of
women’s bodies – taking advantage of what seems like a natural phenomenon of attention to women’s bodies more often than men’s.

As with the ads, the ones that come to mind, or the prominent ones, are car ads. What does this beautiful woman have to do with this car? How does this increase its horsepower or gas efficiency, for instance?

Langseth: [Laughing] There you go. As I’m a feminist, as you can see that, though, why do they use women? Because they know sex sells. The flesh of women sells. This is why they objectify women as just things, not human beings. T

This is my fear. It did not happen to me because I’m this way now. I’m going to be 60 in the next few years. But the next generation, if they do not stand up like real rationalists and real feminists, this will go on forever, especially in the Philippines.

The children are brainwashed like “you’re just a woman, you’re just a girl.” It’s so unfair.

31. Jacobsen: Does this denigration source itself from religion, mainly?

Langseth: That is 100% accurate because in religion the woman is supposed to be humble, should not talk, should not go against the will of the husband, should be submissive, should be subservient. And I’m the exact opposite. So, religion is poison.

That poisoned the whole society in the Philippines. Look at when before religion came to my country, there were pagans; they were worshipping the trees and the sun and the moon, at least they’re not worshipping any God.

They think that it’s nature that is God. That is even better. But when the Spaniards came, it’s all different. They became slaves. They became slaves to religion. So that’s how we got our religion. One hand the sword, the other hand the Bible. So which one will you choose?

32. Jacobsen: There was a good quote from Margaret Atwood, the Canadian author. From the Robber Bride, I pulled it up. May I be indulged to read it?

Langseth: Sure.

Jacobsen: “Male fantasies, male fantasies, is everything run by male fantasies? Up on a pedestal or down on your knees, it’s all a male fantasy: that you’re strong enough to take what they dish out, or else too weak to do anything about it. “

“Even pretending you aren’t catering to male fantasies is a male fantasy: pretending you’re unseen, pretending you have a life of your own, that you can wash your feet and comb your hair unconscious of the ever-present watcher peering through the keyhole, peering through the keyhole in your own head, if nowhere else. You are a woman with a man inside watching a woman. You are your own voyeur.”

This stuff is deeply rooted; it’s hard to extirpate. So, as a women’s rights activist myself, it has to be tackled from many, many angles, having humanist organizations is one. But also working, as you’re doing nobly, with the younger generation, it is also important, and part of that as Paul Kurtz would advocate for it, too.

Langseth: We have to band together. This is why during the HAPI Con we invited Filipino Freethinker or Red Tani. In one of my pictures, there’s a picture I presented our book. He’s also a contributing author to that book.

I specifically, personally gave him one. So, he realizes, he is important to me as an ally to our cause. They are doing great. Education and they have meet ups. A little on the higher echelon, but they don’t have an outreach movement like ours.

Like we go to the outskirts and teach children, they don’t have that. But we are allies. The bigger we are, the stronger, because there is strength in numbers and diversity. We are diversified. That’s why it’s HAPI, its international.

We are not stationed in the Philippines. I am here. We have people in California. We have people in Belgium, in other places of the world, in Germany, so I saw to it that we have diversity. Because a homogenous society sometimes cannot survive like our Filipino culture.

If they’re all Filipinos, they will not know that sense of urgency. Because I was a Filipino before. This is why I have made HAPI International. We have Americans in our group. I am a US citizen already, but I am a Filipino by heart.

We now have other citizens in the group because we can drive them. For example, I need an article for the website. I am retired, but I still run the website. I own the website. I own the domain. I paid for it, for the everything, so I demand two articles a month. That’s all.

But sometimes they still fall short. So, I always light their butts [Laughing]. I need an article! This one is a good one, please do this. That’s the only time they will move. So, Filipinos by heart, they’re like Spaniards. Mañana habit, mañana saying later, I’ll do that later.
I’ll do that tomorrow, next week, next year. And this is why we are successful. And this is the reason why. Because we have different personalities in our group. I want everything done yesterday.

You might not like me, I’m a dictator sometimes, but look what I’ve done. They called me dictator before. They called me Hitler. They called me several names because I want everything done in a timely fashion.

For example, I would say I want this merchandise done, the HAPI T-Shirt next week. After one week, I’ll be on your butt. I’ll be following you up. This is why we are successful. Look at the other groups, they don’t have community. I’m not comparing.

However, you can see the difference in a way. In a short time, HAPI is in the Philippines, we have done a lot. I want to showcase to you what we have done. Not me of course, I’m a facilitator. But we have done a lot more than any society, any irreligious society in the Philippines. In fact, the PATAS Con was the first atheist convention in South East Asia. I paid 80% of that.

**Jacobsen:** Wow.

**Langseth:** It’s because I want it done. And they say I’m such a dictator.

33. **Jacobsen:** And as I know with any organization, there will be many people in the Philippines who would be happy for you to fail.

**Langseth:** Absolutely! Believe me. That’s why I told you I get bashing from both sides. The theist side is much better bashing than the atheist side believe me. The atheists they put me to shame like who the fuck does she think she is?

Something like that. It’s bad publicity. However, I see that bad publicity is still publicity, right? This is why I’m successful. Now, I need to retire. I wanted to retire since September, 2016. I planned that because I plan everything in my life, including my retirement.

Because I want to pass the torch to the younger generation because I’m getting old. I’m not as healthy as before. I used to run. Now, I cannot run. I’m getting older. A lot of people are praying for my demise while I’m still alive. Until now, they’re still praying for my demise.

**Jacobsen:** To no effect, apparently.

**Langseth:** I’m honest, I’m straightforward. I am a bully too.

**Jacobsen:** That points to a substructure of the interactions you’ve had with the societies you’ve been in with the social privilege of religion.

**Langseth:** Yes.

34. **Jacobsen:** People talk nice about the dominant faiths, but when people talk direct, not aggressively, just direct, then it’s taken as aggressive.

**Langseth:** That’s me. That’s why they think I’m aggressive. I’m a dictator; I’m a bully. I said, “Yes, I have to be. Otherwise, there would be no PATAS. There would be no HAPI. We would still be the same people praising religion and praising Catholicism.”

This is the reason I’m like this. If I was not tough, there would be no PATAS. There would be no atheist society in the Philippines. They don’t like it that I had this society, so what? And now I have HAPI, I have two.

However, the first one, again, they lost all their marbles. They even dissolved the website that I put up for them. I gave that to them for free. It was dissolved because there’s no money. There’s no funding. Because they don’t know how to do it, how to raise funds, I am a donor.

I have people who follow me. They like what I do. They give 20 dollars, 50 dollars. It adds up. If you change them to pesos, that’s a big amount. These people don’t know how to do it. That’s why I’ve been teaching them.

I’ve been teaching them fundraising. I am so flabbergasted because nobody has learned. Now, we don’t have funds right now because we all spend it in the HAPI Con, which is fine. So, that means they need to do more fundraising.

They cannot rely on me now because I’m retired. I have retired both ways. I have retired from my job. I have retired from HAPI. But still, I will donate. I had, when I went home to the Philippines, I donated a lot. I couldn’t count anymore how many donations I have given to HAPI.

**Jacobsen:** If people want to donate to help HAPI, and the humanist, atheist, agnostic, and secularist communities within the Philippines, how can they do so? How should they do so?

**Langseth:** It’s easy. We have a website. That’s why we have the website. We have PayPal: donate via PayPal in the Philippines. That will go to the Philippines automatically. We have a HAPI bank because most of the Filipinos don’t have PayPal.

They don’t even know what PayPal is. So, they send their donation directly to the bank. We have PayPal for people who are abroad like me, like people in Europe. They go to our website. They read my articles, our articles and donate. We get a little here and there.
We have a few Americans who donate regularly, like 5 dollars, 10 dollars. That’s fine. I met some of them. 99% of them are my friends who donate regularly. Some are overseas Filipino workers. We have a big donor from California.

She saw our article. She’s a closet atheist. She saw our articles on the website and donated. I befriended her. Now, we’re friends. She’s been a great donor. He donated a projector, two projector sets. I gave her a book, our HAPI book. Another one is in Indiana.

I take care of our donors. They don’t know how to take care of our donors. I take good care of them, even if I’m retired. I send them books, our HAPI book, because they want to read it. Because on the dedication page of our book, I mention their names.

That’s how I took care of them because they’ve been with us since last year. That is one way to appreciate them and recognize their huge help to HAPI. I hope that they will continue to donate even if I have retired.

Of course, they are not happy. I have retired, but I have to or I’m going to be dead soon [Laughing]. I had death threats by the way. So, when I went to the Philippines for the HAPI Con, I hired two security guards. I paid them.

35. Jacobsen: That’s a common story. A common narrative of people having their lives threatened for in essence not believing in the mythology. What are you hoping for your legacy?

Langseth: I’m hoping that my legacy will continue. What I’m doing right now, I am working to improve awareness of humanism, making HAPI a better place to join in. Maybe, better than what I have done, having more education, especially science, promotion of science; and in the future if I’m still alive, I want to build a secular school.

There is one guy in Cebu who also wishes that we build a secular school. This is why he’s active with HAPI. He’s looking forward to building a secular school with me. He is promoting my legacy, which is promoting to be good without God and to believe in you and me and humanity.

So, that’s my legacy. Believe in you, to believe in me. We believe in each other, to believe in each other.

36. Jacobsen: What’s the most tragic story you’ve heard of coming from someone who came out as a non-believer?

Langseth: I have experienced at least two people coming to me. They were young kids. They were thrown out. One was thrown out from his household. One disappeared, he reappeared and I asked him, “What happened to you?”

He said he was in rehab for a long time because his parents thought that he was crazy. This guy is in Cebu. He is gay. He used to be pantheist. He became atheist because of that. He was in rehab for a while.

Whenever he had the chance, he would send me an email saying, “Miss M, when I come out, I will be like you.” Something like that. He is still in school. He is promoting the LGBT in Cebu. He promised me he is going to donate the books to the public library because his father is a politician in Cebu.

He has the teeth to do that. So, he promised he’s going to help me. He’s been following me since he was a teenager. Now, he’s like in his 20s. We knew each other when he was in California, but, again, he was told to come home to the Philippines and do rehab because of what was going on.

In fact, I had a debate with his uncle who is a doctor saying that I am brainwashing his nephew not to believe in God.

Jacobsen: It was the opposite.

Langseth: I have another one who wants to commit suicide. He is gone. I told you. I have so many experiences with these young kids coming to me and now taken away because they’re like me. One of them Gaston.

Now, he is forced to play the piano in a church. One time he sent me an email. He said he wanted to commit suicide because he is gay. He told me he is gay. I said, “That’s wonderful. There’s nothing wrong with you.”

He said, “How come my family, they want to kill me because I’m gay?!” He wants to commit suicide. I said, “No, you should not commit suicide, hide your identity and go with the flow for now until you become self-sufficient and get away.”

So, they forced him to go into a school. I forgot which school, some religious school and now he plays the piano for the church. And there’s another one, at 12-years-old, I met him in 2011. His mother was even there when they attended the PATAS convention.

I made a good impression because we are good people. Suddenly, he disappeared. He said his mother did not like that he was going out with people like me. I said, “But I met her. She thought I was nice.”

He said, “Yes, but then again, there was pressure from her mother’s family.” There you go. And that the whole neighbourhood told him that he should not become an atheist. So, he went back to school and he
was threatened. He was told if you will not stop that foolishness we will send you to school. So, he has no choice.

References


Appendix I: Footnotes

 minced

1. Founder, PATAS; Founder, HAPI.
2. Individual Public Date: January 1, 2018 at www.in-sightjournal.com/langseth-one; Full Issue Publication Date: May 1, 2018 at https://in-sightjournal.com/insight-issues/.
3. Post-Master’s degree, Certificate for Adult Nurse Practitioner with prescriptive privileges – College of Mount Saint Vincent, NY, USA; M.S.N., Adult Health, CUNY, NYC, USA; B.S.N., University of San Carlos, Cebu, Philippines.
4. Photograph courtesy of Marissa Torres Langseth.
An Interview with Marissa Torres Langseth, B.S.N., M.S.N. (Part Two)

Interviewer: Scott Douglas Jacobsen

An Interview with Marissa Torres Langseth, B.S.N., M.S.N. She discusses: becoming a nurse practitioner, disallowance of freedom of conscience, freedom of belief, freedom of movement for women; religious and secular superstitions in medical decisions; assumptions in medical determinations; the God of the gaps; presumption of a family dynamic in declarations at death; evidence for prayer in the medical literature and in practice; assumptions in medical determinations; two streams of atheism; other superstitions brought into the formal medical world; conspiratorial mindsets about the FDA; one of the most egregious examples of complementary medicine inundating proper medicine and causing real damage to people’s lives; fasting and health complications; symptoms of renal failure; other concerns with fasting, as a medical professional; and the ubiquitous belief in prayer.

Keywords: HAPI, humanism, Marissa Torres Langseth, PATAS, Philippines.

1. Scott Douglas Jacobsen: So, why did you become a nurse practitioner, to clarify?

Marissa Torres Langseth: To clarify, I became a nurse practitioner specializing in adult health because I wanted autonomy in my profession. I wanted to direct people in what to do. I’m confident I can do it and I did it. Of course, I retired two years ago as a nurse practitioner. I have never been sued.

No complaints with my diagnoses. So far, I did it all and the money was good. However, I need to rest.
2. Jacobsen: For women coming from cultures or subcultures, this can be North America too, of course, that disallow freedom of conscience, freedom of belief, freedom of movement as one would like, would you recommend becoming a nurse practitioner for that independence?

Langseth: Absolutely. In fact, I have recommended that all registered nurses become a nurse practitioner because it is different when you are already at that bracket. You function autonomously. You are like a doctor.

Not only that, but there is some form of respect that you don’t get from being a registered nurse. I was a registered nurse for a long time. It was different. Our training is different. Our pay scale is much higher and we are regarded by a lot of doctors, especially the general practitioners, as equals.

For example, when my patient goes to the emergency room, I call them and talk to them as an equal, not as a second-class citizen or a nurse. I’m a nurse practitioner and these doctors, some of them, are arrogant. I’ve met a lot of them.

I put them in their place. Modesty aside, I can say I was a successful nurse practitioner during my time. Really, I love my job. I have helped a lot of families make decisions for themselves because part of our job was to empower families and patients to make decisions for themselves. when you go to the hospital, the doctor will tell you.

No, it should be that they provide options and the patient should choose what they want, not the doctors. Some doctors are stupid. They’re arrogant, in fact, they don’t want to be corrected and they don’t want you to let them know that medicine.

Personally speaking, when I go to the doctor, I tell them, doctor, I’m a nurse practitioner, right away they treat you differently. They treat you like you’re an equal.

3. Jacobsen: In regards to the nursing profession in the medical world, does religious or even secular superstition ever play a part in medical decisions?

Langseth: It’s always a part of that because some of these religious people say, “I’ll pray for you. I hope you become better. We’ll pray for you.” They always have that phrase about praying. For me, that’s nonsense.

I always say, “How could prayers work? You’re in the hospital.” And again, I’m objective. I’m straightforward. If it were my patent, I don’t tell them, “I’ll pray for you.” I always say, “I hope the drugs, the medications, the medical interventions, surgical interventions will work for you.”

I’ve never said pray. However, I’ve heard a lot of doctors, especially the Muslim doctors, they always say, “Okay, we’ll pray for you. We’ll say good graces to you, to Allah.” I still see some of them.

In fact, recently, there’s a doctor who told a patient. I was right in from of him. He said, “I’m sorry but your mother was taken by God already.” I said, “Doctor can’t you say the patient did not make or died because of this?”

4. Jacobsen: Why assume?

Langseth: Yes, they use God to maybe finish the statement, so that they don’t have to explain further. God took your family.

5. Jacobsen: In philosophy, they have the idea of God of the gaps.

Langseth: Yes.

Jacobsen: When you can’t explain something in an argument with a premise or formalized argumentation structure, you say, “God did it,” in essence.

Langseth: Exactly.

Jacobsen: I feel as though in that context it’s another form of it, but for grief. So, in place of grief, you say, “God took him or her.”

Langseth: I have no objection to that. In fact, it brings comfort to a lot of people, especially again we cannot explain so many things. Even with how much you like to in medicine and technology, we cannot explain. You’re right. God of the gaps. We cannot explain. That’s why they mention it.

And again, I don’t know. I cannot say God took your mother. I cannot say that.

6. Jacobsen: It seems presumptuous because you don’t know the full family dynamic, where everyone’s at in regards to their faith. In some context, I could see an appropriateness for it, not only as a filler for grief but also based on shared religious doctrine and belief.

But often, even statistically, you should not expect that or use it as a phrase in that a context.

Langseth: It should not be. It’s a little bit unprofessional when they say that. Like, “We’ll pray for your mother.” We’ll pray for your mother? If you were to ask me, you should go to the hospital when you’re sick; otherwise, don’t go there.
It’s the worst place you can be. We have bacteria resistance. Bacteria that will not respond to medications. It’s the worst place you could be, really.

7. Jacobsen: To clarify even further on the prayer example, what is the evidence for prayer or against it in the medical literature and in practice?

Langseth: There was a study. It was in Columbia Presbyterian, about praying. It was specifically for patients who have had open heart surgery if I’m not mistaken. I read the article a long time ago. According to the article or to the study, it did not help.

In fact, it made the patient’s conditions worse. Especially when they told the patient that they’re praying for them, they became anxious and even got worse instead of getting better. Of course, I have this notion that prayers don’t work.

They don’t work. That study not only confirmed my understanding. And this is true that praying for somebody and you’re being prayed for, it makes them uncomfortable and worse in their condition. Although, there was no other study that I have read.

It was only one. But again, tested and proven, it won’t work. For example, patients in the Philippines. They’re poor. My classmates until now, would you believe that? Until now, my classmates in high school still go to quack doctors.

We call them abulerios. Doctors and them will recommend tea leaves or some drink from somewhere. Maybe, they will put charcoal in their wound. Of course, the wound becomes infected. So, I get upset and bothered by these classmates of mine.

That’s why I always get into fights with them. Because I cannot help it. As a medical practitioner, I say, “Why are you going to people who don’t know what medicine is? You will die or it will become worse.”

In fact, one of my colleagues. He’s one of my friends in the Philippines. He recently died. He posted on Facebook that he is sick. I said, “You are sick. Your blood sugar is high. Your blood level: you’re high risk. You need to go to the hospital right now.”

So, after a few days, I don’t know if he listened to me. He was bed bound for a while. He said he was in an out of a doctor. I said, “You don’t need to go to a doctor. You need to go to a hospital because it looks like you have the following.”

Of course, I mentioned my diagnosis according to his symptoms. True enough he had undergone some form of surgery and he died. Even if he believed, he was also an atheist. But even if he believed in science, if he has all these complications, medicine will not work.

8. Jacobsen: There’s a complication there in terms of terminology for an atheist or someone who is irreligious. So, someone could be labeled as having no religious affiliation. That doesn’t leave them unsusceptible to other forms of irrational belief about the world, especially medicine.

Langseth: Even if some people are atheists, some of them still are stubborn. They don’t want to see a doctor. They don’t want to go to a hospital right away. It doesn’t follow that if they’re atheists, they believe in hardcore science or medicine.

Especially in the Philippines, they could be atheist but still because they don’t have money and the means, they still go to these quack doctors for their fever. Unfortunately, in the Philippines, it’s because of poverty. A lot of atheists, members in HAPI, they’re poor.

They cannot afford medicine, so they still go to these quack doctors and boy do they get worse. They get worse, unfortunately.

9. Jacobsen: Also, there are at least 2 streams of atheism. One is “this is the only life I have so I will do the best I can for others and myself. I’m embedded in a social network, so I best take care of my health.”

For instance, “If I have children, I want to be there for them, and my grandchildren.” Another stream is “this is the only life I have and nothing matters and the world is valueless and,” therefore, they fall into some form of nihilism.

They don’t care. They may not have even expressed this explicit belief. So, they don’t go to the doctor. They don’t care about their health. They don’t care about decent behaviour either. Those are two streams that follow from some atheism.

Langseth: Yes, I agree because I have met both types. I’m sad for the second type of atheism because they think life is only a delusion. They think life is unreal. This is why they don’t care about others. They say they’re atheist.

They pretend to be nice, but inside them and I’ve seen it also, but they don’t care. Because they think life has no purpose and their values, their ethical values are bad also. And some people like that and I’m sad for them.

10. Jacobsen: What about some of the other less known superstitious beliefs in medicine? Such as crystals, homeopathy, and so on, are these ever
brought into the formal medical world as far from your experience?

Langseth: We call them alternative treatment or complementary treatment to make it sound better. Like, for example, aromatherapy, massage, and touch therapy. I saw a lot of ads saying alternative medicine or complementary medicine.

Meaning you go there, you have this therapy. Yet, you still believe in taking medications. There is nothing wrong with that. But if you believe in that, like touch therapy and massage, then there’s a problem. They can go together with a massage. You can relax. It’s also relaxation techniques and aromatherapy makes your body relax.

I practice, not aromatherapy, but I like the smell of these types of plants and the massage technique. I love those because it also makes your body feel better afterward, so you can function better. But of course, if you’re sick you go to a doctor, you go to the hospital.

Like Chinese medicine, acupuncture they say it works. Maybe to others, but I don’t know, I haven’t tried it. Homeopathy, maybe, it works to others, but I don’t know. Of course, it isn’t proven that it doesn’t work.

It’s even more expensive. But in a hospital or a nursing home where I work, we don’t apply them. But we do ask our patients if they have that. For example, the plants and the additional things that they do at home or especially using like ginger plants or other herbs, we ask them.

We try to request them to stop while they are in the hospital. Although, we educate them because education helps a lot. We say that some of these plants are not good, or herbal capsules are not good because they do not undergo FDA experimentation.

They don’t go through the FDA, so some could be lethal in a few drops because I’ve heard a lot of horror stories especially from the Philippines. They try to use, comfrey. It’s a form of plant.

It’s used and some of them have a lot of liver failure because of that plant. Again, it’s difficult when we don’t have regulations like FDA regulations. So, we try to educate our patients not to use them.

11. Jacobsen: What are some responses that come from complementary medical practitioners, if I can call them that, who might have, for instance, a conspiratorial mindset about the FDA?

Langseth: Would you believe it? We have a few nurse practitioners who believe in that. Who are still promoting alternative medicine and, of course, homeopathy; in fact, it’s good you mentioned that. I have a close friend, he moved to Asheville, North Carolina.

He’s a nurse practitioner, but he’s also promoting homeopathy. So, I said, “My goodness, this guy is a wonderful guy, but he believes it works for his patients.” So, I could not even talk to him about it, to be honest with you. With due respect to him, he’s a nurse practitioner. He’s a graduate of Colombia University. He’s promoting homeopathy.

12. Jacobsen: What do you consider one of the most egregious examples of complementary medicine inundating proper medicine and causing real damage to people’s lives?

Langseth: It’s some form of manipulation in the neck instead of going to a real orthopaedic doctor. They go to these types of doctors. Chiropractor! Some of them they go to the chiropractor and I have heard of some people being paralyzed because of that.

Because some chiropractors, they’re not careful. Some are good. I went to one or two, but there were instances when they missed a part and these people become paralyzed and that is dangerous.

So far with the herbal treatments, there are some that work like Warfarin. So, if these people are taking it, warfarin, or aspirin, they can also bleed to death. That is dangerous when you mix that. But I have not heard of a lot of instances like that case anyway.

13. Jacobsen: What about things such as fasting – which for many of the faithful, of the formal religious – is an important part of their life, it is a part of an ascetic, religious life. You mentioned before that it didn’t make sense to you because you preferred to eat.

What are some health complications that can possibly show up with fasting?

Langseth: That’s ridiculous in a way because fasting, especially fasting for three days, you can have GERD. You can have ulcers. You can be dehydrated within 72 hours and it can cause kidney failure.

So, fasting is nonsense, stupid and ridiculous. Although, in Saudi Arabia, their fasting is different. They eat when the sun goes down. When the sun comes up, they fast. So, it’s different. In the Roman Catholic faith, at the death of their Jesus Christ, they don’t eat.

Because they think it’s like some form of penitence. They’re like showing respect to their Jesus Christ, which is bad. Imagine not eating for 3 days? Again, during my time, I don’t observe that. I go to my room and eat and do what I want.
There’s so many health issues after fasting. In the Philippines I cannot understand, this is the 21st century and these people still fast. That is plain stupid. And then they complain when they have ulcers, when they have to go into the hospital for renal failure and dehydration.

**14. Jacobsen: What are some symptoms of renal failure?**

**Langseth:** Fasting can cause renal failure, GERD, and ulcers. One symptom is anuria. “A” means without and “uria” is to pee. If you cannot urinate for 24 hours, that means you could have some renal failure. Of course, that stems from being dehydrated. If you don’t drink from 72 hours, your kidney cannot produce urine and there’s no urine so you have anuria. You can be dizzy, weak and will collapse. Dizzy spells, you could collapse. Some people could die from that. And of course, there are so many medications that can cause renal failure too.

**15. Jacobsen: When you look at religious practices in general, what are some other ones that are of concern to you regarding health as a professional?**

**Langseth:** Number 1, when they don’t follow or when they don’t go to the doctor or hospital when they are sick, they think God or prayers will save them. That is dangerous. Number 2, they go to a quack doctor. Of course, they cannot afford.

That’s also one reason why they don’t go to the doctor, because they cannot afford it. There is a lot of poverty in the Philippines, so they don’t go. Of course, they think that Jesus will help them or their God will help them.

Especially if they have incurable forms of diseases like cancer, they think their God will help them. That’s dangerous. Instead of getting different viewpoints from medical practitioners, they go to their relatives and friends and they would say, “Okay, let us all pray for you, so you’ll get better.”

That is dangerous. Would you believe that it’s still being practiced in the Philippines?

**16. Jacobsen: I would because belief in prayer is everywhere. What about these televangelists who appear to be so popular in the United States? These people who go to televangelists are people who throw their diabetes medication up on the stage or their eyeglasses and they say, “Jesus cured my glaucoma and diabetes. Not only that, he took the tumor out of my gut.”**

**Langseth:** These are clowns. They pretend so much; it’s so obvious to me. I could not believe why people would find them useful. I find them nauseating every time I hear that, “Throw away your medication.” Believe me, I’ve seen it.

I’ve seen real people say that. When I was in the Philippines, I saw people from the Church. They go to the pastor and this pastor will pray for them when they’re sick. They’ll think they’re cured. I could not believe why they have spread.

In the USA, we have a lot of educated people. Why do they believe in that? It stems from ignorance about medicine; God of the gaps; people being lazy. They don’t read. They don’t read about new technology and science – being ignorant about so many things.

Then when you talk to them, they think that you are like my God, what are you talking about. But when you show them your credentials, they would believe you. I met a few during my tour in Switzerland. I met a few ignorant teachers.

They’re from the Bible Belt and when they talk about that. I tell them, “No, that’s not true!” And they look at me like I’m crazy and when I tell them my credentials, “Ah!” So, again, I’m straightforward.

In the 21st century, we should not have these televangelists. Why are they allowed to preach when there is hardcore science to prove that science can cure ailments? Or we have palliative measures if it cannot be cured? I could not understand people throwing money at these types of human beings.

That’s why they’re getting rich, rich. Jehovah’s Witness is one of them. I’ve heard of a cult in Texas. There’s the one that came to my mind are Jehovah’s Witness. These are poor people trying to survive in their community.

I feel bad because they come knocking on our door. I would shoo them away, and I tell them, “I’m an atheist. I don’t believe in your bullshit.” One time they even said, “Good morning, ma’am!” I’m honest, I say, “Good morning.” They say, “We would like to bless you.”

I say, “Excuse me? You cannot bless me. You’re only a human being. I’m an atheist, get out of here” [Laughing].

To be honest with you, since I came out and was vocal about my atheism, a lot of people came out. Some of them said, “You inspired us to come out. Now because of you, we would not be able to come out.”

It’s because somebody has to stand up; somebody has to break that barrier and be called an atheist. There’s nothing wrong with being an atheist. There is nothing wrong. When I created PATAS, I had the bragging rights to make PATAS because I founded that.
But as soon as I came out, I posted the picture of Richard Dawkins. That picture with Richard Dawkins launched PATAS. People were shocked that there’s this Philippina on Facebook with Richard Dawkins.

There’s nothing wrong with coming out! And this is the reason why being vocal and showing how good you are as a human being and an atheist will promote not only PATAS in the Philippines, but it will show to the world that we are good people. That has a lot of comments.

Of course, I got some bashing also, but that’s fine. That’s expected [Laughing]. As expected, the jealous people bashed me, but that’s fine. What I’m saying is it’s because of Facebook that I was able to create something that has not been created in the Philippines.

If not because of Facebook and social media, we will still be in the dark. We won’t have these non-religious societies in the Philippines. I’m still stupid with computers, believe me. I’m not at all a computer guru.

But I taught myself to do Facebook and to help out on the website because I need to, as the founder.

You’re right that religion is eroding. We are the silent majority. Why? When I went to the Philippines for 2 months, the people I spoke to said that they went to church.

It’s like for convenience. But as per my conversations with them, they don’t believe in a God that will help them. It’s no longer like that. Although the older population, the 80-years-olds, the 90-years-olds, they still go to church and ask for help.

But the younger generations, they have done better: Millennials. Millennials are the ones who will save us because they know now there is no supernatural being that will help us.

She will help us promote Humanism. Not atheism, but humanism; humanism is a positive word for atheism. This is why if you go to our website, I mention Humanism is the best gift of atheism. I got like 500 likes when that was posted in the Atheist Republic.

That means that a lot of people will agree with me. Humanism is better utilized than atheism. Atheism is an empty shell. It’s a lack of belief. We don’t believe, fine. Humanism is the action word. We do something. That’s Humanism, like educating people and promoting equal rights.

It’s not positive, but it’s like you’re doing something when you’re a humanist. Like how I explained to these youngsters that I met when they had a party in my house, these elementary school or high school students.

I said, “Humanism means human and ism. Human means in you, in me, in humanity.” That’s all I told them. I didn’t tell them there’s no God. I didn’t say that because some of them are still religious. But they are appreciative.

They believe because when they believe in humans, then they will try to help you. That’s all I said. That was positive. We will continue that type of education.

In fact, I was chatting recently to that lady in Bacolod, who launched her project about HAPI SHADE (Secular, Humanist, Advocacy, Development, Education).

She is launching that, but hers is different. She’s getting the young. The young people, they’re not in high school. They are 5- to 7-years-old. I met all of them because I was there when she launched that event.

In fact, I cried because I was so happy with what I saw. This is what you call “catch them while they’re young.” When you catch them young, you teach them these things. Yes, so catch them young, there are 70 of them.

She also got 70 volunteers, so it’s like 1-to-1. Then we feed them. Her style is different. We were chatting, so I have this in my brain. Monday to Thursday, they do remedial classes. Remedial meaning “on top of”: these children are poor.

They don’t know how to read. They don’t know how to do much. They are 5- or 7-years-old. So, they do remedial classes and on Friday feed them. So, it’s one form of saying, “Hey, let’s go to that class Monday to Thursday and then they give us goodies on Fridays.”

She said she’s going to do that for years, and do some assessments and evaluate whether it’s working after a couple or a few years. So, I told her we need to find a lot of donors. I donated a hundred dollars. That’s nothing to me.

We need to sustain that. In order to sustain that, we need an article to immortalize that on our website, so we get more donors who can understand what we’re doing. A lot of the donors would like to see children talk science, technology, and philosophy rather than wasting their time praying, going to church.

I have met a lot of humanist types. Real humanism is a denial of any deity or any supernatural being; that’s real Humanism to me. I’m a humanist. I don’t believe in those bullshit deities or supernatural entities.

Some humanists, I’ve met a few of them. One, I was chatting with her. She said she still believes in something. I said that’s fine. She’s a freethinker.
She’s a humanist because she does this for human beings, to advance humanity. In fact, I have met a person in AHA when I attended that convention in 2011, when I asked if she believed in God.

Humanism does not mean you don’t believe in God. That’s what he said. So, I learned from him and not only that but from experience that when you’re a humanist, then you’re not an atheist. Some of them still believe in something.

Not necessarily Jesus or Allah, but they still believe in something. It’s because they’re not 100% convinced out of fear. Some of them out of respect for their tradition. Like the Filipinos, some of them they think they’re Catholic humanists.

Okay, that’s fine. The reason being that we have a huge umbrella of humanists in HAPI. Some of them are pure atheists and hardcore militant atheists like me and some of them are quite religious. However, some religious people have become agnostic or freethinkers because of what they’ve read in our forum.

One example is Jamie. Jamie was religious before and now she doesn’t go. She always thinks, at this time, that she’s agnostic. For us, that is a success already. We are successful and some of these people coming to us. They were religious at first.

Now, since they’ve joined us, they realize there’s no use for praying. There’s no use of going to Church, being a good person. And that is already a success for me. I can brag that I have converted a lot of people. Jamie is one of them.

A few people in Bacolod who were religious are freethinkers. So, in HAPI, we welcome all of them. We welcome anyone, as long as they don’t have a bomb in their belt, that’s fine. Some humanists, I don’t know if they can still be called humanists.

Duterte is killing these drug addicts and drug lords. You are aware of that. Some these humanists in HAPI are giving them the go signal. I don’t know. That’s selective Humanism.

Jacobsen: Can you clarify?

Langseth: There are humanists in HAPI who believe that Duterte is doing a good thing and killing those drug addicts is fine. They would give a thumbs up to them. I don’t know if you can still call them humanists.

But in euthanasia also, we have a right to die. For example, one of my specialties is palliative nursing, palliative care nursing. For example, if a patient is having pain every day and is bedbound, cannot move anymore and wasting, they have the right to go comfortably or to choose when and where to die.

For example, I have advised a lot of my patients’ families that “why would we go through a lot of medical interventions when it’s futile?” Why would you go through that? And that’s also good humanism because on the positive note, it will stop the misery of the human being.

I hate to say this, but it will save Medicare dollars. But this is not economics, my job. When I was still working, it was to empower my patients, to empower the families. If their loved one is in constant pain, of course, we treat them with maximum treatments with opioids or other things like that, but some of them would rather die than go forward, than be like that forever.

And of course, the families, most of them, believe me, would agree. That is humane. Remember if you see a horse in the street and they are in pain, you want to kill them right? You want to shoot them, so they will be put out of their misery. Why can’t we do that with human beings?

In a palliative and comfortable and respectful way, of course, if I was sick and in pain every day, I don’t want to live like that: please, kill me. When I had a car accident, I was on leave, on medical leave for 2 months.

I told my husband, “Honey, kill me. I’m in pain every day, bury me in the backyard.” I told him that. How much more with those people in the nursing home who are always in pain and bedridden and suffering? There’s pain and suffering every day for years and years. How much more?

I could not imagine how they feel. People would rather die than be in pain. I read a survey. People would rather die than be in pain. This is why we have high incidents of drug addiction in America. Nobody wants to be in pain!

Yes, nobody wants to be in pain. Look at these doctors, I’ve overheard a lot of doctors mention, “What? We’re like drug pushers over here. We treat patients with opioids right away and they come back and they’re drug addicts.”

Of course! Duh. When my husband had a fracture, I was keen on his medication because I don’t want him to be addicted. The doctors would say, “How come you don’t like this medication?” He said, “My wife is a nurse practitioner. I would rather listen to her than you.”

Because they don’t care, they prescribe Tylenol number 3, Vicodin, Percocet, or opioids generally. The whole time the patient is in the hospital. When they come out, they want to refill their opioids and then after a month or two they’re
drug addicts. I’m not surprised. I wrote an article about that.

Because nobody wants to be in pain. I’m in pain right now, I have some tendonitis from my vacation because I was carrying my bags, heavy bags. I have tendonitis in my right shoulder. It’s little pain, but I cannot take it. How much more with people who are in severe pain?

I have seen my patients who do otherwise. Like they’d rather be in pain because that’s what Jesus Christ wants them to have and be pain free when they die. So, when they’re alive, I had a patient. My God, I could not forget her. She’s a Jehovah’s witness.

She was in severe pain. She had gangrene in both feet. That means, she’s dying. I told her I was going to give her a patch to alleviate her pain. She said, “No, I want to be in pain because I want to experience what Jesus did during his life.”

I said, “My lord, I cannot take this. What did? I called her family. Her niece was open-minded.” I said, “We need to treat your grandmother. She is in pain.” So, she came and she saw the pain and suffering. I said, “Yes, okay, do whatever is good for her. She cannot decide anyway.”

She’s not only demented. She was in pain. Her religious belief is getting into me and into my practice. I ordered this. After a few days, she died comfortably, having a religious belief will make you suffer.

It will make people suffer. They believe that is part of life; that is part of the penance or their route to go to heaven, to be in pain. That’s bullshit. I’m talking about religious attendance. My husband and I, we still go to Church.

The last time we were there. There were like 12 people. My husband told me when I was in the Philippines that he went to Church. There were only 9 of them and even the pastor was not there [Laughing]. It’s sad. I said, “My goodness, what’s wrong with this?” It’s so sad. Yes, we have a few of them. But you’re right, it’s changing. The landscape of religiosity is changing and that is a good thing for us.

References


Appendix I: Footnotes
1 Founder, PATAS; Founder, HAPI.
2 Individual Publication Date: January 8, 2018 at www.in-sightjournal.com/langseth-two; Full Issue Publication Date: May 1, 2018 at https://in-sightjournal.com/insight-issues/.

1 Post-Master’s degree, Certificate for Adult Nurse Practitioner with prescriptive privileges – College of Mount Saint Vincent, NY, USA; M.S.N., Adult Health, CUNY, NYC, USA; B.S.N., University of San Carlos, Cebu, Philippines.
2 Photograph courtesy of Marissa Torres Langseth.
An Interview with Marissa Torres Langseth, B.S.N., M.S.N. (Part Three)

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Abstract

An Interview with Marissa Torres Langseth, B.S.N., M.S.N. She discusses: controversial topics for non-belief in the Philippines and North America; jurisprudence and human nature; religious demographics of prisons; no life after death; justifications for the theistic and atheistic side; “cheap grace”; most violent criminals being men and human rights; and having the curtain pulled, so the afterlife can begin for believers; Marilyn vos Savant of Parade Magazine on Pascal’s Wager and religion; Richard Dawkins and the labelling of children; and the emphasis on women’s reproduction.

Keywords: HAPI, humanism, Marissa Torres Langseth, PATAS, Philippines.

An Interview with Marissa Torres Langseth, B.S.N., M.S.N.: Founder, PATAS; Founder, HAPI (Part Three)

1. Scott Douglas Jacobsen: So, what are the most controversial topics with regards to non-belief in the Philippines and North America?

Marissa Torres Langseth: I would say it’s about the death penalty. For me, it is inhumane. Everyone has the right to prove that they’re innocent. With the death penalty, if these people are killed, that means that’s it. That’s the cessation of life and that is contrary to the quality of life.

With the death penalty, if these people are found guilty, I hope they’re guilty, then they’re killed. So, there is no more chance for rehabilitation. However, 30 to 50 percent of these criminals are recidivists. That’s the reason why there’s the death penalty. To be honest with you, sometimes I go, I lean on making them stop. But how do we make them stop? For example, that case in Connecticut. It was in 1997.
I was on vacation in Bermuda when there were two thugs. They escaped from prison. They robbed a house. I could not forget because they got into my skin; these people burned the other people alive.

Heinous. How could somebody do that? And of course they were captured, these two criminals. Of course, they were guilty before and now. But how can we do something to make these people stop? In Norway or places in Scandinavia, in some of the places, the prisons are being closed because they don’t have criminals.

So why is it in North America we have too many criminals and in the Philippines, the prisons are outpouring with criminals, with prisoners? That is difficult, to be honest with you. It blows my mind how to stop them.

And now with Duterte, he is trying to kill everyone. My problem with that is with the people who are not guilty. Even if they are guilty, they still have this right. However, in the course of life, it will become exponential because what about the people around them? It’s not going to stop.

Because the family members will say, “Okay let’s avenge the life, avenge the killing of my brother and so on and so forth. That’s why it has got to stop, but I don’t think I have the answer to that. Although, I don’t like the death penalty.

If these people are like monsters like the case in Connecticut, how do we make them stop? Isolate them? Kill them? Even with the death penalty, it’s not even effective. There are still a lot of criminals.

2. Jacobsen: It’s a complex question about jurisprudence and human nature.

Langseth: Exactly, and human rights, but is it their right to take somebody’s life away?

Jacobsen: In some ways, if you violate a law – I’m not saying this is the way it is, but in some way, I can see the general principle apply where if you violate a law – or the right of another human being, then you revoke the equivalent right for yourself.

So if you steal, then you revoke your right to not have your stuff stolen. Recompense for the theft, for instance. Or if you kill, you lose your rights as a citizen, as a legal person, in a lot of ways when you’re in prison.

But then there are other questions that arise from the pipeline about: how much of this is hereditary? The openness and willingness to do harm to others or to only gain for oneself. So murder in the former example, theft in the latter.

Does this come from someone’s genetic endowment or more from the environment? And if it’s more the environment, then it raises questions about society. Or if it means more from hereditary means, then that raises questions about: how much then can we influence someone’s internal moral compass?

And what can we do then to make a society structured in such a way to bring about a statistically more peaceful situation? But then when it comes to jurisprudence, we come from a tacitly bureaucratic country, America in your case and Canada in mine.

And in each, they have the idea of vengeance or it’s a need to punish those that do wrong in a severe way, it shows in America, especially, and it shows in the Philippines. In the Scandinavian countries, which are much less religious, they don’t show that as much.

Langseth: Right. But you can kill in self-defense, for example, I will only kill if that guy is trying to kill me or if he’s trying to rape me; something like that. But otherwise, that’s beyond me. It’s difficult.

I’m not a lawyer, but that most of these people can be rehabilitated. However, on the other hand, when we rehabilitate them, the percentage is low and this is the reason why we have the death penalty, but still, it’s not stopping criminality.

3. Jacobsen: If you look at the statistics of criminals, the demographics of prisons, there might be confounding factors with regards to religious services reaching out to prisoners, but most people in prisons are religious.

Langseth: Yes, exactly. I was about to say that. Because, maybe, they believe that even if they kill, someone up there will say, “That’s okay. You can pray 20, and so on. Then you’ll be cleansed.” That’s the reason why it’s easy. Even in the Bible Belt, most of them have guns.

Because they think they have the right to kill because their God is behind them.

4. Jacobsen: There’s the stereotype of the Southerner going into the local gas station with a gun afraid that Obama will come personally and take it away from them.

Langseth: [Laughing] Yes, why is it that the most religious are the ones who will kill you right away? They also believe, most of them or 90% of them believe, in life after death. Even if they get killed with their guns, anyway, there’s life after death.

I’ll be better there. Or if they kill, they would say, “God will cleanse us anyway.” So, it’s not believed.
Whereas an atheist would think that there’s no life after death, so I don’t want to kill and I don’t want to be killed.

5. Jacobsen: There are two justifications there. On the theistic side, there’s the idea of impulsivity being excused by the belief in a hereafter. On the atheistic side, there’s the excuse that life has no inherent meaning, therefore, human beings have no value.

Therefore, any violence or harm to them, except to oneself, has no meaning, so it doesn’t matter.

Both of those cases lead to terrible harm. But I’ve never heard an adequate explanation as to why so many prisoners are overwhelmingly religious.

Langseth: Yes, they are. In Mexico, look at the killers, they have tattoos with Jesus Christ on their backs or crosses on their bodies – and they’re killers.


Langseth: They believe they will be forgiven. That’s the issue there. This is why there’s double morality in the Philippines. They think that they can do anything, do something and they’ll be forgiven.

Look at these priests who are pedophiles, we have so many of them. I have heard a lot of horror stories. And this is because we’ll be forgiven and pray, and give Hail Marys, and they’ll be cleansed to start over again.

7. Jacobsen: I mean everyone, whether or not they know the numbers, intuitively understand that most of the violent criminals, sexual or physical or so on, are men. But I don’t see a common knowledge or wisdom that most of the criminals who are locked up are religious.

I don’t know why there is that disjunction. I feel as if religion gets an easy off there.

Langseth: Yes, that’s what they believe in; that’s it, yes.

Jacobsen: And in terms of human rights, to the main theme of most controversial topics in the Philippines and North America, we were talking in the past about how the main issue in the United States appears to be, almost, a tacit despising of human rights because they in some way provide a buffer against religious privilege.

Langseth: Yes, I worked in Saudi Arabia as a registered nurse. For them, life is nothing. It’s like this. There was one nurse who gave a patient the wrong medication. Of course, the patient died and the family said, “Alhamdulillah.” Life is nothing for them.

It’s a culture of death. They are looking forward to their death, in Saudi Arabia, the religious Muslims. I’ve seen it. This is why there are no lawsuits in Saudi Arabia for negligence for nurses or doctors who give the wrong diagnosis.

There is no such thing as that, like nothing. Only in America or of course in Europe, maybe. But in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, if you kill the patient, it’s Alhamdulillah. I’ve seen it all. I was in the ICU and this nurse forgot this patient’s oxygen.

Of course, the patient died. The family came and said, “Alhamdulillah.” Thanks be to God. That’s the answer. If that happened in the USA, there will be litigation; the nurse will be sued as well as the hospital.

Jacobsen: Yes, it’s a litigious culture.

Langseth: This is why it’s so different. In Roman Catholicism, it’s so different. They have this self-entitlement. They want everything done.

They want everything done even if the patient is already dying. You have to put in all the tubes in the world to keep them alive even if the patient is in pain and suffering. That’s fine, as long as they’re alive.

They prolong their agony. This is why I say the most religious suffer the most. But that is only in Christianity. In Islam, when they die, it’s so different. But they both believe in life after death.

This is why we have some of the terrorists they say they go to heaven and get 72 virgins. They are looking forward to that.

Jacobsen: The women less so.

Langseth: Yes, yes. One of my friends infiltrated a Mosque. What’s in the Mosque, they are lectured all about how you have to die because you go to heaven and have sex with 72 virgins. It’s brainwashing. And that’s why they look forward to their death.

8. Jacobsen: That goes to a theme. In one lens, these amount to mythologies. These mythologies are death-oriented. Anything death oriented will incorporate pain and suffering, and not in a Buddhist sense mind you.

This is a way to become more holy. Your body is a sacrament through suffering. So, in a lot of ways, these are almost ways of life and ethics of death worship in some ways.

Langseth: Yup.

Jacobsen: Because this is King Lear or The Taming of the Shrew, it’s a play, before the curtain is pulled and you have action and the real world starts: the afterlife.
Langseth: Right. And until now, I could not understand. I cannot fathom sometimes why people can believe. Even if you explain to them that when the body dies, everything dies and there’s no soul.

Even if there is a soul, the soul cannot touch you, cannot smell, cannot see. It’s nothing; it’s like air. They answer sometimes when I lecture to them about this. That it is fine; it’s better to believe than not to believe.

Jacobsen: That translates into “I’ve stopped thinking.”

Langseth: Yes. But then Pascal’s Wager, they are too afraid to not believe. It’s better to believe than not to believe, to them.

9. Jacobsen: Marilyn vos Savant writes for Parade Magazine, does a column called Ask Marilyn. Some questioner asked her about Pascal’s Wager. She made the point that basically said one then, within context, should automatically devote themselves to the religion that provides the greatest promise in the hereafter. That’s the silly implication.

Langseth: Right, it’s a waste of time. It’s a waste of time praying and going to these churches. It’s a waste of time.

Jacobsen: It can be a waste of life.

Langseth: Yes, waste of life, you’re right because time is life. You cannot get it back.

10. Jacobsen: Unless, of course, it’s an adult who has made the decision to partake in this and get meaning out of it. At the same time, most of it is implicated in kids from a young age.

Richard Dawkins pointed it out that you do not have Catholic children; you have children of Catholic parents. But the assumption is such that you will have the label of Catholic children or Sunni children or Shia children, and so on.

And it gives another familial privilege, in this case, to the religious, to foist their beliefs on children prior to the development of critical faculties. Everyone can pay lip service to the idea that “I will provide a broad-based education to my child about all the religions of the world.”

However, this doesn’t necessarily translate into an objective presentation of world religions as sets of ideas and beliefs or a survey of those beliefs rather than “we have the true, true religion in our family.”

Langseth: This is why in the Philippines is 80% Roman Catholic, because we’re all Catholics. A lot of those Filipinos no. They learn that having religion means you can get money from that.

Catholicism is the number 1 religion. The first person who fought with the Spaniards was Lapu Lapu. He killed Magellan. Why is it that still people believe in Christianity? Why are they still going into the cult?

It’s because they are good at threatening people. Indoctrination of fear.

Jacobsen: It goes to your point earlier about how in many ways: religions are political systems.

Langseth: Yes, exactly. If the family is Catholic, the children are automatically Catholic.

11. Jacobsen: Yes, there’s an argument to be made too. Because if you look at statistics of birth rates, if that is the norm, the global historical norm, a child of X religion parents will be labeled X religion, then the religions with the highest birth rates will have the most adherence in the next generation, statistically.

And so it’s quite deliberate as to the reason for the strong emphasis on bigger families, on control of women’s reproduction and the control of women. If you are a leader and you control the men who control the women, especially women’s reproduction, then you control legacy.

Langseth: Of course, yes, absolutely, that’s happening in the Philippines. That’s why they don’t like this RH bill. No matter how much the people want it, the priests are against that because it will kill the legacy.

And with Islam, they have 4 wives so they can procreate. 50 children at a time, at one time, with 4 women. It’s marketing and promotion. They are good at that.

References


Appendix I: Footnotes

[1] Founder, PATAS; Founder, HAPI.
[3] Post-Master’s degree, Certificate for Adult Nurse Practitioner with prescriptive privileges – College of Mount Saint Vincent, NY, USA; M.S.N., Adult Health, CUNY, NYC, USA; B.S.N., University of San Carlos, Cebu, Philippines.
An Interview with Marissa Torres Langseth, B.S.N., M.S.N. (Part Four)

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Abstract

An Interview with Marissa Torres Langseth, B.S.N., M.S.N. She discusses: Societies and women’s dress; fear for women Millennials; the Humanist party; policies and platform recommendations of the party; normalization of humanism and ordinary humanists; demonization of the non-believer population in America in general; humanism and politics; non-religious invocations; emotionally potent lies; risk of social suicide; and social ostracism.

Keywords: HAPI, humanism, Marissa Torres Langseth, PATAS, Philippines.

1. Scott Douglas Jacobsen: If you look at the lists of restrictions on women, it’s quite obvious. I mean just read the text by implication if you’re being mild about it. ‘Thy ox, thy ass, thy wife, thy
manservant, thy maidservant’ and so on, right there, you have a wife as property in one of the Ten Commandments.

But then also in terms of what is considered appropriate dress for women, as if society at large has a say in how a woman should dress, right?

Langseth: Yes, I couldn’t understand that before. Why are the men allowed to control women’s bodies? It’s because of religion. A woman is supposed to be subservient and submissive to their husbands. That’s what religion taught them.

2. Jacobsen: And my fear, even within my own generation, the Millennial, the women coming out of these traditions with very comprehensive worldviews in practice, in theory, in perspective.

Even if coming now to the label of secular or free thinker and so on, will harbour the same self-doubt and idea, that they are to be of service to the men in their lives, especially in intimate settings such as probably one of the most important decisions a person can make in their life, their partner, their marriage partner or spouse.

This stuff takes a long time to decode and unwind.

Langseth: Yes, it will take centuries, maybe. But it’s happening now. I don’t think I can see it in my lifetime, but if you promote humanism with me and all of us promoting this, that we are all equal.

There are human rights and all of these humanistic values and ethical values, the next generation, maybe not yours, will be a lot better. But we’ll never know.

3. Jacobsen: Are there any topics that you would like to explore?

Langseth: I’m excited about this Humanist party. If we have humanist constituents in the Philippines, we will be known better. They will see us better even if we lose the first few years. This is where my excitement is coming from right now, to be honest with you.

4. Jacobsen: What are some of its policies and platform recommendations?

Langseth: It’s all about human rights, LGBT rights, and women’s rights. Of course, there is democracy in the Philippines, but now it’s becoming a dictatorship by Duterte. We’re more about the promotion of reason and critical thinking like we are educating our children.

If each person in the Philippines is a critical thinker and will not even mention religion, we are better off. And of course, the Churches will close down because nobody will go there anymore. Everybody will go to the library.

This is why we have libraries. I have a library in my house in the Philippines for HAPI. But I’m excited that if this will push through, there will be more awareness in the Philippines of our humanist constituencies.

Not even popularity, it will open a lot of minds and this platform will become bigger. It will become bigger than what we have now and they will no longer be afraid to come out. This is what I’m hoping for.

5. Jacobsen: So, is it a process of normalization of humanism and ordinary humanists?

Langseth: Yes, something like that. But I hope this will push through; we have a plan already. Because as law if we are always under the radar, if we are hiding all the time, like our HAPI Con, it was small.

Few people knew about it. Even if they knew, they were afraid to attend because they think it’s a sin to be a humanist or to get out of their religion. And if we have a party and it’s open, out in the open, people will become bolder to come out. And I am sure one of these days, this will happen. The first few Years we will lose but that’s fine. We will win eventually.

6. Jacobsen: In America, there is a lot of demonization of the humanist population, the non-believer population in general.

Langseth: Yes, in general, in fact, I have met a candidate somewhere in the South. He became my friend. He is running not as a congressman, but in the municipal elections or something like this.

He said he is an atheist, but he cannot tell them he is an atheist. He said he told everyone he’s a humanist. And when you ask what is a humanist, it’s like a vague explanation.

Langseth: Yes, something like that [Laughing]. Because he’s afraid that he will not win if he comes out as an atheist. This is pervasive.

Jacobsen: Yes, it’s the same in America. Statistically, there has to be a lot of atheists in political office.

Langseth: I’m sure.

8. Jacobsen: I’ve been in contact with one politician. It’s a woman. She’s an atheist. And she did an invocation. It was an irreligious statement of ‘let’s all get together and be together.’

A latter middle age, white, overweight Southern accented man got up and made the statement that the policy says that this is going to be an opening prayer to a God – emphasis on God – and he then began his opening prayer to overturn the invocation by stating that ‘God, we ask your forgiveness for our pride, et cetera.’

It was passive aggressive. I thought he was a prima donna about it. In America, the main activists for women’s reproductive rights in light of the Trump administration like, for instance, the Global Gag order, have been women.

Because it more directly impacts them. Women seem more acutely aware of it. My hope is that at least in the non-belief sector of America that people won’t have to be so closeted. That it will be a dual-gender phenomenon, I hope.

Langseth: Yes, it’s like cats. Herding cats is a daunting task. I said that to myself a long time ago in 2011 when I made PATAS. But if we have loud voices, it will become louder even if we are cats.

That’s what I’m saying. If you’re standing for what is good, even if we are cats and we become more vocal, they can hear us. Maybe, they will hear us. I have some successes because I am vocal.

In 2010, we had a high school reunion in Cebu, Philippines. I told them, “I am an atheist. I do not like prayers. I will not tolerate any prayers in front of me.” True enough, I got my wish. There were no prayers. Only flag raising and singing of our national anthem.

There were no prayers. Ask me why.

Jacobsen: Why?

Langseth: Because I paid, mostly [Laughing]. Which means that you are powerful when having knowledge plus money. If you can afford it, right? Look at that, I spent 2,000 dollars on that reunion in 2010. My husband was even with me.

There were no prayers because I told them there are no prayers, I don’t believe in prayers. And that’s a high school reunion. 80% of my classmates; they’re still religious. But they respected my wishes because I’m the one paying for the thing.

So, that you are powerful when you have the means. I would not be able to do this thing if I didn’t have the means. Look at PATAS, when it was launched, the launch was in an open space. We call it Lunetta Park, which is in Manila.

What they did was they went to Lunetta Park with a banner saying, “Philippines Atheist and Agnostic Society,” PATAS in short. We had books because I sent them a lot of books. Richard Dawkins books and Hitchens’ books and Sagan’s books, a lot of lovely books that are not religious.

Because you cannot find these books in Manila, in the Philippines. I told them I could not sleep when they launched when they had that launching in Lunetta Park because I was afraid they would get killed.

Jacobsen: That is a legitimate fear for many people, so many non-believers.

Langseth: Would you believe nobody got killed?

Jacobsen: I will happily believe that.

Langseth: I sent them a lot of funding for their dinner and for their nice things so they’ll stay there for a while. They said, of course, a lot of people asked them what is atheism? What is that? What is that all about? Because a lot of people in the Philippines are ignorant about atheism and about Humanism.
9. Jacobsen: And why is that? Because some pastors, preachers, and priests are telling emotionally potent lies about the character and inherent nature of people who do not believe in their doctrines.

Langseth: Right, these charlatans are everywhere.

Jacobsen: Yes, a man in a dress getting mad at transgenders or trans people.

Langseth: Yes, and in fact, I always get into debates online because I am vocal. We had one of the earlier debate forums. It was “Is there a God or not?” And I was one of the admins.

This was before I made PATAS. My goodness, Filipinos were killing me online. “You’re a devil woman,” “you’re a bride of Satan,” “you’re a whore,” and so on. It was based on “Why are you doing this?” And some of them are my friends.

At least 1/3rd of my friends unfriended me.

10. Jacobsen: That’s the thing. It’s social suicide to reject the dominant culture, the dominant mythology in a lot of cases.

Langseth: Right, and of course, when someone in our forum says, “I lost my friends because of this. I say that’s not new to me. I lost about 1/3rd of them. And some of them are close to me. Some of them are in New York City.”

Jacobsen: Do you ever run into them?

Langseth: Yes, they blocked me.

11. Jacobsen: It’s not only social ostracism from a secular point of view, but it’s probably from their point of view preventing Satan from entering their lives? Not necessarily you, but the influence of the dark one?

Langseth: [Laughing] My God, I’ll tell you something. I recently reconnected with a co-worker in the Philippines. His name is Bello. You reminded me of this. When I reconnected with him, he read about me in my information.

So, he read that I made this and did that. He said, “You are the anti-Christ.” Because according to his religion, there is an anti-Christ coming from America. And he said that must be me!

Jacobsen: Of course, not only are you the anti-Christ, but the anti-Christ coming from America; of course, Jesus Christ is coming from toast.

Langseth: [Laughing] coming from toast! And this man, I knew him personally because we used to work together! It’s funny; he believed I am the anti-Christ from America. He even blocked me.

He sent me a threatening note before he blocked me. Before that, we were debating too. He was debating me. Of course, he cannot reconvert me. Because he can’t reconvert me, he blocked me. He mentioned that his church knows about me now.

They’re following me already [Laughing]. I was laughing.

Jacobsen: I’m hearing the Jaws terror music when they’re following you.

Langseth: Yes! This man, I knew him from before. It’s so ironic because this man is not even clean as a person. He loves women. He’s married, but he likes women. He flirts with a lot of women. Now, he’s telling me that I am the bad one. That I am the evil one.

References


Appendix I: Footnotes

[1] Founder, PATAS; Founder, HAPI.


[3] Post-Master’s degree, Certificate for Adult Nurse Practitioner with prescriptive privileges – College of Mount Saint Vincent, NY, USA; M.S.N., Adult Health, CUNY, NYC, USA; B.S.N., University of San Carlos, Cebu, Philippines.

An Interview with Marissa Torres Langseth, B.S.N., M.S.N. (Part Five)

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Abstract

An Interview with Marissa Torres Langseth, B.S.N., M.S.N. She discusses: Arizona chapter of the Temple of Satan in the United States; differences of belief and punishment; reversing the reality as a thought experiment; irreligion and politics; the next steps for the humanist community and the Humanist party in the Philippines; being misunderstood; Atheist Republic consulate in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; offending religious feelings; tacit theocracy and democracy; politics and gender/sex in the Philippines; Canadian beliefs in the supernatural; women dying without reproductive health rights implemented; birth rate; women as less than equal; expected challenges of an early politics party; dogma and catma; religion with men in power; compounded chauvinism of the religion; some women being used and not seeing it; the priest; the need to be tough as an irreligious leader; the use of humour; and the return to unquestioned authority.

Keywords: HAPI, humanism, Marissa Torres Langseth, PATAS, Philippines.

An Interview with Marissa Torres Langseth, B.S.N., M.S.N.: Founder, PATAS; Founder, HAPI (Part Five) 

1. Scott Douglas Jacobsen: I was talking to the Arizona chapter of the Temple of Satan in the United States.

Marissa Torres Langseth: Really? There’s a temple, okay.

Jacobsen: They have a set of beliefs. They follow them. I take them seriously. So, Michelle Short is the chapter leader and Stuart De Haan, or Stu, is the spokesperson. When I talked to them, they made an important and clear point to me about American culture.
In particular, the American Christian community such as the Evangelical community in relation to the larger culture. One of the things was when the Evangelical Christians don’t get 100% of their way 100% of the time, then they play the victim. But they not only play the victim, they are the ones generally bullying others. So, they become the bully-victim. So, it’s a certain pathology. I agree with the observation. I see that you say you offended me and, therefore, I’m going to somehow demonize you or throw epithets at you.

The extreme example (from Islamists) “you hurt my feelings, so I’m going to shoot up the cartoonists.” You are now the perpetrators of open violence and the victims are the ones that are blamed.

But a larger phenomenon that I can generalize is that Christians in America get so much of their way so much of the time, down to the Pledge of Allegiance, that when they don’t get their way in even a single state or municipality within a state, they react.

Sometimes violently, other times judicially, or sometimes socially by bullying whether in person or online, as you’ve experienced both apparently.

Langseth: Yes, it’s funny. I’m laughing at these people really. I don’t get affected anymore. I used to be emotional and could not even sleep. But now, I’m laughing at them. In fact, David Silverman approached me.

A few years ago when I was in PATAS, I joined the Blackout Secular Rally. It’s like a colored rally. I was there. We had a table too. He approached me and asked if I could speak to the AA group at the convention.

I said, “I’ll get killed if I do that” [Laughing]. I made a lot of enemies already. He said, “If nobody is hating you, you’re not doing the right thing.” That’s what he said.

2. Jacobsen: That’s always a good response. If someone is getting mad at you for critiquing or doing something different, just say, “Look, I didn’t kill him. There’s no reason to crucify me for having a different set of beliefs.”

Langseth: Right, exactly. He is right because: why are these people trying to kill me? Why are they mad at me? I didn’t do anything wrong. I’m on social media promoting my society and coming out as an atheist.

But hey, I have a good marriage. I help a lot. Why are they angry with me? He said, because you’re doing the right thing, you’re doing right.

3. Jacobsen: Even take the reverse case: imagine if a humanist was offended, and many have a right to be, and they threaten violence, how would the authorities react? They would probably be jailed. In some cultures, even many cultures, if the humanist was killed for threatening violence by the public as a citizen-based retribution for threatening violence, I suspect the authorities would be in favor of it.

Those thought experiments of reversing the examples are likely instructive as to the religious privilege that most mainline religions have in the cultures that they happen to inhabit or have grafted themselves onto.

Langseth: This is why when I was in the Philippines I told you that I had 2 security guards. I asked the Filipino humanists, “Aren’t you guys afraid if they find out we have this book that they will come after you?”

I said, “I will be going to the USA, so I’m not afraid. But what about you guys?” They said we’re not afraid.

Jacobsen: Why not?

Langseth: They’re not afraid. We use real names. Nobody uses a dummy account. We removed the dummy accounts in that book. Whatever you see in that book, they’re all real human beings. And they said they’re not afraid. I said, “I’m afraid for you.” I told them.

Jacobsen: I’m afraid for you [Laughing].

Langseth: That’s what I told them! They said, “You shouldn’t be afraid for us. We are going to be okay.” I’m glad because of the other atheists in Malaysia and Indonesia. They’re being persecuted. They’re going to get killed.

They’re being beheaded. They’re being thrown in prison. I’m glad in the Philippines that it’s not coming to that yet. I don’t know in the future. We are under the radar right now.

4. Jacobsen: When it comes to the politics in the Philippines, the outside image is that there’s a lot of chaos going on with President Duterte, who was voted in, but it might leave some humanists concerned, irreligious people in general, who are in the country or those who have loved ones in the country but who are not themselves in the country.

What has been your experience while there even though you are based in New York?

Langseth: While I was there, I was a little bit afraid when I went home. A little bit. Because I’m a
Filipino, they’ll still admit me, but I was hoping that nobody will take me; the people there, because I am an activist.

But everything was so smooth. I had my own agenda. I had my own itinerary for how, where, and what I was going to do in the country. Everything went perfectly. It was so peaceful even in those towns. It was peaceful.

Of course, we did not go to Manila now. It may not be that way now with the chaos. So, this is my hunch. People from the US or from another country think that it is dangerous because of wrong info.

One example is my husband woke me up at 2 o’clock in the morning. Of course, there’s a 12-hour difference. He woke me up at 2 o’clock in the morning telling me not to go to Manila because ISIS was there.

So, that’s what he said because that’s what they heard from CNN. He’s worried because I’m in the Philippines. I’m going to Manila that day. So, out of curiosity, I called some people in Manila.

They said, “No, that’s wrong information.” There was a guy who lost lots of money in the resort world. Of course, the news was wrong. It was wrong. That was why people from the USA were mad at CNN for a while.

In fact, my husband was so mad with that also because he alerted me. He called me, and everybody at home, at 2 o’clock in the morning. That’s what I’m saying. When information is sent wrong, the people become angry. They become afraid.

That is the reason why. They were too afraid. To be honest with you, my husband didn’t go with me because he said they could kidnap me, his wife. They stole his wife. That’s why he didn’t come with me to the Philippines.

So, politically, my neighbourhood in the Philippines is quite peaceful. I haven’t experienced anything bad except for delays in flights, which is normal anywhere. The only thing that I’ve experienced is that the people don’t want to talk about politics.

The taxi drivers, they’re like, “Let’s not talk about Duterte,” because there’s some fear over there. I sense some fear. One of our drivers, we always hire drivers in a van to tour us around. He was the chief of the Filipino police in the area.

He didn’t want to talk about Duterte. So, they were fearful to talk about him. With Marcos, nobody can talk about Marcos. Of course, everything is positive if you need to talk about the previous president.

That they have done good things and some new things, such as the windmills. So, there is some form of fear there. That people don’t want to talk about the leaders in the country.

5. Jacobsen: Looking forward to the humanist community within the Philippines, there has been a discussion between us about a humanist party, a political platform from which to make humanism public and more widely accepted within the Philippines.

How is this next step going to play out in your mind?

Langseth: As far as I have gathered, we have to apply. We had discussed it a long time ago, maybe 2 or 3 years ago. We have to apply, permission of action. Then of course, when you register groups such as HAPI, FF, and LGBT groups, we lump ourselves together.

There’s always strength in numbers and diversity. So, if all of us can collaborate, cooperate with each other, that is feasible. People are waking up. They’re seeing that there are alternatives to religion.

These political parties are the best way to come out as a humanist, having parties. It’s GLAD. It’s a political party for the LGBT. It’s one of the avenues where they came out.

6. Scott Douglas Jacobsen: So, you are misunderstood outside of the HAPI group and even within it. Why?

Langseth: It’s because people are insecure about the leadership. I’ve been leading them since its inception. I have retired. Even as a retiree, I’m still being misunderstood. I could be wrong. But maybe, it’s because of the lack of organizational skills or lack of confidence within the group.

And it seems I am being hounded out; although, they cannot do that because I am the founder. It’s that I feel they are so insecure. They feel insecure about themselves.

Jacobsen: What about from outside of the group?

Langseth: From outside, so far, it is better now. In fact, modesty aside, this is what’s going on. People will say we want to join the group because of you, because of me.

The other people in the group thought that that was wrong. That they would join because of me. I said, “Why not? What’s wrong with that? If people see you as an inspiration the people in Bacolod.”

She said she made HAPI for children because I had inspired her. There’s another one in another city. For
her, I am the light of the HAPI group. Without me, it might go downhill. A few of them are telling me that. Some of the officers have seen it and felt insecure because of how these people see me. They cannot lead. This is the reason why I even removed myself from the HAPI leadership group, so that they can lead.

At the same token, the same people are complaining because the board of trustees are not even responding to their issues. So, what’s going on with our group? All societies have flaws, have issues, but this is common in the Filipino community.

This is my second society. The reason why I cannot leave fully even if I’m retired. I’m still watching over them because I did not want it to go downhill when I leave because that’s what happened with my first group, my first society, which was called PATAS.

The leaders now think that I’m micromanaging or that I’m not a leader. Now, I’m a ‘divider.’ I divide them. You think I would do that? You think I would divide my own group? Of course not.

This is the reason why I said, “Why are they misunderstanding me? Is it a deliberate misunderstanding me or to make me respond to them or to irk me or something that?” I don’t know.

But I am sure that they misunderstood me because of the posting. But I cannot help these people who will tell me you are our inspiration to our group, to our lives. Is there something wrong with that?

**Jacobsen:** No, I see nothing wrong with being an inspiration for a group.

**Langseth:** A real leader would inspire people. If you are a good leader, you will inspire them to do more, not less. And this is why when I retired, I made HAPI-SHADE. I made that because it’s to augment our activities.

In fact, it is also my strategy, so that in case the location or a specific chapter has no meet up, the HAPI-SHADE will have a regular meet up. Because they always do that. They always have children coming in and teaching them.

So, that’s part of HAPI as a whole in general. So, why did the people think of it as a divisive strategy? I’ve been a leader for so many years. There are strategies that we need to do in order for our society to survive and that was my strategy.

It was never to divide; it was never to compete with anybody. In fact, it’s to augment the activities because some of these people think we’re only volunteers. We’ll do it once a year or once a month, or whenever we are not working.

But that should not be right. When you are a volunteer at a specific time, you should volunteer. That’s me; I’m Westernized. If you volunteer, you should do it once a week, or maybe one hour a week or once a month. A society cannot survive with a once a year event. It is not a society, it’s not an activist group. It’s the HAPI group, once a Years because they think they’re only volunteers and that attitude irks me.

**Jacobsen:** Where else do you feel misunderstood within the group?

**Langseth:** For now, that’s all. Before, it was bad. During the PATAS days, back in 2013, it was bad. I was not only misunderstood, but they were voting things. They were making stories about me, which were bad.

But that all went away because they weren’t true. But this time, this is what is bugging me. That misunderstanding that I am dividing them, that I am making my own events to divide them. And that’s not true at all.

7. Jacobsen: Also, off-tape we were talking about some things in the news such as the case with the Atheist Republic consulate in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia.

**Langseth:** Yes.

**Jacobsen:** There are legitimate fears around “being hunted down” by the authorities based on the statement by the minister, as it is an Islamic country. If you look at HAPI’s case, if it became more known, what are some of the fears there for you or for the group?

**Langseth:** I am sure that is a legitimate fear. This is why we have to take down an article about what’s going on with the Atheist Republic in Malaysia. Because somebody wrote an article, it was on our page.

We had to take it down. That legitimate fear is because we are getting known already and there is a plan of making a party, a humanist party, in the future. If we become known, I’m sure.

They are going to hunt down the founder. Because that is the founder’s fault, why did she make that? What is happening in Malaysia? They are looking for Armin because he’s the founder, even though he’s based out of Canada, in Vancouver.

In fact, Armin told me before that he had a lot of death threats already. And even before that incident, he had a lot of death threats. How much more now? So, that is legitimate. It could spread to the Philippines.
Because our government is also somewhat corrupt. Malaysia is mostly Islamic. The Philippines is mostly Catholic, and the CBPC. If the CBPC will find out about HAPI, I’m sure they’re going to put a price on my head.

But again, I’m glad I am here. I am fortunate that I am here in America. They cannot touch me. But I am afraid for the people in the Philippines, really. This is the reason why I asked them about this book.

If someone can get a hold of that book, they can be hunted down by the CBPC, the Catholic Bishop Society in the Philippines. They also hunted Carlos for showing up in the church holding up something that offended their feelings.

8. Jacobsen: What did they mean by offended religious feelings? What did they mean by that? Why is it illegitimate?

Langseth: During the time of the Spanish regime, there was a law about that. I forgot what number, because it’s been there forever. There is a law that if you offend the religious feelings of these friars and clergy, then you can be put to jail.

They think that a person like Carlos who went to a church, has done something wrong. Has done something that will offend them because of the sarcasm. One of those friars in the Spanish regime. He had a lot of women anyways.

Jacobsen: (Laughter) Ah yes, the height of hypocrisy, again.

Langseth: There you go, it’s ongoing. It’s still ongoing because he is not out of the woodwork; he’s not out of danger yet, Carlos. He could still go back to jail. He was in jail for a few days. That was way back in 2011.

Jacobsen: This is for offending religious feelings?

Langseth: Yes, sir. He was in jail.

Jacobsen: As a Canadian, that is remarkable.

Langseth: Again, call me in the Philippines.

9. Jacobsen: Only in the Philippines. Do you consider the Philippines a tacit theocracy?

Langseth: What do you mean? It’s a sham democracy [Laughing].

Jacobsen: Religion is so dominant, and has so much political, social, and cultural sway, so as to render it as if a theocratic society without being a formal theocratic society as you might find in explicit theocratic societies in some Islamic countries, for instance.

Langseth: Maybe, it’s akin to being theocratic in a way because the problem is that these politicians, every time they want to be voted on, then they would go to church. They would ask for the help of these priests to promote them.

Because the people will believe them, they will believe the priests. They will vote for whoever is being recommended by the church.

10. Jacobsen: Is it more often men than not?

Langseth: More men? Of course, it’s 90 percent men. The CBPC is 100 percent men.

Jacobsen: There you go.

Langseth: There are no women there. It’s misogynistic. Not only that, it’s akin to theocratic because there are no women. I have not heard of a bishop who is a woman in the Philippines. Maybe, in other cultures, but in the Philippines, I haven’t heard of any.

These people, I don’t understand. Whenever these priests say you have to vote for this person, they will vote for them. They will believe the priest. This is why I get mad with even my classmates nowadays.

It’s so frustrating to me. They will go to church to pray for their loved one who is sick. I say, “Why don’t you call the hospital? It’s the 21st century.” They still believe in this bullsh*t.

11. Jacobsen: Even in Canada, I do know probably 2/5ths of the population believes in a literal devil, and then some portion believes in the efficacy of exorcism to cure you of a non-problem.

Langseth: Boy, really?

Jacobsen: I find that interesting. When you’re pointing out that the politicians will go to the religious authorities, the priests, to ask for help to get elected, you have a mix of politics and religion at a social level, which then leads to a nearly 100 percent male political leadership with the backing of the Roman Catholic Church.

So, does this also reflect, the “misogyny” in feminist terms, the patriarchal nature of the Abrahamic faiths and their mixing up with politics? Now, modern religious apologists argue for women’s rights in their scriptures (fair enough and a noble effort), but, of course, only in the light of the women’s rights movements.

Langseth: That is the reason why the RH still, the planned parenthood bill, they said it was approved already after 15 years. It has been approved; it has not been implemented. Because some priests, they are holding back the implementation because it’s a sin and so on.
12. Jacobsen: The bottom line is women are suffering because it’s not being implemented. Hell, women are dying because it’s not being implemented.

Langseth: Exactly, not only that, there’s overpopulation. We are 100 million now in the Philippines. 100 million.

Jacobsen: What’s the birth rate?

Langseth: I’m not sure right now, but it is high and the death rate is pretty high. I don’t have the stats right now.

Jacobsen: According to Google, the 2015 birth rate is 2.94. It has declined from the 1960 rate, which was about 7.5 to 8 per woman. As I look at the research that has been done internationally, it shows over and over again.

If women have a choice in reproduction, the number goes to a healthier replacement rate and the health of the country on all metrics rises, the empowerment of women is the main contributor to the development of societies. Religions, more often than not, hinder this, unfortunately.

Langseth: Absolutely, I have read a book by Judith Hand. It’s about women’s empowerment. And yes, you’re right. If women are the leaders, we have a better society. But ever since the Bible, there’s little to no mention of a woman in leadership.

Jacobsen: Not many, and if so it is as a sidekick, basically, to the superheroes in the Bible.

Langseth: Or being raped.

13. Jacobsen: Or being comparatively sold for the value of property or animals, if lucky, or being compared to slaves and property in, for instance, the 10th Commandment in Exodus, this is consistent.

I know there are sophisticated theologians who read more in between in the lines than most do, but those are few and far between. Most people don’t read it that way. Most people take it as a manual for life and they don’t even read all of it if they do.

Langseth: Right, there’s even more work to do. We have a lot of work to do. Judith Hand is the author of a book about women’s empowerment called Women, Power and the Biology of Peace. She is an author about a book I read it in 2012. We have a lot of work to do.

I don’t think I’m going to see humanism in my lifetime be in a position where there’s more power. I’m afraid I will not be able to see that. But I’m trying my best. Godless Grace, this was launched in New York City. It was made by David Orenstein.

He is also my friend. Godless Grace, there’s a lot of people there. He interviewed a lot of humanists and atheists who have done good in their country, in their location, and in their locality. Our hope is in the Humanist Party.

14. Jacobsen: As with most early political parties, they will undergo definite challenges in original formation, in maintenance and growth.

Langseth: That is expected. The growing pains.

Jacobsen: [Laughing] I expect that.

Langseth: The growing pains are terrible, sometimes.

Jacobsen: I suspect this would be greater for a religious party in a religiously dominated country.

Langseth: We expect that. These people are bright. Each person has their own opinion, their own interpretation. This is why it’s difficult to group them, to herd them. Herding them is difficult because they are all thinking.

In general, the religious people are told how it is and what to say, what their values and stances are. It is easy. But the irreligious, they are intelligent, like you. You have your own opinion of something else, which is different from the next irreligious person.

Other people have other opinions. So, if there are 10 people in the party, you will have 10 opinions. If you have a religious party, you have 1 or 2 opinions, that’s it.

15. Jacobsen: I heard this called the split between dogma and catma. One, and you got it, is about dogma for those reading is there is a single doctrine with maybe minor room for interpretation and wiggle room for interpretation, which people believe on faith for the most part and critical thinking is discouraged.

Everyone will believe it as a whole. The catma is a set of meta-beliefs that are fuzzy. You don’t know what is the case, but you have probabilistic opinions about what may or may not be the case on specific issues.

Langseth: Dogma, I get it. It’s difficult. Building these societies was difficult, how much more if you have a formal Humanist Party in the Roman Catholic Philippines? If I had gossiping among intelligent people in my own group, considering who they are, some of them said, “I’m not ready for that.”

Someone said I might get killed. There’s also fear there. One of them is an intelligent person. I won’t...
mention who he is, but I invited him to join us to become a board of trustees because he has no problems except to spend his money.

But he told me that him and other people are fighting over this. They are having issues already because they are anti-Duterte or they are pro-Duterte. The problem with some humanists is they let politics get into their system. We have a few like that.

Although, this person is talking about Islam as a formal HAPI member, but he’s in the group. If there was no Duterte, there would be no problem, maybe, but, of course, there are always problems.

What I am saying is people have to get off that, their personal issues. This is one of the many reasons why another society has been disrupted, has been dissolved. Because of personality clashes about politics.

There was one time it was about to disrupt HAPI. I had to put my foot forward and set my foot down and said, “We will not discuss Duterte in this room.” There was a lot of complaints coming from anti-Duterte and pro-Duterte.

They asked me who I’m siding with. I said, “I’m not siding with Duterte. I have no voice. I am a US citizen.” That is the height of chaos if HAPI was stopped. I got some backlash, of course, but I told them you are not allowed to talk about that in this group.

Of course, I warned them because some people will go in the HAPI forum and talk about Duterte. Then they will fight. And if nobody can stop that, I will stop that. I’m strict. I said, “This is not a crowd for politics. This is humanism. This is a humanist arena. If you cannot let go of your political allegiance, you might as get out.”

That’s the reason why it stopped. I had complaints from foreigners saying your group is becoming anti-Duterte or pro-Duterte. That’s the reason why I had to stop that. People complained to me that your group is becoming pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte.

I said that we have to stop talking about this in the group. That’s the reason why we’re still here. The other societies are gone and dissolved because of that, regarding personality clashes regarding Duterte and politics. So, it helped that I am from the USA.

**Jacobsen:** When I observe the leaders of religions, more often than not, the ones in power and authority, they’re men.

**Langseth:** Of course.

**Jacobsen:** Why is this the case? Not only why is this the case, but, how is this the case?

**Langseth:** Because the Philippines is patriarchal. We recognize men as the chief or the master or the commander of the household. That’s why it’s always men and they think that they’re better than women.

**16. Jacobsen:** Do you think there’s that certain compounded chauvinism where you have the male chauvinism that many women will perpetuate as well, but also the religious chauvinism of whatever religion happens to be in dominance? For instance, a Catholic male will have a certain air about him, especially the leadership.

**Langseth:** One of the many reasons why I did not marry a Filipino is that being mismatched is common in the Philippines. They think because they are men, then they are better than women.

Not only that, the way they talk to women is condescending. I had experiences with Filipino men. I always fight with them. I’m not for Filipino men, nope. It’s from religion; it’s from when they were born. They see it’s the father or the men running the show. In fact, when I was small, I saw my father beating my mother.

So, it was normal for men to beat women, our mothers. Of course, within myself as a child, because they think they are the head of the family, they always think they are the ruler or the chief of the household.

It’s all because that’s what they were taught and what was told to them in the second Sunna in the Quran or in the Philippines, men, even Duterte is vocal, and open, about him having a girlfriend besides having a wife. Is that right?

**Jacobsen:** I didn’t know he was taking the French leadership route.

**Langseth:** He was proud that he has a girlfriend. Showing off the girlfriend and in fact he even said, “Why? Who doesn’t have a girlfriend? What rich man doesn’t have a girlfriend on the side?”

I said to my husband, “He doesn’t have a girlfriend. This is how Filipinos portray themselves. Their machismo.”

**Jacobsen:** Would the word “weak” fit?

**Langseth:** They are over-exhibiting their masculinity. Their machismo.

**Jacobsen:** Overcompensating?

**Langseth:** Yes, that’s the word. They’re only overcompensating. Because, I hate to say it, but these Filipino men are not pretty. They are overcompensating.
Jacobsen: There’s no chemistry. There’s no foreplay at all to these things, right? So, the men’s own overcompensation creates a cycle of bad relationship experiences for them, where they may then even further overcompensate?

Langseth: And women cannot see that.

Jacobsen: Right. That’s sad.

Langseth: Of course, we did not see it before. I saw it now.

Jacobsen: That’s also with Duterte, with the girlfriend or the French president with the girlfriend. The girlfriend: she’s not seeing it. They don’t see they’re being used.

Langseth: That’s what I’m saying. Women, they don’t see it. I didn’t see it before until now I’m seeing. This is what is wrong with most Filipinos, not all. They just, they think it is acceptable to have that thinking, to have a girlfriend on top of your wife.

They think it’s acceptable in society; it’s condemned by society, by the Filipinos, which is wrong. Nothing happens without political precedent.

Jacobsen: Or JFK.

Langseth: JFK. Look at JFK, they cannot even show that they have a girlfriend. In the Philippines, it’s acceptable. What’s wrong with that? What’s wrong with us? What’s wrong with Filipinos?

17. Jacobsen: It shows a culture of maybe enforced morals around sexuality that makes any deviancy so bad as to need it to be not talked about and, therefore, very “hush hush,” very secretive. And that can create a lot of perversions.

Langseth: It’s sad because it’s still happening and this is the 21st century. It should have gone already.

It’s still there. This is why humanism is one route, one avenue to change that thinking and show that it is wrong.

Of course, you can say, “Humanism is also good because it takes away the pain. You don’t want people to be in pain. Humanism is trust in humanity as human beings.” You don’t say, “That is fine. There is a 2nd life.”

They all think of the second life. In the second life, it will be better. This is why they accept bad things right now because they think the second life will be better. Look at the prisoners, as we discussed, they are over 80 to 90 percent religious in prison.

Because they think that it’s alright to do bad things right now because the second life is better.

18. Jacobsen: It’s the similar syndrome of, maybe not similar but, an associated syndrome of committing “sin”: go to the priest, tell the priest through confession, the priest blesses you, and that confession and blessing absolves you from blame.

So, it is an easy out. I only pose this as an idea, as a loose theoretical framework of explanation, but not a certainty, a “catma” in other words. The idea that the easy out, whether it’s through confession or a belief in an afterlife.

Thinking, “Jesus has my back,” that thing. It may breed people who are on the fence for criminal behaviour to go the next step to full criminal behaviour because Jesus has their back or they can get their easy out from confession and so on.

Langseth: Exactly, that’s what’s happening. The story isn’t right. People do a lot of bad things that they are going to do because hey they can be absolved and go to the priest and after that you can start all over again. Or when you die, there will be Jesus and ask for forgiveness.

19. Jacobsen: My sense is from you, from others who are irreligious leaders, in the irreligious world, are people who are tough. Because you have to deal with higher standards.

It’s funny on the playing field of real life because you’re considered an automatic out in a lot of social life. So, there’s that. It makes it a little bit difficult and a little bit tenser, so you almost have to be a tiny bit on your toes.

You have to have your teeth out a tiny bit all the time, psychologically, just in case. And I feel that leaders in the irreligious movement often have to have that. Even to the point of having to call out for militant atheism, I believe Richard Dawkins did in that Ted Talk.

I believe he should have rephrased it. So for those reading this, if you plan on leading in the irreligious world in general, you have to be tough. It’s just part of the job.

Langseth: Yes. Not only do you have to be tough, but you have to show them that you’re an example of true Humanism. For example, I’ve been married for 22 years. They said, “Why are you still married for 22 years when your husband is not a humanist?? I said, “Why not? We respect each other. We love each other. That’s enough.”

Jacobsen: That’s all it takes.

Langseth: That’s enough. We don’t fight about politics. He’s voted Trump. I didn’t vote for Trump, but he doesn’t Trump for so many things. But he voted for him anyway. What I’m saying is, you don’t
get politics and religion into your system or your married life or your personal life.

Believe me, there will be a lot of broken homes. But because of the respect and love, we’re still together. For example, I will not condone any of my members to be girlfriends of married men.

But for me, I cannot condone that. That’s not humanism because you intend to hurt other people. I don’t condone for my group members to do bad things because we are supposed to be examples of good deeds.

We should do good things to people, not bad things. We should be an example. Especially the officers, they should be an example of what a true humanist is; not hypocrisy. To say, “I’m a humanist,” but then you’re doing a lot of hypocrisy.

That’s why we have to be tough as leaders. We could get a lot of bashing, of course. I get a lot of bashing, but I laugh at it now.

20. Jacobsen: It also helps to have a good sense of humour about all this stuff.

Langseth: Yes.

Jacobsen: You argue for women’s reproductive rights. A religious leader has a spasm. Usually, he foams at the mouth. It comes out later they are involved in some sex scandal. You’ve read about the similar cases. I’ve read about similar cases too.

Where it happens and life has a certain humour about it, if you take the right angle, at appropriate times, there is humour.

Langseth: Precisely, we have to have humour in our lives. We can’t be serious all the time. Laughter is still the best medicine.

Jacobsen: That’s right.

Langseth: I mean it still is. Of all the drugs in the world, laughter is the best medicine. When I went to the Philippines, I laughed a lot. I laughed a lot of my sister and my brothers, we laughed a lot.

I am pro-LGBT because they’re humans. We have to respect them too. Of course, and because, my sister is a lesbian. But respecting human beings, it’s not in words. It has to be in action too.

People, they want to preach, the priests, but they do other things. They do bad things on the side. And that is ironic for them to do that.

Jacobsen: And it goes back to that unquestioned authority given to them.

Langseth: Unfortunately, the Filipinos don’t question their bosses; anybody with authority. They don’t question.

References


Appendix I: Footnotes

[1] Founder, PATAS; Founder, HAPI.


[3] Post-Master’s degree, Certificate for Adult Nurse Practitioner with prescriptive privileges – College of Mount Saint Vincent, NY, USA; M.S.N., Adult Health, CUNY, NYC, USA; B.S.N., University of San Carlos, Cebu, Philippines.

Ask A Genius (or Two): Conversation with Kirk Kirkpatrick and Rick Rosner on the “American Disease” and “Super Empowerment”

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Abstract

Rick Rosner and I conduct a conversational series entitled Ask A Genius on a variety of subjects through In-Sight Publishing on the personal and professional website for Rick. Rick exists on the World Genius Directory listing as the world’s second highest IQ at 192 based on several ultra-high IQ test scores developed by independent psychometricians. Kirk Kirkpatrick earned a score at 185, near the top of the listing, on a mainstream IQ test, the Stanford-Binet. Both scores on a standard deviation of 15. A sigma of ~6.13 for Rick – a general intelligence rarity of 1 in 2,314,980,850 – and ~5.67 for Kirk – a general intelligence rarity of 1 in 136,975,305. Of course, if a higher general intelligence score, then the greater the variability in, and margin of error in, the general intelligence scores because of the greater rarity in the population. This amounts to a joint interview or conversation with Kirk Kirkpatrick, Rick Rosner, and myself on the “American Disease,” as identified and labeled by Kirk, and “Super Empowerment,” as observed and named by Rick.

Keywords: general intelligence, Kirk Kirkpatrick, Rick Rosner, sigma, Stanford-Binet, World Genius Directory.

Ask A Genius (or Two): Conversation with Kirk Kirkpatrick and Rick Rosner on the “American Disease” and “Super Empowerment”

1. Scott Douglas Jacobsen: So, let’s open the discussion with the election and lead into healthcare. Rick, I believe you had some thoughts on the election. We had some discussions before.

Rick Rosner: Kirk wanted to go deeper than that. Right before we started taping, he wanted to talk about deeper causes because everybody has had a stomach full of the more obvious proximate causes, but I believe deeper trends help generate the situate we’re in.

Kirk Kirkpatrick: Yes, I think he’s right. If I can start the conversation, my background is rather diverse considering most Americans. I lived in 8 countries. I have probably been to every country in the northern hemisphere. I speak several languages.

My wife is a native Chinese. I tend to take a more international look at things. But when I returned back to living in the United States, one the things that struck me was the way people think they are entitled to hold an opinion.
And they confuse the entitlement of holding an opinion with the veracity of the opinion. In other words, “I have a right to hold an opinion, and that means you need to consider this opinion as valid.” So, I see, if I can give an example.

If I had never been to LA and I was speaking with Rick, and we were having a discussion about Los Angeles, and Rick said to me, “You know, Kirk, I grew up here. I lived here all of my life.” I would start deferring to him about finding out what Los Angeles was like.

I would be the last person in the world to start arguing with him about a place I had never been to before, and that he happened to live in and had grown up in, and is a rational, intelligent human being. Do you understand my point?

Rosner: Yup.

Jacobsen: Yes.

Rosner: And I agree with it. I’ve been calling it “super empowerment.” Where a lot of our tech and social media give people reinforcement of the idea that whatever you believe must be the truth, you’re entitled to spread that truth by whatever means necessary.

Kirkpatrick: The evangelists, I think that’s a very good point. The way I put it, or the succinct way I say it, “A Google search does not an expert make.” Because you Googled an article and read it doesn’t even tell me that you 1) had the background to understand the article that you read or 2), and more importantly, to validate the article and find out whether or not the author knew what he was talking about.

Rosner: I heard on NPR yesterday, day before. Some country or entity wants to install something before you’re allowed to comment on the article. You have to take a quiz on the article to make sure you even read it and understood it.

Kirkpatrick: [Laughing].

Jacobsen: [Laughing] That’s very good.

Kirkpatrick: I can give you a perfect example that will illustrate it excellently. If you remember a while back, we did a deal, or I say we were part of a deal, with Iran to try to prevent them from developing nuclear weapons.

While that was going on, I had a phone call from a woman who claimed to be from my congress, which I don’t believe. But she said she was. I’ll quote her as quickly or as accurately as I can. She wanted to know my opinion on “Obama’s deal with Iran.”

And those were her exact words. I said to her, “Ma’am, can I ask you a couple of questions first?” She said, “Yes.” I said, “What is your opinion on Obama’s deal with Iran?” She said, “I don’t like it.”

Rosner: Sure.

Kirkpatrick: I said, “Have you been to Iran?” She said, “No.” I said, “Can you name 5 cities in Iran?” She said, “No.” I said, “How about 3?” She said, “No.” I said, “Can you name the countries that border Iran?” She said, “No.” I said, “Then, what is it that bothers you about this deal?” She said, “It threatens Israel.” I said, “That sounds reasonable. Can you name 5 cities in Israel?” She said, “No.” I said, “Can you name 3?”

She said, “No.” I said, “Can you name the countries that border Israel?” She said, “No.” I said, “Have you ever visited the place or been there?” She said, “No.”

I said, “Then allow me to answer your question.” I said, “Firstly, I don’t know any deal that Obama did with Iran, but I know a deal that the P5+1 nations did with Iran under the auspices of the Security Council at the UN. If that’s the one that you’re referring to, I’ve been to Iran and can easily name 5 cities in the place, and can tell you every country that touches it.”

I continued, “And on top of that, I lived in Israel. So, 5 cities are really easy. I can tell you every country that touches Israel. I have been to all of them. And in spite of all of this, I still don’t know enough about this arms deal to form an opinion one way or another. So, the operative question for me is, ‘Why do you care what I think? And why do you even have an opinion?’”

Of course, she hung the phone up.

Rosner: Nice.

Kirkpatrick: That’s my point. You’re going to have an opinion on an arms deal that you incorrectly describe to these people, and it’s an arms deal! You know, it’s like, who are you?

Rosner: What she characterized as an arms deal was the nuclear weapons development negotiation going on, I guess, right?

Kirkpatrick: She meant the P5+1 nations’ deal with Iran. But my point is, you’re going to form an opinion about something like that. You’re not bothering to educate yourself? Not knowing the countries that border Iran?

It isn’t that advanced. Let’s put it this way, if Rick and I were talking, and Rick put an equation in front of me that said, “y+8=4,” and I looked at him and
said, “You can’t add letters to numbers.” I’m not sure he’d take my opinion on math very seriously.

Rosner: Yes, Yes.

Kirkpatrick: That’s the point I’m trying to make. This is what I call the “American Disease.” Where because we have TV, cable news, and Google, we think, “Oh, I’ll Google this.” The American becomes unaware of the fact that the guy who wrote the article doesn’t know any more about the subject than he does. He’s writing down what somebody else has said, over and over again.

Rosner: I’ve watched a lot of the middle to Left-leaning news. I watched a lot of MSNBC. I reluctantly watch CNN. With Fox News, at least you know, you’re getting biased news. CNN presents itself as news and tries to be even handed, or at least they present the appearance of being even handed.

That involves assembling these panels of 6 or 8 people. Most of whom either don’t know what they’re talking about or who are dispensing fairly pure bullshit. And this was a staple of coverage during the election. CNN has stayed with that format.

All of the little tricks they learned about drawing in eyeballs during the election. These cross-partisan panels. People on Trump’s side. People on the other side. Countdown clocks, town halls, they’ve kept it all. It’s as if the election is still going on.

It is endless presentations of uninformed and/or deliberately misleading opinion.

Kirkpatrick: Yes, I have to give you credit here because I can’t stomach any of it. I watch no, absolutely zero, television news. So, you understand, I can’t do it.

Rosner: I used to write jokes for late night TV. Which meant that I...

Kirkpatrick: you had to...

Rosner: Yes, I had to be informed. I’ve kept the habit. Much to the detriment of my blood pressure.

Jacobsen: [Laughing].

Kirkpatrick: Here’s what I advise my friends who come and ask me, because my news is a little tough, in that, I speak multiple languages. I am able to read Het Parool in Holland or Die Welt in German. So, I get a little different viewpoint.

But what I tell them is to go to Google News, if they go down to Google News at the bottom, there’s a link that says, “Other languages.” Or there’s about 20 overseas editions of Google News that are English, but presented from the perspective of the person in that country.

So, for example, India has an English Google News and Australia has an English Google News, Israel has an English Google News, and South Africa has an English Google News. If you click that, then there’s every article that you’ll never see in the United States.

Rosner: That’s really good to know. I get sick of my three stupid go-to sources. The ones that I can stomach. I go through it pretty fast. I’m unnecessarily informed after going through it.

Kirkpatrick: They all have to buy it. That’s why I say, “If you get a bunch of them, you read them in the middle.” The other thing I tell people is that if you want to, for example, tell me about Germany and the problem they’re having, or perhaps not having, with the immigrants, and then try to sit there and argue with me.

First thing I’m going to do. I’m going to research it in the German press. Because when I lived in Europe, sometimes, you can see the European press writing in glee about a problem The United of States was having.

When you look down into the problems, it wasn’t nearly as bad. There was a lot added to it because they wanted that. That goes in all directions for any country. I’m not blaming Europeans or anybody else.

Rosner: I had a discussion with a super conservative friend about Sweden being the rape capital of Europe because of the Muslims. My buddy is an artist, which means he’s using his eyes and hands all day but his ears are free.

He pipes in ten hours a day of conservative talk about this stuff. He is very informed on all the conservative talking points. The story about this rape in Sweden. You poke at it a little bit. It starts to fall apart because it starts turning into mush where you really have to do a lot of research on it.

It’s all the parts, but you’re not left with anything because now you’re left with uncertainty. One reason that Sweden seems rapey is that they have a super inclusive definition of sexual assault that can include things such as micro aggressions.

Kirkpatrick: It is worse than that, okay? Now, let me give you an example, my company, the one I am the CEO of, has about 15 employees who has 10 on contract. We build countrywide telecommunication systems, but we generally use the manpower of whoever is buying our system to build it.

So, let’s get to Sweden, I’m talking to some young thing in the bar. I tell her I’m the CEO of a telecommunication company. Then we go to bed
because she thinks I’m hot. In the next morning, I get a phone call.

I say, “I’ve got to do this and that. It’s my accountant. I don’t have a secretary.” She asks, “How big is your company?” I reply, “We have five employees and ten contractors.” Now, she thought I was this rich Apple type CEO, but, in fact, now she found out that my company is not as big as she thought it was.

That’s right: I deceived her. That’s rape after the fact. That’s what Julian Assange has been accused of; that exact thing. That he lied to the woman about who he was. I’m not going to show what they do about it, but I don’t think that that’s right in the other direction.

But it’s the same thing when you’re talking to a conservative about the crime rate in the UK. If I raise my fist to you in the UK, then I’ve assaulted you, even though I’ve never hit you. In the United States, that’s not a violent crime and in the UK it is.

But I think that’s my point in the case of discussing this about Sweden. I will move this on social media. This will come up and almost lead into the conversation. A guy who is not only Swedish, but he lives there. He’s living there now. He’s never lived any place else.

I’ll still have Americans who argue with him. Sure, that’s much more.

Rosner: Yes, so, in a deeper sense or looking at its people feeling super empowered, at the same time, they’re almost more manipulable than at a lot of other points in history.

Kirkpatrick: Does that mean the Dunning-Kruger effect?

Rosner: Yes, I love that thing. I tweeted about that during the election so many times. To explain to everybody, the Dunning-Kruger Effect, let me explain: in movies, there are magical characters. Often, in movies, dumb people have a special wisdom. They know they’re dumb.

Forrest Gump, he’s retarded. He’s got an IQ 70. Yet, he’s full of this wisdom, a deeper wisdom that goes beyond his academic difficulties. That’s in the movies. In real life, the Dunning-Kruger Effect is that somebody who’s dumb is also dumb about their level of dumbness.

So, a lot of people who are dumb think they’re super smart because they’re too dumb to realize that they’re dumb. There’s nothing magic about them. There’s no deep wisdom about them. There’s a deep assurance that they know what’s what.

They’ve been catered to by these news sources. Fox being the first one to it. I’m not sure my understanding is completely accurate, but it is my understanding. That 30-40 years ago conservative think-tanks started researching how to win people.

They realized that dumb, colourful, easy branding, easy issues were the way to grab low information – meaning dumb – voters, and yank them around. They started by that. Anyway, Fox News has been going for 37 years. People have their brain tenderized.

They are super confident about what they think, but they’re not good in the head.

Kirkpatrick: I think you’re giving them a little too much credit.

Jacobsen: [Laughing].

Kirkpatrick: Let me tell you what mean by that. I think this is more Rupert saying that there’s the gullible objects. First, what I’ll say is this, we say it about CNN and MSNBC. I think MSNBC tried to be FOX a little bit.

But what I would say is most of the American media and a lot of European media are biased towards sensationalists. If it bleeds, it leads. They want to be sensational. CNN is the worst with this, but Fox is appealing to a specific constituency that Rupert Murdoch realized CNN wasn’t available to feed these people.

When I was dealing with a man who was very close in the group, I helped set up Sky Latin America for him down in Latin America. He told me that they had brought in a bunch of marketers who’d do a marketing plan for Sky Latin American.

The groups produced a document about a 158 pages long. Rupert wasn’t there. Rupert came down. My friend whose name happens to be Scott, came in to say you may have this marketing plan in his hand, which they put together.

He said, “I handed it to Rupert.” As I see Rupert glance at the cover, he said, “This hand never stopped moving towards the next page.” Finally, he dropped it. He looked at him. He said, “Scott, you buy the football. You put dishes on the roofs. That’s the marketing.” You get it?

I would say deep understanding of these markets. 80% of the decisions when multi-channel video is made on the basis of sports program in Latin America; soccer is everything. So, Rupert was much more fundamental than Scott was.

Guys, it’s really simple. These guys want football, buy the rights, then y’all run to you to get it, okay? Same with FOX. You could out that conservative
Rosner: I can’t get me to shut up about the size of the American population. 325-329 million people. You got the dumbest half of the country. Then half of that again is the dumbest half of the dumbest half. That’s still 80 million people.

Kirkpatrick: FOX has this subscribership of about 30 million. So, that’s not even half of that, but look at how much money they’ve made.

Rosner: By the way, this is little off what you were saying, where the coverage is people who are on the Left. They lost the election, lost the government. All the branches feel pretty angst and bereft.

Perhaps, beyond even the immediate or midterm consequences of the laws, I think it’s hard on people’s sadness that the coverage took the form of sports coverage during the election. So, it’s not the political implications, but there’s this emotional bond you have with your political team now.

The way that people either love or hate you the way they do with the Patriots.

Kirkpatrick: You definitely have this, but I think there’s ignorance. I know that there’s a lot of — I didn’t say – angst because we lost the election, but this in my opinion is fundamentally different. I’ll tell you why for a couple of reasons. Number one, as I told you, I’ve lived more than half of my life in other countries.

You might imagine other countries follow American politics closely. The reason is because it affects their lives. But until the second George Bush election, I had never seen that end up with the American people. What I mean by that is people saying, “I don’t like your government at all, but I think the Americans are best people who work.” You understand what I mean?

Rosner: We’re starting to get hit hard with our own brushes.

Kirkpatrick: Yes. After the second George Bush election, people started saying, “Straighten this out, if that is the way you are, then, maybe, the American people are not who we thought they were.” I don’t think the average American understands the picture that we started painting for over the border.

If I can give you an example, did either of you gentlemen see the movie ‘The American Sniper’?

Jacobsen: Nope.

Rosner: No.

Kirkpatrick: I haven’t either, on purpose. But I know about the scene because I went out and looked at it, because of the description of the scene. The first scene of this movie they’re attacking a neighborhood in Iraq. I believe it’s Iraq.

The red’s a woman in a Hijab and Abaya, where she’s got a 10-year-old kid.

Rosner: I heard about that scene too.

Kirkpatrick: You’ve heard about it? So, he shoots the woman. The whole time he’s sitting there saying, “Please don’t throw the grenade, please don’t throw.” But she starts to throw and he kills her. The little 10-year-old kid picks up the grenade and he starts back with this.

Of course, to make it more dramatic, his partner says, “If you’re wrong about this, you’re going to go to prison.” And, of course, he hesitates, the boy throws the grenade, but it doesn’t make it all the way to Americans. So, he saved their lives.

I say to people, “If you watch this scene in this movie, the only thing about the movie is that you convert the American soldier into a Soviet Union informant and make the woman and the boy Afghans, how would you feel? Would you feel the Soviet guy was a hero because he is saving the other Soviet soldiers from this evil Afghani woman and her child, as they’re invading their country?”

Rosner: Not so, much.

Kirkpatrick: Not so much, what’s different about the situation with Chris, Scott? We’re invading their country. They’re defending their homes the same way. Yet, now, he’s a hero and the whole world looks and wonders.

Let me give you a second example to chock the crap out of them, my wife is Chinese. She became an American citizen. She applied for American Citizenship. They had a nationalization ceremony. 80 people got their citizenship. I went to it.

While she went to what should have been a solemn ceremony, they had a big screen in the centre of the room that would pop down when they played the national anthem. People stood up. After they said their oaths and stuff, they handed out to these little American flags.

After the ceremony, the screen comes back down, then they start playing Proud to be an American, the country music song. A woman walks on stage swinging a huge American flag back and forth. She yells at these guys and says, “Now, new American citizens stand up, wave your flag and sing.”
Now, I’m sure my wife has never heard this song before. She’s sitting right in front of me. They (new immigrants) were sitting together. But my point was when the song is over, of course, the 80 guys stood up and smiled and waved their flags.

It was as soon as it was over my wife not knowing what she was doing looks over at me six rows across the room and says out loud, “Just like IN CHINA, So Communist.”

Jacobsen: [Laughing].

Kirkpatrick: Guys, that’s exactly what I was thinking. I spent time behind the Iron Curtain. I was thinking “This looks eerily like in Moscow.” What do you mean stand up, wave your flag and sing? Is that an order? I never did anything for it. Scott, you’re Canadian, right?

Jacobsen: I am, yes.

Kirkpatrick: Yet, can you imagine a lumberjack in the middle of the nationalization ceremony?

Jacobsen: [Laughing] If on the condition that it was a replay of a Monty Python song.

Kirkpatrick: Oh, right, right. And you don’t have the guys doing Doug & Bob McKenzie impressions from the podium. No, I can end this by saying my team I hired him out of Moscow. He grew up in the Soviet Union and has lived in the US for 5 years.

He came to me and said “One of the big differences between the Soviet Union and the US is that we have understood that our propaganda was all bullshit, “But you guys believe yours!”

Rosner: Because it comes out of an earnest people because the basic American values are not cynical. The 20th century marked the decay of American institutions that people used to believe in wholeheartedly: the church, Boy Scouts, patriotism, and so on. Everything got torched.

That stuff worked great for a while. So, it’s easy to sell people on stuff that used to work without examination and qualification. I remember in the ‘60s being taught critical thinking skills in elementary school.

There was a lesson on the nine ways advertising manipulates you. It was good to have that.

Jacobsen: [Laughing].

Rosner: If that is still taught, but I know that we’re in the middle of a bunch of new technology and new social media, that makes us vulnerable because we haven’t learned the considerate bullshit. We’re still virgins.

When I worked in bars, one of my jobs was walking through the bar and looking for underage people who’d snuck in one way or another. One way I found them was I’d look for the clump of lame guys over there night after night without picking anybody up.

If there were several of those gathered around somebody, I knew at the center of the cluster of lame-Os would be an underage girl who had yet to bullshit. She didn’t have the experience yet on how to detect bullshit, how to push it away.

We are in that situation, where there’s all this new stuff. It looks shiny and powerful and makes us feel powerful. It makes us manipulable.

2. Jacobsen: Then maybe a closure question for the two of you: do you think social media, the new technology, amplifies the American Disease as you call it, Kirk, or the Super Empowered population as you call it, Rick?

Kirkpatrick: I think we’re both right. What I mean by this is I think it amplifies the American Disease, but as Rick implies, it’s probably going to be solved. In the end, it’s probably going to be the closest to the point that, as he mentioned before, you’re going to pull something and it’s going to pop up.

Instead, I’ve marked this is incorrect for anybody who might read.

Rosner: I totally agree with that. It takes a while to get resistant. When people first had cell phones, only 10% of the population had cell phones. We saw a lot of behaviour because it made everybody else pissed off: talking really loud on your phone in the line at the bank or in a restaurant.

Over time, people calmed down with that. Now, the new prop is texting all over the place, in crosswalks or while driving. Eventually, people will calm down with that and will learn to make better use of technology and understand. They will be less swayed by it. The trouble is by that time. It will be two or three new ways of tech to mess with people, but I remain optimistic.

Kirkpatrick: I do too.

Rosner: Is that a good place to end right there?

Jacobsen: That is a good line to end on, I think.

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Appendix I: Footnotes


Conversation with Dr. Darrel Ray on Christian Fundamentalism and Sex: Founder, Recovering from Religion

Interviewer: Scott Douglas Jacobsen

An Interview with Dr. Darrel Ray. He discusses: Christian fundamentalist upbringing; Recovering from Religion; individual factors in recovery; Richard Dawkins’ terminology of religion as a virus; unexpected allies; secular therapists; sex addiction; most bizarre sexual taboo; criteria for asexual; universal attractive characteristics; guilt around sex; unsupported and non-scientific ideas around sex; and admirable aspects of religion.

Keywords: Christian fundamentalism, Darrel Ray, religion, sex.

Abstract

Conversation with Dr. Darrel Ray on Christian Fundamentalism and Sex: Founder, Recovering from Religion

1. Scott Douglas Jacobsen: You grew up in a Christian fundamentalist family in Wichita, Kansas. From a youth perspective, what’s running through a child’s mind as they’re growing up in a fundamentalist household that is Christian?

Dr. Darrel Ray: If you think about it, as you’re growing up, you’re being taught a whole lot of things. One is which language you’re speaking or you’re going to speak. There aren’t any children that sit around thinking, I wonder why mom isn’t teaching me Chinese, or why am I not learning Zulu.

Jacobsen: [Laughing] That’s right.

Ray: It is. At the same time, you’re learning the language. You’re also learning a lot of other things. You’re learning how to have polite manners at the table. You’re learning how to treat other people, your brothers, and sisters, and you’re learning what the religion is.

To the child, language acquisition and religious acquisition are happening at the same time and you’re not going to question why am I not being taught Catholicism or Buddhism. You accept whatever it was.

That’s what’s going on in a child’s mind. Here’s the deal, in a hunter-gatherer society, and we’re only separated by only a few thousand years from being hunter-gatherers. In a hunter-gatherer society, the child is genetically and biologically built to listen to their parents.

Because if there’s a lion out there that could eat you, you better listen to your parents. So, the parents say, “Don’t go into that bush over there, because there are tigers and lions that might eat you.” “Mom, dad, that sounds like a good idea.”

Then the mom and dad turn around the next day and say, “Don’t go into that over bush over there because...”
there are demons that will send you to hell.” How does a child know the difference?

Jacobsen: They don’t.

Ray: They can’t; they can’t know the difference, right. So, by age 10, you’ve programmed all those kinds of ideas and you have no ability to critically analyze those ideas. Once they’re embedded in your brain, they’re embedded deeply and probably permanently.

So, notions like hell, the notion of hell, once it gets embedded, can scare the hell, literally, out of a 10-year-old. Think of a 10-year-old that goes to a Pentecostal meeting, somewhere where they’re shown the fear of God and talking about how terrible hell is.

That gets deeply embedded into your brain and can easily trigger responses that are as if the lion is about ready to eat you. Your brain is going to respond to that threat, whether it’s the threat of hell or the threat of a lion eating you, and buried somewhere always.

So, I see as a child grows up. One of the most interesting things is tragic. I work, we work, with a lot of people who are dealing with the fear of hell. They are atheists, they’re secularists, they’re atheists or agnostics, but they were raised in families like the Westboro Baptist Church that are fearful of hell.

The poor people, now, they’re an adult, they’re 30, 40, 50-years-old They’re still scared of hell, waking up with cold sweats at night, they have nightmares. We know now that’s probably related to post-traumatic stress disorder.

In fact, Dr. Marley Rinella, pioneer psychologist over in the Bay Area renamed it religious trauma syndrome because she could see from her work as a psychologist that post-traumatic stress of somebody coming back from Afghanistan in a war zone looks a lot like the stress people had being raised in religious environments from early on and then terrorized with things like fear of hell. That’s a long answer to a short question.

Jacobsen: That’s an important answer to a deep question.

Ray: That’s what you’re looking for, I’m happy to help you to give it to you.

2. Jacobsen: I appreciate that. You have the relevant qualifications – anthropology, sociology, education, clinical psychology. These provide a framework from which to speak authoritatively on these issues. So, I appreciate that.

So, with Recovering from Religion, for those that don’t know, what is the elevator pitch of what it is?

Ray: We help people deal with the consequences and trauma of leaving religion. That’s much of our mission. So, somebody 40-years-old with 2 children, now recognizes that everything they were taught is a bunch of phooey, what do they do now?

They raise their kids religious; their wife or husband is still religious. Who do they turn to? They certainly can’t go talk to their minister. I started this in 2009, Recovering from Religion; we’ve now grown phenomenally.

We now have a hotline somebody can call and say exactly what they feel. We get those kinds of calls all the time. Their kids are religious, but they’re an atheist and they raised their kids religious with their religious husband or wife. Or their wife has become an agnostic, but they’re still a Catholic.

We get calls from religious people. We get parents. Parents, for example, will call us and say we love our child, they say they’re an atheist now and we found you on the internet. We want to respect our child, but we don’t know how to deal with it because we’re Catholic or we’re Jewish or we’re Buddhist.

It could be anything. So, that’s our goal. We have small group meetings all over the world. People meet about once a month, talk to each other about recovering issues. We have many other programs.

But the short answer is we’re helping people deal with the trauma and consequences of leaving religion.

3. Jacobsen: What personality factors or personality variables, and individual factors, play into the rate at which someone can recover? So, for example, the level of general intelligence, or the degree to which someone can adhere strongly to engaging in executive function behavior? Or having “grit,” what are some variables there?

Ray: I write extensively about that in my book, The God Virus. It has little to do with intelligence. That’s not to say intelligence doesn’t have something to do with it. I’m not going to focus on it right now. There are five major personality components in human beings. Four of those components do not correlate at all with religiosity.

The fifth one, however, does; the fifth one is the only one I’m interested in with respect to this research to answer your question. It’s called openness, curiosity, and openness to new experience. Here’s what the research seems to show.
The less curious you are, the less open you are to new experience, the more likely you are to be in check with religious notions of any kind. It’s much easier for parents. Let’s be serious here, most religion you get from your parents.

That’s where most everybody gets it. You’re most likely to be infected, more easily infected, if you have a low level of curiosity and a low level of openness to new experience. On the other hand, children being raised by parents who are religious, but the child is high and open to experiencing curiosity is going to be that darn child that asks why mommy, why daddy, all the time.

It irritates the hell out of the parents. It’s hard to infect that kid or keep them infected because they keep asking the wrong questions. The other child, the one that’s not open to new experience and not particularly curious; they don’t ask those questions in the first place.

And I’ll tell you, I have three examples of that in my own family. I can see it. Sometimes, it’s amazing how those two things happen. So, what you get is a person that gets older and then realizes, starts asking tougher questions, or getting answers to some of those questions.

Then they start moving away from religion; they were still infected at that pre-critical age, prior to 10-years-old. That’s before the questions could even be asked. So, while their logic says one thing, their emotions say another thing.

So, generally, people go through a phase, generally, two to three years, of having to deal with that dissonance, that conflict between my emotions say, “There is a hell,” or my emotions say, “That God is watching me all the time.”

My logic says, “That’s crazy.” So, it takes quite a while, like I said, maybe two or three years, maybe longer – and sometimes a lifetime. Like I said, I got people dealing with it; they’ve been nonreligious for decades.

So, I don’t think there’s a formula. At least Recovering from Religion, we take people where they are. Obviously, we don’t give them personality tests or IQ tests or anything. Where IQ comes into effect is obviously, a lower IQ, the less curious and openness, open to new experiences, that has some correlation to it.

It’s not perfect, but intelligent people are more open to new experience, more curious. That’s why you get the phenomena that the more educated you are, the less religious you’re likely to be.

And that 94 percent of all the top scientists in the United States are atheists, pretty much. That thing is what you see and that’s where the correlation with intelligence comes in.

4. Jacobsen: Also, if I recall correctly, but I might be misremembering, the data on non-belief in any deity by professional academics goes up especially if you go to natural sciences or fields that require higher cognitive demands in general. So, that’s also a factor as well.

Ray: Absolutely.

Jacobsen: You use the term “infected” when talking about children. Does that come from Richard Dawkins’ terminology of religion as a virus?

Ray: In my book The God Virus, it was largely inspired by an essay he wrote back in 1989 called “Viruses of the Mind” or something like that. It’s this notion has been around since he wrote his book The Selfish Gene back in 1976.

What I noticed was that Dawkins is a biologist and Daniel Dennett is a philosopher and Sam Harris is a neuroscientist, nobody is a psychologist. Nobody is looking at it from an anthropological, sociological, and psychological point of view.

So, I basically stole Dawkins’s notion of a mind virus and applied it specifically to religion. He quite approved of it. I met Richard several times and he likes the book, The God Virus, likes its specific application, from a psychological perspective.

I give Dawkins full credit there; although, he didn’t come anywhere near what I did on the psychological side, anthropological and sociological sides too.

5. Jacobsen: With Recovering from Religion, and something we haven’t mentioned, the Secular Therapy Project, which seems self-descriptive. Who have been unexpected allies that are religious—organizations, individuals, researchers, and so on?

Ray: There are two questions there. Let me address Recovering from Religion. We have seen that there are allies out there. We are appreciative of Unitarians, for example. While they may be somewhat religious, they can be secular too.

Secular Jewish organizations have been allies of ours. Other groups like the Satanic Temple, Flying Spaghetti Monster. People like that love us. Those are all groups that we have some alliances with, that we cooperate with.

Also, the LGBTQ community is one big ally of ours. It might be the other way around. We’re more an ally
of theirs than they are of ours, often times. So, many people in the LGBTQ community have been disfellowshipped or thrown out or in some way ostracized by their families, by their community, by the place they were raised in.

And as a result, they ask questions. They start asking questions—you don’t know; this is funny. How many music directors and choir directors that are now in some way, shape, or form affiliated with? Why? Because they’re gay!

They were gay. They loved music. So, they were the choir director in their church for 15 years until they got caught or they forced themselves. They confessed and got thrown out of a church. Now, they’re looking for a community, looking for a place to land. We’re one of the places that’s easy to find on the internet.

So, I would say probably top of the list is LGBTQ. They love us; we love them. There’s still a lot of religious gays. There’s a lot of religious LGBTQ people out there. It makes no sense to me why you would want to go to a church that hates you, but there are still gay Catholics.

It’s amazing to me that they still do that. But, when they find us, they’re on their way out, or somebody outed them and now they’re searching for answers to questions.

Scott, the beautiful thing is that in 2009 there was no organization to call.

The only person you’d probably talk to maybe were psychologists if you could find one. And you certainly wouldn’t talk to your minister. Now, there are people to talk to around, and here. There is an enormous resource page on our website. Enormous.

You go to our resource page. We have hundreds and hundreds of links and resources for people in every walk of life and from every religion. We’re expanding rapidly as we speak. That’s the first answer.

The second part of the question is the Secular Therapy Project. That’s a different piece there and a different question. I don’t see the alliance with everything being too much a part of that, except that those groups, once they become aware of us, then they realize there’s a need.

There are real people out there, real psychologists, real social workers who still believe you can pray the gay away. There are psychologists who went to seminary and learned that homosexuality is a sin, being a lesbian is a sin, being trans in a sin, and so on.

They do believe this. They practice it. In their practice, they still use Jesus to heal people. It is crazy. It is dangerous. Because if a person comes into your practice as a psychologist and says, “I’m depressed.” I say, “You’re depressed because you’re an atheist. You’re depressed because you turned your back on Jesus.”

Wow, that certainly doesn’t help the depression. That’s what we faced, and I faced that in 2010 and 2011. After my book The God Virus came out, people who never heard of me realized I’m a psychologist, from reading my book.

They said, ‘I’m going to contact you, find out, and find a good psychologist.’ So, I got countless calls and emails and texts from people saying, “Help me find a good psychologist, the last psychologist I went to send me back to church, or the last psychologist I went to said I need to get Jesus or I need to – part of my problem is that I’m an atheist now.”

So, I said, “I’ll help you.” So, I start looking, and Scott, it’s impossible to find a secular therapist by searching on the internet. It’s impossible. The reason I say that is no therapist admits they’re an atheist.

No therapist says, “I’m secular.” Because in Oklahoma City, if you said, “I’m a secular therapist.” That’s like saying, “I’m in a second cousin to the devil.” No, the religious judges will not refer people to you, the hospitals won’t refer to you, ministers certainly won’t refer you.

And so, the notion of a Christian counselor has ballooned in popularity over the last 20 years. Entire programs have been developed around Christian counseling. Some of them are Biblical Christian counseling.

So, I mean this is crazy. There’s no science behind this stuff and yet these people are getting insurance money. They’re licensed. They’re certified in various states. So, I realized that I’m going to have to do something about this.

So, I started the Secular Therapy Project in 201 and got a website developed and everything. Now, people around the country, and soon around the world, are coming to us. We’re opening soon to the international community in full and will be able to register with us as a secular therapist.

We have four highly qualified therapists on our vetting team. If you were a social worker and you wanted to become a part of our database, you would apply. You’d have to prove two things to us. One, that you’re secular. We need evidence of that.

We don’t take what groups you belong to or something on your webpage. Second, you need to prove to us that you use evidence-based methods. Not
a new age woos or something like that; none of which have scientific validity to them as a therapy. So, once we’ve established you’re bona fide, we let you into the database. Then if I’m searching for a therapist who is secular, I can go into our database. I can register for free. All of this for free: free to the therapist; free to the client.

I can find out if there’s anybody in my zip code or anywhere close to my zip code, like a Match.com between therapists and clients. But it maintains confidentiality and anonymity for the client and for the therapist.

Because we don’t want to out the atheist therapist in Dallas, Texas, or Point, Texas, or, whatever, Timbuktu, Texas. Because the moment it is learned in your community that you are not a Christian, you’ll lose your practice.

Imagine: Tennessee, a psychologist saying, “I’m not a Christian.” 99, 98 percent of the people in that town are out as Christians. They’re not about to go to a therapist that is not a Christian, especially an atheist.

6. Jacobsen: I suspect that would be reflected in the treatment of atheists, if not attitudes reflected in surveys, but also in the treatment of young people who go against the norm of belief — as in the given examples.

People, they might still go through as secular therapists, possibly, because they have been battle-hardened in life for their atheism or agnosticism or some form of nonbelief in the standard, dominant religion.

Ray: Right. There’s a lot of problems with being a religious minority. I mean atheists are the most hated religious minority in the United States, even more so than Muslims. It’s funny, but that’s what the few trusted religious surveys have shown for quite a few years now.

So, it’s highly intelligent trained therapists who should be using evidence, and because of being highly trained and educated, are probably also secular. What has happened in the United States is, like Liberty University or Regents University, Paul and Pat Robertson’s institutions respectively, and other institutions, like George Fox University, they’re all fundamentalist colleges and universities.

But they have created these new programs for family therapy. It’s insidious around family therapy. But it’s a religious institution teaching family therapy or psychotherapy methods and requiring people to adhere to their theological perspectives throughout their training.

For example, Birmingham University, if you are a Ph.D. candidate, master, or lower Ph.D. candidate at Birmingham University, you’d have to sign a statement, or nobody will admit you that on: you will not masturbate and two you won’t have sex acts outside of marriage.

Jacobsen: [Laughing]!

Ray: So, right. [Laughing]! So, the funny thing there is: now, first, there’s finish graduating from that college, goes out in the world of practice. What are they going to teach people?! How are they going to get over their own stupidity around masturbation and help somebody who’s having a lot of guilt?

They’re a Catholic. They’re guilty as hell about masturbating. How is that therapist going to work with them? They can’t. Their own indoctrination is going to get in the way. It does. We get this repeatedly.

My therapist sent me back to church. In fact, reading a good article, interviews, another interview, it’s right on her website. The Psychotherapy Project website, ‘has your therapist tried to save you?’

David Niose did the interview with me for Psychology Today a couple years ago.

7. Jacobsen: You have written on “sex addiction.” Is it not a real thing? So, one of the major, or main restrictions, boundaries, borders that are put up, traditionally speaking, by religious texts and subsequently communities, and even societies, are strongly around sex.

So, why isn’t sex addiction a real thing? And what do you see as the main reason for religion in general, especially the Abrahamic ones, to restrict and direct sexual activity of the young especially, and even more especially the women?

Ray: First, sex addiction is a religious construct. It is not a psychological or scientific construct. The reason I say that is in 25 or 30 years of research; nobody has been able to figure out how you would scientifically define and diagnose this notion of sex addiction.

Most addictions are questionable and difficult to define, but we found ways to define some of them. But let me ask you a counter question, “Do you believe in Facebook addiction?”

Jacobsen: [Laughing] Not really.

Ray: Okay, people who spend hours after hours online on Facebook. They waste a ton of time. It interferes with their work; it interferes with their life; it interferes with their relationships. Doesn’t that sound like an addiction to you?
Jacobsen: It does fit some criteria that I would tacitly have.

Ray: And yet, those researchers aren’t concerned about Facebook addiction because sex has a special component to it. So, that’s my answer to the first piece. The second part of the sex addiction piece is, since there’s no science, we can’t diagnose it.

If you can’t diagnose it, you can’t treat it. So, anybody who claims to treat sex addiction is a charlatan; they’re selling snake oil; they should be disbarred. And yet there are people who advertise themselves as sex addict counselors.

They should be disbarred; they should have their license taken away. But it’s a powerful religious lobby. The religionists make a lot of money off the notion of sex addiction. DSM-5 does not have a category of sex addiction in it.

In fact, hypersexuality has even been severely changed and modified because: how do you define hypersexuality? Is somebody masturbating 10 times a day hypersexual? If it doesn’t interfere with his life or her life, then it’s not hypersexual.

But, in the Catholic worldview, masturbating even once makes you a sex addict. Masturbating to pornography makes you a porn addict, even once. I have quotes. I have a video of a Catholic spokesman for the Catholic Church of the United States saying, ‘If you’ve masturbated to porn once, you are a sex addict.’

That’s ludicrous. But not to a Catholic. I have a nice 50-minute talk on the myth of sex addiction. You can see it on YouTube. Google it, it’s right there. There’s a hell of a lot to talk about on that. But the main thing to know is that sex addiction is a religious notion, not a scientific one.

So, women and sex, all patriarchal religions have discovered over centuries that the best way to control people is through their sex and sexuality. I use the term in my book The God Virus, I call it the “guilt cycle.”

But religions, they teach that when you’re 5 or 10-years-old; that sex is bad; that masturbation is bad, touching your own genitals is bad. If you do it, then you’re going to hell: Jesus is watching you.

There’s a voyeuristic God out there that wants to see everything you do and is going to condemn you. I often tell Christians that if you’re a Christian, and you have sex, then you have a threesome with Jesus. He’s watching you the whole time.

Jacobsen: [Laughing].

Ray: So, patriarchal religions, once they realize that, they’ve taught you that your own body is your enemy: I mean look at the story of Adam and Eve. That is a signal that your body is the enemy and particularly women are the enemy.

Women were the temptress; women succumb to temptation. Women tempted men. All those are sins and crimes and all women are guilty of that crime in the Catholic worldview. Also, in the Islamic worldview, and to a somewhat lesser degree, even in Buddhism, Buddhists clearly are misogynistic, and male-dominated, patriarchal.

Hinduism, the same thing. So, you can name the patriarchal religion and control of women’s sexuality as number one in their list of priorities from their worldview. It starts early on with girls being taught about the religious concept of virginity.

Virginity is not a biological concept. At all. It’s a religious concept. So, what we do is we teach girls that virginity is precious, God owns your virginity; in other words, you do not own your own body, and losing your virginity is a dangerous thing.

You must guard it carefully. Of course, on the opposite side, it assumes that boys are out to get your virginity; that you must protect yourself; that you keep your legs together with an aspirin between them. All these messages.

In the purity culture, especially among fundamentalists, but it pervades our whole culture. And when we have people going into our schools right now teaching abstinence only, bull shit, the girls, most of the messages are guilt messages.

Now, why is that important in a patriarchal religion? Because when a child is taught their body is bad, they commit a sin, where they feel terrible about it. “I masturbated this morning, now I feel terrible, what do I do?”

A Baptist reads the Bible and prays. A Catholic goes to confession. A Mormon confesses to his bishop. Do you realize that bishop Mitt Romney of the Mormon church had to listen to 12-year-old boys tell him if they masturbated or not? Did you know that’s a part of the Mormon church?

12-year-old boys come in to get their talking to by the bishop and one of the questions they ask is, “Have you masturbated?” And if you have, “What are you going to do about not doing it anymore?”

This is a 12-year-old boy. They hand them an 8-page piece of literature. I even quote it extensively in my book, Sex and God. They even give them an 8-page a story or metaphor that does not mention the word sex
or penis or masturbation, doesn’t mention it once, but the title is, “Don’t tamper with the factory.”

The metaphor is that your genitals are a factory for creating sperm. It’s going to do its thing and you shouldn’t mess with it. Don’t touch your genitals, [Laughing]! And Mitt Romney was giving this thing to people.

To 12-year-old boys, because the bishop in the Mormon church must do that, it’s one of their duties. Nobody said that during the election cycle, that’s for sure, [Laughing].

8. Jacobsen: What’s the most bizarre sexual taboo that you’ve come across in your research on sex and religion?

Ray: Oh, that’s an easy question to answer. Most Christians say to secularists, “You want to be secular because you want to act like an animal. You want to have all the sex you can.”

Let me tell you something. There are almost no animals in this planet that only have sex for procreation.

There are almost no animals on this planet that can have sex whenever they want to. Humans can have sex whenever they want to, bonobo apes can have sex whenever they want to, chimps can have sex whenever they want to, dolphins can have sex whenever they want to.

But, my dog, she’s walking around me right now wondering why I’m not petting her. She only mates when she’s ready to procreate. That insect that’s getting ready to hatch out of its larva this spring in a few weeks is only going to have sex to procreate.

Most animals on this planet only have sex to procreate. In other words, when the Pope tells you to have sex to procreate, he’s telling you to have sex like an animal. Now, think about that. He’s telling you to have sex like an animal.

As a human, I have sex whenever I want to, and masturbation is a big part of being human. So, that’s perverted if you think about it. When the Pope says nuns cannot have sex their entire lives, that to me is one of the most perverted sexual things you can ask a person to do.

So, flip it on its head, your question. What’s the most perverted thing? Telling people, they can’t have sex for a lifetime.

Jacobsen: I can see from their perspective a self-selection of people entering them, but then also telling them: it’s probably both. It’s people self-selecting to go into that, plus then being reinforced and encouraged to not.

Ray: They’re somewhat self-selected at an early age before their own hormones. Many, many priests tell me that they committed their lives to God when they were 12- or 13-years-old before the hormones got rolling.

Now, there is a self-selection. About one percent of the population probably meets the criteria of being asexual.

9. Jacobsen: What are the criteria for asexual?

Ray: Have no interest in sex at all. Don’t masturbate, don’t want to have sex with another person, it doesn’t interest them.

Jacobsen: That’s a lot of people.

Ray: In some ways, they are lucky. The rest of us are so horny. We don’t know what do with it sometimes. If one percent out of the population is asexual, now, there’s probably a large percentage of that that is situationally asexual.

Medically, you have a medical illness or disease or condition. You might lose your sex drive; your libido might disappear. People have told me after they got divorced, they had no interest in sex for three years.

Then suddenly their sex life comes back, their libido comes back. But what I’m talking about is of those one percent in the world, of course, half of those are male. If those people are self-selecting to become priests, then they have a huge advantage.

They’re not interested in sex and never will be interested in sex. So, they’re going to make great priests. But the problem with that is they’re also going to be great priests standing up in front of everybody else and saying, “You can’t masturbate. You can’t have sex.” It’s easy for them to say!

I have no interest in Game of Thrones. I don’t want to ever watch that; it doesn’t make any sense to me; I don’t want to watch it. So, if I said, “You can’t because I don’t like Game of Thrones, you can’t watch it either.”

That’s basically what people are saying, what an asexual would be saying to the rest of the congregation. Now, the fact is that most of those priests are not asexual because they went to an all-boys seminary.

I’ve interviewed so many priests. I’ve done this so many times. They commit themselves to the church at 12 or 13, often at the behest of their parents because Catholics love to have a boy in the family that’s a priest.

That gives them lots of status in the Catholic community. My uncle is a priest, or my son is going to be a priest. They love that. And so, the kid at 12 or
13 under parental pressure and family pressure goes to an all-boys seminary and in the all-boys seminary; there’s a lot of fucking going on.

A lot of homosexual activity going on. And most every person I’ve ever talked to that went to the all-boys Catholic seminary, even if they didn’t eventually become a priest, said there was lots of homosexual stuff going on.

So, these boys are discovering their sexuality, even as they’re going through their celibate and abstinence-only indoctrination. It’s not working then when they get out. They become an actual priest. They have been programmed to sexually respond in that environment.

And as a result, in my own research and several other people have verified this in their own research, that’s a big part of where the pedophile priest issue comes from. It is the way they’re being trained as boys because your brain is designed to labor: what are the appropriate sexual behaviors and sexual object in my culture?

And that’s why what is attractive and beautiful in one culture is not attractive and beautiful in another culture because the brain has been programmed for that cultural expectation. We’re not programmed, our brains are not preprogrammed like an insect.

An insect or a bird knows exactly who to mate with. We don’t. We must learn that. If your brained is turned on to learning who to mate with when you’re 13, 14, 15, and you’re in an all-boys seminary, you look around or your all girl’s nursery; you look around, all you see is boys, or all you see is girls, your brain is going to imprinted.

I mean by that “imprinted,” the biological printing, to think that should be the focus in your mating behavior. It’s done at a biological level and neurological level. I can go on and on about that, but I don’t think that’s what you wanted to hear.

**Jacobsen: It’s all fascinating.**

**Ray:** This is an aside, you may or may not be interested in. You may have noticed this, but every culture seems to have a body type that is more prevalent. I’ll give an example. The most extreme is something called “Steel Page” in Africa. Women with gigantic butts.

Now, why are women in certain tribes of Africa having gigantic butts? Whereas you go to Wales and you look at women there, women there have on average much larger breasts than women in other places.

Then you go to Asia, you see Asian women with almost no breasts at all, tiny, if at all. So, you must ask the question, “Why is there such a massive difference in body types across cultures?” And part of that has to do with what we’re talking about. We literally are breeding ourselves.

There is sexual selection going on right within our own species and different cultures highlight what is sexually attractive in their culture. Then those people tend to breed more successfully. Their offspring tend to have their butts bigger, or bigger breasts or fuller breasts.

It’s fascinating to know we’re doing to ourselves what we do with cattle and what we do with dogs. We’re self-breeding. And it’s because the brain is programmed to look around and say, “What is attractive? What should be? What is attractive in my culture?”

So, you get lots of people at age 12 or 13 – all people, men, and women are – looking around; their brain is programmed to say, “What is the right thing in this culture?” Once they’ve locked in on that, then that becomes their sexual fetish, probably for the rest of their life.

It is especially true of men. The research shows that men fetishize much more quickly and completely and for lifelong than women do. So, if a man has a breast fetish, he locks in on that. It’s probably going to have a breast fetish for the rest of his life.

Lots of other fetishes, we think that’s probably where it comes from, the brain. It is so desperate to figure out what’s the appropriate mating strategy currently in this place and this culture. That it locks onto whatever seems to be right to that 12 or 13-year-old, who is totally inexperienced.

He doesn’t have a clue. He’s responding to the visual and emotional cues of that time and place.

So, that’s my extra bit of knowledge there for you.

**10. Jacobsen: What are sometimes termed universal attractive characteristics? Those that would be invariant. So, things across-culture-attractive and that we are self-selecting for no matter the culture?**

**Ray:** I’m not sure I can answer that. The reason I say is that humans, we are the most sexually flexible on the planet. There are almost no other species as nearly as sexually flexible as ours. The interesting thing is there’s a good book called *Sexual Fluidity*. It came out about 5 years ago.

It’s a long-term – I mean long term, 10- to 20-year – a study of women and shows how women’s sexual behavior changes rather dramatically over a lifetime. And that a woman who may describe herself as straight in her teens may describe herself as bisexual.
in her 20s and lesbian in her 30s then back to straight in her 40s.

It’s amazing how fluid women’s sexuality is. Men do not seem to be nearly as fluid but still fluid within that window of time that I’ve spoken about that that the brain is programmed. The remarkable thing: obviously, there’s probably some universals.

But even that’s iffy. I’m not sure. Every universal I can think about there’s major exceptions. If you think about it, my dog doesn’t have a wide variety of sexual behaviors that she wants to engage in.

Whereas a female, the equivalent of that, age and all, would have a wide variety of sexual behaviors she can engage in. Some of which would develop by age; I’ve studied people in their 40s and 50s and 60s. They’re still developing new things.

People who are 50 and 60 years old can be kinky as hell. Tell me in my 20s, I’d have never thought about doing that. I’d be scared to death to do that. So, we are amazing. The unique thing about humans is we have a high-level need for variety.

Humans want variety, constant variety. That’s partially what drives our consumerist society. We’re always looking for the new thing: we always want the latest technology, want the newest car, want a different color or shade of lipstick or whatever.

If the same thing that drives our sexuality always labor what’s going to turn us on, one of the problems with religious sexuality is religion has a one size fits all approach, and that’s monogamy forever.

The fact is, there’s no human society on this planet that’s monogamous. There’s never been a time in human history that was monogamous. So, I give talks about this all the time. I ask my audience. Let’s say there are 400 people in the room.

I’d say, “How many of someone who is monogamous?” And I bet half the hands will raise up. The other half have heard my talk before or they’ve read my books, so they know better.

Jacobsen: [Laughing] That’s funny.

Ray: Now, I say, “Keep your hands up if it’s not you.” And almost all the hands go down. Because, for example, my parents, who are now both deceased, told me that they had never had sex before they were married.

That was not true or at least one of my two parents. I have evidence for it. So, people lie about their sexual experience, especially women. Because sexual experiences are shamed in our culture. Women are shamed for being sexual.

So, anyway, the one size fits all religious straitjacket works for people who have a low sex drive, low level of curiosity, who is asexual, who buy into the religious stuff about staying married to your spouse for the rest of your life.

The rest of us, we don’t want to have a deal with that. That’s why the divorce rate is so high. The divorce rate is higher among the most religious. The more religious you are, then the more likely you are to be divorced.

11. Jacobsen: Are they not only the more guilt-ridden around sex as well?

Ray: Oh, there’s a lot of shame and guilt that they don’t know how to deal with. So, they act it out and that leads to divorce. And this notion of sex addiction. You don’t know how many people are going to therapists now saying my husband is a sex addict because I caught him looking at porn and masturbating.

So, who diagnosed that? Was it a psychologist? Or was it the wife? [Laughing!] Or the mother in law, or the minister? I call it the Oprah Effect. Oprah Winfrey is diagnosing sex addiction.

She has no fucking qualifications for doing that. She’s having people on her show like Dr. Drew, who’s an idiot, or Dr. Phil, who has no qualifications and shouldn’t be diagnosing anybody; they’re calling people sex addicts.

Dr. Phil, I mean these people are spreading incredibly harmful notions about sexuality on Oprah and she is not challenging them. Believe me, I’ve tried to get her to challenge them, she won’t answer my emails, that’s for sure.

12. Jacobsen: But that’s in the United States. The United States, maybe outside of the Islamic world, is one among a few extraordinarily religious nations. So, the framework from people, families, groups, and subpopulations that will view the world in one way, which is completely internally self-affirming to unsupported and non-scientific ideas around sex, right?

Ray: There’s a lot of good research out there. You might look at David Barash’s book, it’s a great book called *The Myth of Monogamy* or read Dr. Marty Klein’s book. Both guys are major sexologists.

Dr. Marty Klein’s essay called “You’re Addicted to What?” It’s an essay. Or you might also be interested in Dr. Marty Klein’s book called *America’s War on Sex*. It’s an interesting look at politics and statistics and practices of America and sexuality.

And of course, if you’re interested in the sex part of it, go look at my book, *Sex and God: How Religion*
Distorts Sexuality. There’s a lot of people starting to write about it. The reason I wrote both of my books, my most recent books, was because I wasn’t seeing anybody talking about this stuff, especially sex.

Nobody wants to challenge the religious notions about sexuality in our culture. And nobody wants to challenge therapists that are using nonscientific approaches to therapy that cause more problems.

The first rule of medicine is “do no harm” and yet psychotherapists out there are exacerbating the psychological problems that people are having that was initially caused by religion.

As a therapist, my colleagues verify this, about 80 percent of the people that come into my office or have come into my office over the years, dealing with sex problems, 80 percent, probably more, really, is dealing with sex problems directly related to religious training.

So, if they’re going through a divorce because the wife says you’re a sex addict, that’s a religious notion. It’s not a scientific notion. And we got all that stuff going on in our culture. And psychologists that don’t stand up and say, “That’s wrong. You can’t do good psychotherapy.”

They can’t say that without challenging underlying religious assumptions. That’s scary. That’s scary, especially when you’re a religious person as a psychotherapist, scary.

13. Jacobsen: Are there any aspects of religion that you find admirable?

Ray: Religion can bring people together in community. That’s one of its big strengths. But, it is not unique to religion. They have created a corner on that market. Humans are social creatures. We want community.

We want a place to bring our children, we want a place to teach our children, they’re safe. And churches claim to do that for people. Unfortunately, once you get in the church, then your children are going to be taught things you probably don’t want to be taught.

And where’s the secular person going to go? If I said, and too many secular people say, “I went back to church because I wanted a community. I don’t believe a word that minister is saying.” But the problem is you’re putting your children through Sunday school where they’re being taught some nasty stuff.

Like God created genocide, killed everybody on the planet through this cute little story about Noah’s Ark or another cute little story like murdering all the children for making fun of a prophet.

So, the community teaches us what people are after. And what I’m loving right now, Sunday Assembly is a movement out of England. It’s sputtered a bit, but it’s working in some places. Oasis started about 3 years ago. It’s bringing the community together.

I’m watching it. It started in Houston and is thriving in Houston. And it’s now in Kansas City. I say we because I’ve been a part of this movie. They have 3 organizations in Salt Lake City area, one in Okun area, one in Toronto area, and one in Austin opened two weeks ago.

One in Wichita, Kansas that opened a few months ago. Here’s what Oasis is: it’s a weekly meeting on Sunday morning at 11 o’clock where mostly atheists, secularists, and humanists, all come together and have a blast listening to a science culture, hearing some good rock music or good secular music.

There is childcare, which is really important. All churches have childcare. We’ve got childcare. The minute you add childcare to the formula, your population doubles or triples. It’s amazing to see how many people come to these things.

We’re getting 200 people showing up every Sunday. Houston is getting 150 people showing up every Sunday. Now, it sounds crazy and people say it sounds like an atheist church. Oh, no, it’s community, like the Rotary Club is a community.

Nobody calls them a church. Our focus is on education and science, philosophy. We have great speakers; people who challenge your thinking process about stuff like death and dying. What do death and dying mean to an atheist? That’s interesting.

We have polyamory presentations on “What’s polyamory?” and “How does it work?” We show some people that can talk about it. Or swinger, somebody talking about a swinger lifestyle. Now, what church is going to let you talk about swinging or polyamory?

Jacobsen: Not many.

Ray: No, you would be shocked at the number of polyamorous in the atheist community, lots of poly people. About 30 percent of our group in Oasis is poly or poly-friendly. The fact is, there’s probably poly people in churches too.

They couldn’t say it. Or they’d get thrown it. Does that answer your question?

14. Jacobsen: That does, and I’m out of them. So, thank you much for your time, Darrel.

Ray: My pleasure.
References


Appendix I: Footnotes

earable, Recovering from Religion.

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BA, Sociology/Anthropology; MA, Religion; Doctorate, Psychology.
Dr. Oren Amitay, Ph.D., C.Psych. on His Life and Views: Registered Psychologist and Media Consultant (Part One)

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Abstract

An extensive interview with Dr. Oren Amitay, Ph.D., C.Psych. He discusses: Growing up; having a monkey, first Canadian sex store own mom, and artistic bipolar father; university selection; clinical practice work and methodological specialization.

Keywords: clinical psychology, media consultant, Oren Amitay, registered psychologist.

Dr. Oren Amitay, Ph.D., C.Psych. on His Life and Views: Registered Psychologist and Media Consultant (Part One)

1. Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What was life like growing up – geography, culture, and language?

Dr. Oren Amitay: I was raised speaking Hebrew, which I do not speak at all. At one-year-old, my brother, who was three at the time, came into the family by way of adoption. He did not speak Hebrew so my parents began speaking English with him and me.

At one-year-old, I suddenly had my language changed. I was spoken to only in English, like my brother. That messed things up with my language. I had to go to speech therapy after that. Obviously, I don’t remember this period of my life, but that has been told to me.

I grew up in Montreal for the first three years of my life, in an English-speaking part as opposed to French, and then my parents came here to Toronto, where I am currently, when I was 3. My mother started a business here: Canada’s first sex store, Lovecraft.

Jacobsen: [Laughing].

Amitay: I do remember part of the drive to Toronto. We were run into by a doctor in his car. He paid my mother some cash to help us get to Toronto and to tow our car. This is our day of moving there. I sort of remember that.

As mentioned, my mother opened Canada’s first sex store. She is a pioneer and some call her the grandmother of Canada’s sex industry. My father was an artist—a well-respected, but crazy artist, crazy, literally, because he had bipolar disorder. It was undiagnosed until he was in his 50s, likely because, when you are an artist, people expect you to “act crazy” as he did.

Jacobsen: [Laughing].
Amitay: That was part of his artistic temperament. We lived in a middle-class(ish) neighbourhood but were one of the poorer families there. Sex may sell, but when you’re the first sex store in Canada, it takes a while for people to adapt to that.

Jacobsen: [Laughing].

Amitay: I never had much money growing up. I started working at ten-years-old. I was delivering papers and have literally been working ever since. My parents paid for the roof over our heads and food, but, since ten, I have been paying my own way.

But it also depends on what you call poor. We did have a tiny home, my parents had an old beat-up car, we went on one international vacation in childhood, but my parents made the most out of it, I never felt “poor.” I knew what poor was and our financial situation didn’t hinder us that much.

Back then, the social pressure was not as bad as it is today to have all of the cool things. We never did have any of those cool things, but we did have things other kids didn’t have; my dad would make some really cool presents for Christmas or our birthdays.

Also, we were one of the coolest families in the neighbourhood, with my mother having opened Canada’s first sex store; that gives you cache as a kid, even with adults. Also, we had a monkey for a while.

Jacobsen: [Laughing].

Amitay: So, that is my early upbringing.

2. Jacobsen: A little bit further ahead of that. How was having a monkey, having a mother with the first Canadian sex store as well as having a bipolar artistic father in high school? Some of that I would see as bringing good social cache and other parts of it I could see not bringing so much of that.

Amitay: The monkey and stuff were in our earlier years. I think we were a pretty popular family. I will tell a side story. I always thought that our norm was “the norm”. If that is what your family is like, you don’t know any differently at the time.

I really thought we were pretty normal in most ways and I thought everyone else felt the same way. I was a little jock, I played sports all of the time and I was friends with a lot of people in the neighbourhood. Everything seemed normal.

Then, I was back in my old neighbourhood a number of years ago and I decided to check out my old house. I saw a car in the parking lot and I saw a woman was home. I was going through my wallet, pulling out my Ryerson University ID saying, “Look, I am not going to kill you. I want to come in and check out my childhood home until I was 12-years-old.”

She let me in. She wouldn’t let me come upstairs—I can understand. She said, “Come back another time, maybe.” Anyway, we were talking and I said, “When we sold our house, we sold it to this famous Canadian boxer named Shawn O’Sullivan. He won the silver medal in the 1984 Olympics and was on all these Red Lobster commercials.”

She said, “Cool, cool, I have something even cooler. I heard that some people before me,” (she wasn’t sure how many families before), “I heard the family before me was a cult…”

Jacobsen: [Laughing].

Amitay: “…run by a lesbian witch.”

Jacobsen: [Laughing].

Amitay: I said, “Did you hear that from a guy called [ ]? It blew her mind. She was like, “How did you know, of all the people that could have said that?” I won’t get into detail about how I knew who had told her about the lesbian part and why they would have said that (it was not true), but I couldn’t understand the witch or cult leader part. So, right after I left the house, I called my mom and asked her. She was thinking and thinking and then she put the pieces together: My father, the artist, used to make candles for my mother’s store when she first opened up. The candles happened to be in the shape of penises.

Jacobsen: [Laughing].

Amitay: In order to air out the candles and get them to dry, he would put them on the front porch on the banister. So, apparently, we had all these penises lined up like heads on a stake. I do not remember that, but that is one of the things that was normal for us.

The woman also told me that she was Italian and the old Italian women in the neighbourhood—she said she was not exaggerating—the few Italian women there (the neighbourhood was almost all white and a few Greek families; there were only two black kids in the whole neighbourhood—one being my brother) would follow her up and down the street, telling her in Italian that the house was cursed and saying, “you have to let us exorcise the house.” She said they were literally throwing holy water at her but she wouldn’t let them do this ritual with the house they apparently believed was possessed. That was all until 12-years-old.

We moved to another neighbourhood at that time. It was very different. It was more an inner-city type neighbourhood. My brother and I were not prepared for that. We adjusted pretty quickly though. You see,
when you were raised the way we were, we weren’t raised to follow trends.

As social animals, especially around 12-15 years old all you want to do is connect with other people, be a part of the group. A part of me wanted that and I was a part of a bunch of very different groups, but I never felt like I had to be in any of them. I spent a lot of time alone.

I went from group to group to group to group. No real allegiances to any group but I did have a very small number of close friends in my first two years of high school. My father by that time had been divorced from my mother for a number of years, but I still saw him pretty regularly.

Back to trends: I rarely followed any trends, aside from the heavy metal music we listened to. I did my own thing and set a number of trends—or I was the first kid (or one of the first kids) to do being certain things. I was always the bad kid and had to go to three different schools. I pissed off the principals and teachers and many of the students. I usually had the top grades in my classes but I also had the most absences; my absences for each class were usually as high as my grades. I also got caught for doing a lot of really stupid things I cannot disclose, but fortunately, I did not get caught for most of the terrible things I did.

So, I had to go from school to school to school; that is how I passed my high school years. I do not remember much; it was all a haze of doing stupid, self-destructive things and wasting a lot of time and definitely most of my potential. But then, after four years of screwing around, in grade 13 (we had five years of high school back then; now it’s technically four, although many kids choose to do one more year before heading off to university), I knew that if I wanted to go to university then I had to smarten up. So, I put in three months of hard work, got really good grades and got accepted into all of the universities to which I applied. Then, after that one term, I went back to old habits [Laughing], having fun basically. So, three months of hard work out of five years of high school got me into university. I’m not sure what it’s like now, but there you go.

3. Jacobsen: [Laughing] When released, so to speak, from family dynamics, especially your father, entering into university, no more monkey. No more penis candles. No more holy water to exorcise the family.

What university did you choose? Why did you choose it? What did you end up taking in it?

Amitay: First, my father was still in the picture. They were divorced, but my mom was very generous. She always had more money than he did. Her store became successful around the time of the divorce, when I was about 10 or 11, maybe a bit later.

So, my sister, who is eight years younger than I am and was adopted at three months of age, benefitted; she got all she wanted. When we moved to the new neighbourhood, I did not get a new paper route at first. Instead, I asked my mom, “Can I have an allowance?” She said, “What? Are you lazy? Get a job.” So, I got a paper route the next day and then asked her for an allowance. Her response? “You have a job and are making your own money; why do you want more from me?” That was always her mentality: Work hard and pay your own way.

I had started to say that, notwithstanding her philosophy on an allowance for me, she was very generous. On the weekends, she would leave the house and my father would stay in her house for the weekend with the kids. It was mostly for my younger sister – not my brother and me. We did our own thing. He was almost always in the picture, in a peripheral way, but he was involved with my younger sister. It is not like I didn’t have a father.

My mother also got a new husband, whom my father had known first. He introduced my father to his career at the CBC and my father introduced him to my mother.

Jacobsen: [Laughing].

Amitay: They have the same name and couldn’t be any different than two people or men: totally opposite ends of the spectrum. That happened when I was 10 or 11 years old, shortly after my parents broke up. It was a huge shift in my perception of people, dynamics, and so on.

Getting back to university, I had earned a scholarship to go to Western University, which is in a small town known for business. But I said, “I am not going to go to Western. I would rather stay at home in the city I know.” So, I decided to go to the University of Toronto, which is still considered one of the best universities in Canada for whatever reason.

Then, maybe a month before university started, a very, very old family friend—I have known her and her siblings since I was 3; they are the children of my mom’s former business partner—she came back from Japan and told me all these great stories about her time there. This was 1987; there was this first wave of people going to Japan then. Canada had this special arrangement with Japan that Australia, New Zealand, and the UK had, which was the “Working Holiday Visa” – you can travel, study, do whatever for a year without needing to be sponsored: total freedom.
She went to Japan on this visa and lived in the countryside. I thought, “That’s cool.” So, one month before university began, I suddenly decided to go to Japan and, within maybe two months, I was there on a Working Holiday Visa days after my 19th birthday. Ironically, at first, I chose not to go to Western because I thought it was too far from all of my family, friends, and comforts in Toronto. A few months later, I was in Japan and spent the year there—a year and a few months. I was making really good money, having such a great time, and I met a young woman my age over there.

As a side note, I had to return to Canada after one year because that was how long this special visa was for; it was for six months but you could renew it for another six months while in Japan. Japanese visiting Canada apparently could return to Japan after one year and get another Working Holiday Visa for one more year (they may have been able to do it a few more times), so I was told by Japanese consulate staff that I would be able to do the same thing.

I, therefore, left all of my things in Japan—including the nice house in which I was living, my many private students, a private school at which I was working (the owners had essentially taken me in like a son) and my girlfriend—fully expecting to return in a few weeks. In Canada, however, I was told that we were, in fact, able to get only one Working Holiday Visa for Japan (and the UK, Australia and New Zealand, I believe) in our lifetime. When I told them about how I had left everything in Japan, they told me I could return on a three-month Tourist Visa to settle up my affairs over there.

I refused and explained that I had to go back for another year, if not longer. Over the next week or so, I kept speaking to different embassy representatives over the phone on a nearly daily basis, working my way up to the very top: either the Lieutenant Governor of Canada or the Governor General of Canada (I really should know the difference but I was still 19 and did not care who it was, as long as they would give me what I wanted). Each time I spoke with someone, I kept explaining how much I had fallen in love with Japan and told them that one year was not enough time to truly get to know the country and its culture, which was the whole point of the Visa program.

The Lieutenant Governor of Canada or the Governor General of Canada was apparently compelled by my reasoning and granted me the second Working Holiday Visa for Japan—the first time this had ever happened. They apparently realized that it made sense to let those who really loved Japan to stay longer under the same conditions so they eventually made it a policy for everyone.

When I arrived in Japan, however, no one in Customs would stamp my passport because they had never seen anyone receive two such visas. My Japanese was pretty good at the time so I could understand that each person they called over tried to get someone else to make the decision because no one wanted to risk getting in trouble for letting me in, just in case my second Visa was a fraud. They finally did get a senior official to let me through.

A funny side note was that I had brought a bunch of souvenirs from Canada, most of them being from my mom’s store. The airport agents were amused but suspicious of this 19-year-old foreigner who was explaining in pretty good Japanese what all of these very strange items were in a tactful manner.

Once I resumed my life in Japan, with the way everything was going I thought, “Screw university. I’ll start an English school in Japan.” My life in Japan, especially after I had met my girlfriend, was nothing like I had ever experienced. I was leading a hedonistic and pretty easy life and I lost any motivation to do the hard work I would need to do in order to live successfully in Canada.

Thank goodness, my mother was smart enough to say, “Come back to Canada and try at least one year in university; you’re too smart to waste your brain doing what you’re doing.” I resented her greatly at the time and returned to Canada prematurely in order to shut her up. Interestingly, I had similarly resented her a few years before that because I had always assumed I would take over Lovecraft since I was a kid. It was the family business. It was a cool store and I was lazy.

Most kids whose parents run their own business say at some point, “Why do I have to go to school? Why don’t I just train with you and take over the business?” That was my mindset as well. When I asked her the same question at around 17 or 18 years old—we were likely talking about my going to university—my mother looked at me and said, “No, you’re not taking over Lovecraft. I am simply a store owner; I’m in retail. You are better than that.”

So, at 20, I left Japan early to apply to the University of Toronto, which I commenced weeks before my 21st birthday. But I was really doing it only to shut my mother up. I was planning on going right back to Japan after the first year so that I could return to the easy and fun life I had been enjoying.

Now, I cannot get into the next part of the story, other than to say that my first year in university was not good for a variety of reasons. I was, in fact, doing
very well, but a number of factors caused my final grades to drop from As/A+s to mostly the B range—aside from my Intro to Psychology course, in which I was able to maintain my A+.

I had no intention of continuing school and I ended up going back and forth between Canada and Japan for the next few years. In the meantime, I worked at a few restaurants in Toronto and then worked at a few language schools here. Just before I turned 22, I believe, I was hired to help set up, open and operate an English/Japanese language school and cultural centre in Toronto, across from the University of Toronto campus, as the director of the English section.

It was a big thing. It was thrilling and great, using my brain and doing all of these things I had never done before as we opened up this new business. I was speaking with lawyers, people from the embassy, lots of business people, politicians and respected members in the Japanese community. Truth be told, the business would never have got anywhere if it were not for my partner in the English section, a hard-nosed, intelligent and ambitious woman who was probably 20 or 25 years my senior. She was really the one who made everything happen but, as a 21- to 22-year-old, I relished all of the challenges with which I was tasked.

After a while, however, everything was in place and running pretty well. I essentially went from being a director and taking on so many new challenges to being an English teacher, doing the same thing I had done in Japan right after turning 19 years old and then in Toronto. Also, my status and salary dropped considerably and I could tell that the respect was no longer there. The bosses were...let’s just say that I could see the writing on the wall.

At some point during this process, I also broke up with my girlfriend, who had returned to Japan after living in Canada for a while. I subsequently met the woman who would end up becoming my wife, here in Toronto. She was also Japanese and ended up returning to Japan once her visa had expired.

I am fast forwarding through a lot but, about one week before my bride to be was about to arrive in Canada with her mother for our impending wedding in June, I started becoming very anxious. I had come to realize that I would need to set up a life here for us, as I did not want to return to Japan to teach English. Also, unlike how things had been planned previously at the language school/cultural centre, I knew I would not be able to fly back and forth between countries to live in both places. I additionally knew I could not survive on the salary I was making at the time, the job was too easy so I was getting bored, and I did not like the work environment that had developed—although I did always love the actual teaching.

I remember standing in my mom’s kitchen by myself, starting to freak out because, if I were to return to school in order to do what I knew in my heart I loved to do—become a psychologist—I would have to return to university for three years to complete the rest of my BS, followed by one year for a Masters and three years for a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology. Not only did I think I would be so old by that point—well into my 30s—but I also knew I could not afford not to work for those seven years because I needed to support my wife and myself. And if I tried to go to school part-time while working part-time or even fulltime, it would take many more years to complete everything. On a side note, I was unaware that, for a Masters in Clinical Psychology, it was actually two years, while a Ph.D. was at least four or five years (more typically 7 to 10 years!).

This was about a week before my marriage! My wife to be and her mother were coming over soon and I had to admit to them that I did not know what the hell I was going to do because the great company I had been working at when I first met my wife’s parents was not the same as it had been, nor was my salary. Feeling like I had no viable options and that there was no way things could go the way I would want them to go for the rest of my life, I literally worked myself up into a panic attack in the middle of my mom’s kitchen.

I had never had a panic attack in my life. It was brief and my head was swirling. I felt like I was about to pass out and I kind of collapsed on my mom’s counter. A few seconds later, I got up from the counter and thought, “What am I talking about? I can go to work full-time and school full-time. Why not?” I suddenly snapped back into the person I usually was.

The next day, I arranged to return to the U of T and, about three months later, started my second year. At this point, I was five years older than most students because of all of the time I had taken off over the past number of years.

I continued to work at the same language school/cultural centre, which was right across from the U of T campus. It was near perfect: I would work fulltime during the day and take classes at night and over the summer. I was able to finish my undergraduate degree in the three years it was supposed to take.

And unlike most students in the second year, I knew for sure that I was going to be a psychologist. As
mentioned earlier, even though things had happened that messed up the grades in my other courses, I still got the A+ in Intro Psychology and loved the course.

Even some students in their fourth year are unaware that, in order to enter most Graduate Schools for Clinical Psychology, you need to take a very difficult exam called the GRE or the Graduate Record Examination. Conversely, before even beginning the second year, I had already purchased materials to prepare for the GRE a few years later because, again, I knew that I was going all the way to get my Ph.D. and become a registered psychologist.

Fast forward to a few weeks before I graduated from the U of T, the language school/cultural centre fired me without any notice. They did it in such a cold manner, even though I had helped the various owners and their families essentially settle in Canada. In fact, I should have not been surprised because they had done something similar to the senior partner I had mentioned before, and she was really the one who helped everyone be able to come to and reside in Canada.

Besides, to be honest, I had been screwing around at work. I was so focused on school that I was doing the minimum at work.

Unfortunately, they fired me within maybe a few weeks of not only my getting into a serious bike accident, which messed up the end of my school year, but also my experiencing two of the biggest setbacks one can experience in academia—one of which was due to the accident. I got depressed for about a week or two and then snapped out of it. I elaborate on this a bit later.

I ended up getting into graduate school and, by the second year of my Masters, I began teaching at the university and was also doing some clinical work. Before and after that, I also was paid to be a Teaching Assistant and Research Assistant, so all throughout my undergraduate, Masters, and Ph.D., I was working full-time in addition to my actual academic work.

The good thing about this was that, unlike so many of my colleagues who felt they had put their “real lives” on hold for 4 to 15 years while they went to school, I never felt that way. Although some of my schoolmates would work over the summer or do a bit of part-time work in addition to their work as a Teaching Assistant or Research Assistant, they still always felt like a stagnating student or they did not feel as if they had really entered “the real world” yet. This was particularly true for students who went straight from high school to university and then to grad school.

On the contrary, I treated school as a second career, while my teaching and clinical work were my other careers. Unlike most graduate students, I was never anxiously wondering, “When is school going to end?” Most of my schoolmates felt their careers would not begin until they graduated. For me, getting my Ph.D. would simply enable me to do more in my chosen fields and to make more money in the careers I had already begun to forge several years before.

In addition to learning that sleep really is over-rated, leading dual career/academic lives all throughout my undergrad and graduate degrees taught me about resilience, hardiness, responsibility and so much more. But that was the kind of work ethic and determination I had learned from each of my parents. That was how I became a psychologist.

4. Jacobsen: Also, you are also referencing the upbringing with the [Laughing] penis candles and the mother being a store owner, where the parents have a strong influence on you. That is for Masters and Ph.D. What about clinical practice work? What particular methodologies did you specialize in?

Amitay: I did my Masters and Ph.D. at York University, which has the biggest Clinical Psychology program in Canada with many professors who are well-respected and renowned internationally. It focused mostly on human-centered or client-centered therapy. There was one outright CBT Professor and one Psychodynamic Professor (and a few other orientations) when I was there, but mostly they were more Humanistic or Rogerian, as well as emotion-focused and process experiential.

The thing is, the program was mostly about academics and research, and some of the courses were garbage or entirely irrelevant to becoming a registered psychologist. Such courses, as well as other aspects of the program, basically lengthened our time in it. I said, “This is ridiculous. What are we doing here?”

As an undergraduate, being five years older than most students, I was quite arrogant. I was also not that much younger than some of my professors and was even older than some of my TAs. I was thinking that I had made more money than them when I was still a teenager and in my early 20s, and had lived a far more interesting life than most of them had. I thought that I knew more than they do and that made me, very, very arrogant. I had a big mouth, had a bad attitude and caused a lot of trouble.

I became well-known around the department, but not for the right reasons—although when I started getting 100% on exams, including short-answer and essay-
based tests, some TAs I knew told me that others had been mentioning that. I ended up becoming pretty close with some TAs and professors. Whenever there was some luncheon or similar informal get-together for the professors and/or graduate students, I would walk in as if I belonged there, hang out and avail myself of the free food and drinks—usually to excess. I would then head off to class in the right frame of mind; it made the lectures far more tolerable.

One time, during the first or second class of the term, I stayed too long at one of these functions so I brought a glass of wine to the professor as a peace offering; she was relatively young and considered one of the “hottest” profs in the department. I walked in, handed it to her casually and proceeded to sit down as if it was no big deal. She asked my name and we ended up getting to know each other a bit better after that.

By hanging out with the TAs and professors, I could hear what was going on in the department and get a better sense of how things operate. However, I was still a troublemaker and I had a couple of professors say to me every once in a while, “What the hell did you do this time?” One of them told me that, when he was in the faculty lounge and my name would come up, he could see some of his colleagues literally twitch. He would apparently mention my name occasionally just to get a rise out of them!

I say all of this because, when I went to York, I was determined to not repeat the same crap I had been doing for so long. This was because, as alluded to earlier, I experienced several “crises” all around the same time: I was fired from the job that was supporting me and my wife (who was also working at a low-paying job at the time) and, shortly before that, I had been hit by a car a few weeks prior to completing my final undergrad term. The accident prevented me from being able to complete some work on time and I was too proud to ask for an extension.

Also, because I was so determined to get all my work done in time, while still working full-time (I took only one day off after the accident and had checked myself out of hospital against doctor’s orders that day so I could get to class, mangled bike and all), I was popping painkillers like candy. I went into shock and/or had a full-blown panic attack in the middle of one of my classes when I realized I had finished my month’s supply of narcotics within a few days. I ended up back in the hospital that night, experiencing wave after wave of involuntary “shock” or panic.

On a side note, I had done something similar a few years prior: I rolled my ankle playing basketball at the university and, after being taken to hospital, hobbled to class in the middle of a snowstorm with my crutches because it was the last class before the exam and I did not want to risk missing important information. Being very frugal, I took the subway home after class instead of a taxi and, a little after arriving home, I went into shock due to the intense strain stemming from my stupid determination and poor judgment.

Returning to the other story, my failure to ask for any extensions following the accident, together with my subsequent “shock” or panic-induced setback, ended up causing me to screw up my thesis. I was consequently one of the few students who did not get an A on it—I think it ended up being a B+. I had also got a B on a full-year lab/research course due to some conflicts with the professor and my fellow students, and these were the two most important courses prospective Grad School professors/supervisors would look at.

Getting relatively poor grades in these two full-year courses (as opposed to most courses in which I was getting As and A+s that were half-year and thus contributed less to my GPA) was critical because of the next crisis to befall me at that time: I had failed to get accepted into Grad School for a variety of reasons—most of which were my fault, although I did get into a Top-10 program in the US, but the professor/supervisor ended up leaving after she accepted me and thus my offer was nullified.

Now, I had no grad school, no job and, if I were to try once again to get into grad school, my application would be hindered by a GPA that was lower than it had been when I failed to get accepted the first time; because of the timing, applications to grad school are usually based on grades up until the penultimate term, but now I would have to include results from my final term, which included my inadequate thesis performance as well as other grades that fell somewhat after the accident. Plus, my plans had been delayed by at least a year and, in the state of despair into which I was falling, I was distorting reality severely and felt as though that one-year delay would cause me to be an old man by the time I finally became a psychologist—assuming I could even get into grad school in the first place!

In short, I really did not see any hope for my future at that point. As alluded to earlier, this is when I went into a depression for about a week or so. I was not used to failing and now I was facing a number of the biggest failures someone in my position could confront, all at the same time.

I ended up going to therapy, but for dubious reasons (I won’t get into that). In the end, however, I
experienced a moment of significant self-reflection and insight in spite of my psychologist—or, more accurately, to spite that psychologist. In short, the entire experience really humbled me and greatly changed my perspective on myself and my life.

I picked myself up, took complete responsibility for a number of problems I had experienced—including those for which I had mistakenly believed I had already taken full ownership—and set about planning to get into grad school for the next year. I worked on improving myself in other areas of my life and, one year later, began graduate school on the same day my first daughter was born.

I should point out that my reputation at the U of T almost ruined my career aspirations, as I learned that, when prospective graduate supervisors/professors would contact my former professors, they would warn them about me. I found out that at least one professor who had never even taught me had similarly advised against taking me on as a grad student!

Fortunately, one of my former professors, with whom I had become quite close, really stuck up for me and convinced my supervisor at York to take me on. She took a chance with me and, I believe, I did not make her life too much more difficult than any other grad student.

Interestingly, after my Free Speech talk with Drs. Jordan Peterson and Gad Saad on November 11, 2017, I met my former supervisor for the first time in about 10 years. She was there as Dr. Peterson’s personal guest because they have been friends for many years; she also brought him onto my dissertation committee as an “external reviewer” as part of my graduation requirements.

In any event, when I began graduate school, my recent life-altering experience with profound self-reflection and self-improvement caused me to make a determined effort not to keep doing things as I had always done before. I was committed to being a “good boy” and not causing any shit. I joined a number of committees and got very involved with the department.

I really immersed myself in such things and contributed to some major changes in the department. And, as part of my devotion to becoming a better person, I focused many of my efforts on doing things that would help others and not myself. In addition to learning how things work in the department, I learned what most “do-gooders” learn: The vast majority of people are happy to sit back and let a tiny number of people do all of the hard work that ends up benefiting those who do nothing to help out.

I should add that one reason I first got involved in all of these things was that, by chance, I had been set up with a student who was as ambitious as I was. She was one or two years ahead of me and, as part of our orientation, she and others in her grade would each be paired up with one incoming student. At this point, she had been doing so much for the program as a student committee member that she had finally had enough. She asked if I wanted to take over one or two of her responsibilities and I took them all over, as well as several other positions.

If I had kept my mouth shut, my life would have been much easier and simpler. But it would have also been far more boring and I don’t do boring. Knowing me, I would have ended up filling my spare time with my typical trouble-making antics.

**Jacobsen: [Laughing].**

**Amitay:** In any event, I soon realized that York’s program was not very efficient: We were taking too many courses—some of which were literally irrelevant or useless—in lieu of clinical training and experience. The department asked how I knew that my complaints were valid. They challenged me to prove my assertions so I contacted the dozen or so Canadian Clinical Psychology programs at the time that were accredited by both the American Psychological Association and Canadian Psychological Association, as York was.

I had been on the committee that had recently got the APA accreditation for York so I knew about various requirements and expectations. After compiling all of the data on each of the aforementioned comparable graduate programs—which had so many variations in their course load, training, internships, research requirements, average duration, etc—I showed conclusively that we had too many courses and not enough training.

While I was at it, I also showed that one research paper requirement literally had no meaning or value for most students. Also, it had been designed in such a way that there was no consistency among students’ experiences: Some had supervisors who did not care about it and gave them an A for doing virtually nothing, while others had to work their ass off doing something that did not benefit them at all.

I pushed and got the department to change that paper so that, in fact, most students would derive some benefit and would have to do approximately the same amount of work. In short, I got the department to implement parameters that would help the student turn this requirement into a brief paper that could get published and would thus help them get funding.
into future internships or post-doc positions and/or advance their eventual careers.

In the process, however, I really pissed off a number of professors who did not like that a student was pushing for all of these changes. I believe a few of the professors got their revenge by giving me lower grades than I deserved. They also decided to implement one of their new policies that they knew was my personal favourite—eliminating one of the courses we needed to take—literally the day my own useless course was finished; I know this was deliberate because of the interaction I had with the professor who told me about this change. Oh well, that’s what you get.

By the way, when I finally resigned all of my committee positions, I recruited a colleague to take over, just as my “buddy” had done with me a few years prior. However, I fully warned her about the problems she would face and she was still determined to do it. She knew how much I had been doing so she got two more students to split all of the duties I had been handling.

Sure enough, each of these three students found themselves having to deal with “passive-aggressive” and/or retaliatory B.S. from some of the professors and administrators with whom they were working on the various committees. Unfortunately, they did not have the kind of thick skin I have and I believe two of them ended up dropping out of the program (I know one did for sure and she told me that the BS I just mentioned was a huge factor). I think the third student gave up on her committees after a pretty short time.

One of the points of this digression was that, although York did end up adopting most of the changes I pushed—especially with respect to clinical training—they did so after it was too late for me to benefit from these changes. In other words, I received very little actual training from York with respect to psychotherapy and psychological assessments.

Jacobsen: Right.

Amitay: So, I had to get it from the outside. Some of it was through practical experience, such as the Employee Assistance Program, which is a program paid for by certain employers. It is limited private insurance for mental health. (It was originally established to help employees dealing with addictions and then they broadened it.) That was my first “clinical” job. For a graduate student making $65/hr, not bad!

We are talking 20 years ago. I had a niche market as I was apparently the only one in Canada at the time who was doing therapy in Japanese, according to the EAP provider.

Jacobsen: [Laughing].

Amitay: These Japanese clients who came to Canada had a hard time adjusting. I was doing therapy with them through this EAP. I told this to my department at York when we were discussing what I was doing. They said, “You can’t do that. You are only a first-year Master’s student. You are not a psychologist. You do not have malpractice insurance. If someone kills themselves, the company will throw you under the bus because you are a private contractor for them.” And the fact is that one of the people I had dealt with through this EAP had attempted suicide.

I could have lost everything. I had no idea. So, that was my first “clinical” experience. York stopped me after I had done this for about a year. They did it for my own benefit and said that they would never allow another student to do that by tightening the rules.

In fact, there have been a number of times in undergraduate and graduate school where they have changed some policies because of something I had done and the outcome was not necessarily great. But how do you know if you don’t do it?

But the point is that I ended up getting most of my training outside of the university through practice, internships and other opportunities I sought out for myself. One exception to this was Emotion Focused Therapy (EFT) with Dr. Les Greenberg, who came up with this very powerful therapy with Drs. Rice and Elliott, and he taught it in one of the courses at York. He also ran workshops where he was training therapists on how to do EFT; I volunteered to facilitate several such workshops with him and learned more about EFT this way.

I was constantly looking for any opportunity for more training and more experience. Then, the most important experience for me, which ended up changing my whole life, occurred when I did one of my internships at a hospital. A friend of mine, one of my lab mates at York, had done this internship previously and suggested that I apply to do it as well.

I was accepted and began working and training with my supervisor, Dr. Szabo, at the hospital. However, Dr. Amin, the head of the psychology department (and also Dr. Szabo’s former mentor), liked what he saw of me and ended up “poaching” me. I ended up doing a lot of side work for Dr. Amin, who got me into doing Parenting Capacity Assessments (PCAs) for the Courts and many different Child Protection Services across Ontario. I had never planned to do
this kind of work, as my goal was simply to do psychotherapy.

At the time, Dr. Amin was probably doing the most PCAs in Canada and had been doing them for many, many years. I assisted him in doing many of these types of assessments and got so much extensive training in assessments. Dr. Amin ended up becoming my supervisor and mentor for subsequent internships for York and then for my registration with our College of Psychologists of Ontario not only for assessments but also for psychotherapy. Dr. Szabo was also my secondary supervisor during this training.

When I got my full registration, I ended up doing PCAs on my own. I basically called all of these Children’s Aid organizations—with Dr. Amin’s blessings—and said, “Just so you know, you can contact me directly now if you would like me to complete any PCAs for you.” From what I have heard from those in the know, I ended up doing the most PCAs in Canada per year and may still be doing more than any individual psychologist.

I am so grateful because virtually anyone can be a therapist. Although I have many patients, with the way things are going in Canada with respect to psychologists and psychotherapists, I believe many psychologists who do only psychotherapy are going to see a significant decrease in their business in the near future. That is, even though psychotherapists have far less education, training, knowledge and expertise than psychologists, they have recently been gaining far more rights, abilities and standing by our government.

If I did only therapy, I would be just one therapist in a giant pool. But conducting Parenting Capacity Assessments—and now Custody and Access Assessments—I am part of a tiny select/specialized group of psychologists doing such niche work.

One reason very few people do these types of assessments is that it is kind of like forensic work and often requires us to give expert testimony in Court; this intimidates many psychologists. What intimidates and deters psychologists even more is that PCAs and especially Custody and Access Assessments draw the most false complaints to our College. I won’t get into that nightmare other than to say that defending oneself against such false allegations can be a very anxiety-provoking and/or extremely time-consuming process. I have been through a number of such false complaints and they really can take their toll; I will leave it at that.

Another reason people do not like doing PCAs can be elucidated in the following story that I tell my students. When Dr. Amin first hired me to help him conduct PCAs, he wanted to ease me into the process because he knew how terrible some of the cases could be; we have both had some truly horrific cases and have seen the worst that humans are capable of doing. We also each have children, so these things can potentially strike home.

Knowing all this, Dr. Amin decided to make my very first case relatively easy—which rarely happens, since the Courts or child protection agencies don’t need to bring us in for “easy” cases. In any event, he happened to have received such a case and told me, “This is an easy one: It involves a grandmother who has agreed to take care of her granddaughter and Children’s Aid completely supports this plan.”

I thought, “Great!” I opened the case file and thought to myself, “Either Dr. Amin is one sick bastard if he thinks this is an “easy” case, or he has a really sick sense of humour.” I am saying this to you with a smile, but I have to follow it up with the most unfunny thing ever.

You see, the reason the grandmother was involved was that her daughter had allowed a boyfriend to beat the living shit out of her child. My mentor did not know the specifics of the case. He is definitely not an asshole; he is a very good, compassionate and generous man.

However, as soon as I opened the file, the first thing I saw was a color photograph of the child in the hospital – bruises up and down, near death. This was my very first case: what an introduction into the world of PCAs.

Since that first case, I have conducted over 450 PCAs. Sadly, there is a great demand for such assessments and, like I said, it is a niche market. It is a terrible field in which to work but I try to do some good.

In addition to PCAs and Custody and Access Assessments, I see about 15-25, sometimes 30, patients a week. I never have to advertise because my patients come through word of mouth and from seeing or hearing me in the media, as I give about 4 or 5 interviews per week. It started off as a few here or there about 14 years ago, then eventually increased to about one per week and I kept getting more and more interview requests on literally any topic you can imagine.

Although some might consider me lucky for the way things have turned out for me, nothing has ever just fallen into my lap. Rather, whenever I see an opportunity, I go for it and do my very best to prove that I am the right person for the job, whatever it is.
Nobody has ever simply given me anything or done me any favours just for the sake of being nice to me.

As another example, when I first decided to try teaching at Ryerson 16 years ago, the day I called to inquire into how I should go about applying for any positions that might be available, I was told that there were no positions available in the Psychology department at the time and there would not likely be any in the foreseeable future. However, I was told to try the Continuing Education department. I called them up and found out that that very day was the last day to apply for teaching positions that term. I can’t remember what I was doing that day but I pushed everything aside, found out what courses were being advertised, got my crap together and put together a CV and application package over the next few hours. I rushed down to the university, delivered my last-minute application package right before they closed and, weeks later, was told that I would be teaching Introduction to Psychology.

Over the next eight years, I would always teach at Ryerson and one other university in Toronto or just outside the city. This caused me to teach four to six courses four terms/times each year—once I taught seven courses and twice I taught eight! I am pretty sure that was a record. Plus, I was still seeing many patients each week and conducting numerous assessments.

I thought, “I am going to have a story to talk about one day. If I can make it through this term…”

**Jacobsen: [Laughing].**

**Amitay:** “…I will have a story to tell.” It is not comparing myself to other people. It is comparing myself to what I had done before. It is having a healthy mindset. Instead of feeling overwhelmed, I always ask myself, “Okay, how am I going to make this happen?”

One of the times I taught eight classes was when I was working 100 hours per week. I was teaching 9am-12pm at Ryerson; 12:6pm at U of T Scarborough, which was about a 20-30-minute drive; and finally 6-9pm back at Ryerson. Those numbers obviously don’t add up [Laughing]. However, I worked things out with my schedule to make all of that happen without my students losing any class time or quality of teaching.

Those are the kinds of challenges I live for. I love knowing that I am able to do such things and do them well. This is the way I see life: challenges. Otherwise, you stagnate and get bored. You atrophy.

However, in 2011 I decided it was too hectic to try to balance working at two different universities. I stopped teaching elsewhere and have continued to teach two courses every term at Ryerson, four times each year: I teach Psychology of Human Sexuality every term and Psychological Disorders (which is often called Abnormal Psychology) and Clinical Psychology in alternating terms.

And, because I am a workaholic, I end up filling up a lot of my “free time” with social media stuff. Making my podcasts and engaging with viewers on Youtube and Twitter could, in fact, be a fulltime career if I had any business or marketing acumen. But I do all of that simply because it is the right thing to do; I make absolutely no money off of it.

Returning to Ryerson, I do love teaching. I also appreciate that much of what I learn in order to teach can also inform my clinical practice, and vice versa.

I have had opportunities at different universities to work full-time and aim for a tenure-track position. However, doing that requires a lot of research, which means that you are not really teaching much. I have always enjoyed the teaching part and not so much the research part. And I really do not like having to “beg” for money via research grant proposals all of the time and having to prove my worth to a department by showing them that I know how to play the game properly. That is not my thing at all.

Teaching, however, is definitely my passion. And because I love it so much, my students see me at my absolute best. I am on fire in class. To be sure, there have been some days that I am sick or sleep deprived. I will stagger into class, coughing and barely able to speak at first. But once I get rolling, I get energy from the students and I can get right into the lesson with full vigour.

And it does not matter if I have taught something before. I always try to keep it fresh for both myself and for the students. They can see that. The funny thing is, I will sometimes stand there in the middle of class and literally pat myself on the back and say something like, “I have taught the same thing 60 times, and this is the first time I made that joke spontaneously about this material.” I do not plan those kinds of things. I want such comments or jokes to manifest at the moment. And I will always try to bring recent events to the lesson plan so that, even if I have taught it many times before, it will be different in important ways because new examples are always available.

Also, my students know that, no matter what I am teaching, from the very beginning I have always taught critical thinking. I have a number of ways I do this organically in the lecture that really drives home
the need to be able to think sceptically and critically, and to keep an open mind to everything.

I also show students that they are able to hear and discuss extremely controversial and uncomfortable materials from a logical, rational, or fact/evidence-based perspective without letting their emotions overwhelm them. In my Human Sexuality class, within the first 20-30 minutes of the very first lecture of the term, I have discussed rape, pedophilia, domestic violence, feminism, gender wage myths, real and false allegations of sexual assault or incest, masturbation, sexual orientation and more. And you know what I never include? “Trigger Warnings.”

I do have to be careful because I have no tenure and no job security. I am merely a sessional lecturer on contract. So, I still have to apply to teach three times per year, although I always get the courses I want because I have so much seniority. But I still have to apply.

I have forgotten to apply three times over the past 17 years because sometimes I am so busy with deadlines for Court reports or some other work-related duties, and the application period occurs near the end of the term, when I am trying to wrap everything up and get all of my grades in. Fortunately, my immediate superior is a good person and, each time I forgot to apply he gave me two other courses to teach. Although these are usually courses I have taught previously, once I was offered the chance to teach Positive Psychology and once it was an Addictions course.

Teaching a new course can be very demanding because you have to create the syllabus, lecture materials, powerpoints and exams from scratch. And, as a sessional instructor, I do not get paid for this prep time, only the actual class time. So, for each of these two new courses, I knew I was going to invest so much time and effort into something that I would most likely never teach again, since I always teach the three courses I mentioned (each instructor usually gets to teach only two courses per term).

Fortunately, I ended up teaching Positive Psychology two more times, so I was able to use the materials again, with some tweaking/modifications. Moreover, when I was preparing for the course, I learned about another psychological orientation/therapy—Acceptance and Commitment to Change Therapy (ACT)—which I pursued and incorporated it into my clinical practice as my eighth one.

As for the Addictions course, although I never taught it again, it did provide me with a lot of information that I have been able to use in my practice. It gives me another area of knowledge that is very relevant to my work with many patients.

In other words, instead of complaining about all of the work I had to do for each course, I looked at the positive aspects of my decisions. This is the kind of healthy mindset that enables me to take on new challenges: I look for ways in which doing these things will benefit me instead of worrying about the potential negatives. However, I do engage in a mental calculation to make sure that the potential benefits will outweigh the costs, otherwise I am prone to making bad decisions for the wrong reasons.

**References**


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Appendix I: Footnotes


Dr. Oren Amitay, Ph.D., C.Psych. on His Life and Views: Registered Psychologist and Media Consultant (Part Two)

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Abstract

An extensive interview with Dr. Oren Amitay, Ph.D., C.Psych. He discusses: current tasks and responsibilities and his process; clinical and teaching work, and the different therapies such as Rational Emotive Therapy, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Dialectical Behavioural Therapy, etc., having overlap; and additional services within his professional work and much of the work as re-parenting the patient.

Keywords: clinical psychology, media consultant, Oren Amitay, registered psychologist.

Dr. Oren Amitay, Ph.D., C.Psych. on His Life and Views: Registered Psychologist and Media Consultant (Part Two)

1. Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Now, what are your current tasks and responsibilities when you are dealing with up to 30 patients and teaching? Can you walk us through that process? Your style in which to engage patients as well as style in which to engage students.

Dr. Oren Amitay: Right, so, for my clinical practice, thank God for my wife. She found me another office nearly two years ago that is more convenient for me and is available 24/7. Before that, I was at my mentor’s office. Because I wanted to keep as many days free as possible to teach, do assessments and write up reports, I would schedule all of my patients on two (or sometimes three) days, meaning that I would see them straight from 8 or 9am until as late as 10 or 11pm.

With this new office my wife found, I can see a few patients here or there at any time throughout the week. Plus, I still have one long day at my mentor’s office, but it is not as bad as it used to be.

As for my clinical work, I see individuals, families, and couples. I do sex therapy. I do relationship counselling. I do family therapy. I used to do group therapy. I incorporate eight different types of therapies or orientations, some of which overlap with others, so they are not entirely different.

As my mentor taught me, part of the therapy is technique but another aspect is adopting the right mindset, understanding a person from a certain perspective and seeing how they came to be rather than using specific tools and techniques. But I definitely need to use the various techniques and
tools I have learned as well. It depends on the person, their situation and their needs.

And, as research clearly shows, the most important part of treatment is the therapeutic/working alliance or relationship. It is critical that the patient feel safe and not judged at all. This latter part is easy for me because my upbringing was so “different” that I don’t know what “normal” looks like. And my patients can sense this with me. So there is no judgment, although I make sure my patients know that I will not blindly accept anything they say or do. That is not genuine compassion and it is usually not helpful.

I should add that my parents told my brother and me when we were kids, “We don’t know what the hell we are doing.” My mother had given birth to me shortly before she became 22 and my father was a “crazy hippy artist.” They explicitly encouraged us to always question or challenge them.

I have a memory of them saying that so I was probably about four or five years old. The most important point about them saying such a thing is that, growing up, I never internalized their craziness, their many problems or their bad parenting. I knew that those things were on them. Now, that doesn’t mean I didn’t develop my own neuroses and crazy traits. But it was never because I blamed myself for my parents’ many faults and failings.

The one problem was that, notwithstanding my parent’s encouragement to question or challenge them, my mother didn’t like being challenged. But I was too stubborn and kept challenging her; I never stopped. Her responses to my challenging her were never appropriate, nor were here responses to the very many bad things I did; the punishment was always extremely disproportionate to the crime. But again, I knew she was not acting like a good parent. I always knew I was doing something wrong and I chose to do it, hoping that I would get away with it or that I could talk/lie my way out of it if I got caught. But I never thought I was so horrible that I deserved the kinds of things my mom said or did to me when I pissed her off.

The reason I am saying all of this is that it had a huge impact on how I saw the world, how I saw myself. It did something to me and for me. Interestingly, even though I thought I was always able to recognize and to admit whatever I had done—to myself, that is; I would often lie to others in order to avoid some negative consequence—the crisis I had mentioned earlier caused me to realize for the first time in my life that I was not being 100% honest with myself.

Immediately following the third horrible session with the aforementioned psychologist I was seeing after those major failures that had occurred within weeks of each other, I spontaneously had a moment of profound insight. It inspired me to come up with a thought exercise that, for the first time in my life, showed me that I had not been seeing things as honestly and clearly when I had conflicts with people as I had believed.

Sadly, I did have very many interpersonal conflicts and I never adequately appreciated the nature and degree of my role in all of these unpleasant interactions. On that day, however, I realized, “Holy shit! I am so far off the mark.” Once that happened, I finally fully accepted how messed up I was, how much of an asshole I was, and so on.

It was enlightening. It was amazing. I couldn’t believe it. It was a weight off of my shoulders because I was no longer carrying any self-serving “delusions.” From that point on, I dedicated myself to making sure I never employ any (unconscious) defence mechanisms. I see myself, my actions and the world around me as “objectively” as possible, no matter how ugly, shameful, embarrassing, scary, distressing, discouraging, etc. any of these things might be.

I am able to look at these things—including my patients—without negative judgment. Rather, I accept everything for what it is and focus on making sure that I or my patients are making the most adaptive decisions in light of the reality of my/their actual thoughts, feelings, motives, actions or circumstances.

My patients know they can tell me anything. Not everyone feels comfortable doing so at first, of course, but most feel that they can open up and say things. I relate to them in a human-to-human way. I tell everybody. “Look, I wish I was as good of a father or husband as I am with my patients. I wish I could be that open, non-judgmental, and so on, because I am a judgmental asshole in my normal life. I try not to be, but that is part of who I am.”

I have to work on that. With my patients, it is suspended for that 50-60 minutes with them. I am there for them. I am very Rogerian in that sense. It is empathy. I always tell my students and the people I train, “As long as you can make the other person feel you get them or are doing your damnedest to try to get them, everything else is gravy.”

If your only value is being empathetic, you will not be the greatest therapist, but it is the first step. I know many psychologists and psychiatrists who are horrible when it comes to being genuinely empathetic. However, some of them have mastered their technique, which gives them a sense of...
confidence, and that can have a positive impact on the patient. It can help the patient develop a sense of “I can do it.”

But I have literally lost count of the very many people who have told me horror stories about their experiences in treatment. Look, this is the last place that you would ever want to be judged. Sadly, far too many therapists do make their patients feel judged or demeaned—usually inadvertently.

As alluded to above, I am very empathetic but I do not let my patients live in fantasy; I call them out in a compassionate manner. They know I will do this and they know that everything I say or do is without any bad intentions.

As an example, I tell my students, “When certain patients with a history of bad relationships tell me excitedly that they have met a new person, the first thing I ask them is, ‘What are you going to do to mess this one up?’” They sometimes get shocked or upset. But they realize why I am saying it. If they don’t get it, I explain the reason for such a question.

That is, when you have a typical conversation, you are processing things on one level. If I say something that is a little bit “off,” unusual or otherwise unexpected, you will hear and process things a little bit differently. In the example I just gave, my blunt question puts them in a different emotional state and makes it easier for me to penetrate or to circumvent their defences. It also forces them to reflect on and to recognize what they bring to each and every relationship that they have ended up sabotaging.

For instance, they might end up saying, “Oh, I didn’t know I put up huge walls,” or “I had no idea my supposedly witty comments were actually insulting to someone on a first date.” It is a cliché, but you truly cannot change something if you are not aware of or cannot admit what is wrong.

Helping people acknowledge their flaws in such a way that they do not feel you are merely mocking, criticizing or devaluing them is what will help them make the kinds of improvements they need to make so that they can function better. This is true compassion.

It is funny because many people who love Dr. Jordan Peterson believe he is saying that compassion is bad or not a desirable trait. However, that is a misinterpretation of his message. That is, compassion is very important if employed properly, and Dr. Peterson himself is compassionate with his patients and all of his fans.

What he describes as “bad compassion” is when you are not telling people the truth, even if it may be painful to hear. Or, as their parent or teacher or anyone else in a position of authority, you are “spoiling” or disempowering them by being too lenient or indulgent, or you are being too intrusive and solving all of their problems instead of letting them figure things out (with some guidance) so that they can learn to deal with failure or other adversities. This enables them to become more resilient and resourceful, and we hope to become the best person they can be.

Part of this process involves helping people learn to tolerate discomfort. That goes along with finding the will and the courage to confront whatever it is they might need to confront, whether it is an illness or how shitty their parents are or their bad behaviours in relationships or the realization that their meaningless job is slowly robbing them of the will to live, or whatever.

Whatever it is, they have to learn to confront and to tolerate it. It grounds them. That is one thing that I do. Another thing that I do, and some of my colleagues think I am crazy for doing this, is something that is similar to the system for Dialectical Behavioural Therapy for borderline patients.

I don’t know how it is in other programs, but in Toronto where one of the earlier DBT programs were established, they originally had a pager system. Patients were able to call their therapist at all hours of the day or night and they could expect a call back within a relatively short period of time.

I do something similar, in that I am available 24/7. A few patients take advantage of this but most respect my rules and boundaries. That is, they can reach out to me by phone, text or email at literally any time of the day, whether it is a crisis, they want to vent instead of saying or doing something that they will later regret, they want to share an insight, they remembered something they forgot to say in therapy, they want to suggest something for next session, etc. They know I am not necessarily going to answer or get back to them right away, although I do try to be very responsive.

My mentor was against this because he didn’t want them to develop a sense of overdependence on the therapist, which I fully understand. I tell my patients, “I am not expecting that you will have to call me, but if you ever feel the need to reach out, please know that I am here for you.” And that feeling that someone is out there who “has your back” can be very empowering; it can make you feel that you are a valuable or worthy person who deserves not to mess up your life or to undermine yourself.
Especially with technology, many people have a tendency to act on impulse and send texts or make calls that they really should not do. I tell such patients to text me instead because by doing that they’re taking themselves out of that moment where they are likely to sabotage themselves in some way. If they can step back and not act on emotion right at the moment, that gives them a chance not to be a slave to their limbic system and instead to access their frontal lobes or prefrontal cortex: the part of the brain that controls impulse and enables one to exercise more rational thinking and better judgment.

In short, it can help defuse the momentary urge or compulsion, which is when people often get in trouble. It is similar to the DBT model, which in turn seems a lot like AA. One of my former students, who is in AA, got really turned onto the DBT model when I taught about it, and now he is an expert in it. But when he first looked into DBT further, he came back to me and said, “This is fucking AA” [Laughing].

**Jacobsen: [Laughing].**

**Amitay:** He was actually right. A lot of DBT is like AA in some key ways, including the aforementioned “pager” system, which is like “sponsors” in AA. As mentioned, when you are in that rough spot and know somebody is out there to help if you reach out, it can be extremely helpful.

Believe it or not—and this makes me sick to my stomach—I know some therapists who will say, “That was a 10-minute call. We will pro-rate it at $40.” Come on, really?! Jeez. They do the same thing with emails.

If I charged for all of my emails, phone calls, texts, and other things I do for my patients outside of session, it would increase my salary substantially. But I do not need that extra money. I make more than enough as it is. I think it is important that my patients know I do this for them, even though I do not have to do it, and many therapists do not.

Plus, my patients can’t say, “Oh, you are only doing this because I am paying you.” Some do say that about our work in therapy, but with this system, I can say, “I do not have to do this for you; I could spend my free time not thinking about you at all but I do it because I do actually care.” Sadly, many people do not have that feeling that even one person cares about them and/or has their back.

**2. Jacobsen: Between the clinical and the teaching work, some things come to mind on reflection. One, the relationship between Dialectical Behavioural Therapy and AA, and the comment, of the person that you knew, that they were basically the same.**

**Do you think between things like Rational Emotive Therapy, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, DBT, etc, that there is a lot more overlap than there needs to be in the sense that they do not necessarily need to be disjunct?**

**Amitay:** Yes, I have said this many times. When someone comes up with a “new” therapy or “new” approach, they are often pretty much reinventing the wheel. I prefer to take “the common factors” approach: You look at “What are the shared or common elements in the various therapies that make them effective or beneficial?” Is it the therapist? Is it the approach?

I spend a lot of time criticizing Cognitive Behavioural Therapy in my classes. However, I also tell my students that it is one of my eight orientations and, if someone were to say to me, “From all of the orientations you use, if you had to choose one for yourself, which one would it be?” I would say, “CBT.” Currently, I would also say ACT/Acceptance Therapy, which is similar to CBT in many ways but deals with emotions and other important elements better, I believe.

I tell my students that my criticisms are not about CBT itself but rather about therapists who focus too much on the technique or structure of CBT, to the exclusion of being able to really connect with and to understand their patients. For example, with “CBT for depression,” it may be 16 sessions. Session 1, you do this. Then session 2, 3, and so on, you do A, B and C.

A therapist who does that too rigidly is not a good therapist because mental health issues, therapy and life are not that neat. Yes, treatment should be evidence-based, but we need to also recognize that the work we do is often messy because humans are “messy.” You can’t always do things according to set schedules and expect them to progress as you would like.

That is what worries me: when people are such strong adherents to one approach or the other. If the patient does not act as the therapist expects, they often make the patient feel incompetent, devalued and demotivated.

And, as mentioned earlier, all of the evidence shows that the therapeutic relationship is the most important element of successful treatment. So, to me, it is recognizing the underlying factors that are common to most or all major therapies, having an adaptive personal philosophy, understanding how humans work, having a very strong knowledge base with respect to psychotherapy, and trying to find an
approach, technique, and so on that might be most appropriate in a given situation.

Now, my mentor used to say, “Anyone that calls themselves eclectic doesn’t know what they are doing.” He believed that you should not take different approaches to working with a patient because it can make them feel confused or even overwhelmed if the therapist is trying a bunch of different things each week. Patients want a sense of stability and this can undermine such an atmosphere.

I can understand my mentor’s point because I do know some therapists who do that. One thing didn’t work this week, so they try something entirely different the next week, and they do this in a way that makes the patient question the therapist’s competence, confidence and/or effectiveness.

I tell my patients at the beginning that I have eight different orientations from which I operate and, as we work together, I will be able to determine which approach or technique is most appropriate for the person and their circumstances.

I also tell them that, sometimes, we operate on a more behavioural level, whereas at other times we will go to a deeper level. I add, “We do not always have to go to a deeper level or go back to your past in order to deal with your current issues adaptively.”

3. Jacobsen: If you had a knife to cut vegetables or an ax to cut a tree down with, and you’re stuck in the forest and all you have is a can of soup, at some point, you use the ax or the knife to cut the can open.

The techniques are tools. You use them as you deem fit or as the patient needs. There was something that I thought was particularly noteworthy, which you mentioned. You’re permitting or allowing patients to text or email you.

In other words, to stay in contact with you over some period of time, which they may deem important, they may be in an emotional moment. They talk to you instead or text you. Is there a sense that people who have particular problems, even disorders, are somehow having a loyalty lack in their lives, where you are providing that additional service within your services is seen as extra beneficial?

Amitay: For a lot of people who don’t have that at all, yes, it is just the idea that someone is willing to do that for them. Research shows, by the way, when it comes to social support—and I tell people all of the time, “All you need is one person in your life who you believe has your back. They don’t even have to have actually helped you. Simply this positive belief is often sufficient.”

And that is why I allow patients to reach out to me in various ways outside of session. Again, it is not about making them feel they need to do so or that they cannot do things on their own. It is simply making them feel that they are worthy enough to deserve or to receive such support if they need it. Most people get that and I think it is very important for them to feel that someone is willing to give of themselves for their sake.

Another thing I say to students, and I am going to try to articulate it in a way that it does not come off the wrong way. One thing told to me by my mentor and I have also read this elsewhere: “What a therapist does, in many cases, is re-parent the patient.”

Jacobsen: Wow, that’s powerful.

Amitay: Some may take that as “What? Are you being condescending?” No, many people come to therapy because they didn’t get proper parenting, whether they were lacking in love, attention, validation, support, guidance, discipline, etc. in childhood.

When I help train people and they tell me about their patient, I ask them, “Who in their family do you represent to them? Which role do you play in their life?” I then see it in their eyes: “Holy shit, I became their mother!” or brother or whomever.

And that is one way to look at things. It is part of my philosophy. Interestingly, back in the day, I was younger than most of my patients. Now, I am older and many of my patients are in their late teens, 20s or early 30s. Many of them are in my oldest daughter’s age group.

It is funny. I don’t think I come across as a parental figure. My mentor, on the other hand, is a grandfather and is very calming. Some people who want to see me really need someone more like my mentor, who will be low key and slow, and will bring a sense of calm and stability to the person’s life for one hour per week; it can really help reorient them. I will refer them to him, although I will also let them know they can work with me if they would prefer that.

Also, I do in fact act somewhat similarly with certain patients: I am very calm and low key. However, I have to really work on presenting in that way because it is not my nature.

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Appendix I: Footnotes

Dr. Oren Amitay, Ph.D., C.Psych. on His Life and Views: Registered Psychologist and Media Consultant
(Part Three)

Interviewer: Scott Douglas Jacobsen
Place of Publication: Langley, British Columbia, Canada
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Abstract

An extensive interview with Dr. Oren Amitay, Ph.D., C.Psych. He discusses: personal philosophy in terms of epistemology and engagement with people, non-shyness, Carl Jung, Freud and Rogers; cognitive complexity in animals, Jordan Peterson, Magnanimousology and Martyrology; and an ending note with Alice in Wonderland.

Keywords: clinical psychology, media consultant, Oren Amitay, registered psychologist.

Dr. Oren Amitay, Ph.D., C.Psych. on His Life and Views: Registered Psychologist and Media Consultant
(Part Three)

1. Jacobsen: What you are getting at is what we both know, the countries with the highest single parenthood rates in the developed world are the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and the United Kingdom, I believe.

In this country, we do have that lack of parental guidance, support, encouragement, mentorship, and so on. I think that is very apt in terms of describing patient lives, I guess. In terms of personal philosophy, I am thinking of themes consistent across domains of life.

What do you take as your personal philosophy in terms of epistemology and engagement with people?

Amitay: There are a few. Because of the way I was raised, I tell people that I am kind of antisocial, but in a different way. There are two types of “colloquial antisocial.” The one that most people think of are those who are shy or don’t like being with people.

Jacobsen: Zimbardo’s research on shyness and misanthropes come to mind for those categories for me.

Amitay: Sure, that is not me. But that is what people think of when they think of antisocial. Then there is the clinical diagnosis of antisocial personality disorder. And that is definitely not me because it describes someone who is reckless, impulsive, irresponsible, deceitful, aggressive and/or lacking in empathy; people with antisocial personality disorder have a history of harming or violating the rights of others with no remorse.

I am sure there is a better term for it, but I call myself “antisocial” in the sense that I do not allow society to dictate how I function. I stay within certain
parameters and rules, but I do not do so blindly; I question them all of the time. If I choose to do something, fine.

But the point is that I am choosing to act in a certain way because I know that it is in my best interests to do so or because I want to do it, even though I know I could do something that contravenes a particular norm, rule or expectation—and there’s a chance that I may still do those things at some other time. The opposite of my perspective is what Karen Horney called, “The tyranny of the should,” whereby people are driven by a “neurotic” need to be a certain way or to do things that they believe society or others expect of them, without questioning why.

But when you ask about personal philosophy and how I interact with others, I balance a few things: One, I believe humans are, by nature, self-interested or self-serving. I am more on the Freudian side than the Regerian side in that regard. If you put a bunch of kids on a deserted island, Rogers thinks you would get utopia. I say, “No, you are going to end up with Lord of the Flies.”

Jacobsen: [Laughing].

Amitay: That is why communism or socialism will never work. That is, within any given group of more than a few people, whether 10, 20, or whatever, there will be at least one person or a few people thinking, “Everyone is working together and cooperating with each other. I can take advantage of that.” That is part of our human nature. Why wouldn’t it be? Every other animal is self-serving or self-interested. Richard Dawkins showed in The Selfish Gene that even apparently altruistic behaviours are, in fact, self-serving. There is also a kind of reciprocal altruism, whereby you scratch my back and I will scratch yours.

Humans are self-serving, I have no doubt. Selfish would be the harshest description; self-serving is not as bad. Then there is self-interested, which is a relatively benign term.

There are anomalies, of course. But are such people genuinely altruistic because of some gene sequence? Is it due to the way they were raised? There is even a disorder where someone gives, gives, gives beyond what they can give. They give money, time, whatever to the point that it comes at some great cost to him/herself.

Jacobsen: Magnanimousology [Laughing]?

Amitay: [Laughing] Martyrology? That is a good name for that.

In any event, notwithstanding my belief that humans are self-interested and my inclination not to be constrained by societal conventions or expectations, I am guided by a “humanistic” personal philosophy, which is “do no harm to others.”

Do I want to hurt certain people? Of Course. But I typically do not act on such feelings, or the “harm” I cause is minor, for instance knocking someone down a peg or two on Twitter.

This brings us to another important part of the human condition, which is the dark side we all have. Carl Jung called this “the Shadow.” Dr. Peterson talks about that a lot.

When I was reading Carl Jung, the idea of the Shadow really appealed to me. I always knew I had a dark side and I was never afraid to access it. So many people are afraid to acknowledge or to tap into their Shadow because of shame, guilt, fear of losing control, or some other reason. I try to encourage people to understand that they too have this dark side and there is nothing wrong with admitting that, as long as you do not let it overwhelm you—otherwise you are potentially entering the realm of psychopathy or evil.

The Shadow is part of what makes us human. That is part of my philosophy. We are incredibly flawed creatures. As long as you recognize that and can accept it, you can become better; not better than someone else, not better because someone tells you to do so, but better because you want to grow as a human being.

I do believe that we as animals are motivated to grow to the best of our capabilities. It is survival: be the best that you can be. Other animals do not have neuroses like us because they are not being told, “You are not good enough.” Yet, they do develop in the direction of becoming the best animal they can be, otherwise they will not survive long.

2. Jacobsen: They do not live long enough to know what can pop up. Their cognitive complexity isn’t as far as ours.

On a side note, Dr. Peterson has recently been saying that he finally discovered what “The meek shall inherit the earth” means, since it does not seem to make much sense. In short, this phrase is a translation of the notion that the man who knows he could unsheathe his sword and wreak real havoc/destroy if he wished, but chooses not to do so, is the most noble and powerful man, and he shall “inherit” the earth. In other words, if you know you are capable of doing terrible things, yet you choose to access and harness your Shadow in ways that end up benefiting others, you are a truly righteous person.
Conversely, those who have antisocial personality disorder go in the other direction: They don’t care about other people. They break rules wantonly. They “rationalize” or make cheap excuses for whatever bad things they do.

Before my aforementioned crisis when I was 27-years-old, I used to do that to some degree: I would make up self-serving lies like we all do. I would justify things, rationalize. But when I was struck by that moment of profound insight, I thought, “No, I am going to own everything completely.” Since then, I am always completely aware of what I do. When I screw up, I know I have screwed up. If I have done something bad or wrong, I know it and I feel an appropriate amount of guilt about it.”

I have a conscience, thank God, because fear does not usually stop me from doing things. Rather, I do not want to harm other people; it is that simple. That is the way I function.

Another thing to consider is that we have an immensely powerful prefrontal cortex and an incredible capacity for language. I put a premium on language because there has to be a reason we have such a complex system and that we are born with the ability to learn something like this.

If you think about it, there is no way that we should be able to process and to understand language as well as we can at such a young age. It is not possible that we learn it purely through exposure or conditioning because our abilities develop at a rate totally disproportionately to our experiences. Noam Chomsky argues that we must therefore have a language processing centre in the brain.

It is interesting and disappointing: I tell my students, “There are so many books I have planned to write but I have never got around to finishing any of them. Instead, other people go ahead and end up writing about things I have thought of as well. Kudos to them.”

As an example, Dr. Peterson created his Self Authoring program. When I first decided to become a psychologist about 25 years ago, I wanted to create a therapy based on something I had read about “self-narrative” theory, which really appealed to me.

Humans are the products of the stories that we tell ourselves. I tell my students and patients, “It all boils down to perspective.” Whatever situation or experience you find yourself in, you can interpret it in many different ways. As long as you are not “deluding” yourself, you should try your best to look at things in the most adaptive way.

For example, if I go up to a beautiful woman and say, “Hi,” and she says, “Get away from me toad,” I can look at that in several different ways: I can say, “I am a horrible toad. I should go kill myself.” Or, “I guess I was punching above my weight class; I should aim for someone I have a chance of attracting.” Or, “Jeez, she is not a nice person,” etc. As long as I am reasonable or realistic and don’t think, for instance, “She is just saying that because she really loves me but does not want to risk getting hurt,” I should try my best to interpret and process the scenario in ways that will benefit me in some way.

We have to keep in mind that what we choose to focus on or the way we choose to interpret our experiences or the people, events and situations we observe will affect how we feel about ourselves and other people, how we function and feel the next day, what we learn from it, etc. It is based on language to a large degree. Language is how we make sense of our experiences and the world around us.

Here is one example I teach my students and patients (it does not work for certain cultures or languages such as Iranian/Farsi): I say, “When people talk, we have a tendency to say the word ‘you’ when describing a personal experience—It is a simple language convention that is intended to make the story seem more ‘applicable’ to everyone, especially the person with whom we are speaking. For instance, if someone is talking about something that happened to them while riding the bus the other day, they might say, “When you’re riding a bus and people brush by you…”

In therapy, however, saying “you” when talking about your own personal experience is, in fact, often a way of emotionally distancing yourself from what happened. You are making it seem abstract or a generalization rather than your own personal experience. I tell my students and especially my patients, “Own your experience. Embrace it completely.”

Some people are incessant and cannot help themselves. No matter how hard they try or how many times I point out what they are doing, they seem to be compulsively disavowing themselves of the experience.

As another example, people who frequently use “stupid” or “silly” or “ridiculous” or other such negative words when referring to themselves or something they are saying tend to be self-critical. They are often perfectionistic. And they are miserable a lot of the time. They usually have no idea how often they use this kind of language to denigrate themselves.
One more example: Most people who talk quickly are very nervous. I talk a mile a minute but it is not because I am nervous; that is the way my brain operates.

In any event, when I was training to be a psychologist, my colleagues and I were listening to a recording of my very first therapy session. Whereas most of my classmates were scared, nervous or embarrassed to play their own recordings, I did not care at all. In my mind, if I sound bad, so be it. I will not be embarrassed. I will learn from it.

In this case, it was a young, attractive, intelligent, articulate and witty woman. We had a great back-and-forth. There was very little silence.

It was a great session and everyone was saying things like, “Wow! This guy is good.” They all seemed impressed with or envious of how smoothly the session went, especially since their first session recordings did not sound so good.

However, the professor gave me a disapproving look. I thought, “You asshole, don’t rain on my parade.” But he was 100% right. When I tell my students this story, I say that what we had been listening to was a great date…”

Jacobsen: [Laughing].

Amitay: However, this was not a date but a therapy session. And what was lacking was any reflection on the patient’s part. The professor told me to slow it down and to not fill in the silences. When I took his advice the following week, the difference was incredible.

It made the first session seem like a waste. This next session, I saw the effects it had on her. I saw her really reflect on her words. She was focusing on her words and what they meant. She was not jumping from topic to topic and feeling to feeling. She had to sit in the moment. There was real depth to her experience and she gained some important insights.

Okay, last example: When I have students talk in small groups and then present their ideas to the class, if the student speaking says something like, “We believe that…” or “We thought that the problem you gave us…” I tell the class with a smile, “If (s)he had said, ‘I’ instead of ‘we’ right now, that would have been a pretty good indicator that (s)he may be a ‘narcissist.’ At the very least, it would have meant that they are likely the kind of person who is not a team player, who tries to make him/herself stand out or look better than everyone else, who takes credit for other people’s work, who is apt to throw you under the bus if necessary, etc.”

I would never say such things if the person had, in fact, said “I” when referring to what the group had discussed because that would make them feel so uncomfortable, given the implication of what I am explaining. But whenever I do say it, many students do seem to be reflecting on past experiences (or maybe the group work they had just done) and some of them display a look of recognition, acknowledgment, or appreciation for the accuracy of my claim.

3. Jacobsen: “We’re painting the roses red…” from Alice in Wonderland. The scene with the Queen of Hearts. These two cards are jumping around painting roses that were black/white into red because the Queen of Hearts says so.

It is just to calm everyone down. We are going to make the world her vision. Why? To appease.

Amitay: [Laughing] Right.

Jacobsen: I think that should suffice to cover much of your own life and views. Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Dr. Amitay.

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Appendix I: Footnotes


Two Short, Separate Conversations with Ben McDonald and Howie Slugh

Interviewer: Scott Douglas Jacobsen

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Abstract

Two short, separate conversations with Ben McDonald and Howie Slugh. Both interviews were conducted in late 2017 with recommendations from Pardes Seleh. McDonald discusses personal background, personal studies, the general state of America, the media and journalism, cross-political conversations, blanket demonization, and assessment of Trump. Slugh discusses personal background, Orthodox Judaism, cultural and media representations of Judaism, the state of America for 2017, virtue in the individual and in the society, ethics, the Trump Administration, and a personal hero.

Keywords: Ben McDonald, conversations, Howie Slugh, media, political science, Trump, Utah, Washington

Two Short, Separate Conversations with Ben McDonald and Howie Slugh

1. Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Let’s start with some family background regarding religion, geography, culture, and language.

Ben McDonald: I grew up in Salt Lake City, Utah. I am not personally religious. My grandpa is an Episcopal priest. I grew up around Mormons too, living in Salt Lake City. I have a bunch of family members who aren’t religious as well.

2. Jacobsen: What are you studying in school?

McDonald: I am a political science major and a journalism minor.

3. Jacobsen: When you’re looking at the general state of America, what is your perspective on it?

McDonald: I think it is becoming a little more divided, but as more time goes by things become more divided because everyone is so polarized with everything. You see this with politics being involved in every aspect of everything. I think it is starting to turn back to where you see people who are more set in their ways.

It is hard to have a discussion with people. But you have people who still don’t care as much. There are people who want to go about their own business. I
think there are people who aren’t interested in politics being made to be involved in it.

4. Jacobsen: If you look at the landscape of the media, in our own field of journalism, tied to politics to a degree, do you think that the media are doing their job sufficiently or do you think that they are failing in their journalistic duties?
McDonald: I think there are the journalists who do a good job. But I think people are starting to distrust the media, even fake media or the smaller newspapers, but even national things and YouTube. The reportage on things that aren’t necessarily a story or a worthy cause. A lot of not truthful things that the media reports on makes people not trust them. I think the gap of people not trusting them is growing more and more, the more and more it goes on.

5. Jacobsen: Do you think this contributes to a mild decline in cross-political conversations? In other words, Republicans speaking to Democrats and vice versa, or other political orientations.
McDonald: I think so because I think people want to watch their side and see the other side as the bad guys. They don’t want to have a conversation with them. I think people can be portrayed as – whatever side you’re on – the bad guy, which makes you not want to converse with them, in my opinion.

6. Jacobsen: In a way, it is a form of blanket demonization so you don’t have to think about the other side.
McDonald: Yes, it is othering the other side, so you’re right no matter what you do.
Jacobsen: In a way, does this amount to a form of moral self-exaltation? “I am right. They are wrong. Therefore, I am better.”
McDonald: Yes.

7. Jacobsen: With regards to the two areas of your expertise, we talked about one, which is journalism. We also talked about politics a bit. For the Trump administration and the surrounding rhetoric, do you think President Trump is doing a good job, an okay job, or a poor job, in his position as the President of the United States?
McDonald: I think he’s doing an okay job. I think he’s done what he can do personally. But a lot of the agenda had gotten stopped in Congress for multiple reasons, whatever they may be. Though I think his rhetoric could be better, which has set him behind of what he wants to accomplish. But I he’s done a relatively okay to a good job, overall.

8. Jacobsen: Do you have any final feelings or thoughts in conclusion based on the conversation today?
McDonald: I think politics has become so polarized, so I think people need to re-evaluate and take a look at what is happening.

9. Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Ben.

1. Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Let’s start with some family background regarding religion, geography, culture, and language?
Howie Slugh: I was born in Queens, New York. I lived in Fairlawn, New Jersey. Then we moved to Hollywood, Florida. I am an Orthodox Jew. My parents are Orthodox Jews. Now, I live in Washington, DC.
2. Jacobsen: With regards to the Orthodox or I assume Hasidic Jewish background with parents, do you still practice?
Slugh: Yes, I continue to be an Orthodox Jew.
3. Jacobsen: With regards to that faith, what do you consider to be some of the more common misconceptions about the faith – beliefs and practices? What truths dispel them?
Slugh: I am not particularly keen on cultural or media representations of Judaism, so I wouldn’t really know. I know the most famous representations of Judaism are not religious or only religious in shallow ways, or in “spiritual but not religious” ways. None of those would accurately represent Judaism, obviously. I have not seen a super amount of representation of Judaism in the culture.

4. Jacobsen: Taking that and pivoting into perspective, I want to get your perspective on the state of America 2017. If you look at America, broadly speaking, to set the groundwork of this part of the conversation, what is your general take on what are the more things? Do you think things are positive, relatively stable, or negative?
Slugh: So, I am Burkean in addition to being an Orthodox Jew. I think they go well together. I look at 2017 and see a concerning lack of faith in our institutions, and lack of faith and dedication to the permanent things. That is certainly concerning. I do think things do tend to go slowly. I think things are more resistant than people think they are. I don’t think things are that bad. Things tend to be sticky. They take a long time. I forgot who said it at the moment, but there’s a lot of rot in a country. This is not a bad thing; it means that countries can withstand a lot of negative things.

The country has a negative that we can make better. But America has been around 200+ years and has a lot of social capital. I don’t think it is going away anytime soon.

Things, incrementally, might be headed in a not great direction in some ways, but also, thank God, we’re healthy and living long and generally a still very prosperous country. Even in some social trends, things are improving.

The fact that sexual abusers are getting called out and punished is definitely a good trend, especially if there is an underlying cultural trend. People saying, “Hey, things aren’t arising ex nihilo. People aren’t harassing out of nowhere. There is a general culture of not taking virtue seriously enough. We should foster virtue rather than only going after the bad guys.”

That would be a tremendous change. Things can change quickly. But the permanent things are very permanent, respect and love for family, respect for country, religion in general, even if they wax and wane are very permanent.

Even if something is pulling those permanent things, we can quickly go to strengthening them. All the while they remain fixed and steady. It is easy in the heat of the moment to say 2017 is a super, monumental moment

But if you take a step back, it’s probably not that important.

5. Jacobsen: You mentioned the permanent things and virtue. Two things, a person, and tradition, that come to mind for me are Aristotle and the Abrahamic faiths. So, when you’re referencing permanent things such as family and faith as well as things such as an ethic grounded in virtue, I want to dive a little deeper into that, if I may. What are you defining as virtue, in an individual and in a society?

Slugh: The general thing that comes to my mind is Burke, not necessarily on virtue, but Robbie George on virtue. Working to create an environment Where the pursuit of the good and human flourishing is available, I guess teleology in there too. The purpose of people is to live a good life, to have families, to love their children, to work to the flourishing of their fellow humans. That is a virtuous life. A way that does not cause suffering of your fellow people. That treats your fellow people as ends and not means. That follows the Golden Rule treating others as you would like to be treated, not subjectively but objectively.

If you want to be treated poorly, you shouldn’t treat others poorly. It is not that. It is how would a human being with the characteristics of a human being want to be treated, not how you as an individual want to be treated.

It is creating those kinds of circumstances where those things that are good for humans are able to be pursued. That you are not interfering with other people’s pursuits. It is a positive and negative. You are fostering an environment where people can pursue the things that are good for people and not hindering those things that are good for people.

You can see this is in history, religion, tradition. There are sources for finding things. It is not the simplest question, but it is also less complex than people think. We have the American ideal of fairly independent people living with their families and loved ones and not harming one another, adding valuable things to the world.

People may scoff at it as simplistic, but it has endured for all of American history and long before that. Sometimes, “simple” is good
6. Jacobsen: In a way, its simplicity may underly the carving out of a lot of excesses that may have been attached to it in earlier times as that kind of ethic developed.

Slugh: It is certainly possible.

7. Jacobsen: I want to talk about the Trump Administration or President Trump himself. If you were taking the perspective of a teacher, and this is a bit of a lighter question, what would be the grade and comments section?

Slugh: Basically, very incomplete, because of no significant legislation, a lot of stuff he has done that hasn’t required Congress has been quite good because he has released regulations repeating the HHS abortiofacient/contraceptive Mandate. Which is now in the interim final rule, the contraception mandate now carves out an actual exemption for religious people and religious institutions and even conscientious objectors, as opposed to the prior accommodation that wasn’t a real accommodation.

It still forced people to be complicit with evil, or at least what they considered evil. He nominated terrific judges, Gorsuch and a number of appellate and district court judges. He signed the Mexico City Policy very early on in the administration: day 3. It wasn’t day 1, but day 3. It prohibits the funding of foreign abortionists, which saves lives, obviously, and is a terrific thing.

So, in those courts, he has done very well. Obviously, his rhetoric has left a lot to be desired, and his personal ethic [Laughing] has left a lot to be desired, but one role of a president is to sign legislation.

Somewhat, it is also Congress’s fault, but he certainly hasn’t helped matters on this pointing, getting matters through. He has three more years at least to get some more legislation through. Then we can more fully judge his legacy at that point.

Obviously, if we get wiped out in the midterms, then there will be a major difficulty and stumbling block in the way of his getting any legislation through. That will make it much more likely that he gets a bad grade. That’s where we stand now.

8. Jacobsen: Last question, who is a personal hero for you?

Slugh: I had the privilege to know. I had conversations with him. I met him in Italy in a law school class. I was very impressed by his determination to keep on pushing forward, even when things seemed bleak. He certainly recognized a lot of times when things seemed bleak, and when he was on a bit of a quixotic quest. He realized that. Sometimes, it seemed like he didn’t make a difference, but kept pursuing what he thought was right in a brilliant, funny, and energetic way. He was not Pollyannaish about it, saying, “Tomorrow, I will wake up and Americans will realize how the Constitution should be interpreted and what the rule of law means, and what it means to be a country of laws and not men.” But he kept his eyes focused on history and on what the right thing to do was. He kept pursuing that goal. I find that very admirable. He was a terrific person, who was easy to get along with and overall a person that I admire greatly.

Appendix I: Footnotes

[1] Slugh is an Attorney who works in Washington, D.C. McDonald is a Journalist.

A Conversation with Professor Rick Mehta on Self-Discovery, View Changes, and Conveyed Messages (Part One)

Interviewer: Scott Douglas Jacobsen

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Abstract

An interview with Professor Rick Mehta. He discusses: geographic, cultural, and family background; discovering himself; main research findings from the doctoral thesis; major trends in the way we look at the way human beings process information; reflections on Mehta’s transition from militant atheism to new views; problems with slant in social and political views and the influences on findings and interpretations; Sternberg’s Triarchic Theory of Intelligence and Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences, the work of Anthony Greenwald and Mahzarin Banaji with the IAT, general intelligence, and conscientiousness linked to discussion on biology; values to convey in a first-year class; fragmentation of epistemology in academic disciplines; inadvertently stepping into controversy; amelioration of the fragmentation in psychology; and his hoped-for message for the next generations conveyed in classes.

Keywords: controversy, epistemology, free speech, militant atheism, psychology, research, Rick Mehta.

1. Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What was geography, culture, and family life – heritage – and so on?

Professor Rick Mehta: My parents came to Canada in 1967. They started from India and went to Coventry, England, then from Coventry, England came to Canada in 1967. I was born in 1970.

It was one month before the October Crisis. I was living in LaSalle at the time. It was a turbulent time because this was, as I said, around the time of the October Crisis and the times leading up to the Referendum of 1980.

There was tension between the English and French. With our family being East Indian, we were viewed as enemies by both sides. We were not that liked at that time. There was racism that I experienced during that time.

After the referendum, I found things got better in Canada. I never had any regrets about living in Canada. I have adopted the Western values as part of who I am. That is the cultural part.

Religion, my parents are Hindu. I have never been religious. I may be a bit spiritual, maybe, but not outright religious. I was a militant atheist for a bit.
But then I noticed when I went online that many of the militant atheists were probably more intolerant of the people they were criticizing.

I gave that up. I am open to other people’s views. If we are connected to each other somehow, that’s good enough. For language, I had trouble learning multiple languages when I was in elementary school.

For better or worse, my parents decided to speak only English at home. The downside is we didn’t know the research on language. It shows that children might struggle at first if they are learning multiple languages.

But they will excel at all three later in life. If my parents had later known that, my parents would have taken a different tactic. They did the best with what they knew at the time.

I guess having grown up around that time with the animosity between the English and French, I developed a closed-minded attitude, “Why do I have to learn French when they can just learn English?”

In retrospect, I wish I had gotten rid of that attitude and had been more open-minded. Unfortunately, I am a unilingual Anglophone with some very basic working knowledge of French, so I can get by in Montreal.

2. Jacobsen: I want to get into some of your earlier educational experiences. When it came to university, did you know what you wanted to do, or did you need a little bit of time to, as they say, discover yourself?

Mehta: A little bit of time, in terms of how I evolved over time, it changed. In my first year at the undergraduate level, I discovered that I liked the psychology courses. But I was not particularly keen on some areas like the personality of the person who taught some courses. They did not seem to have one.

Jacobsen: [Laughing].

Mehta: [Laughing] There were certain courses like that that I did not want to take. Biology, there was a plants course. I did not like it. It was a required course. At the time, there was a new program opening in neuroscience that was being offered at the satellite campuses at the University of Toronto.

It was a way of getting people to go to the Scarborough and Erindale campuses. So, I was living in Scarborough at the time. It seemed like the best degree at the time. It was a way to get the best of psychology and the best of biology and avoid certain courses that I did not want to take [Laughing].

3. Jacobsen: [Laughing] Eventually, you did earn up to the highest level that we do have, which is Ph.D. What was the main research question in the doctoral thesis? What was the finding? Or what were the findings?

Mehta: Basically, the Master’s degree was in psychopharmacology and involved research with rats. I found it very limiting and narrow because I could not see the connection between the rat models and addiction. I probably could have done a better job in my own research.

Some were my own shortcoming at the time, too. But also working with the animals and the way everyone is treating the animals as if they are commodities, it never felt right to me on that front.

I was also developing allergies to the rats. I think at least 60% if not more of people who work with rodents develop allergies that are severe. I switched to human cognition for my Ph.D.

I was trying to look at how people learn correlations or associations between events, so that one event magically predicts another. That is the information we use to detect relationships with our world and predict what will happen next.

That was what I was interested in. It was more of the basic level. I was working with different associative or mathematical models versus other more top-down models. I found those a mix that could explain how people do their reasoning.

It was the easiest way to explain those reasonings. I did that line of work. For a postdoc at the University of Winnipeg, I was doing that as my early research at Acadia University. I found that the models were getting so convoluted.

The research was so inaccessible. If I was having difficulty, how could I get my students to do that? So, I switched to decision-making to have something more broadly defined and more accessible for students to be involved in.

4. Jacobsen: When you’re dealing with human cognition and you’re looking at the research now, what have been the major trends in the research or the big changes? In other words, what new findings have changed the way we look at the way human beings process information?

Mehta: I find that the main problem of a lot of the literature is that it has become so fragmented with these small questions. Not so much in dealing with the big issues, I think probably the main frustration of being an academic is that it is very small and territorial. We are all working in these small realms.
That is my dissatisfaction with that. So, there are these small little sub-fields. In academia in general, though, the part that has me worried is all these fields with identity because all they do is look at themselves and see how oppressed they are.

I do not see where there is the human condition. Let’s take a degree like Fat Studies, how much can you really learn from a degree where you learn that “I’m fat and if there are exercise programs that they are somehow victimizing me by telling me to change my diet”?

It seems like the fields are getting much more fragmented. Some more than others. Since I am interested in decision-making, with one honors student, we are interested in looking at the perception of singles vs. couples and so on.

One big name in the field, Bella DePaulo. Her earlier books were on how single people are stigmatized and that maybe they should get some respect, but her latest book for the public is about how singles are badass

That does not sit with me because that is not a message that I want to convey to people. That we are superior in any way. We are different and should deserve the same level of dignity as others. Some of the messages in these research areas to do with identity worry me.

5. Jacobsen: I reflect on the minor comment stated about early life for you in relation to the term in the TED Talk by Richard Dawkins in that period where you were a militant atheist.

You noted the unpleasant convictions and bigotry at times coming from that sector of some of the atheist, of the New Atheist, population as well as this thing that you just said.

It is not arguing for equality of singlehood. It is arguing for the superiority of it. It is not arguing for, in the former case, an equality of atheism with general society. It is arguing for superiority in a sense.

I notice that one consistent thread.

Mehta: Yes, I notice that with even with some of the cognition. They will design these studies and the result of it shows that conservatives are somehow morally inferior or something like that compared to liberals.

Of course, if it is all run by liberals, it sounds like what we did in the past to use science to justify our own bigotry. For a little while, I was a like that, except I caught myself. I have tried to realign my thinking to how we can have different ways of respecting each other with different ways of things in terms of how we view the world.

I think not having tied an emotion to my way of thinking has made a world of difference in terms of being open to new ideas and new perspectives.

6. Jacobsen: As you know the research better than I do, with the massive slant in social and political views, especially in psychology, more towards liberal than conservative, though I don’t know how they defined liberal and conservative in the research, the research will slant within that framework of demographics.

Also, not only the questions are asked, but the findings that are found and the interpretations that are given to them, how big of a problem does this present in psychology?

Mehta: I would say it is quite major. I am teaching the first-year psychology. I haven’t taught the second half in over 10 years. You would think after all this time that some of the stuff in the textbook would change, but it hasn’t.

We still have the Sternberg Multiple Intelligences. The whole idea that we all think differently.

Jacobsen: Oh, he is Triarchic.

Mehta: Yes! All of that is still there, even though it doesn’t work. The idea that we all learn in different ways is false. The things like stereotype threat explain racial differences is still there. The Implicit Association Test (IAT) is still there.

People are saying this is an area of controversy. This is being claimed as if it is established as fact. I am looking at the second half of the textbook trying to figure out how to teach it, even though I know a bunch of it is outright false.

Even looking at family structures, it is still under the assumption that we will get married, have children, and have the nuclear family. That is not the way we are living these days. There was an article recently in Maclean’s reporting the number of mothers regretting having their children.

That is not a topic at all discussed in psychology. If you think under developmental, that would be one of the big questions, it clearly isn’t. There is clearly much missing in our field in terms of big ways that we can’t even address the society we are claiming to serve.

7. Jacobsen: Also, to clarify, you mentioned Sternberg’s Triarchic Theory of Intelligence and Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences as well as the work of Anthony Greenwald and Mahzarin Banaji with the IAT.
At least in terms of general intelligence, tied to conscientiousness, especially in a knowledge economy, it is probably more predictive of life success. Let’s take intelligence, why are these two theories alongside general intelligence pushed in the first year, in that half of the textbook you mentioned?

Mehta: I think the reason they didn’t acknowledge that side is the role of biology is far stronger than we had even thought. I was shocked having taken a break from it for ten years and then looking at the latest research.

I remember going through and my jaw dropping at what I had seen. It was so different than what I had thought before. With heritability, the fact of its role seems to increase over the course of development from childhood to adolescence.

Whereas, I would think it would decrease or be a small role. It increased from .5 to .7. It goes beyond what I expected. But because I did not have a vested interest in that research area. I was able to present the information as fact and let the students think for themselves.

But if I was a social psychologist or in that line, that would be a threat to me if I was liberal and seeing the world as being a social construct. That explains the racial disparities.

Because I was able to do it neutrally, I thought, “This is what the evidence is, and this is what I am going to present to my class.” When I went into the social psychology textbook and went through the explanation, none of them seemed valid.

What I ended up showing in the class was a clip from Thomas Sowell, I mean, the question that bugged me over all these years when covering the section on intelligence. Lots of groups got the short end of the stick.

They were treated quite poorly by our European settlers. But some groups have thrived where some groups haven’t. The question was “Why?” None of the explanations in the textbook seemed at all convincing.

So, looking at the economics and who we vote for, it was a shock to my students. My own initial reaction, being a left-liberal, but listening to Thomas Sowell. It is hard to attack him, which is what we do.

We discount the person. Here we are, a black person who has lived 80 years and seen the world changed through the different eras and is knowledgeable and well-spoken and has a soft, gentle demeanor, so there is nothing you can attack on a personal level.

But it was amazing to hear him. Now, I bought some of his books to put for my summer reading and try to look at that whole angle; it was a learning experience for me that I have been a voter all these years voting on economic issues, but I don’t have an idea how economics works.

That is not a good feeling [Laughing]. But, of course, it is true. You can’t know everything. What do I do now? I learn about it. How do we correct these mistakes and tell the students that “you are the next generation, and these are some of the issues that you will have to deal with”?

8. Jacobsen: What do you see as some of the values to take onboard from a class, even though it is nothing that you are forcing on them? It is a learning environment. What do they tend to take away from that first-year psychology?

Mehta: It has been interesting. In the first half, it was straightforward because it did not that go against their thinking, e.g. talking about inattentional blindness and tie it to driving. Most people are willing to accept that.

But the second half, and as I am seeing, it has a political lens to it. Given that, I think they come from a background where their teachers and elementary school teachers were liberal-left leaning.

For some, I know they became defensive, when I brought up the fact that the wage gap is false. Many got angry and upset with me when I showed the Thomas Sowell video. I saw some students walking out.

It is strange, the defensive reaction. I did talk about that the following class as a debrief. My observation was the reaction was not in line with what I was saying. From a mental health perspective, it is in line with an immune system that hasn’t been exposed to germs and then has a strong reaction.

I said that if that was happening with something I thought was innocuous, then I would be worried about their resiliency.

It is like giving the patient the bad news. I try to frame it as “here is something to think about,” especially race. It is one no one wants to touch and if it is touched then the only explanation must be environmental as opposed to biological.

9. Jacobsen: When it comes to the two forms of fragmentation of knowledge that you noted in the earlier part of the interview, the one with identity politics-oriented disciplines and the other within psychology.

This fragmentation of the epistemology that the disciplines are bringing to the fore. It breeds some
issues because at least in the identity politics areas or disciplines. They will be focusing on themselves in terms of their research and citations.

So, if their focus is on themselves in terms of their research and citations, it can breed problems of new ideas coming in from the outside and the reactions to it. What are some?

Mehta: Oh, I can give you an example. It was at Acadia, last summer. It was a major announcement release that a thesis got an award. The title of the thesis was about how that person came to be in touch with the sexual identity through interpretive dance.

It was released on the Research and Graduate Studies website saying that what made this thesis so special is that dance was the focus of the thesis and not just an add-on. I read the thesis.

There could be, as a research question, some merit to it. So, I don’t want to minimize that or someone’s coming out experience, but the problem with that is that it used autoethnography.

That was the key part I forgot to mention. You read the thesis. It reads like a diary entry, where “this is my diary and I will use references to reinforce my view of the world.” This is an exercise in confirmation bias.

There is no attempt to challenge your worldview from different angles. It was “all about me.” There was no attempt to use his experience to see if this can generalize to other people. That would be an interesting question.

It is not the question, but it is the approach. It is all very insular. You come through that thesis more ingrained in your views than you were to begin with because that process is reinforced.

This was a thesis in education, a counseling degree.

Jacobsen: This doesn’t seem as rigorous as one would hope in a graduate program, frankly.

Mehta: Yes, in a discussion on Facebook, I posted about that; it was one of my public posts. It was a different context about our union about to go on strike. That discussion led to this.

I said to that student that if you don’t think a university education is a Left-wing indoctrination, then go to New Real Peer Review on Twitter and see what’s there. If you don’t think that would happen at Acadia, then look here.

Then I gave a link to the Research in Graduate Studies website. So, then afterward, the dean came to see me. He said that if someone could, in theory, say that what I was saying was minimizing the person’s coming out experience, and if that was the case, then I would be violating the university’s policy on homophobia.

He said that he recommended that I take it down. I outright refused. That became a bit of a kerfuffle.

10. Jacobsen: What would you say has been the main controversy that you inadvertently stepped into in Canada?

Mehta: [Laughing] I thought that it would be my big claim to fame because after that I tried to tweet to media outlets and whatnot. I thought I was going to have an interview. That didn’t materialize. That fizzled.

I tried attempts at saying to Acadia, “If you really want to deal with racism, then abandon the decolonization and your commitment to social justice.” I hoped that would be the big stir. That didn’t happen, even though I ended it with the hashtag: “#itsokaytobewhite.”

Still nothing, but it happened inadvertently when I least expected it, which was when Andrew Scheer, our conservative opposition leader had removed his senator Lynn Beyak from the conservative caucus.

I tweeted out to him: You claim to be for free speech on the one hand, but then you remove her from your caucus. So then, are you saying First Nations are a group that cannot be criticized anyway? Then that is a bad move for race relations.

All I had done was tweet that. I hadn’t thought much of it. That is what led to the Twitter mobbing and all of these being in the media spotlight.

11. Jacobsen: When it comes to the underlying point, if I get the tacit message, in an ethnic, you do not want to be a hypocrite. You want to apply standards to yourself as you would to others.

Mehta: As humanly possible.

Jacobsen: Within the constraints of energy, time, and so on, if someone was tired and drunk [Laughing], they would act like rats on narcotics. It would be roughly the same model. It would not be running at 100% so to speak.

I want to touch on more academic issues with regards to the fragmentation of knowledge. It is a formal interview setting, but I think it is a valuable conversation – especially in the context of North American academia, Canadian academia for shorthand.

What I notice with regards to the various disciplines in psychology, e.g. evolutionary psychology, cognitive psychology, etc., these fields obviously have some moments of distinct overlap.
in findings but coming from different frameworks of reference.

So, I would take a metaphor of the entire hopes and dreams of all knowledge in psychology in some Platonic world, some abstract, would be a big black sphere. Each discipline is a light shone on that sphere.

At times, they form something like a Venn diagram with each other with this mutually distinct but partially overlapping findings but coming from those different frameworks of reference or lenses.

What might ameliorate the issues with regards to the fragmentation of that knowledge based on differences in perspective in epistemology in psychology?

Mehta: I guess if there was some way of getting groups of people who do not think the same way to work with each other. I think right now the trend is “let’s encourage collaboration,” but what happens naturally is people who think alike work together because that is what you need for a collaboration [Laughing] to work.

Jacobsen: Political affiliation links to personality, right?

Mehta: There is partly that. I think those political links would affect how you think in terms of how you would approach problems, especially if there is going to be an ideological part.

Let us say within social neuroscience. “Let’s look for a biological basis for these constructs that we are viewing through a very limited lens,” you have all this work using event-related potentials trying to look at the biological basis of the implicit associations, but it always involves targets of white vs. black with white people using it.

But we are not using some crucial comparisons such as black look at white vs. black because that is what you would need to say it is that in-group and out-group difference. If I have read the social psychology literature, nobody wants to touch it.

What I have noticed in reading the beginning of articles, they say blacks show the same prejudices that whites do against blacks. I remember one study they showed faces on a screen.

The black faces were seen as larger and more threatening, but it was not only by whites but by blacks as well. There is something about having a darker skin color that our brains, for whatever reason is not clear to me, is registered as more threatening and that is putting them at more risk for all these horrible things that are happening to them.

If that got out and people knew that, then we could address the core problems but because no one wants to look at that side then the problems here will be solved because nobody wants to talk about that angle whatsoever.

Jacobsen: So, that part of the sphere remains dark or even if not dark only partially lit.

Mehta: Yes, it is like inattentional blindness or willful hemi-neglect.

Jacobsen: [Laughing].

Mehta: “We must not look at that.” We must be blind to that, even though it is staring you in the face.

12. Jacobsen: I remember some of the research on spousal abuse, where the focus is rightfully on women in the home, but looking at the rates it was something like a 1% difference between men and women.

It was a difference in style. Men were more prone to physical violence. Women were more prone to social and emotional violence, or abuse. That second part of that statement is that part not brought into the discussion. I do not see it.

Mehta: Yes, it is very hard. If you bring it up, you are called a Men’s Rights Activist, as if that is somehow a bad thing. But by extension of being one, you must somehow be a misogynist. Unfortunately, the political climate has gotten very heated.

But I think people are clueing in that all that is happening is that the Left/Liberal side of that doesn’t have arguments and are resorting to name calling. We are starting to see people say, “We have had enough and your game is up.”

Hopefully, that is what I try to do in my class. “Let’s be the voice of reason, you guys are going to the be the next generation, show the public that you can tackle these discussions. That you can lead and can do that in a positive manner.”

That whole idea of balancing the positive psychology with being realistic and open to people who think very differently from ourselves, so we can reach common ground. Maybe, not everyone will be 100% happy.

But at least, they can feel like part of the conversation and can get part of what they were looking for. I think that is a more realistic way of trying to approach things than what the social movements of the past did, which was “let’s grab life by the horns and our way is the right way.”

References


Appendix I: Footnotes

[1] Professor, Psychology, Acadia University.


[3] B.Sc. (Honours), University of Toronto; M.Sc., McGill University; Ph.D., McGill University.
A Conversation with Professor Rick Mehta on Defamation, Censorship, and Honest Discussions (Part Two)

Interviewer: Scott Douglas Jacobsen
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Abstract

An interview with Professor Rick Mehta. He discusses: terms used to defame people; being kept upright contrasted to being upright; means used to silence some speakers; protections of some viewpoints and not others; and some students lacking protections and fearing speaking out.

Keywords: FIRE, Heterodox Academy, psychology, Rick Mehta, Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship.

A Conversation with Professor Rick Mehta on Defamation, Censorship, and Honest Discussions (Part Two)

1. Scott Douglas Jacobsen: I liked the term, the broader phenomena, not only within the Left/Liberal spectrum, as far as I have seen so personal view, which is that they are terms to defame to dismiss.

You label someone a “fascist,” “Marxist,” “Men’s Rights Activist,” “feminist”; once you label someone that. In your own mind, it amounts to a low fidelity cognitive replacement in place of reasoning, of reason.

Rick Mehta: Oh, definitely.

Jacobsen: That way, you can dismiss them. My fear is that this might become such a large phenomenon that it even becomes accepted in high-level intellectual circles. People writing some of the most influential columns in the country, which seems like a risk to really lower the level of intellectual discourse.

Where, at times, many of the most intellectually astute people are reading them and people that are influenced by those people then follow their brand of that in a way, but it gets diluted in quality.

That could be a risk in terms of how people talk with one another in the public. So, if you want to know the general content of the way a leader composes themselves, what are their followers doing?

Of course, the leader is not responsible for what the followers are doing, but, in many cases, the followers are taking on a style and tone from that leader.

Mehta: Yes, I think we are approaching a tipping point. What I showed in my introductory psychology class, the way I did it was “here is the context of intelligence in the past, so let us look at intelligence in the present.”

I was able to show the graph of the Heterodox Academy, where the universities have shifted quite dramatically to the Left. I found a Business Week
article. Interestingly, we see the Left bias in two other places: mainstream media and Hollywood entertainment.

All of them are imploding right now. It is an absolute disaster. Those are the three areas where we have Left-leaning et cetera. The distribution for the political leanings for all these other lines of work are completely different.

So, I think there is this fragmentation going on and I think people are clueing on that there is this major disconnect with what I see on my television or CNN website, or whatever, even with video games now. They are a heavy emphasis on social justice. But people are not wanting to buy them. So, their sales are going down. Even the comic books, and Star Wars too. Fans usually love those ones. But on Rotten Tomatoes, only, I think, 50% of people liked it [the latest Star Wars movie], but it got a high ranking by the critics.

So, there is a fragmentation, where it is not going with the public. I think the Pew Center (in the US) found that public support for the higher education is starting to become politicized where the Democrats are loving it, but the Republicans are not – which is unprecedented.

It has never happened before, if I understand it correctly. I think I saw a tweet earlier this week that companies are reluctant to hire women because of the overreach of the Me Too movement. There are problems starting to happen now.

I think the 2018/19 years are going to be pivotal years.

2. Jacobsen: When I look at some of the bastions of this, I think about the one you mentioned: Hollywood. Let us take the big bargaining chip that Hollywood takes with the public in some of its most self-aggrandizing moments...

Mehta: [Laughing].

Jacobsen: …such as award ceremonies, they, for years, have mentioned themselves, not across the board but in general as a general phenomenon, as moral exemplars, as the height of virtue in the public sphere.

Maybe for some, that is the case. Perhaps, they are donating copious quantities of money investing in public good for which they deserve praise, but, as a general phenomenon, if I look at the recent and ongoing cases of sexual misconduct allegations coming out, then the same people coming out later saying, “That we shouldn’t allow this to happen. Look at us calling out this terrible behaviour,” and so on.

I think about it. If they want to be considered legitimate persons or institutions, you should be upright rather than be kept upright. Somehow, cleverly, the public relations of that environment made it such that it is a win-win for them.

So, if you take the case of giving these signifiers of ethical purity in awards ceremonies, you look good. You are fighting the moral fight. You are fighting the good fight.

But then you get called out as an institution with the highest-ranking people and most famous people in the industry for sexual misconduct by the outside of the institution, then the institution has the gall to then come out and say, “Look at us now calling out all of this behaviour.”

They were not right, to begin with. They were kept upright. I do not think that that then makes it morally legitimate as a position or a set of actions that are ongoing.

Mehta: Yes, it is like the metronome. We went from one side and then went to the exact opposite side, so we went one kind of dysfunction to another. No one can be morally virtuous 100% of the time.

The way I see it. People give money to people who are poor. I like to think that is something that we would do out of the kindness of our hearts rather than “I have done this and now I must get the world to praise me for it.”

They likely get tax write-offs for it as well. I do not think the public really buys that. It is politically correct to state that in a public setting, but I think that is partly what has happened. It is the double-standard to it.

So, you went from not having that much credibility to having even worse credibility. It will be interesting to what happens with the movies and what will sell and so on. It is hard to know for sure.

I anticipate, though, that people are getting turned off by a lot of what is being generated from the fields that are dominated by people with one perspective because it was as bad if you think many years back where things were primarily on the Right.

That had its own problems as well. Hopefully, it will get some form of tipping point, where we can swing towards the center and get to the center point and maybe work our way from there rather than have the pendulum swinging back and forth.

That is always going to be counterproductive in one group’s favour over another.

3. Jacobsen: I want to focus on some of the other academic issues now. This is happening more in
the United States than in Canada, but it has happened in Canada. Where speakers will be invited and then that platform will be taken away from them, I believe this is called de-platforming.

Other times, the student activists will have a technique of simply bringing in a crowd into an auditorium or a conference center, or something like this, and then yelling the speaker down so the speaker cannot be heard.

Now, I know FIRE (Foundation Individual Rights in Education) is an organization in the United States, which has tracked some of these from 2000-2014, in the United States at least – where there are about 2,600 universities.

There are about 100, public-private combined, in Canada. In raw numbers, it will not happen as much in Canada. Per capita, it may happen at some parity. With that as a background, I wanted to get your thoughts on the phenomena of de-platforming in some campus censorship.

In other words, what do you think is its prevalence? How bad do you think it is? And so on.

Mehta: It is hard for me to answer that question because, unlike the States, we do not have the equivalent of FIRE. We have the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship. I will admit that I am a member. So, that will bias me in terms of saying that they do good work.

I do have to be honest and open about that. I am also a member of the Heterodox Academy in terms of viewpoint diversity. So, full disclosure is important. However, we have instances of what happened at Wilfred Laurier when they wanted to invite Daniel Robitaille.

In my talk, I did document some events that had happened within the last year in Canada. But there is another technique that used as well. It is not called no-platforming. It is “let us just make sure we can control the messaging.”

What happened at Acadia, I think it was last year? It was Marie Henein who was giving a talk about Bishop’s. It was broadcast through a livestream to the other Maple League universities: Acadia, Saint Francis Xavier University, Bishop’s, and Mount Allison.

Anyway, we had the live stream on Acadia on a Friday night. In terms of the publicity, it was sent as an attachment on the emails. You look at the emails. It would be a big piece of paper, like this, then the name would be this big.

That is what the posters look like when they are on campus. The most discrete kind of publicity for that talk. Then, on top of that, the talk was followed by a panel chaired by a women and gender’s study professor and the panel were people pretty much from our union, and people involved in the gender study program.

It was all people who were going to think the same way and have it in a hush tone because “oh, we cannot talk about this Marie Henein because she had defended Jian Ghomeshi and there might be people who are sensitive.”

It was the strangest type of publicity for a talk. It was “let us make sure there was a debrief.” If I did a panel, I would invite someone like Christie Blatchford [Laughing], right? Someone who covered that from a different angle.

It was very like “these are children and we have to protect them.” I found that rather interesting.

4. Jacobsen: I find that unfair. I see that as one viewpoint set protections. That seems unfair and against the spirit of an academic environment. Can you recall another case? For instance, based on your speech on free speech in universities.

Mehta: I found that interesting in terms of the publicity because the student newspaper was the one hosting me for that, but they just kept calling it a panel or a discussion. They did not put my name to it or say what it was about.

Even when I said, “You have rather misleading and imprecise posters.” That was summarily discounted. It did not stop the interest. I had somewhere between 45 and 50 people in the room and another 250 people who listened to the live stream.

I think a lot of people there were surprised. I think they did not know what to expect. I guess knowing that my audience was going to be towards the Left-leaning side. I think that helped.

I used that information to frame how I would get the message because I wanted to win them over. Then the question and answer period, only two or three faculty members showed up – and solely for the purpose of attacking me.

The students were open for the most part. It is the small groups on the campus that are the most vocal. For instance, when I brought up the wage gap, only a few got upset and irate. The others were wondering what was going on.

Jacobsen: These are the 1-in-50s. These are the Mensa level of obnoxiousness [Laughing].

Mehta: Yes.
Jacobsen: I want to focus on students now. So, if a student is coming into an environment where they make an argument, then they receive some epithet or are given an ad hominem attack to shut them up. They may have fewer means through which to protect themselves.

For example, if a European-Canadian student in the university environment takes something like the Hopi notion of not truly owning the land but caring for the land in conversation with someone of First Nations or Cree descent, the young First Nations student in conversation may have different views but given the campus culture simply calls the European-Canadian “racist.”

It stops conversations.

Mehta: If you are doing a study in which you’re comparing Canadians to South Africans, then it is a cross-cultural study. But if we do that within the Canadian or American context, then it suddenly becomes a study of race differences. I said, “Why don’t we talk about these as cross-cultural differences?”

If we talk about across countries, it is a cultural difference; but if we talk about in a country, then it becomes about race. What I think is that we are talking about cultural differences within Canada or the United States, we are talking about cultures clashing.

Then we can then have these honest and difficult discussions. Such as, why are poverty rates higher or lower among some groups and not others? If we talk about that as a cultural difference, then we can make some headway.

5. Jacobsen: Do some students, though, not have protections against the early parts of this question? Where the discussion isn’t mainstream in that way, in other words, the headway has not been made and the students may be afraid to speak out.

Mehta: Yes, what I was talking about there was not individuals but groups, it is the average. This is what we’re seeing. That is the way I introduced heritability of race. It is a population index. It means nothing.

What we need to do is test the individual and see where they lie, that is what we do with IQ. It is returning to that frame of reference. It is not the individuals, but the group differences. So, we see how we can shift that group difference, so that rates of being arrested or whatnot.

Why is it in this group that happens to have a label in it? It is trying to undo years of how we have been framing that debate. I think this is the proactive interference at work. It is very basic first-year psychology principle.

We can talk about that and compared to swimming correctly. I learned to swim with unilateral breathing. It is hard to do bilateral breathing. Everyone gets that. If we put that in the context of race, suddenly, it is culture now.

The defenses go up. It is trying to unlearn a bad habit that we have had ingrained in us for God knows how long, right?

6. Jacobsen: Thank you for your time, professor Mehta.

Mehta: Yes, my pleasure, I hope that was helpful.

References


Appendix I: Footnotes

[1] Professor, Psychology, Acadia University.


[3] B.Sc. (Honours), University of Toronto; M.Sc., McGill University; Ph.D., McGill University.
Interview with Michael McDonald: Executive Director, Canadian Alliance of Student Associations

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Abstract

An interview with Michael McDonald, Executive Director of the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA). CASA represents more than 250,000 post-secondary or tertiary level undergraduate students across Canada. It is the second largest organization of its kind in Canada. McDonald discusses: the bigger budget items to focus on; medium budget items of note; the nuanced, small line items of note within the budget; closing the education gap for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students; things more or less important to post-secondary students incorporated into the budget; provisions for students entering into trades and other areas; data or outcomes for funding relevant to the prevention of sexual violence; provisions for the Quebec Student Union; different emphases for different student collectives; and provisions for student mental health.

Keywords: budget, Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, CASA, Michael McDonald, students.

1. Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Let us begin with some of the basics of the new budget for the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA), what would be the bigger things within the budget that student unions, student representatives, and the students that are represented by CASA at large should pay attention to in this new budget?

Michael McDonald: This budget was primarily focused on research funding. The main area where dollars were allocated from the federal government to post-secondary institutions. Specifically, some of the largest investments were in the granting councils that have ever occurred. The granting councils, and there are three of them, are the National Sciences and Engineering Council or
NSERC, the Canadian Institute for Health Research or CIHR, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council or SSHRC.

These three bodies provide significant funding to individual researchers but also to students at the undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate levels to conduct research. These are some of the largest and most prestigious research awards that one can win in any of these given fields.

It is estimated, at least from the budget numbers, that it is likely up to 8,000 new student applications from the undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral levels who will be able to access the grants.

2. Jacobsen: What are some of the more medium-sized line items that should paid attention to as well?

McDonald: There is a renewed commitment to the funding for the Canada Summer Jobs program as part of the Youth Employment Strategy. This extends what was a funding commitment of 3 years in Budget 2016. It extends it to 5 years, so an additional three years of expanded funding for the program. It also really importantly highlights the Youth Employment Strategy and the Canada Summer Jobs program in specific, should look to the Youth Employment Report on how to improve work-related learning and youth employment opportunities.

This is a report that CASA and its members submitted to a comprehensive set of recommendations. Some of the recommendations were adopted in the report. One was released back in June. The budget is saying that this is what the program should look to when it is modernizing. It is a positive sign. We are looking forward to the future on how that will be implemented. Also, we are looking at specific funding that will impact student unions.

There is now $5.5 million dedicated by the federal government to the Status of Women Canada to create a working group to be able to tackle sexual violence on campuses. This material, specifically, is something that CASA’s Chair and a variety of other CASA members have spoken to the Status of Women committee about.

It is the first set of investments that we have seen from the federal government for this, to coordinate across the country and to share best practices. This was a good first start for the federal government.

They did institute some particularly strong language around what steps the federal government might take when institutions do not adopt best practices. They have said in the budget that the Canadian government may consider withdrawing funds.

This strong language is something we are happy to see. We are concerned what mechanisms or vehicles they are considering. We are waiting to see how this will be implemented before we comment on it further.

3. Jacobsen: As per the logical progression of the first three questions, what are some of the more nuanced, small line items within the budget that may be noteworthy?

McDonald: Initially, some of the other stuff that is important to highlight. There was a $10 billion funding allotment to the Post-Secondary Student Support program, which is the primary mechanism First Nations and Inuit students receive funding from the federal government for post-secondary education. This $10 million allotment was to allow for Metis students to access the program. This expanded, specifically, access there. You also saw something like the $27 million over 5 years to support educational and labour market linkage data.

This is supposed to be able to help those entering post-secondary and in post-secondary learn about information about careers and sector outcomes. This is something that helps with job prospects and what jobs are connected to outcomes.

It provides more of the information and makes it more easily accessible and easily comprehensible.

4. Jacobsen: If you look at a national conversation around Indigenous – or First Nations, Inuit, and Metis – students, graduate and undergraduate but
particularly for this conversation undergraduate, there are efforts to close the education gap, as it’s called.

For instance, the former prime minister Paul Martin has the Martin Family Initiative that has an emphasis on the health, wellbeing, and education outcomes of Indigenous youth in particular.

What are some parts of the budget, and you have noted some, devoted to working to close that gap through additional funding for Indigenous students in Canada?

McDonald: So, beyond the funding for the Metis funding announced in this year’s budget, last year, the government invested $90 million over 2 years, so $45 million this year and $45 million next year into the Post-Secondary Student Support program to provide additional support for Indigenous learners who would be accessing the program. This is not thought to be enough to cover the demand for the program. Initially, it was implemented in 1997. It had a capped growth, like all services in Indigenous Affairs, of 2%.

While education inflation, so the costs of education, is greater than 2% each year, and on top of that, you also saw the Indigenous population who was capable of accessing funding increase larger than 2% every year.

This has resulted in a gap, where a significant number of eligible students who can attend post-secondary. They have been accepted, but have not been able to access it. The federal government is engaged in a review of this program. This funding was designed to be short term. There are strong indications over the next year. There will be significant alterations to the program in how it provides funding to students and bands in general.

This is something that will see significant changes in next year’s budget. It is something the government has pledged to address. I know stakeholders outside the government are waiting for them to institute the systemic reforms that they made commitments to.

It is one that we are still waiting on.

5. Jacobsen: In terms of the scaling, though I do not recall off the top but do remember being a part of this, what are the sliding scale of things that are a part of this? How are those incorporated into this new budget?

Things more important get more focus and funding. Things less important to students get less focus and funding.

McDonald: From an advocacy side, when engaging with the government, we have seen significant investments in something like the Canada Student Loans Program over the last few years, which is the primary vehicle where students receive funding from the government.

In 2016 and 2017, there were significant investments either to expand the number of individuals eligible or the amounts of the grants that they would be able to receive. This process is one that this year did not see.

There was not additional funding to the Canada Student Loans program, even though CASA asked for additional funding for students with disabilities because they have not received additional funding in the last couple of years.

We acknowledge the federal government has been contributing significant finances to this field after the last little bit. Our members will go back to the Hill next year, likely, and ask the government to do more where there are additional cost barriers to post-secondary and potentially in the area of repayment – where being able to make sure students who didn’t carry substantial financial debts are not punished and protected from those loans.

6. Jacobsen: What are some provisions for students entering into areas that the country needs more and more as time moves forward such as trades?

McDonald: This is a complicated discussion. One of the good things in the budget that was also identified was that the community skills training, the skills program, is run out and provided funding for research initiatives held at colleges and polytechnics.

We did receive additional funding for five years there. This helps operate certain programs across the country that gives opportunities to students and
businesses to work in an environment that allows to students to work on projects that are market-focused.

It allows them to get those skills from an employer while in study, and all the while leading in something that is in economic demand. When it comes to gaps in potential demand across the country, we do highlight and want to emphasize student choice and student choice in what field they want to enter into.

We advocate on assistance that covers everyone. No matter if you go to college, university, or a trades school, you deserve assistance to complete your studies. Anybody should have access if they are academically qualified to any program.

When it comes to the ideas behind potential gaps, very often, some of these will be self-correcting. A good example of this has been recently with – though the data is a bit more complicated than this – increased enrollment in the STEM fields: science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

It is sometimes in high demand fields. Significant numbers of students are entering into those fields. It has been at a decrease in other departments. Over time, what is outcome data does establish that we have not necessarily seen a large number of students that entered a field and then that was not proving to be lucrative for them, that means our best tracking data that we still have, which is any tax-linkage data out of somebody like professor Ross Finney.

The data ends up indicating students do quite well on average, whether they enter the arts, humanities, social sciences, sciences, and so on. We are somewhat hesitant as an organization to ever jump onto a “well we’re missing this right now.”

The thing about the educational system is that it has a delayed response to these things. if we say that we are missing out on a specific profession or field, those students may not get out of the post-secondary system for the next 2, 4, or 5 years.

They might be entering into a completely different labour market. The idea that we think is a better responder on what the needs of the students is what reflects their interests, the areas that they want to get into, and to build the jobs that they want in the future because they will be key components in the future for that as well.

7. Jacobsen: I want to touch on the sexual violence prevention on campuses within Canada for those represented by CASA. What have been, if there are, data or outcomes of similar measures that CASA will be funding other campuses in terms of the prevention of sexual violence in order to reduce the rate of sexual violence on campus, as this is a concern throughout the country?

McDonald: CASA will engage with the government to be able to provide those data points. We have been in consultation with Statistics Canada on the development on what will be its first reporting mechanism on the safety on campus, which includes sexual violence statistics.

One of the challenges that does exist right now is that there is not standardized data across the country. One of the challenges is also measuring the impact of initiatives taken by provincial governments and the federal government.

It is something where we lack the tracking data to see if it has been effective. We will continue to work. We are happy to see the federal government commit funding to Statistics Canada and happy to see some of the best practices are more easily shared across the country into the future.

But some of the data in Ontario where they have mandated that there will be sexual violence reporting on their campuses. It still will be available for a while.

8. Jacobsen: As well, the QSU or the Quebec Student Union and its 8 members represent about 75,000 students within CASA’s national voice now. What are some provisions within the budget that differ from other sectors of that budget that at for the QSU student collective?

McDonald: CASA and the QSU both advocate quite actively on the issue of fundamental sciences and on research funding in the country. Both student groups, that is French and English in the country, saw the importance in the ability to bring forth new dollars
for researcher led research across the country, investigator led research
This is the important stuff. It crosses the country. Students from the East Coast to Quebec, to Ontario, to Manitoba, to Saskatchewan, to Alberta, to British Columbia, and the territories, all think it is important that the funding is available in an active way and in an accessible way for Canadian researchers and especially early career researchers as they are integral to the operations towards building an innovative economy.

These are the projects that will be turning into both the social science questions that we will be able to more tackle more comprehensively that we encounter with sexual violence on campus. The people who will be involved in significant new discoveries in those lucrative fields that a modern economy so requires.

So, both groups commit together to the benefit of all students. Luckily, in this situation, that benefit was spread pretty equally across the board.

9. Jacobsen: As well, if you look at the bigger picture of student association collectives, CASA being one. Canadian Federation of Students being the biggest. Then a bunch of smaller ones. Some defunct and some extant.
What are some different emphases that they have that differ from some of the ones that CASA has?
McDonald: As an example, we focus predominantly on our members and our members’ objectives. I think one of the positive things across the country is that student groups at the provincial level, the federal level, care deeply about making sure the experience of being a student is improved. They care fundamentally about improving the lives of students on a day-to-day experience. How that is accomplished is different at times and on what is brought forward to the government on a given day may change, I do think – and this is a positive story – that they are all working on the idea that we can make the lives of all people pursuing study better.

That they can pursue higher quality education and can do so in ways that they don’t get burdened by long-term debts and respects the diversity of the students and is responsive to that diversity as well.

10. Jacobsen: Another concern is student mental health. So, an expansion of provisions for counselling services for students, whether it is call-ins or face-to-face, for the better wellbeing of students on campus.
Are there any lines within the budget devoted to this?
McDonald: The federal government has very actively acknowledged the importance of mental health, but did not include anything specifically campus related. In part, that was because of the recent health accord with the provinces. It did include mental health funding for each government. Those agreements did emphasize the mental health across the country. The federal government does have some tools to help engage in a healthy conversation.

However, this is the purview of the provincial governments. So far, from an administration of services, they link pretty directly and fed to their provincial partners. That said, there are definitely areas around being able to understand the challenges faced by those who are experiencing mental health issues.

There probably needs to be better federal policy. That is being able to acknowledge clearly the real life situations of people who may be experiencing a mental health challenge and being able to reflect that in student loans policy. That would be being able to take greater periods of time away from your student loans, which may be a break in study but would not punish a student by immediately forcing them into repayment.

Looking through experiences like this is something the federal government needs to adapt more actively on, beyond that, it is also making sure that the provinces have the funding necessary to support initiatives on campuses and support initiatives where the demand is.

That is where the real key components of answering mental health questions in a post-secondary environment is that this is where students are first experiencing these challenges and are first experiencing the challenges that may stay with them
for some years, and being able to address these at this time makes it more likely that they will be more likely to complete their studies, be more likely to enter the job market, and more likely to be able to do so in a comfortable and in a healthy way.

11. Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Michael.

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Appendix I: Footnotes

[1] Executive Director, Canadian Alliance of Student Associations.


[3] DEC, Heritage College; Bachelors Degree, Political Studies, Bishop’s University; Masters Degree, International Environmental Law, Macquarie University.
In-Depth with Count & Grand Master Raymond Dennis Keene, O.B.E. (Part One)

Abstract

An interview with Count & Grand Master Raymond Dennis Keene, O.B.E. He discusses: geographics, cultural, and linguistic background; pivotal moments in early life; influences on intellectual development; growing up gifted or not; precocious chess achievements; myths and truths around chess prodigies; interest in Goethe; personal achievements; motivation for diverse interests; benefits from being a chess Grandmaster;
general transferability to other areas of life; computers surpassing humans at chess; innate versus environmental influence on ability; benefits for students learning chess; Magnus Carlsen; probable near and far future for the world of chess; ranking chess achievement; common personality traits of the great chess grandmasters; genius gone awry such as Bobby Fischer; and underrated chess Grandmasters.

**Keywords:** Bobby Fischer, chess, genius, grandmasters, Magnus Carlsen, Raymond Keene.

**In-Depth with Count & Grand Master Raymond Dennis Keene, O.B.E. (Part One)**

1. Scott Douglas Jacobsen: In terms of geography, culture, and language, where does your family background reside?[2]

Count & Grand Master Raymond Dennis Keene, O.B.E.: We have lived in London.[6] We do not go back hundreds of years. The records are hundred years or so, and have always been in London.[1]

2. Jacobsen: What seem like pivotal moments in early personal life?

Keene: I was six years old. My mother wanted to take a bath. I was pestering her. She said, “Here, play with these.” She gave me chess pieces.[6] I had never seen them before. I said, “I don’t know how to play with them. You tell me.” She never got to the bath. That was my association with chess. I went on to become a chess Grandmaster.[6]

3. Jacobsen: How did these influence personal and intellectual development with respect to side activities such as chess, journalism, and writing?[10]

Keene: I got into journalism and writing through chess. I was primarily a chess player. I became a Grandmaster.[10] I won the British Championship.[12] I got the gold medal in the European Championship.[12] I got the bronze medal in the World Team Championship.[12] Because I had training in literature at school and Cambridge: German, French, and English.[13] I was fluent in writing about chess. That lead to writing 199 books, 12,000 articles, et cetera.[14][15][16][17][20][21]

4. Jacobsen: Were you gifted growing up?

Keene: I was serious; not sure I was gifted. I was serious. If I was interested in something, I applied myself to it, quite determinedly. If I wasn’t interested in something, I really hadn’t any trouble focusing on it at all. In fact, I wanted to get rid of it as quickly as possible. (Laughs) Physics, I couldn’t stand physics. Physics and math, I wasn’t interested in the slightest, but things like languages, history, Latin, German, French. I was interested in, of course, chess. I was able to apply quite serious dedication to them.

5. Jacobsen: Now, when it comes to precocious chess achievements, how did you find growing from childhood to young adulthood from childhood with this?

Keene: Precocious is a prodigy at 6. 8, or something. I didn’t show any serious talent at chess, until I was about 12 or 13. At that point, I started to take it seriously. I studied and read books on tactics, and so on.

I think it was books on strategy more than anything else. It told you how to begin a game, the right structures to aim for, and so on. I learned fast. Compared to people like Capablanca or Kasparov, or some of the modern prodigies, I was not precocious,[14][22][23] I was average, until I was at least the age of 10 or 11. After that, it moved quickly from the age of 12 or 13.

These were real prodigies. They had some sort of cosmic link with chess. I do not think I had that. I was very intelligent and very determined at things of interest to me – serious and not distractable. If I do something, *then and now*, I am ruthless at its completion. I tend not to become distracted. I have been lucky. I do not need much sleep. Quite often, I could do normal stuff during the day. During the night, I could study things I wanted to study. Next morning, I would still be awake.

I never needed a huge amount of sleep. Hopefully, it will continue because I enjoy sleeping. However, I do not sleep for long periods. I prefer short naps like in a plane, a car, or a train. Go to sleep, use the dead time for sleeping, and then catch up during the night. I did all of my school homework at night. My mother used to get worried. I would be awake at 2 or 3 o’clock in the morning working. She tried to get me to the bed.

6. Jacobsen: When it comes to prodigies in general, myths and misconceptions exist about them. What myths exist and truths dispel them?

Keene: It is said that Capablanca learned chess by watching his father. That he learned at the age of 4.[23] That’s not impossible. It is quite possible, actually. There are stories about Paul Morphy, that he learned chess at an early age, and then being able to beat European masters.[25] And they’re actually true because you can – games exist, you can see the games that they played, that are very impressive. They’re quite extraordinary.
Some people, like Capablanca, really were, and I think Kasparov, were truly gifted in chess. I don’t think I was. I was gifted with something else. Dedication, certain kind of intelligence, focus, not easily distracted, but I was quite big. I have always been big. Some kids at school are small and weedy. Some were bullied.

Nobody did that to me because I was twice their size. I was a good rugby player at school. I have been big and heavy.

7. Jacobsen: You have an interest in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. In fact, you translated Faust into English. Where does this interest, in the man and the story, originate for you – to such an extent as to translate the famous text?

Keene: The first thing of Goethe’s I read was his play, Egmont, which is about the liberation of the Dutch in the 16th century from the Spanish Empire. When I was at school, I was told that Goethe’s most advanced and difficult work was Faust. It was almost like, “You shouldn’t read it. It’s too difficult.” I started to read it. I found it incredibly exciting. The opening line of Goethe’s Faust are amazing. My spine was tingling as I read it. It was incredibly well-written and exciting.

Exploring what we know scientifically, what we know through magic, what we know through religion, what human ambition consists of, it was a really extraordinary play. I was impressed by Faust. I took Goethe as a special paper at Cambridge. I studied Goethe in general. I studied, not his plays and his poems alone, but his philosophy, his theory of color, which was quite different from Newton’s. I read the conversations he had, which his secretary, Eckermann, recorded. I knew a lot about Goethe. I knew the opinions.

He was a towering colossus of European thought. He was probably the giant of European culture in the first decades of the 19th century. He knew Napoleon. He knew all the major politicians. He knew all of the artistic figures. He worked with Schuler. He was like a bridge between the 18th century and 19th century.

The German Shakespeare, but in many ways the German Leonardo da Vinci. He was everything. He was a great polymath and a politician. He was Prime Minister of Weimer, and minister of works and roads. He was everything. It was part of this universal talent. This giant talent to cope with anything I found impressive.

8. Jacobsen: You hold the, or at least a, record, if I gather correctly, for the greatest number of written books, 199, on “Chess, Mind Sports, Genius, Mental World Records, Art and Thinking.” You wrote 12,000 articles on various topics in chess, mind sports, and so on. You won numerous international chess prizes including the Gold Medal of Chinese Olympic Association (1981) and Global Chess Oscar (twice). You competed simultaneously against 107 opponents with 101 wins, 5 draws, and 1 loss. You co-founded and organize the World Memory Championships. You had involvement in organization of the World Chess Championships. You earned a peak rating of 2,510, which sufficed to earn the title of Grandmaster. In addition to these, you acquired “freeman of the City of London” and were “granted right to Arms by the Royal College of Arm. Knight of the Order of the White Swan conferred by Prince Marek Kasperski and Chevalier of the Order of Champagne.” With these in mind, what remains the single greatest achievement in personal life?

Keene: I will give you one more. I have been made a Count! So, I am His Excellency Raymond Dennis Raymond Order of the British Empire (OBE), international chess Grandmaster, and Count of the Order of Torres Vedras, Portugal. I am the first person in the history of chess to be made a Count on account of his chess ability.

It is spelled Torres Vedras. It means “Green Towers.” Of course, “Torres” in Portuguese is the same as a chess rook: “Count of the Green Towers.” It’s a genuine title awarded by the legal descendants of the Imperial House of Braganza in Portugal.

It was getting the Grandmaster title. It took the longest to do: blood, sweat, and tears. It took me a long time. It was very, very close on a number of occasions. Things went wrong at the last minute. I needed to win one game in a tournament, and lost it. Things like this. Or I would get two wins, and draw them both. I was so close on so many occasions.

According to modern rules such as freeze results before the end of the tournament, you have a Grandmaster title pro rata, before the end of the tournament nowadays. If I knew that, I would be a Grandmaster two years earlier. Also, when I was doing it, 2,510 was a good rating. Nowadays with inflation that will be a 2,700 rating, when there’s been enormous inflation since I achieved that rating.

In 1975, 1976, 1977, around that time, that was 35 or 38 years ago. In 1986, I was having dinner with Garry Kasparov in Brussels. I said, “Do you think you’ll ever get to 2,800?” He said, “No, it’s impossible. It cannot be done. Absolutely impossible.
Mathematically, impossible. It cannot ever be done.” Now, there are – Kasparov got over 2,800, Carlsen got over 2,800, Kramnik got over 2,800, and Anand got over 2,800, and five or six people have already done it. 

Is it impossible? They are all very strong players. Even since 1986, there has been tremendous inflation. It is not playing strength alone. It is inflation too. 2,510 was good at the time. It would be a couple of hundred points higher were I to play at that strength now, which I cannot because I am old and tired.

Anyway, I think Grandmaster title was the thing that took the most blood, sweat, and tears. That was the most difficult professional thing that I achieved.

9. Jacobsen: In 1985, you replaced, and continue to write as a chess correspondent, for The Times following the retirement of Mr. Harry Golombek. In addition, you contribute to The Sunday Times, The Spectator, The Daily Yomiuri Tokyo, The Australian and The Gulf News. Bearing in mind the previous question with incorporation of personal achievements, what motivates these diverse interests convergent upon the world of chess?

Keene: It all takes part from one. They are all chess columns. The one for the Gulf News, and the one I write for The Times. It is a syndicated article. It is the same article in the Times and Gulf News. I do two IQ questions every week. It is two questions that require a bit of thought, even a bit of knowledge. Even the rest of the chess columns, they are all about chess. I’m not writing about Mozart symphonies one week, and the sex life of the Guatemalan fruit fly the next one. It’s all chess-centric.

It is the most diverse mind-sport. The IQ questions formed a kind of mind sport, quiz questions with brain teasers. That is the linking factor. Almost everything that I have written is connected with that, and most of the books that I have written have been what happens to the brain as it gets older, and another about geniuses. What motivates a genius, who I think the main geniuses are, those are books I wrote with Tony Buzan. Most of the books I have written have been about chess. That is the predominant theme because that is the thing. I am coming to other things like memory and other mind sports through my association with chess, and the World Memory Championship because I am biased on the conversion from chess being a hobby to being a sport. It was possible to convert chess from being a hobby to being a competitive sport through the analogy with chess.

10. Jacobsen: Does being a chess Grandmaster confer benefits to other domains in your life?

Keene: Yes, it confers social and intellectual status. It helped me to earn the OBE, the Order of the British Empire. You get a certain respect, certain credibility. People offer you opportunities. Also, the kind of thinking required for chess is transferable. Many people deny this.

They say being good at chess means you’re good at chess and nothing else. I actually subscribe to the view of Musashi, the Japanese swordsman of the 16th century. He wrote a book about martial arts. He said, “From one thing, learn ten thousand. If you learn master one art, you can transfer skills.”

I believe this. I believe that by mastering chess I am – though I’m not fully mastered. It’s too complex, too difficult; it’s quasi-infinite, but by mastering a large subset of the skills required to play chess well. I can see strategic opportunities in life. Tactful opportunities, business opportunities, and I think opportunities are key. In chess, you can form a strategy, an overall play, but the real key to chess is grasping opportunities that arise. It is something that happens.

If your opponent makes a mistake, you will cease it, jump on it, and exploit it. I think one of the things that I am quite good at is seeing opportunities, using them quickly, and thinking fast. I think chess helps with this. From chess, it is possible from one thing to learn ten thousand. By mastering one thing, you can apply those techniques to other things. That was the central message of Musashi.

I wrote a book with an American martial artist called Michael Gelb. It’s called Samurai Chess in which we explain that theory. That if you master chess, this will help you in all other areas of your life. It will give you insight into the way strategy works, tactic works, opportunity ceasing works, and so on. I firmly believe that. Chess teaches the ability to cease opportunities, exploit situations, and think quickly. I’ll give you another example.

In 1968, I was coming home from a dinner at Simpsons on the Strand, which used to be a chess club. And outside my house, somebody tried to mug me. Great thug said, “Give me your wallet.” And I thought, “We’ll see about this.” This guy was there threatening, saying, “Give me all your money.” It was like I was playing a chess game, where I had to make a quick decision. Does he have a gun? Does he have a knife? Is he going to start with his fist? I rapidly summed up the situation, and punched him in the nose. He ran away. (Laughs) I think chess-
playing helped with that. I had to analyze a whole bunch of factors quickly, form a conclusion, and act on it. I did; I won.

He ran away. I did not. As far as I was concerned, that was victory. Chess was helpful. I felt like I was in a chess situation. Fortunately, he did not have a knife.

11. Jacobsen: A lot of research given through brain training programs, most of the experts note that there is no general transferability of ability. Here, as far as I understand, there seems to be sufficient general transferability into other domains of life.

Keene: That is right. It is what I have done in my own life. I feel that my ability transferred from chess to other things. In terms of speed of thought, grabbing opportunities, summarizing situations quickly, analyzing the long-term against the short-term, it may be that the experts, or the other experts, are looking at things too rigidly, and do not interpret at things fluidly enough. However, I can say, looking at my own experience, that I can transfer things. I feel it is possible for other people as well.

12. Jacobsen: I suspect this involves two variables. One, the length of time. Two, the complexity of the tasks. For instance, when it comes to the typical brain training programs online now, most of them do not seem to necessitate complexity. In addition, most people likely do not pursue them for long periods. Therefore, when people test them for transferability, there does not seem to be much transfer. With chess, people begin at the age of 6 or 7, might be a child prodigy, and then can train for decades to get to the desired Grandmaster title, and then from that acquire the benefits. The length time, in addition to the “quasi-infinite” status, as you noted, might indicate the level of complexity there plus time would breed some form of, at least, relative general transferability.

Keene: That is a good explanation. I would say that sounds true, yes.

13. Jacobsen: Will computers surpass the greatest competitive human chess Grandmasters on a consistent basis (if it hasn’t already happened)?

Keene: It has happened. That is the trouble. It really has happened. We have got the state now where the top Grandmasters are learning from computers. I, honestly, think that matches between humans and computers are pretty well a thing of the past. I think the top computers won. And I am afraid some of the solutions computers come up with to complex chess positions, even the best players do not think of these things. I mean they are so anti-intuitive it is not true.

There are still occasions. There was one of the games from the Carlsen-Anand match, not the last one, but the one from before in 2013, when computers were still saying the game was drawn, and Carlsen was planning a way to win it. This is becoming increasingly rare, and as computers get better and better, and they will get better and better, I do not think we are ever going to catch up. I think we are going to have to accept the fact that like athletes who run, that the motor cars are always – the Formula 1 cars are always – going to be a bit faster. There’s not much we can do about it. I find it a shame. I mean it is a bit of shame. When the genie is out of the bottle, what can be done about it?

There is nothing that can be done about it. I really do not see a human player ever getting to the point where they can consistently beat computers. I think we are gonna draw games, get in situations where you do not actually lose. I think it is an uphill task. That point of no return has already been passed. It annoys me. I do not want to say that, but it sounds like the truth to me.

14. Jacobsen: An old question relates to the ratio of innate talent and environmental influence on ability. In terms of chess talent, what seems like the proper ratio of contribution between general ability and training for their influence on chess performance?

Keene: I that there are few people with an innate talent for chess. It is rare. Even Magnus Carlsen did not have an innate talent for chess, it is not like he went to the chess board and could immediately beat his father or his brother. He could not. He was attracted to chess and then he worked at it. He could absorb information very quickly. His main talent was being able to absorb information very quickly.

I think Morphy and Capablanca had an innate talent for the game. Even Kasparov. I do not think had an innate talent. He was a bright guy, good at absorbing information, assimilating it, and processing it. It happens chess attracted him. I am not sure he had an innate gift for it. There is a difference between talented and gifted. Talent being good, clever, and so on. Gift means like a gift from God. I think Morphy and Capablanca had some kind of divine gift for chess.

I mean their games, at early ages. When the amount of published chess information was pretty small, compared to what it is now, they can only really pick it up from watching other people play. And improving upon the principles they saw adumbrated on the games they saw there. With all of that sort of information, to play at that level that early, argues for some sort of gift, really gifted, to me. That is not the
case for many people at all. I am trying to think of artists. I mean Mozart was really gifted, but he came from a musical environment. I guess his own kids were great musicians. Bach created a musical environment. A whole bunch of Bach’s went further on in music. They were good on their own, but not in the same league, and there are chess players whose fathers were good chess players, and who became chess players as well. The Littlewood Brothers, there was John Littlewood. Both of them came in second in the British Championship on a number of occasions. The son of John Littlewood, Norman Littlewood, won the British Championship, and he ended up becoming Grandmaster.

Giftedness is rare, but possible. Talent is usually a talent. There is something, which gets channeled into chess. Environment can go a long way. For instance, the Polgar sisters. Now, Judith Polgar is the best of the Polgar sisters. She lived chess from a very early age, but she never became World Champion. She got into the top 10. You think that someone who is a talented person, which she clearly is, exposed to that much chess information and that much chess intuition might become World Champion. She did not.

There are some chess players like Karpov and Kramnik, and Kasparov. There were certain areas of chess that she mastered like tactics. It was a strategically slower game. She had some troubles. You need a rare combination of talent in something, the desire to play chess, and a favorable environment before you become a great champion.

Some of those like Morphy and Capablanca were gifted, but gifted in the long run did not help them. Capablanca won the World Championship once. He never dominated the way he you think he might have done afterwards. Morphy gave up chess. Bobby Fischer was not gifted in chess. I think he was talented. He did not even have really favorable environmental conditions. He gave up chess. It is hard to tell. I think the ideal strong chess player is someone who is intellectually curious and has a talent for something which goes into chess. I think persistence is very important.

I think that Emmanuel Lasker, for example, held the World Championship for a very long time, but I do not think he was gifted at chess. He was a talented person. Intellectually active, discovered chess, fell in love with it, and stayed in the top for an extraordinary length of time. Somehow, I feel that is the ideal combination to produce someone who was a really great champion.

15. Jacobsen: Young people continue to pursue, with deep passion, the world, and mastery, of chess. Below the level of Grandmaster, what benefits accrue for students in the process of learning, competing, and honing their abilities for chess?

Keene: It trains you in many things. One of them is to a certain extent logic. I have some trouble with the concept of logic because one person’s logic is somebody else’s illogical.

Imagine a chess game, where you have two ways of getting an advantage, one is to gain more mobility; the other one is to gain extra material. Now, if you’re writing commentary on the game with the benefit of hindsight, if the thing done by the person concerned works, there’s tendency to say, “This is more logical than doing Y.” And if it doesn’t work, you can say, “More logical would have be that.”

I think there are moments when the fine-tuning of judgment in any situation. That is not just in the chess board. That is in all areas in life. What is more or less logical, is somewhat relativistic, it is; logic is, quite often, conferred by the outcome, not by the process.

Let’s say there are two guys moving toward you with the intention of killing you, okay? And you have a gun, and you can pick off one or the other in sequence. But one of the guys has a gun, and one of the guys has a sword, and they’re both going to kill you, alright? But there both 200 yards away, alright? You can kill both of them as long as you do it in time. Which one is it more logical to kill?

The logical thing to do is shoot the man with the gun because he can shoot you from a distance, and then turn your attention to the man with the sword who has to get much closer to you before he can do any damage. Okay?

I would say that is the logical way of looking at it, okay? But what if you don’t know that the man with the sword has the ability to throw the sword 200 yards and kill you? And then you shoot the guy with the gun, and while you’re doing that, the man with the sword hurls the sword and kills you. So the logic suddenly becomes more hazy because it becomes more dependent on a lot of factors you cannot necessarily determine.

Therefore, what is prima facie logical can be influenced by hidden factors to be illogical. What I am saying is there are so many factors in complex situations that what may or may not appear logical may, in fact, be, or not be, logical. So, logic is harder.
to determine than, “Oh that’s logical and that’s not logical.”

There are shades of distinction. And in chess, you can often make the case for something being logical, but if you work hard at it, you can make an equally good case that somebody else is being logical too. So when I say chess develops the skill of logic – yes, it does in general – but I have trouble with the question of logic because I’m not too sure that logic always holds up.

It fosters the skill of analysis. It teaches you to analyze. You cannot get by in chess without seeing an abstract pattern, and seeing combinations and maneuvers in your head that it definitely helps through. I think it also helps with concentration. So kids who do chess at school will concentrate better at maths or science, or whatever, because they’ve learned to focus on chess.

And I think the other thing it helps with, and I think this is very important, and I think this is the major attraction is that it enables you to win, because so often in life is what you try to achieve has an opaque outcome, can’t see the outcome, the outcome is deferred. You play a game of chess, and you can win it. You can win it quite quickly.

And if you play, within ten minutes, you can win. Winning, I think, is the basis of the prime human commodity, which is identity. I think the more commodities that human beings crave, whether they know it or not, the most important, the most significant, the most enriching, is identity. And winning a game of chess confers identity on you.

Let me give you an example, modern life for a lot of people is anonymous. You do a lot of things online. You don’t interact with human beings. You don’t feel as though you’re a real person, and the machine is replying to you. And quite often, say you want to complain about something, let’s say that somebody is dumping rubbish in your street, but you want to complain to the local government.

Certainly in the UK, this can be a long process for somebody who tends to your needs and takes you seriously, or like the government owes you a tax rebate. It can take you a long time to get a tax rebate. And there’s a tendency in modern life that is mechanized, computerized. Voice mail systems that say, “Press button 1, now press button 2, and press button 3.”

And as an individual, you find that your identity is attenuated. That you’re not being recognized. That other human beings are saying that you do not exist. It is a wide-spread disease in modern Westernized societies. I think playing a game of chess. You beat somebody. That person resigns. You see them concede your victory. You suddenly ratchet up your ontological rating considerably. Your identity becomes confirmed.

Something out in the universe identifies that you exist. And I think that all goods in the sense of money, fame, wealth, sex; all these things are roots to serve validation, ontological validation: an identity. I think that chess can do wonders for one’s own identity.

Ergo, it is pretty good to teach to kids who come from underprivileged backgrounds that they suddenly feel a sense of self-worth, achievement, and a very quick sense of self-worth and achievement. Okay, you’re going to lose games, draw some games, but you’re going to win some games. But the wins are more valuable to their psyche than their losses, and their losses and draws are inimical.

16. Jacobsen: Of the present crop of the young Grandmasters, Magnus Carlsen stands above the rest. What are your thoughts on his achievements, talent, and future trajectory?

Keene: I think his main talent is in preventing games from drying up, becoming drawn. And I don’t think he tries to take a big advantage after the opening like Kasparov did. I don’t think he tried to destroy the opponents. He simply tried to keep the battle going, and thinks that if it goes on long enough the other guy will make a mistake and he’ll win. So his games are very hard to read.

Quite often, “What on Earth is he trying to do?” All he’s trying to do is to stop the game from going drawn. He’s not badly off, or it is level, but not dead; he can play on, and on, and on, and win in the end. I think that is his main talent. I think that if he carries on he has the capacity to equal the achievements of people like Kasparov and Karpov as champion. I do not see anyone remotely threatening his reign as champion.

There are other guys like Wesley So, or Anish Guree, or Nakamura, or Caruano, but I think he’s got the measure of all of them. I don’t he’s got a serious rival at all. He’s still dreadfully young. He could be world champion in 20 years. He could end up as the greatest player ever. I do not think his games will turn out as the most attractive games ever. In terms of sheer results, he’s got the potential, if he carries on to get the best sporting results of any of the world champions. He has a weakness.

His weakness is arrogance. Occasionally, he just gets overconfident, and plays like a complete idiot because he thinks that he can do anything and win. He lost a couple of games in the chess Olympiad last
year by being arrogant. But if sticks to what he’s doing, does not relax, he could be the greatest ever.

17. Jacobsen: For the world of chess, the people and sport, what seems like the most probable near and far future?

Keene: There are a lot of people that say we should be using randomized opening positions, that the pieces should be shuffled at the start of the game. It’s called Fischer Random. I don’t think highly of that idea at all. It’s a bad idea. The pieces are where they are at the beginning of the game because they are most harmoniously placed for military action, and if you mess this up you get stranger portions. I think chess is sufficiently infinite to be carried on playing in its current form for a very long time. There may come a point when computers solve it.

Computers have more or less solved checkers. It’s a long time before computers completely solve chess. I think it’s too complicated. When they can tell you what is going on at any given position to play a couple openers and analyze how every possible game, and every possible conclusion, is a long way off.

I think if chess were to be played out in its current form rather than put the pieces on random different squares. I am prepared to expand the board to a 100 squares in a continental draft, which is a 10×10 board. Add a couple extra pieces, a piece that moves, like a rook or a knight or something like that.

A queen with a rook and a bishop, and a piece that moves like a rook and a knight, and I think a small simple change – Japanese chess is played on a 9×9 board. Continental draft is 10×10. 8×8 is a convention. You can easily play on a 9×9 board or a 10×10 board, but mixing up the pieces at the start I really do not like at all.

My prediction on the exhaustibility, or inexhaustibility, of chess. Tamburlaine the Great, the great Mongol conqueror used to play on a much bigger board with more pieces. They used to have camels and things like that. There is precedent for that sort of thing.

One of the big developments will be more female players. Personally, I cannot understand why there shouldn’t be more female players. It is more cultural than anything else rather than brain power. I think fewer women, culturally, have played chess professionally, made a career out of it. There will become more, and more, strong female players.

Manahel, for example, is a very bright person am sure if she had taken up chess as a young person she would have done well. A very sharp mind. I think more female players, and younger players. I think players are getting younger and younger, and both sexes are taking it up. I am not immediately worried about the possibility of chess being exhausted. It is more or less infinite. If there is a problem, rather than shuffle the pieces at the start, I would rather add two more pieces to the board than 10×10. I know that would solve the problem.

Japanese chess, for example, Shogi, they have a rule, when you catch an opponent’s piece it becomes yours, and it is a gain on your side. Maybe, that is something we should consider as well. However, I do not think that crisis has been reached. I don’t think it will be reached for some time.

18. Jacobsen: Some methodologies in chess combine human pattern recognition and computer massive serial processing with chess algorithms. How does this process work at the highest level of achievement in chess (say, greater than or equal to 2,700 FIDE rating)?

Keene: The very top players nowadays, certainly players above 2,500, are learning from computers. The kind of chess they’re playing is often quite antithetical to what you would call “classical chess.” I mean there are all of these anti-intuitive move of players at the highest level nowadays. To be frank, I do not know what they are doing. Some of their strategic ideas or long-term moves I find really weird. I’m sure this is influenced by computers. They’re using computers to analyze. They invent moves in their own games that a computer will improve, which wouldn’t necessarily have been used by human analysts. Human are already revolutionizing even quite standard positions. They’re coming up with ideas that are totally alien to all that’s gone before.

19. Jacobsen: What common personality trait do the great chess Grandmasters have in common?

Keene: I would say it is determination. All of the top chess grandmasters are very determined. It is not just good enough to be able to understand chess. You’ve got to be able a sportsman as well. And sportsman in the sense of wanting to win and being able to adapt to difficult or changing circumstances on the move as it were. For example, there was a big tournament in St. Louis recently. It was a million-dollar international grand prix. One of the talented players in it is a Philippine grandmaster name Wesley So. A very good player, he’s been up-and-coming for a long time. He’s born in the Philippines, but now he represents the USA. But he came near the bottom. The reason he came near the bottom is because he doesn’t have the same killer instinct that the other players in the tournament did, and not all of the other
players, Anand, for instance, who was the former world champion, who has “been there and done that,” but his ambition is waning. I mean, he’s still a superb player, but he still doesn’t have the hunger that the others have; unless you have that, if you are in a bad position, or about to make a loss, total commitment, total determination, you normally succeed at the top. It’s a sporting quality, not just chess talent. You can have great comprehension of chess without necessarily having that killer instinct that makes you a supreme practitioner.

