Strange Bedfellows: Politics Invades Psychotherapy

Pennsylvania Psychological Association
Annual Convention
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Presented by
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ABSTRACT

- Psychology has gone through stages of political involvement and self-imposed isolation from external political events, the latter becoming impossible after the 2016 election. This workshop looks at various ways patients and psychologists have interacted through the first 18 months of the provocative Trump administration, the impact of the cultural anxiety and stress level on life and treatment, and possible areas for aiding in coping strategies for our patients and ourselves.

In addition, the presenter will discuss participating in APA's delegation to the International Congress of Psychology and Health (Psicosalud) in Havana, Cuba, after Trump's prohibition against travel there, and some perceptions of US politics held by our colleagues in other countries.

OUTLINE

I. Brief History of Overlap of Psychology & Politics
   A. Erich Fromm -- Escape from Freedom
   B. Analysis of Evil in WWII
   C. Feminism impacts Psychotherapy
   D. A-political Era with Self-Help Movement
   E. APA's misguided alignment with DOD's dubious interrogation methods

II. What Prompted This Workshop?
   A. Impact on Patients-emotional dysregulation from "outside"
   B. Heightened Anxiety, Media Fatigue, Comey, Not Normal?
   C. Demographic, Conceptual, Mythology by the "other"
   D. Cuba Pre-Obama, Obama, Trump

III. Voices from the "Other Side" and What I Learned
   A. The Blue Collar Vet; The Iranian Immigrant; The one-issue member of my synagogue
   B. The Rust Belt & Hillbilly Elegy
   C. The Blue Collar Vet: The Accidental Diplomat
   D. Sally Kohn: The Opposite of Hate

IV. How to Simultaneously LISTEN & BE AN ACTIVIST
   A. Wisdom from Politics/Journalism--Van Jones
   B. Wisdom from Psychology--Steven Pinker
   C. Mindfulness to Cope with Emotional Dysregulation and Polarized Dialogue (psychologist self-care needed more than ever)
US PRESIDENTS SINCE 1933

1933-1945
Franklin D. Roosevelt (Democrat)
John N. Garner/Henry A. Wallace/Harry S. Truman

1945-1953
Harry S. Truman (Democrat)
v.p. office vacant/Alben W. Barkley

1953-1961
Dwight D. Eisenhower (Republican)
Richard M. Nixon

1961-1963
John F. Kennedy (Democrat)
Lyndon B. Johnson

1963-1969
Lyndon B. Johnson (Democrat)
v.p. office vacant/Hubert H. Humphrey

1969-1974
Richard M. Nixon (Republican)
Spiro T. Agnew/Gerald R. Ford

1974-1977
Gerald R. Ford (Republican)
Nelson Rockefeller

1977-1981
Jimmy Carter (Democrat)
Walter F. Mondale

1981-1989
Ronald Reagan (Republican)
George Bush

1989-1993
George Bush (Republican)
Dan Quayle

1993-2001
Bill Clinton (Democrat)
Albert Gore

2001-2009
George W. Bush (Republican)
Richard Cheney

2009-2017
Barack Obama (Democrat)
Joseph R. Biden

2017-
Donald J. Trump (Republican)
Mike Pence

HISTORY OF OVERLAP BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGY AND POLITICS

A. Erich Fromm—Founder of Political Psychology
1. Fled Germany before WW II; co-founded Wm Alanson White
2. Use of reason to establish moral values
3. Escape From Freedom—cautions against conformity, authoritarianism, destructiveness

B. Hans Eysenck—The Psychology of Politics
1. Personality researcher who wanted to deal with reactions to German destructiveness
2. Authoritarianism can appear equally on the left and on the right

C. Feminism—1960s, Roe v Wade (1973), Third Wave (1980’s)
1. Betty Friedan points out psychology reinforces political position of women
2. Feminist Therapy—agitation, gender affects social/psychological of therapists and patients

D. A-political era in the late 20th/early 21st century with self-help movement

E. APA’s unfortunate lending professional veneer to DOD’s dubious interrogation practices.
WHAT PROMPTED THIS PRESENTATION CLINICALLY & PROFESSIONALLY??

A. PATIENT EXAMPLES
1. ED recovered mother of 2 who told sons “the bad man won’t get elected.”
2. ED recovered vindicated by judgment of sexual discrimination by the EEOC disillusioned and frightened by election.
3. ED recovered divorced man rejected by a new partner for his voting decision.

B. Evidence of Heightened Anxiety and political preoccupation in and out of tx.

C. Polarization because of diverse opinions in families, etc.

D. APA Trip to Cuba in Fall 2017: 
1. Contrast to personal visit after Obama re-opened economic exchange in 2015
2. Unique aspects of Community Psychology and its relationship to Cuban political philosophy
3. Impressions of the US from other attenders at the 2017 International Congress on Psychology and Health hosted by Cuban Psychological Association.