20. Jacobsen: Some unfortunate cases of chess genius going away come to mind such as the late Bobby Fischer, for instance. Does this happen often in the chess world?

Keene: No, I do not think it happens any more in the chess world that I think it happens in any other area of high performance. I think Fischer, I think he was bonkers, went completely insane, especially towards the end. These players can go mad. For example, Tony Miles was clinically insane. He had drug treatments to suppress his insanity. There were one or two others. I do not think it is any worse than in any other area of high performance. I think people in any area of high performance will be subjected to exceptional stress and all sorts of mental problems can occur. I mean most of the top chess players – Garry Kasparov, Karpov, Carlsen, Kramnik – are very sane, rational people. I don’t think chess causes mental illness at all. In fact, one chess commentator said, “Chess is one way of keeping crazy people sane.”


Keene: In the modern world, it is very difficult to be underrated because the rating system is mathematically based on results. If you score well, you will rise in the rating system. I would say none of the modern players are underrated. They are rated exactly where they should be because their results place them in the place where they ought to be. So the question is only really relevant to historical characters. I would say a prime example of someone who is underrated is a guy named Efim Boguljubov. He’s often dismissed because he lost the World Championship matches twice to Alexander Alekhine. People tend to dismiss saying, “He didn’t deserve to be in the World Championship.” Actually, if you look at this guy’s results, he won the Russian Championship or, as it was, the Soviet Championship. He then emigrated and won the German Championship. Then he held the German and Russian Championships in the same year. He won major international tournaments. He thoroughly deserved his crack at the title. The fact that Alekhine defeated him easily is not a comment on Boguljubov, but a comment on Alekhine. I think he deserved a much higher ranking than he is normally accorded. He is one that deserves a lot more credit than he’s got.

In the modern era, I don’t think there is anybody who is underrated because the rating system tends to put people exactly where they should be. The only player I can think of, and this is not a question of underrating but it is a question of bad luck, was man named Paul Keres, an Estonian Grandmaster, who was number 3 in the world for a long time. He was number 3 in the world in 1948 and probably number 2, or 3, in 1938. Even in 1969, he was still very much near the top. In 1962, he was number 3 in the world. He maintained these positions for a very long time. He was always coming second in the qualifiers. He was somebody who I think people would have liked to see become World Champion, but he never quite got through that final hurdle of ruthlessness that characterizes the great champions like Alekhine, Botvinnik, and Kasparov. So I think Keres and Boguljubov are the two that are the most underrated.

References

GVc6hEIyV8QIfjZmoDg&gws_rd=ssl#q=Raymond+Keene&start=20.
Appendix I: Footnotes

[1] Knight of the Order of the White Swan, (conferred by) Prince Marek Kasperski Chevalier of the Order of Champaigne; Chair, Outside in Pathways; Director, Brain Trust Charity; Former British Chess Champion; Bronze Medal, World Team Championship; Right to Arms, Royal College of Arms; Freeman of the City of London; Winner (Two Times), Global Chess Oscar; Ex-Head (1994-2000), Mind Sports Faculty; Ex-Chess Tutor, Imperial Court of Iran; Gold Medal, Chinese Olympic Association; Gold Medalist, European Championship; Honorary Board Member, World Intelligence Network (WIN); The Global Media and PR Director, World Memory Sports Council; Ex-Head (2013/2014), Leadership Academies Prince Philipp of Liechtenstein and President of Mexico, Vicente Fox, in Leon; Britain’s Senior International Chess Grandmaster; International Arbiter, Fédération Internationale des Échecs (FIDE) or World Chess Federation; Co-Founder, World Memory Championships; Count of the Order of Torres Madras, Portugal; Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (OBE); journalist; columnist; and author.


[5] According to The Gifted Academy Distinguished Patron (2015), it states:

“MA Trinity College Cambridge: Officer of British Empire, awarded by HM the Queen in person. Britain’s senior International Chess Grandmaster, former British chess champion and Gold medallist in European Championship, writes every day in The Times. Ray has also written the world record 197 books (translated into 13 languages) on Chess, Mind Sports, Genius, Mental World Records, Art and Thinking, and has won numerous first prizes in international chess tournaments across five continents.


Ray co-founded and organised the World Memory Championship 22 times since 1991. Personal bests in chess displays challenging multiple opponents at the same time, 107...
simultaneous opponents at Oxford 1973 where he won 101, drew 5 and lost one, and Leon Mexico 2013, defeating 17 opponents simultaneously without sight of the boards or pieces. Translator of Goethe’s Faust into English. Freeman of the City of London and granted right to Arms by the Royal College of Arms.”


[9] In The World Championship and FIDE (2015) of the Encyclopædia Britannica, it states:

“IDE also took over the Women’s World Championship and biennial Olympiad team championships, which originated in the 1920s. In addition, the federation developed new championship titles, particularly for junior players in various age groups. It also created a system for recognizing top players by arithmetic rating and by titles based on tournament performance. The highest title, after World Champion, is International Grandmaster, of whom there are now more than 500 in the world.”


[28] In Encyclopedia Britannica Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (2015), it, in part, states:

“Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, (born August 28, 1749, Frankfurt am Main [Germany]—died March 22, 1832, Weimar, Saxe-Weimar), German poet, playwright, novelist, scientist, statesman, theatre director, critic, and amateur artist, considered the greatest German literary figure of the modern era. Goethe is the only German literary figure whose range and international standing equal those of Germany’s supreme philosophers (who have often drawn on his works and ideas) and composers (who have often set his works to music). In the literary culture of the German-speaking countries, he has had so dominant a position that, since the end of the 18th century, his writings have been described as “classical.” In a European perspective he appears as the central and unsurpassed representative of the Romantic Movement, broadly understood. He could be said to stand in the same relation to the culture of the era that began with the Enlightenment and continues to the present day as William Shakespeare does to the culture of the Renaissance and Dante to the culture of the High Middle Ages. His Faust, though eminently stageworthy when suitably edited, is also Europe’s greatest long poem since John Milton’s Paradise Lost, if not since Dante’s The Divine Comedy.”


[32] In Encyclopedia Britannica Faust (2015), it, in part, states:

“Faust, two-part dramatic work by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Part I was published in 1808 and Part II in 1832, after the author’s death. The supreme work of Goethe’s later years, Faust is sometimes considered Germany’s greatest contribution to world literature.

Part I set out the magician Faust’s despair, his pact with Mephistopheles, and his love for Gretchen. Part II covers Faust’s life at court, the wooing and winning of Helen of Troy, and his purification and salvation.

In earlier eras the play was often decried as formless because of its array of lyric, epic, dramatic, operatic, and balletic elements. It includes almost every known poetic metre, from doggerel through terza rima to six-foot trimetre (a line of verse consisting of three measures), and a number of styles ranging from Greek tragedy through medieval mystery, baroque allegory, Renaissance masque, and commedia dell’arte to something akin to the modern revue.”


[35] In Encyclopedia Britannica Egmont (2015), it, in part, states:

“Egmont, tragic drama in five acts by J.W. von Goethe, published in 1788 and produced in 1789. The hero is based upon the historical figure of Lamoraal, count of Egmond (Egmont), a 16th-century Dutch leader during the Counter-Reformation. The work had great appeal for European audiences excited by the new movements toward democracy and nationalism.

The play is set during the period in which the Netherlands was suffering under the harsh rule of Roman Catholic Spain. The
story pits the sympathetic and tolerant Egmont against the fierce and brutal Spanish Duke of Alva (a character based on Fernando Álvarez de Toledo y Pimentel, 3rd duque de Alba), who is sent to repress further Protestant rebellion. Egmont proves to be no match for the scheming Alva, and he is sentenced to die. At the conclusion of the play, however, he has a vision of the eventual triumph of freedom.”


[57] Please see The Brain Trust Charity (2015). Raymond Keene OBE. Retrieved from


[62] In Encyclopedia Britannica House of Bragança (2015), it, in part, states:

“House of Bragança, English Braganza, ruling dynasty of Portugal from 1640 to 1910 and of the empire of Brazil from 1822 to 1889.

The first duke of Bragança was Afonso (d. 1461), an illegitimate son of the Portuguese king John I. When Portugal gained its independence from Spain in 1640, João II, 8th duke of Bragança, ascended the Portuguese throne as John IV. Thereafter the title duke of Bragança was borne by the heir presumptive to the throne. The new dynasty lasted until the death of Maria II in 1853. Her two sons (Peter V and Louis), grandson (Charles), and great grandson (Manuel II), all of the House of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha-Koháry (their father’s dynastic house), ruled until the end of the monarchy in 1910.”


[63] “Pro rata” means “proportional ratio.”


[82] In About: Tony Buzan – Inventor of Mind Mapping (2015), it, in full, states:
“Tony Buzan is the world-renowned inventor of Mind Mapping and expert on the brain, memory, speed reading, creativity and innovation. He has been named as one of the world’s top 5 speakers by Forbes magazine.

Through over 40 years of research into the workings of the brain, Tony Buzan is dedicating his life to developing and refining techniques to help individuals think better and more creatively, and reach their full potential. He has awakened the brains of millions worldwide.

Described as “one of the most influential leaders in the field of thinking creatively”, Tony utilises his accredited training courses to build a network of highly specialised experts in creative thinking, memory and speed reading techniques. Tony Buzan imparts his knowledge and expertise on the three ThinkBuzan Licensed Instructor courses in Mind Mapping, Memory and Speed Reading, which he both leads and accredits. The ThinkBuzan accredited training courses bring practical skills to delegates all over the world including individuals from FTSE multinational corporations, leading global universities and Government departments.”


[101] In Encyclopedia Britannica Susan Polgar (2015), it states:

“Susan Polgar, original name Zsuzsanna Polgár (born April 19, 1969, Budapest, Hung.), Hungarian-born American chess player who won the women’s world championship in 1996 from Xie Jun of China. In 1999 Polgar was
stripped of her title by the Fédération Internationale des Échecs (FIDE; the international chess organization) for failing to agree to match conditions.”


[102] In Encyclopedia Britannica Judit Polgar (2015), it states:

“Judit Polgár, (born July 23, 1976, Budapest, Hung.), the youngest of three chess-playing sisters (see also Susan Polgar). She earned the (men’s) International Master (IM) chess title at the age of 12 and set a new record (since beaten) by becoming the youngest (men’s) International Grandmaster (GM) in history at the age of 15 years 4 months, eclipsing Bobby Fischer’s record by a month.

Apart from her gold-medal-winning appearances for the Hungarian women’s Olympiad teams of 1988 and 1990, Polgár has spurred women-only events. She defeated former world chess champion Boris Spassky in a match in 1993. In 1994 she went undefeated in winning a chess tournament in Madrid, Spain, the first woman to win a strong grandmaster tournament open to both genders.”


[113] “Prima Facie” means “at first appearance.”


[121] At the time of publication, Magnus Carlsen is 24 years old.


[127] In The Gifted Academy About: Principals... (2015), it, in full, states:

“Dr Manahel Thabet is ranked among the 30 Smartest people alive by SuperScholar and Brain of the Year Award Winner 2015-2016. In 2014 she was selected the AVICENNA award Laureate, as a successor to Professor Tony Buzan, given every year to those who present best practice in science, connecting East with West through science and knowledge. She also represents The Brain Trust Foundation as President of the MENA region, with one objective, which is to unlock and deploy the vast capacity of the human brain.

She is a PhD holder; Youngest winner of Woman of the Year 2000 from Woman Federation for World Peace. In 2013 Dr. Thabet won Genius of the Year 2013 by the World Genius Directory representing ASIA. She is the President of WIQF (World IQ Foundation), the High IQ society and Vice President of ‘WIN’ (World Intelligence Network), with more than 60,000 high IQ members from all over the world; in 2012 Dr. Thabet was the Chairperson of the Scientific Committee, Recommendation Committee and Senior Advisor to the International Asia Pacific Giftedness Conference held in Dubai – UAE hosted by Hamdan Bin Rashis Awards for Distinguished Academic Performance. The conference hosted specialists from 42 countries, 320 papers and more than 2000 participants in the field of Talent and Gifted Education.

Dr. Thabet obtained the “Excellence of Global International Environmental and Humanitarian Award” given for outstanding efforts in undertaking environmental and humanitarian support. Dr. Thabet is also the winner of Middle East Achievement Awards in Science and was ranked among the 100 most powerful Women in the Middle East and most powerful 500 Arabs in the World by Arabian Business. Dr. Thabet is a Royal Grand Cross Officer of the White Swan Companionate and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Medicine in London, UK.”


In-Depth with Count & Grand Master Raymond Dennis Keene, O.B.E. (Part Two)

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Abstract

An interview with Count & Grand Master Raymond Dennis Keene, O.B.E. He discusses: exemplars for generalized abilities, offensive strength, defensive strength, Blitz Chess strength; late-bloomers in chess; the 3 greatest chess games in history; media productions on chess; the collective reaction of the chess community, and the set of chess Grandmasters at the time of Deep Blue; the use of stature in the chess world for personal,
social, or political ends; the philosophy of reality; gods and God; supreme spiritual or motivational principles; attributes of God; reducing cheating and scandals in the chess world; political views; conflicts in communism and human nature; the core of human nature; the function of destructive human beings; ethics; economics; poor countries aiming to be developed countries; women’s rights and the Polgar sisters; Tony Buzan, Dominic O’Brien, and Dr. Manahel Thabet; the aforementioned’s uniqueness; Dr. Manahel Thabet; future plans with them; near and far future plans for himself.

**Keywords:** chess, gifts, grandmaster, Raymond Keene, skills, talents.

**In-Depth with Count & Grand Master Raymond Dennis Keene, O.B.E. (Part Two)**

1. Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Some chess Grandmasters have all-around high-quality talents, gifts, and skills in chess. Others have specific talents, which they exploit, e.g. strengths in offensive or defensive strategies, or talents in Blitz Chess. In each major division of skills, gifts, and talents, what exemplars come to mind for generalized abilities, offensive strength, defensive strength, Blitz Chess strength, and so on?

**Count & Grand Master Raymond Dennis Keene, O.B.E.:** The great exponent of defensive chess was a man named Tigran Petrosian, who was World Champion from 1963 to 1969. He died in 1984. He was known to be unbeatable. For example, he went through the World Championship qualifying tournament in 1962, which he won without losing a single game. He represented the Soviet Union in many, many chess Olympics and Olympiads. He only lost one game out of about 80 that he played. He was an amazing example of someone who was an exponent of defensive play. His main talent was not losing. If you do not lose, it maximizes your chances of winning. In fact, he won the World Championship.

In modern chess, the World Champion is Carlsen. He is probably the greatest exponent of the end game. I think it was the sixth game of his 2013 World Championship game against Anand. The rooks and pawns, where computers were saying the position was completely drawn, but Carlsen found a way to win, and it was a way to win the computers hadn’t seen. I think one of his strengths is in the end game.

Until there is an attack, the ones that come to mind are Alekhine, Mikhail Tal, and Garry Kasparov. Mainly, they are known for attacks against the imposing king. This has become more difficult because with modern computer players. Defense techniques are becoming better. It is becoming rarer and more difficult to achieve, but these guys in their prime were able to do that, and it wasn’t just by the brilliance of their ideas, but by the charisma of their personalities. It is not a dry exercise. Charisma, personality, and psychology play a very large part in it.

2. Jacobsen: We spoke about chess prodigies. What about late-bloomers in chess? Those that made a tremendous impact on the mind sport’s trajectory throughout its history.

Keene: Nowadays, it is difficult to become a late bloomer. It’s really very difficult indeed. You have to start young. I think all of the top Grandmasters now started very young. If you go in back in history, you can find some people who were late bloomers. One was Akiba Rubinstein. A Polish grandmaster. He didn’t learn the moves of the game until he was 16, a teenager. Yet, he became one of the world’s greatest players, and that is very, very, very rare.

In the past, winning the World Championship, Alekhine won the World Championship in 1927. He was 35 years old. That wasn’t uncommon. Nowadays, people do not win the World Championship until in their 20s. Carlsen won it in his 20s; Kasparov won it in his 20s. You need to look into the past for late bloomers.

Rubinstein is one of the ones that come to mind. Most of the great players were really strong. Capablanca was World Champion from 1921-1927 and was playing since the age of 4 with his father. He started to observe his father play. I think there are activities like mathematics, chess, where there is some kind of cosmic harmony. A five-year-old or a six-year-old could have possibly written a novel like *War and Peace* because it requires expertise, historical knowledge, and experience. I think mathematics and chess are quite different. They are purely an expression of harmony, universal harmonics. Very young people could pick up on those harmonics and pick up on it. Same thing with music. You can play the violin very young. You can do mathematics very young. You can play chess very young. That is because I think there is some kind of harmony in the universe, which is in certain people with certain gifts can actualize and interpret.

3. Jacobsen: What chess games remain the greatest in history to you – top 3?

Keene: Top three games, I think probably the first one would be the immortal game between Adolf Anderssen and Lionel Kieseritzky played in 1851. It was a game that made a huge impact on chess
history. It is called the Immortal Game because of its impact.

I would say that the game between Botvinnik and Capablanca in 1938, where Botvinnik was the representative of the Soviet school of chess. Capablanca was the old champion and was defeated by Botvinnik in a game of an amazing series of sacrifices. It showed the shift from the domination of Western chess to the new domination of the U.S.S.R. It was a beautiful game.

The final game, I think, also very symbolic, it was the 24th game of the 1985 game between Garry Kasparov and Anatoly Karpov. Garry became the youngest of the World Champions at the age of 24 as he beat Karpov in the final game. It was not only a fascinating game, very deep strategy and amazing ideas, but, again, it showed a transition, a historical transition, between the old Soviet Union and the passing of what must have been the Soviet state from 1917 and became the New Russia.

Although brilliant games in themselves, they were symbolic of political and social change. That’s why I’d think I’d choose those three. The 1851 game, 1938 game, and 1985 one between Kasparov and Karpov. It is interesting that in those three games two were won by white, but, Kasparov, as black, won the third game. I find it interesting that normally white has the advantage. It is a bit like having the serve in tennis. The kind of massive upheaval that overthrew the Soviet state also somehow symbolizes black, as the disadvantage, somehow won that last game.

4. Jacobsen: You have produced numerous media productions for the presentation and increased knowledge, and insight, into the professional strategy of chess – even inclusion of games with individuals such as GM Garry Kasparov. What responsibilities with the chess community, other chess Grandmasters, and the public comes with taking on this important activity of accurate and in-depth representation of chess to those with/without experience in it – and in an entertaining and respectable manner?

Keene: I think that with writing about chess or broadcasting about chess, there are different audiences to bear in mind. One audience is people who are expert chess players and understand a little about the game. This is a very small number of people compared to the rest of the world. I think the next group is those that have interest chess, play chess, but do not have expert knowledge. I think that the key thing is to appeal to both groups at once. I have always tried to do this.

You can do this in two ways. First thing, you can say something about a position, or a variation, or a possibility, it has to be analytically accurate. You should not give a variation that does not work. I think that if you say something that is analytically correct and will hold up to computer scrutiny.

Next thing, which is where I think most chess commentators fail miserably, is you’ve got to make it clear, and you’ve got to make it comprehensible, and you’ve got to make it exciting. It has got to be verbally expressed. If we think back to Homer’s epic, the Iliad, Homer made that series of battles around Troy exciting. He didn’t do it by listing the latest technical developments in the forging of Greek armor. He did it by making the thing into an epic adventure. By creating heroes, by stating the deeds of an amazing set of people, I think the duty of the chess commentator is to think of the chess board like Homer, and to extol the virtues, the strengths, and the winner. You don’t denigrate the loser in the Homeric battle. You have got to explain this. You have got to present this battle between two sides. Chess is thought incarnate. It is the battle between two systems of thought. Two characteristics of thought. Two charisms of thought. It is exciting and needs to be expressed verbally, rhythmically or cosmically bound by correct variation like a symphony or epic. You cannot lie about the variations to make it more exciting. The variation is correct, the analysis would be correct, but you must be seen as a sort of bard singing the virtues of these heroes of mental warfare to make it exciting and attractive to pull more people in and show them the beauty of the game.

5. Jacobsen: You noted the current state of computers versus human beings in chess. In reflection on the defeat of Garry Kasparov by Deep Blue, what seemed like the collective reaction of the chess community, and the set of chess Grandmasters at the time?

Keene: I think that there was a belief after that match that it was still possible for Grand Masters to beat computers, that is, not lose to them. The period of matches for the World Championship for the highest honors between human thinkers and computers in mind sports, which started in 1992 where I organized the Draughts World Championship. That was the first ever world title match between a human and a computer in any thinking sport. By the time that Kasparov played Deep Blue in 1997, for a few years after that, maybe four or five years after that, it was still possible for humans and machines in thinking sports – but now, we know the computers are going to win. It will be some time before a player can sensibly challenge a computer and still win. There was a window between 1992-2008, where there was
an interest in these matches. Now, we know in time what is going to happen.

Because computers advance so quickly, we no longer see computers as opponents, but as tools to help us, help the leading Grand Masters, or anybody, to improve their own play.

I hadn’t realized that that set a record for the first mind sports competition between a human and a machine. I didn’t realize it at the time but should have written a book about it.

6. Jacobsen: Some chess players utilize their station and stature in the chess world, such as Garry Kasparov, for the purpose of political and social activism too. For instance, in protest over the Presidency of Putin in Russia at the moment, Kasparov protests the government. Of course, his formidable achievements in chess provide – as you noted with yourself with respect to a certain weight in intellectual and social status – the basis for people taking his opinions, even outside of chess, seriously and given quite a lot of gravitas.

What other chess Grand Masters come to mind in terms of utilization of their stature in the chess world as a means towards another personal, social, or political end?

Keene: Dr. Max Euwe, who was the World Chess champion from 1939-1947, and he defeated Alekhine in 1945, but lost the title later. He was a Dutchmen. He became a giant figure, not as a Dutchman, but someone who won the World Champion. He became a gigantic figure in Dutch society. He influenced Dutch culture to take on chess in a very big way. He was a massive figure, highly respected. One of the greats. His presence turned chess into a passion in Holland. I think if you think in countries who have worshipped chess there is Russia, Iceland, and Holland, and these are the three that really stand out.

Now, other people who have utilized their chess ability to create a certain standing: Anand in India. He has won sportsman of the year twice. He has been recognized by either Indian sportsman or cricketers, cricketer, in India as being sportsman of the year. Although, I don’t think he’s done much with it. I do not think many chess players have done that much to leverage their chess prowess.

7. Jacobsen: What philosophical system seems the most robust and accurate in its representation of reality to you? What argument(s) and evidence seem the most convincing for this philosophical system?

Keene: Cause and effect, and the possibility or impossibility of infinity or non-infinity. Here’s my answer to several questions at once:

I believe that the human brain cannot conceive of either infinity or non-infinity in either time or space because if you say, “This goes on forever.” There’s an urge to say, “You must stop at some point. What comes after it?” If you say, “Well, existence is infinity backwards,” the brain demands cause and effect. I do not think the universe, the physical universe as we can observe it, are subject to the laws of cause and effect. They break down at the beginning. There can’t be a beginning. Otherwise, what would have come before it? There can’t be a beginning. Cause and effect annihilate each other at the point of any beginning. How can something always exist?

I think it is also impossible for the human brain to conceive of nothing. The standard way of conceiving of nothing is a vacuum. A vacuum isn’t nothing. A vacuum is a space in which there is nothing, but that’s not nothing because the state which involves the vacuum is already something.

The space which can be emptied of everything that is conventionally viewed as nothingness isn’t nothingness at all because nothingness implies the absence of the space itself. Ergo, reality cannot be comprehended by the human brain. We can’t do it. It is not possible. Maybe, one day we can. Maybe, one of Manahel’s equations will do it. At the moment, we do not understand anything. We are like blind, deaf, and dumb. We do not know what the hell’s going on.

The universe isn’t just weird; it’s weirder than we can possibly imagine, somebody said. We cannot conceive of a beginning without something before it, or space that’s empty. We cannot conceive of nothingness. We cannot conceive of infinity in time or space or non-infinity.

To be absolutely frank, the universe doesn’t make sense. Let’s live in it and do our best.

8. Jacobsen: You noted “gifts” for someone like Capablanca, as from something from God, possibly. Do you believe in gods or God?

Keene: Of course, I believe in God because, otherwise, it’s completely impossible to comprehend – I’m not a Christian. Technically, I am part of the Church of England, but I do not prescribe to Christianity, Islam, or Buddhism. I believe these are attempts to grasp the universal truth by different cultural and geographical methods. So I think there is a God, and we cannot comprehend him or her. I do not even know if God cares about us or not. I think God thinks in very grand designs. Individuals do not matter very much. I think our job in the universe is to help the universe become aware of itself and aware of God, and that is our job. The better the job we do, the better we are doing it. I think the origins of the
universe are energy. Energy becomes gas; gas becomes liquid; liquid becomes solid; solid becomes matter; matter becomes sensate; sensation becomes intelligence; and the process, I see, is a driven process whereby the universe becomes aware of itself. It becomes aware of the divine. It becomes aware of the way it is, and we are currently beings capable of understanding what is it.

We are currently as far as we know the only beings remotely capable of understanding what it is. Maybe, somewhere it is something, and somewhere else it is something else. Whether it is some sixteen tentacle octopus on the moons of Alpha Centauri that is more intelligent than we are, but as far as we know we are doing the best job we can to understand it, comprehend it, and visualize it, to try and comprehend the complexity of beginnings and ends. But I’m not sure if any philosophical system or scientific system comes remotely close to explaining what the universe is, or what religion is, or what philosophy is. I think we just have to do the best we can, given our limited knowledge.

Maybe, Manahel’s 300+ page equation could solve it. So far, no one has anything. We are complete bloody beginners. When people say, “Well, I know this – I know there is no God.” Oh yea, really?! You know that for sure. Or people say, “Definitely there is a God.” Oh, yea, perhaps, my feeling is that there is so much that we cannot particularly comprehend, which is logically so completely beyond us that I think there must be some divine principle that is impelling us to understand. I think understanding, comprehension, is our job. Everything we do towards understanding, comprehending, is a good.

9. Jacobsen: Does this amount to a supreme spiritual or motivational principle?

Keene: Yes.

10. Jacobsen: In terms of this God, what attributes does this transcendental object/being/entity have to you?

Keene: The desire to be comprehended.

11. Jacobsen: What can be done to reduce cheating and scandals in the chess world?

Keene: [Laughing] That’s a jump.

Jacobsen: [Laughing].

Keene: Do not let people bring mobile phones into chess tournaments and make damn sure that they aren’t wired up to anything. It is all to do with electronic communication. There has to be some way of monitoring electronic communication. People, in any way, suspected of electronic communication, then you better figure out a way of dealing with it. It should be fairly simple, but one of the ways communication can ruin chess tournaments. It is as simple as that as far as I’m concerned.

12. Jacobsen: What political views seem the most efficacious in the world to you?

Keene: I think human beings are animals. I think animals are subject to the laws of evolution. And I think the laws of evolution have to honour in political systems. I think political systems, which distort human nature are doomed to failure. I think communism is a disaster, which tries to distort human nature.


Keene: Because communism is too dirigiste, it tries to direct what human beings do. I think political systems that are successful are the ones that allow human beings the greatest freedom. I am pretty close to being a Libertarian. I think government is very suspicious. I think you need government to maintain order internally and defend the state against external aggression. Apart from that, I think governments, in general, try to take on too much. They try to legislate too many parts of people’s lives. I think the states that are most successful are the ones that allow citizens to get on with their lives. The government is simply there to be a last resort to make sure order does not break down and that the society isn’t threatened.

14. Jacobsen: Based on the principles of evolution by natural selection brought by Charles Darwin in 1859, what seems like the core of human nature to you?

Keene: I think the core of human nature is enlightened self-interest. I think that there are sizeable species like the preying mantis, which is promoted entirely by self-interest. It is not enlightened self-interest. A mantis will eat another mantis. I do not think human beings will do that. I think human beings are programmed to cooperate. A human being will not eat another human being. You will cooperate with another human being to grow crop to eat that, but a preying mantis with another preying mantis will simply eat it. Human beings are characterized by enlightened self-interest. Quite often, the most catastrophic events in human history have occurred when self-interest has been prevented. For example, the First World War, millions of people were interested in self-interest. They would not have dashed off to go and kill each other at all. There were other ways, but the First World War was the one where people were forced to fight in a way they were not in previous wars because of mass conscription. I
think that human beings are naturally cooperative. They are naturally inclined to create. The destructive human beings are the exceptions rather than the rules. I think that if left to themselves human beings will create excellent systems. Governments bugger things up.

15. Jacobsen: In terms of the destructive human beings, in an evolutionary framework, they might perform a function. What seems like that function to you?

Keene: Napoleon was seen as good by the French and bad by the British. The British saw him as a continental despot trying to run the whole continent. The French saw him as some trying to restore French liberty, glory, and divinity. So, what is good? What is bad? A destructive human being, a really destructive human being, is often one who would be clinically insane. Even Adolf Hitler, the man was a criminal. If you read accounts of the way he rose to power, he rose to power by criminal methods. However, having gotten to power, if he hadn’t gone completely bonkers trying to conquer every other country in Europe, he would have restored Germany’s fortunes. It’s just that he was bonkers. He hit the Sudan, Czechoslovakia, then Poland, then Russia and France. I mean, this is insane behavior. I think even Hitler himself declared war on America.

The immediate denial of the Jews was insane. It was irrational. I think that where you get truly destructive individuals is because they are mentally unbalanced. Maybe, these people can be good. Yes, as a result of this terrible insanity, Europe has now stabilized itself, where I think European wars are a thing of the past. I do not think there will be another European war. Europe has had its differences, but there, I think, will never be another war between France and Germany. There may be another war thousands and thousands of years into the future, but as far as I can see, the traumas of the past caused by some very bad people have led to a better situation.

16. Jacobsen: Some things come to mind with respect to “relative ethics.” Some ethics include individuals such as Jeremy Bentham for Utilitarianism and John Stuart Mill. Utilitarianism splits into Act and Role Utilitarianism too. Other ethics come to mind such as Divine Command Theory, where the Good or the Just comes from the top-down from a transcendent object, being, or entity. What ethic do you take into account when considering relative values?

Keene: I think the key is to not harm other people. Do what you want to do and do not harm people in the process. I think there was a book written by Kingsley in the 19th century called The Water-Babies. It’s a kid’s book. He basically says, “Do not do to others what you wouldn’t wish to have done to yourself. Deal with others in the way you would wish to be dealt with.” I think that is the basic, simple rule, but I think it is a good one.

Jacobsen: It sounds as if it comes out of Matthew 7:12.

Keene: Everybody remembers it from Charles Kingsley’s The Water-Babies, which is a sentimental 19th century kid’s book from England. I think he invented characters like Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby.

Jacobsen: Mr. Golden Rule. [Laughing]

Keene: Yes.

17. Jacobsen: What form of economic system seems the best for developed societies such as the United Kingdom?

Keene: Capitalism: I would say think when the government tries to interfere that is where things start to go wrong. Of course, I think there should be some checks and balances. I actually believe in the survival of the fittest. That if a company is successful, then they should not be hand strung by government regulations. In that context, I think all drugs should be legalised. I think that the government should sanction companies to make drugs available and people should be allowed to take allowed to take whatever they want to whether marijuana, or cocaine, or any other thing. They should be allowed to do so. It should be the same penalties when under the influence of drugs as when committing criminal behavior when under the influence of alcohol.

I think that billions and billions of dollars are wasted worldwide by trying to stop people taking drugs, where you can damage yourself by drinking or even overeating. People should be allowed to do what they want to do. If they commit a crime, it should be tickets. Billions are spent on trying to stop people taking drugs. If the state licenses drugs, they can be a source of revenue instead of a source of loss. The whole question of drug-taking is totally relativistic. In the 19th century, cocaine was completely legal. Opium was legal. Some sort of modern argument that these should be criminalized. I find that thing weird, illogical. I think in due course that more drugs will be legal. Not that I’ve ever done a drug in my life. I would never do anything that I think would impair my thinking process if people want to take them, then so be it. Let them do it.
Jacobsen: That argument ties together the Libertarian leanings and the Capitalist framework for the United Kingdom for you.

Keene: Yes.

18. Jacobsen: In the modern, in an intellectual, context, for the left, far-left, even moderate or centre-left, the positions seem to have misgivings with respect to Capitalism. What seems like a reasonable response to you?

Keene: I think Socialism is a disease.

Jacobsen: How so?

Keene: I think that the idea that human beings can be controlled and that free thought can be contained, or crushed, as indeed under extreme right-wing regimes such as Nazism is completely wrong. I say it again, you must give people the freedom to act, unless people are doing harm to other people. Governments must let them be individuals and let the individual do what they want to do. This is how creativity flourishes. If you try to crush creativity, whether creative expression, or actions or performances, you limit the creative potential of the human race. I believe in free speech.

19. Jacobsen: What about developing, or poor, countries with the aim to become developed countries?

Keene: The system of government. Is that what you’re saying?

Jacobsen: Better system of government is part of it, but it would be derivative from that better system of government. In other words, the economic system that would be implemented to improve their lot at either a faster rate or in general.

Keene: It’s got to be Capitalism. I think the best system of government for a country, which is very difficult to achieve, is a benevolent dictatorship without corruption. It is almost impossible, but a lot of these countries, for example, South Africa. It went on a great course after Mandela, but with this current President corruption is rife. I think it’s going to go the same way as Zimbabwe if it’s not careful. Developing countries are in serious danger of being run by corruption. Money is put into these ridiculous projects to be distributed fairly. I think Capitalism is a better way forward in all of these countries and freedom. I think when people start to tap out Capitalism and press freedom these countries start to go off the rails.

20. Jacobsen: How important is women’s rights and the empowerment of women to the development of countries – even narrowed topics of cultural and sport import such as chess (which you indicated the future of chess with more women in it aside from the formidable Polgar sisters)?

Keene: I think it’s absolutely vital. You cannot leave out half of the population when you’re trying to develop creativity. It’s completely bonkers. Women should be encouraged to shine in every area of intellectual area of performance.

21. Jacobsen: You have deep association with Tony Buzan, the inventor of Mind Mapping, Dominic O’Brien, Eight Times World Memory Champion, and Dr. Manahel Thabet. What instigated involvement with these prominent individuals?

Keene: I met Tony Buzan in 1991 when I went to one of his lectures. We have been working together closely ever since. Dominic O’Brien, I also met in 1991 because what had happened is that Tony suggested that we organize the first of the World Memory Championship. I went to the Guinness World Record to see who won the world records and invited all of those who got people who got memory awards to the meeting and Dominic turned up. So I started an association with him in 1991. He won the first ever World Memory Championship, which we organized. I’ve been working with Dominic ever since. We have another one coming up in China this year. Manahel, I think she met Buzan last year, and he mentioned here to me. I got in touch. I have been associated with her ever since. She’s a wonderful person.

22. Jacobsen: Each brings unique specialties and talents to the professional and public world. Various talents, skills, abilities, and initiatives of importance and influence in a national, and international, context. What makes each of them unique to you?

Keene: Tony Buzan invented mind-mapping. He is absolutely committed to everything involving the mind, the brain, and genius. Dominic is a great ambassador of mental qualities. He’s very presentable, very tall, always well-dressed, very immaculate, and with a suit and tie. He really represents mental qualities in a most impressive way. Manahel is the most extraordinary person. I have never met anyone with such an amazing intelligence and an incredibly high IQ. Highly presentable, very, very charismatic, tremendous powers of reflexive persuasion. She is really a unique individual. I have never met anyone like her.

Jacobsen: Could you elaborate a little more on each individual?
Keene: I could, in what way?

Jacobsen: A parsing of personality variables. What seems to make them succeed in their area of professional life?

Keene: With Dominic, it is the fact that he started off without any particular talent for memory. I think this is probably common to all three of them. When they are presented with a situation where they have to succeed, or want to succeed, they had to analyze the accentuation that would derive the algorithm of success. Dominic did not start off with a great memory. He was inspired by a man named Craig Carvello. He wanted to do it himself. He wanted to perform all of these memory feats. He studied the methods of improving memory. He won the World Memory Championships eight times.

Tony, in university, was facing a dead-end in his studies and he wanted to remember what he was taught and how to make it interesting, colorful, how to make it attractive, and how to make it stick. That’s how he came up with the mind maps system. It is a situation where somebody is not given a God-given gift needs to solve certain immediate problems. They find the algorithm to do it by a process of ratiocination, by a process of analysis. I think that’s very impressive.

I think too with Manahel. I mean she comes from a different culture. She comes from a Middle Eastern culture where women do not have the freedom in life that men have. She wanted to solve the problem of breaking in to areas of activity that have traditionally been masculine. She did it by creating a genius persona and by winning IQ competitions, genius competitions, and she studied the methods of how to break into this masculine circle. She did it. Now, she is a global superstar. All three of them.

23. Jacobsen: One woman with an interest in women’s rights, women in science, women in academia or the university system, and in the world in general is Dr. Manahel Thabet. How important are contributions, such as her own, to the increased equality and rights for women in the world and the aforementioned domains because these seem interconnected in this globalized world?

Keene: I think they are very important because she is a very prominent person in Middle Eastern society, they all know who she is. She is immediately recognizable. She has a very distinctive style of presentation and dressing. She stands out. I think she is very widely respected. I think that’s why she won Brain of the Year from the Brain Trust Charity. That has been going since 1990. I think she has helped a lot, the cause, throughout the world. I think she will continue to do so and will increase her profile.

24. Jacobsen: Any future plans in development with them?

Keene: Absolutely, I’m going to do the World Memory Championship with Tony Buzan in China later this year. It’ll be China again next year. I’ll be hoping to bring it to the Middle East in 2017 with, possibly, Dr. Manahel’s assistance. There is a definite scope of possibility there. Of course, Dominic O’Brien is very active in the World Memory Championships. I am seriously considering expanding the scope of the World Memory Championships. It is much bigger than it was than when we started. It started with 8 people. Now, it is at about 200 every year. I think that there is scope for making the World Memory Championship something truly exciting. Something televisial; something that becomes almost as the World Championship of the brain. I think all three of them will be involved in that.


Keene: I have a lot of things. I want to increase the range and scope of The Brain Trust Charity. I want to help Professor Michael Crawford in his aims to eliminate world mental ill-health with his Institute for Brain Chemistry and Human Nutrition. I want to increase the range and scope of the World Memory Championship. I want to create a real Olympic Games for the mind, which we started a few years ago but never quite made it. I am very interested in creating an Olympic Games for the mind that covers all the possible mental competitions. We’ve got The Gifted Academy with Dr. Manahel. I want to enhance the scope of it to bring our new mental training technique to as many people as possible. I want to help Tony Buzan bring mental literacy to the whole world. Everything is centered around increasing the power of people to think and help them make their own decisions to help the individual make up his or her own mind about the truth, and not be fed lies by governments or the press. And to help them decide for themselves what is the right path for themselves for comprehension.

26. Jacobsen: Thank you for your time, Mr. Keene.

References


Appendix I: Footnotes

[1] Knight of the Order of the White Swan, (conferred by ) Prince Marek Kasperski Chevalier of the Order of Champagne; Chair, Outside in Pathways; Director, Brain Trust Charity; Former British Chess Champion; Bronze Medal, World Team Championship; Right to Arms, Royal College of Arms; Freeman of the City of London; Winner (Two Times), Global Chess Oscar; Ex-Head (1994-2000), Mind Sports Faculty; Ex-Chess Tutor, Imperial Court of Iran; Gold Medal, Chinese Olympic Association; Gold Medalist, European Championship; Honorary Board Member, World Intelligence Network (WIN); The Global Media and PR Director, World Memory Sports Council; Ex-Head (2013/2014), Leadership Academies Prince Philipp of Liechtenstein and President of Mexico, Vicente Fox, in Leon; Britain’s Senior International Chess Grandmaster; International Arbiter, Fédération Internationale des Échecs (FIDE) or World Chess Federation; Co-Founder, World Memory Championships; Count of the Order of Torres Madras, Portugal; Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (OBE); journalist; columnist; and author.


from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DuLYKgulc3U.


[18] In The Gifted Academy About: Principals... (2015), it, in full, states:

> “Dr Manahel Thabet is ranked among the 30 Smartest people alive by SuperScholar and Brain of the Year Award Winner 2015-2016. In 2014 she was selected the AVICENNA award Laureate, as a successor to Professor Tony Buzan, given every year to those who present best practice in science, connecting East with West through science and knowledge. She also represents The Brain Trust Foundation as President of the MENA region, with one objective, which is to unlock and deploy the vast capacity of the human brain.

She is a PhD holder; Youngest winner of Woman of the Year 2000 from Woman Federation for World Peace. In 2013 Dr. Thabet won Genius of the Year 2013 by the World Genius Directory representing ASIA.

She is the President of WIQF (World IQ Foundation), the High IQ society and Vice President of ‘WIN’ (World Intelligence Network), with more than 60,000 high IQ members from all over the world; in 2012 Dr. Thabet was the Chairperson of the Scientific Committee, Recommendation Committee and Senior Advisor to the International Asia Pacific Giftedness Conference held in Dubai – UAE hosted by Hamdan Bin Rashis Awards for Distinguished Academic Performance. The conference hosted specialists from 42 countries, 320 papers and more than 2000 participants in the field of Talent and Gifted Education.

Dr. Thabet obtained the “Excellence of Global International Environmental and Humanitarian Award” given for outstanding efforts in undertaking environmental and humanitarian support. Dr. Thabet is also the winner of Middle East Achievement Awards in Science and was ranked among the 100 most powerful Women in the Middle East and most powerful 500 Arabs in the World by Arabian Business. Dr. Thabet is a Royal Grand Cross Officer of the White Swan Companionate and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Medicine in London, UK.”


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