“I had to stop watching the news—it was making my own problems seem insignificant.”
HIGHLIGHTS: CUBA-US HISTORY

- 1902 Platt Amendment giving US right to have naval base at Guantánamo after Cuban republic established
- 1950's - Mafia presence
- 1959 - La Revolución - Fidel Castro overthrows Batista and establishes government control
- 1962 - Cuban Missile Crisis - JFK created the embargo blocking communication/trade after Cuba housed Russian missiles potentially aimed at the US
- 2008-9 - Raúl establishes "prosperous sustainable socialism" according to "the people's mandate"
- 2014 - after 18 months of negotiations, US removed Cuba from list of countries housing terrorists
- 2015 - Obama re-opens diplomatic relations, trade, communication, opening access to UNESCO funding for country improvements.
- 2017 - Trump re-establishes embargo

APA'S DIVISION 52 (INTERNATIONAL) EXCHANGE WITH CUBAN PSYCHOLOGISTS

- 4 visits to Cuba from 2010-2017 - (Pre/post/renewal of embargo) encourages listening/partnerships/collaboration.
- 2017 trip coincided with 8th International Congress on Psicosalud (Psychology and Health), which we attended.
- 2017 Visit included meetings with Medical School, Neuroscience Center, Community Mental Health Center ("We keep talking about integrated care in this country. They already do it." Suzanne Bennett Johnson).

FREE TREATMENT IN CUBAN DENTAL CLINIC
LISTENING TO VOICES FROM THE “OTHER SIDE”:

THE QUESTIONS FOR THOSE WITH DIFFERENT BELIEF SYSTEM

- What is your age/ethnic background/location/history of party affiliation?
- What is your vocation?
- Were your earliest family members US citizens?
- What are your strongest voting priorities (pro and con) and what deeper values do these reflect?
- What is your philosophy about the importance of the US Constitution?
- What is your philosophy about Human Rights and government’s responsibility to its citizens?
- What is your belief system about psychotherapy and other forms of professional/paraprofessional support?
- What is your view of the role of the media in our democratic process?
- What is your view of the role of the US in global affairs?
- How do you think our executive branch is doing these days? Our congress? Our judiciary?
- How do you feel about talking to people with different viewpoints?

LISTENING TO VOICES FROM ‘THE OTHER SIDE’

A. THE INTERVIEWS

- BOB: Viet-Nam Vet, blue collar town, (Rust Belt/Pittsburgh); Fox News watcher, Christian, Dutch/English-Irish, paternal side original US.

Key Points
1. Hx of voting independent, but had to register in TN so registered Rep.
2. Voting priorities: security/family/lower taxes
3. No busing for schools
4. “Strict” definition of the Constitution
5. Media was biased toward HRC

LISTENING TO VOICES FROM ‘THE OTHER SIDE’ (2)

- ELANA: Jewish-American Baby Boomer from Philadelphia suburbs; college and post-graduate educated, parents Polish/Austrian first generation; committed to Israel.

Key Points
1. Hx of voting Democrat
2. 2 key issues are Zionism/Israel and pro-choice—hard to find in same candidate
3. Resolved by being guided by family (father’s) values and DID NOT VOTE FOR PRESIDENT.
4. Govt responsible to its citizens more than human rights and refugees.
LISTENING TO VOICES FROM 'THE OTHER SIDE' (3)  
• "JOHN": 58 year old Iranian immigrant, came to US in 1977 (age 14) before hostage crisis, citizen 3 years later-children are 1st generation, business owner.  

Key Points  
1. Concern with confidentiality.  
2. Voting priorities are economic conservatism, military security, anti govt assistance for the poor, pro-guns.  
3. Votes no party. Felt disenfranchised when labeled "non-affiliated" at time of citizen requirement for party declaration.  
4. "Media is driving people to brink of insanity!"

Confidentiality Agreement

This agreement, between Karyn L. Scher, Ph.D., interviewer and John Doe, interviewee, states that content of the interview will be limited to sharing with a professional psychology audience for the sole purpose of education in learning listening and empathy skills. The content will not be shared beyond the professional presentation on June 13, 2018. Specifically it will not be shared with any party or agency or person not present at the professional presentation.

______________________________
Karyn L. Scher, Ph.D.
Interviewer

______________________________
John Doe
Interviewee
OTHER VOICES

B. Geographic variables like The Rust Belt (Great Lakes Steel Towns near Pittsburgh and parts of Ohio) and Hillbilly Elegy (referenced Appalachia and Ohio): J.D. Vance points out that the psychological impact that spiritual and material poverty has on the lives of children is devastating (low social mobility, drug addiction, pessimism).

C. Sally Kohn, former Fox News commentator: The Opposite of Hate is Connection: “Emotional Correctness” no matter how strongly we disagree, but we all, as humans, hate—Cites Gordon Allport’s The Nature of Prejudice.

ON LISTENING W/ THE FIRST/SECOND/THIRD EARS & BEING AN ACTIVIST

A. Van Jones: push the grief along
B. Corey Booker: from sedentary agitation to agency
C. Steven Pinker: insights from cognitive psychology
D. Victimized youth may actually be MORE engaged, tho Kelly-Woessner’s research shows American youth of today is LESS TOLERANT than their parents—1st time in 60 yrs.
E. Therapist self-care/mindfulness/activism

THERAPIST SELF-CARE

- Awareness of internalized biases
- Seek collegial support
- Foster environment of open dialogue, tolerance, and deeper exploration in tx.
- Contain reactivity with mindfulness/breathing
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY