Abstract

This article analyzes current psychological practice and its effect on parenting and education. It explains how opportunistic psychological diagnoses are created and destroyed, fueled by public credulousness and the absence of scientific first principles within psychology. A case history is included.

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1 Overview

A note about terminology. In this article, to avoid excessive wordiness the term “psychology” refers to both psychiatry and clinical psychology. Psychiatry and clinical psychology are distinct fields but have common properties – they’re both based in human psychology, both rely on the DSM (psychology’s “bible”) and they’re equally unscientific.

This article examines a troubling aspect of modern psychology. It shows how parents use psychology to control their children by pretending that the field is more evidence-based and reliable than it is. The ultimate victims are the children, who may enter adult life believing that authority, even faux authority, ranks higher than scientific evidence. In today’s world, such a belief represents a terrible handicap.

In my other articles, for example “Psychology and Neuroscience”, I show that ethical considerations and the complexity of human behavior prevent theoretical psychology from performing the kinds of experiments that would place psychology on a firm evidentiary footing, and that as a result the practice of psychology must get along without a scientific grounding in testable, falsifiable theoretical principles. I would like to make that argument by comparing physics, mainstream medicine, and psychology.

1.1 Science and Pseudoscience

Before we compare these fields, let me make a brief statement about the nature of science. Science differs from most human endeavors in that evidence has the highest standing – authority has no standing at all. In science there are only theories, no laws or unchallengeable facts, and any theory, however well-established, can be falsified by new evidence. If an idea should become so well-accepted that it is no longer looked on as a theory, at that moment it leaves the domain of science.

In brief, if a theory can be falsified by empirical evidence, it is scientific. If it cannot be tested in practical experiments and potentially falsified, it is not scientific. This point cannot be overemphasized, and it uncovers the primary defect in modern psychology.

1.1.1 Physics

Physics is a scientific field so completely and successfully governed by theory and evidence that practitioners of less rigorous disciplines are said to experience “physics envy.” There are several reasons for the scientific standing of physics, but the primary one is that its principles are comparatively simple and easily tested. Some readers may object that Einstein’s Theory of Relativity is not at all simple, and quantum physics is much more complex. This is true, but the complexity of these subjects pales when compared to the workings of the human mind.

Physics possesses a well-tested theoretical core that can predict physical events to a staggering degree of precision, typically ten or more decimal places. And, because so much of modern technology hinges on an understanding of physics, physical theories are constantly being retested and modified when they are discovered not to reflect reality.

Also, there is no ethical dimension to physics experiments. If you want to find out at what point a rod of steel will break, you simply bend it until it breaks. There are no steel rights groups to object to how badly the steel is being treated. And the steel cannot lie to you. You don’t have to ask the steel at which point it will break, instead you bend it and ignore its squeaks and groans. So when a bridge is built on the basis of laboratory tests, the steel in the bridge is very likely to behave in the same way – all according to a very clear physical theory, a theory confirmed by experiments that could have falsified the theory but didn’t.

1.1.2 Medicine

Mainstream medicine can’t be conducted like physics because people have rights, and the quality of experimental evidence stands in opposition to the rights of the experimental subjects. If scientific evidence were the only priority, we would treat human subjects like animals and get much better evidence on which to judge the effectiveness of various medical procedures and substances. Because we cannot do this, medicine cannot ever rise to the scientific standing of physics.

But there are ways to improve the evidence. As it turns out, we can conduct animal experiments to draw some conclusions about human physiology, for example pigs have cardiovascular systems very much like ours and there seems to be a reasonable basis for extrapolating pig experiments to humans.

In the practice of modern medicine emotions run high, patient beliefs play a part, many things go wrong, consequently many theories in medicine have had to be discarded over the years, and the level of certainty in
medicine is not very high. Therefore doctors are obliged to get something called “informed consent” from patients before subjecting them to procedures that are uncertain or that have side effects.

Also, when a patient enters a doctor’s office, he has the right to know the nature of the procedures themselves, which might be research, diagnosis, therapy or a mixture of all three. It is here that the issue of informed consent is most important.

In the old-style relationship between a doctor and a patient, the doctor was God and you did what he said (and the doctors were all men). In modern times, because of the effect of media reporting and a higher degree of comprehension, patients understand what kinds of things can go wrong and what the consequences are. The best-educated patients ask frank questions and make their own decisions, with the understanding that the doctor is often no better informed than they are.

1.1.3 Psychology

An aside. The ordering of these subjects is not accidental. Physics is the litmus test of scientific methods and content. Mainstream medicine is less scientific than physics, and psychology is less scientific than medicine. The only thing less scientific than psychology is religion, where belief rules and evidence has no place.

If we want to test a theory in medicine, we might locate an animal that can serve as a human proxy, like a pig in a cardiovascular study. But in psychology this option doesn’t exist for any but the simplest human behaviors. We are free to conduct experiments with rats or pigeons, two experimental animals very commonly seen in psychology laboratories, but we cannot realistically extrapolate pigeon mental behavior to human mental behavior, and we cannot ethically design rigorous experiments using human subjects.

Let me expand on this point, because according to my correspondence with psychologists and psychology students, the issue of experimental design appears to be a confusing topic. Let’s say a client enters a program of counseling and, after several months, reports that he feels “better”. What conclusions can we draw from this? Are we justified in taking this as evidence that the therapy is effective? Yes, but only if we abandon any pretense of scientific evaluation. Here are some questions a scientist might ask about the outcome:

- Would the client have felt better if he had not entered the therapy and simply let some time pass?
- Would the client have felt better if he had spent the same time talking to a sympathetic relative, or to a bartender, or an astrologer, rather than a psychologist?
- Might the client have personal reasons for reporting that he feels better, reasons having nothing to do with his actual subjective state (the “self-reporting” problem)?
- Might this be an example of the “placebo effect,” where any attention paid to the client, including a procedure of no known therapeutic effect (a “placebo”), produces a positive result?

These are reasonable questions, they are rarely asked in psychology, and they can only be answered by designing a more scientific study, one consisting of:

- An experimental group of subjects, the subjects that receive the therapy under evaluation.
- A control group that receives a make-believe therapy that has no known therapeutic effect.
- An overall experimental design in which neither the therapists nor the clients know to which group they belong (a “double-blind” study).

This is how science works to minimize the confounding effects inherent in a study of human behavior, but it should be obvious that this experimental protocol is hopelessly unrealistic in the context of psychology – there would be too many ways for the control and experimental groups to discover which they were, and there are those nasty ethical issues lurking in the background, where someone really needs therapy but gets a placebo (or really needs a placebo but gets therapy), which would push the entire enterprise out of the laboratory and into a courtroom, where the therapists and researchers would be sued to within an inch of their lives.

It is for these and other reasons that such strictly designed scientific experiments are never conducted in human psychology. And it is for that reason that theoretical psychology cannot produce a reliable core of scientific, falsifiable theory. And it is for that reason that the practice of psychology is not governed by scientific findings in the same way that physics and medicine are. This is why psychology consists of a series of conjectures and beliefs, rather than a series of scientific experiments and results.

Let’s clarify this point with an example. The practice of theoretical physics is called “engineering”. If an engineer builds an airplane and the plane falls to pieces while flying, it will turn out that one or more physical theories was
ignored in the design of the airplane. This is because engineering is governed by the scientific content of theoretical physics. To put it simply, a failure in the practice of physics can be trivially traced to a failure to heed the theory of physics.

When theoretical psychology is applied in a clinical setting, any connection with science collapses. If a client commences therapy and then falls to pieces while talking, the psychologist, the “engineer,” cannot refer to theoretical psychology for an explanation, because theoretical psychology doesn’t contain a coherent, testable, falsifiable theory of human behavior. As a result of the theoretical vacuum at the top of human psychology, psychologists can do or say virtually anything, without any realistic prospect of refutation, and clients who can’t think for themselves are at the mercy of therapists.

1.2 The Role of Theory

Scientific fields are defined by scientific theories – general ideas that arise from empirical observations. The ideas are tested in different domains and those that survive efforts at falsification become principles on which scientific fields are built. Psychology doesn’t have empirically derived, falsifiable theories – it relies on descriptions, not explanations – consequently its standing as a science has always relied on a public misunderstanding of how science must be defined.

1.3 Science Defined

Some of my readers have asked, “Must science be so strictly defined? Can’t we have a more relaxed definition of science, so psychology can be counted among the sciences?” In reply, I ask how society keeps religious ideas like Creationism out of public school science textbooks and classrooms. Most people agree that religious teachings and public school science classes should be kept separate, but how exactly does the law accomplish this? Well, it’s not difficult – all we need to do is find out how science is defined and show that religious ideas don’t meet the definition. As it happens, those steps have been taken – in a series of successful legal actions, science’s basic requirements have been clearly stated. Here is how one influential legal ruling defines science:

1. It is guided by natural law;
2. It has to be explanatory by reference to natural law;
3. It is testable against the empirical world;
4. Its conclusions are tentative, i.e. are not necessarily the final word; and
5. It is falsifiable.

Legal decisions like the above are now commonplace, and science’s basic requirements are no longer a matter of debate. In consequence, because psychology studies the mind, because the mind is not part of the physical world nor open to empirical investigation, because psychological ideas cannot be falsified, psychology is not scientific as the law defines science. This is why psychologists describe but don’t explain, and why they don’t shape and test general, falsifiable, unifying scientific theories – they can’t.

1.4 Pseudoscience in Psychology

Because psychologists cannot shape and test unifying empirical theories about the mind, this allows them to invent imaginary diseases and offer imaginary cures. Here are a few examples psychologists have dreamt up over the years, based on popular sentiment, prejudice, and social fads.

- 1.4.1 Drapetomania

An imaginary mental illness dating to before the U.S. Civil War, Drapetomania presumed to explain why slaves ran away from their masters (apparently a desire for freedom wasn’t a suitable explanation). There was no corresponding mental illness to explain why slave owners believed it was moral to own a human being, but the slave owners, not the slaves, paid the psychologists.

Outcome: abandoned.

*Separation of church and state is a U.S. Constitutional requirement.
• 1.4.2 Prefrontal Lobotomy

A procedure developed during the 1930s, then popularized in the U.S. by Walter Freeman and associates, Prefrontal Lobotomy achieved its greatest popularity in the early 1950s, during which time Freeman drove about the U.S. in his “lobotomobile,” performing icepick lobotomies at mental hospitals along the way. After a total of 100 of his patients died from the procedure, Freeman, who had no formal surgical training, was banned from performing any further procedures.

The advantage of the lobotomy was that it rendered mental patients docile and manageable. The drawback was that it often left them without personalities or intelligence. In the U.S. about 40,000 people received the procedure before its terrible effects caused the procedure to be banned. One critic of the procedure remarked, “through lobotomy, an insane person is changed into an idiot.”

Outcome: abandoned.

• 1.4.3 Homosexuality

When homophobia reached its peak in the mid-20th century, psychologists listed homosexuality as a mental illness and offered nonsense “treatments”. When public attitudes changed, homosexuality suddenly wasn’t a mental illness any more and was removed from the diagnostic guide. But because of the undisciplined and unscientific nature of psychology, society now finds it necessary to pass laws forbidding therapists from trying to force changes in people’s sexual orientation.

Outcome: abandoned.

• 1.4.4 Refrigerator Mother

Invented by a prominent psychiatrist, this widely accepted pseudoscientific diagnosis supposedly explained schizophrenia and autism as resulting from emotionally crippled mothers unable to bond with their children. Relying on the imagined authority of a psychology expert and with no scientific evidence, this outrageous belief held responsible any number of innocent and caring parents for outcomes that actually arose in organic and genetic conditions outside psychology’s purview.

Outcome: abandoned.

• 1.4.5 Recovered Memory Therapy (RMT)

This dangerous, nonsense fad took hold in the 1990s. Therapists who practiced RMT talked their clients into imaginary “memories” of (among other things) vile sex crimes. In some cases virgins, brainwashed by their unscrupulous therapists, reported copious details of imaginary rapes. Many lives and families were destroyed before the stupidity of the claims became apparent. Psychology insiders now describe RMT as a “debacle”, but in the long term it’s had little effect on the relationship between therapists and their naive clients.

Outcome: abandoned.

• 1.4.6 Asperger Syndrome

Also known as “Asperger’s”, this diagnosis appealed to parents who believed their bright youngsters weren’t “normal”. Psychologists used the Asperger’s diagnostic criteria to misdiagnose bright youngsters as mentally ill, then offered therapies meant to “correct” behaviors that are normal for bright people. After an epidemic of nonsense diagnoses of above-average youngsters, Asperger’s lost public credibility and was removed from psychology’s diagnostic manual. But, just as with homosexuality, some psychologists still offer “treatments” for this discredited idea.

Outcome: abandoned.

Some notes for the above list:
• It’s hardly comprehensive – it only shows a few highlights in the history of modern psychology.
• As with all psychological ideas, each of them has been abandoned.
• On reviewing the list, with a little insight one can see it represents an evolutionary process, of learning by experience, and each new imaginary ailment shows more sophistication in appealing to public taste and prejudice.
• To date, by far the most successful imaginary ailment has been Asperger Syndrome, for these reasons:

*Treatments that drove computer pioneer Alan Turing to suicide.
– It exploits a superficial association with an objectively real organic ailment with genetic roots (Autism21), that, because of its biological origins, lies outside psychology’s purview.
– Its diagnostic indicators are close enough to the normal behavior of intelligent people that the latter are assured of receiving the diagnosis if they want it (in a practice called “pathologizing normal behavior”).
– In a stroke of public relations genius, psychologists “diagnosed” a number of famous people, living and dead, with Asperger’s, including Isaac Newton, Thomas Jefferson, Albert Einstein and Bill Gates. This has had the effect of making a mental illness diagnosis seem appealing, desirable, even a status symbol, for the first time.

Asperger’s was as wildly successful as Recovered Memory Therapy was wildly unsuccessful, but Asperger’s finally became a victim of its own success. So many people clamored to be allowed into the exclusive Aspie∗ club that even psychologists realized they had given birth to a monster. So to prevent further damage to psychology, they removed Asperger’s from the DSM1, psychology’s “bible”, only to discover that, like an undead zombie, Asperger’s has taken on a life of its own.

In a perhaps unintended irony, those responsible for removing Asperger’s from the diagnostic guide explained their decision by saying, “It’s not an evidence-based term20,” overlooking the fact that none of the DSM diagnoses are evidence-based (all rely on lists of symptoms, none rely on a knowledge of causes, i.e. science).

When reviewing psychology’s history and the connection between wealth, power and what society chooses to describe as mental illness, it becomes clear that to predict the outcome of a mental health controversy one need only ask, “Who pays the psychologists?”

1.5 Psychological Practice

In the above citations and many others, new mental illnesses are crafted to appeal to public fashion or to follow political trends and/or money, but none of them follow science, for a very simple reason – there isn’t any science. This means anything the public will tolerate can become official psychological practice.

Am I exaggerating the present state of psychology? No, not at all. Consider these examples:

1.5.1 John Mack : Alien Abductees

Professor John Mack22 was a psychiatrist, a Pulitzer Prize winner, at the top of his profession, when he decided to accept at face value the reports of people who claimed to have been abducted by aliens. Mack’s position at the Harvard Medical School and his standing in the world of psychology greatly increased the number of people willing to count themselves among the alien-abducted. And it was not possible to evaluate abductee claims objectively or argue against Mack’s position using scientific evidence, because there is no psychological theory that addresses this kind of mental disturbance. Mack was free to say or do anything he cared to, and he could not be called to account by reference to a nonexistent psychological theory that might refute his beliefs.

∗Aspie: one who has acquired an Asperger’s diagnosis.
1.5.2 Ian Stevenson : Past Lives Therapy

![Ian Stevenson](image)

While chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Virginia, Ian Stevenson decided to study reincarnation by interviewing children about their past lives. Not surprisingly and with the right kind of encouragement, the children exhibited fantastic recall of their prior visits to planet Earth. Encouraged by these results Stevenson went on to found the Division of Perceptual Studies at the University of Virginia, a department that now stands alongside physics, chemistry and biology on this university’s roster of serious subjects.

Not surprisingly, scientists have shown little interest in this department of the university, except for a rumored inquiry from the IRS, who are alleged to be investigating the idea of past-lives income tax audits.

1.5.3 Candace Newmaker : Rebirthing Therapy

![Candace Newmaker](image)

Candace Newmaker was a 10-year-old girl whose mother submitted her to a practice known as “rebirthing therapy”. Like so many psychological fads, rebirthing therapy gained traction among parents by word of mouth, glowing testimonials, the encouragement of psychologists, everything but scientific evidence. As time passed, the therapy took on a more aggressive form – the child was wrapped in sheets and cushions as a sort of faux womb from which she was expected to emerge completely changed. Well, Candace was certainly changed – she was dead. She had suffocated in the make-believe womb.
1.5.4 Rebecca Riley: Psychoactive Drugs

When Rebecca Riley\(^{25}\) was two years old, she was placed under the care of a psychiatrist and diagnosed with attention deficit disorder and bipolar disorder. On the psychiatrist’s recommendation, Rebecca was placed on a potent cocktail of drugs meant to calm her down. Over time her parents and her psychiatrist, noting the salutary effect the drugs were having on the child’s behavior and reasoning that more is better, gradually increased the dosage. Finally, when Rebecca was four, the drugs had the desired effect – she became supernaturally calm. She was dead.

The above examples come from a long list of similar stories – therapists who will say anything, parents who will accept anything, children who have no rights. These are stories where science plays no part.

1.6 Fringe Diagnoses

A “fringe diagnosis” is one that may be based in reality but that can be plausibly applied to nearly anyone. Asperger’s, ADHD\(^{26}\) and many other conditions may represent real subjective states, but they also represent a playground for unethical psychologists, a pretense to get people into the mental health care system.

1.6.1 DSM

Over time psychologists have greatly increased the number of conditions officially recognized as mental illnesses, by including them in the “Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders” (hereafter DSM\(^1\), the psychologist’s professional “Bible”. The present DSM identifies an absurd number of conditions as “mental illnesses”, including:

- “Spelling Disorder”
- “Written Expression Disorder”
- “Mathematics Disorder”
- “Caffeine Intoxication/Withdrawal”
- “Sibling Rivalry Disorder”
- “Phase of Life Problem”

This example list means exactly what it says. According to current psychological practice, if you have trouble spelling, if you can’t add a column of numbers, if you can’t compose a coherent sentence, if you don’t like your older brother, you are mentally ill and you need professional help.

When one hears that a two-year-old girl was given serious, multiple diagnoses as in the Rebecca Riley story recounted above, one may wonder whether such diagnoses can meaningfully be applied to a child that young. The answer is no – these diagnoses are meaningless even in the prevailing relaxed atmosphere of psychology. But it’s important to understand why this happens. It happens because a misbehaving child might result from parental incompetence, but a psychological diagnosis confers the status of a disease, a “mental illness”, which frees parents from any responsibility for their child’s behavior. This is the parental motive behind the present fad of acquiring fringe psychological diagnoses for very young children.
The problem with fringe diagnoses is that, while it frees parents from any personal responsibility for their child’s behavior, it also frees the child from any responsibility for his own. It is difficult to overestimate the emotional effect of being diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome, or ADHD, or any of the other currently popular fringe diagnoses. To a child who is not mature enough to understand the social standing of psychology, such a diagnosis might easily be understood as:

- I am sick, so I should not try to accomplish anything until I get better.
- I will never get better.

In reality, all these children will eventually have to make their own way in the adult world, and their prospect for individual success is in direct proportion to their willingness to ignore the beliefs and statements of psychologists. This is why such diagnoses are almost always applied to children, and by the time these children become adults, they either figure out that they must sink or swim like everyone else, or they’re on their way to becoming permanent, voluntary psychological invalids.

To summarize the above points, because of the superficial connection between psychology and science, because psychologists have no authority and cannot compel behavior, we arrive at the bedrock principle of contemporary psychology: clients pay psychologists, and psychologists tell clients what they want to hear. If a psychologist contradicts a client, the client goes shopping for a different psychologist who will agree with him. And as the John Mack/alien-abductee story proves, you can find psychologists willing to say anything.

One might ask whether parents are diagnosed with mental illnesses – statistically they’re as likely as children to be mentally disturbed. But this doesn’t happen for the simple reason that parents, not children, pay the psychologists.

1.6.2 Asperger Syndrome

As explained above, in the recent past a new mental illness has become popular and has created an epidemic of U.S. diagnoses, mostly of children. Asperger syndrome (“Asperger’s”) is thought to be related to autism, but this is conjecture for the usual reason – psychologists don’t know what Asperger’s is or even if it is distinct from other conditions. Asperger’s also meets the definition of a fringe diagnosis – present diagnostic tests can and do mistakenly identify bright people as suffering from Asperger’s, which can lead to an unnecessary stigma and burden and pointless therapeutic treatment for children who, apart from being intelligent, are quite normal.

Also, because a number of famous, successful people have been given the Asperger’s label, the diagnosis has become trendy and fashionable – there’s no other way to put it. Some parents don’t mind at all that this diagnosis is applied to their children, and some proactively seek it out. The parents get all the personal advantages stated above, and they place their children in the company of some very successful people. Because of these forces, the Yale Child Development Center has posted this warning:

“Clearly, the work on Asperger syndrome, in regard to scientific research as well as in regard to service provision, is only beginning. Parents are urged to use a great deal of caution and to adopt a critical approach toward information given to them.” [emphasis supplied]

The opinion leaders in the field of psychology have directed this advice to parents, not therapists, for a reason that should be obvious – as explained above, there’s no realistic way to control the behavior of therapists. For a therapist, a diagnosis is bread on his table, and any bright youngster can be given the Asperger diagnosis. Many parents don’t understand that psychology isn’t a science and that psychologists aren’t doctors – sadly, these people become hostages of their own ignorance.

Update: Some readers have asked why psychologists are still diagnosing and “treating” Asperger’s – hasn’t it been abandoned by the highest authorities? Well, yes, it has, and if psychology were a science, practitioners would pay attention to such decisions and abandon discredited ideas, just as doctors do. But psychology isn’t a science, it’s a belief system, and everyone is entitled to his own beliefs.

1.7 Authority and Responsibility

*Parents who consider submitting their children to the care of psychologists should read this section very carefully.*

Many people believe that psychologists are sort of like doctors and therefore speak with the authority of a doctor. But because of the absence of science in psychology, psychologists are not accountable for their actions in the same

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*U.S. psychiatrists acquire an M.D. degree before specializing in psychiatry, but this creates a misleading association between psychology and the field of medicine as well as giving psychiatrists the power to write lucrative prescriptions.*
way that doctors are, instead parents are held to account for the therapeutic procedures visited upon their children. In the two cases cited above in which children died while under the care of psychiatrists or psychologists, the parents were brought up on criminal charges. This is society’s unmistakable signal that:

- Psychology is not a science, and
- Parents will be held personally responsible for the actions of psychologists.

If the above reasoning seems too esoteric, if a reader finds the logic too difficult to follow, then pay attention to how science distinguishes medicine and psychology. In medicine, if something goes wrong, the doctor can be sued in civil court or charged in a criminal court with wrongdoing. This is because medicine is strongly governed by scientific evidence, and errors tend to result from willfully ignoring the science. In psychology, if something goes wrong, parents are typically held to account for accepting the psychologist’s opinions. This is because psychology is not governed by scientific evidence, instead it is nearly all a matter of fad and opinion.

1.8 Summary

Since the first appearance of this article, many conscientious psychologists have begun to take a similar position, but more with a sense of foreboding than anticipation. In 2005, Dr. Ronald L. Levant, president of the American Psychological Association, penned a daring initiative meant to nudge psychology toward an evidence-based model and away from its present reliance on anecdote and belief. But it seems Dr. Levant misjudged the present state of clinical practice – on hearing his proposal, rank and file psychologists reacted with a mixture of panic and fury. Here’s a quote from Dr. Levant’s later defense:

Evidence-based practice in psychology (APA, 2005): “Some APA members have asked me why I have chosen to sponsor an APA Presidential Initiative on Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) in Psychology, expressing fears that the results might be used against psychologists by managed-care companies and malpractice lawyers.”

The rank and file are right, of course. Any effort to move psychology toward an evidence-based model would expose what until now has been a well-kept secret – psychology is not remotely evidence-based, relying instead on anecdotes, dubious extrapolations from animal research, poor-quality retrospective studies and simple belief. To publicly air these facts would trigger a number of legal and practical consequences that psychologists would be wise to avoid. And so far, they have – after a brief uproar in 2005, the APA proposal has been shelved.

In his most revealing sentence, Dr. Levant says, “… psychology needs to define EBP in psychology or it will be defined for us.” This acknowledges something that Levant emphasizes in his article – EBP is a proposal, a wish, not a reality. Scientific psychology lies in the future – at present, we only have the acronym.
2 Case History

“No matter how cynical I get, it’s just never enough to keep up” – Lily Tomlin

This is a first-person account that looks inside a profoundly dysfunctional family. According to standard practice in the social sciences, the identities of the participants are concealed – all names and some events are fictionalized, but the themes are true to life. This account shows how psychology, contrary to popular belief, can make a bad situation worse.

2.1 Narrative

For those who treat it with an appropriate degree of critical thought and skepticism, psychology is no more risky than astrology. But for those who either will not or cannot think for themselves, or who treat psychology as though it is a science, serious problems are inevitable.

Above I gave examples where parents, with the active participation of psychiatry and psychology, killed their children outright. That is obviously a rare occurrence – it’s more common for parents to enlist psychology to destroy their children in ways that don’t leave external scars. Obviously a principled psychologist could say, “You’re infecting your children with your own dysfunctions, and I won’t have any part of this!” Or she could say to the children, “The problem is your parents – the cure is to get away from them as soon as possible.” But in real life this almost never happens – because parents pay the bills, a principled psychologist would soon be out of business. It’s important to understand that psychology is a business, not a science, and to understand how it works, one need only follow the money.

On a personal note, I am the “first-person” alluded to above. I’ve had an adventure-filled life with many risks along the way – an armed standoff with pirates in the Indian Ocean during my around-the-world solo sail, many close calls as a stunt pilot and skydiver, and more recently, a number of fun-filled grizzly bear close encounters.

But the biggest risk I ever faced was from a psychopathic housewife who had no hesitation about lying under oath. This is her story, and equally a picture of modern psychology.

2.1.1 The Lead-in

When I’m not sailing across oceans or in Alaska photographing grizzly bears, I live in a pretty part of the rural Pacific Northwest. A nearby town has an odd reputation, one that I doubt many of its residents willingly accept – that of a gathering place for the mentally unbalanced. This view is so widely held that some of the town’s less even-keeled inmates – excuse me, residents – defiantly created their own bumpersticker that says, “We’re all here because we’re not all there.” The town’s supposed status as a haven for crazies wasn’t a matter of great interest to me until one of its residents emailed me, said she had read about me on the Web, and asked me to meet her son.

I don’t want to sound overly cynical about people’s motives, but over the years experience has taught me that when a mother asks you to meet her children, it’s almost never what it seems. There’s nearly always a hidden agenda – the woman is unhappy in her marriage, she wants to shame her mate into working harder to satisfy her narcissistic wishes, or she may want to dump her mate and trade up. Something – something other than a wish to enrich the lives of her children.

In this case I made a polite but discouraging reply – I simply had no interest. The woman, who I will call “Joan Smith”, then began a telephone/email campaign that stretched over seven months, repeating her requests that I meet her, accept a lunch date, befriend her son, etc.. I just ignored her and gave it little thought, occasionally writing back to correct one or another of her more egregious distorted beliefs, but offering no encouragement.

Seven months later, realizing I had no intention of meeting her and discovering I was making a public appearance, Joan showed up and presented her son. Contrary to my expectations based on Joan’s prose, her son (who I will call “Jim”) was very bright and personable, but for reasons I couldn’t fathom had no friends and possessed very low self-esteem. In a few minutes of conversation I discovered he much preferred mathematics and logic to messy reality, which reminded me of someone I know very well.

2.1.2 The Set-up

So it began – not with anything formal or deliberate, but Jim and I began conversing, in person and by email. We both preferred the clean, rational world of mathematics to everyday reality, to the degree that neither of us would have considered mentioning it. I’m sure we both agree with Bertrand Russell’s famous remark: “Mathematics, rightly viewed, possesses not only truth, but supreme beauty – a beauty cold and austere, like that of sculpture, without
appeal to any part of our weaker nature, without the gorgeous trappings of painting or music, yet sublimely pure, and capable of a stern perfection such as only the greatest art can show.”

I’m sure most of my readers will get the point of this section without elaboration, but in case this isn’t so, over a period of months Jim and I became close friends and focused much of our time and energy on each other. I include this observation because without understanding it, the rest of the story makes no sense. For a spell, all I could think about was spending time with Jim, seeing the world through his eyes – and he felt the same way about me.

I got to witness Jim’s private world, the relatively unencumbered outlook of a very bright young person, and he got the validation of having a friend from reality, who accepted and appreciated him as he was. We worked on mathematical problems, wrote little computer programs. It was a perfect friendship – for about six months.

Why so short? Simple – our friendship had nothing for Joan. She had only gotten what she said she wanted, not what she actually wanted, and even while listening, she had no idea what Jim and I were talking about. About this time she wrote and said, “It’s nice that my son has a friend who understands the words he uses.” I should have taken this as a warning.

... ...

In retrospect it’s clear that Joan and I had different goals. I wanted to encourage her son to think more of himself, see himself more accurately, prepare for self-respecting adulthood. Joan wanted to squeeze blood from a stone, and I was her designated stone. Joan could – and did – find out who I was by typing my name into a search engine. I could have found out who she was by ordering a criminal background check, but by the time I did that, it was too late.

2.1.3 Narcissism

If what Joan had said she wanted during her long charm campaign had been accurate, everything would have been fine. She said she wanted me to befriend her son, a wish she repeated over a seven-month series of dull, overheated emails, and now I had befriended her son. Where’s the problem? But Joan was a textbook narcissist, a petulant child trapped in an adult’s body. To a narcissist, anything that’s already happened is by definition not good enough. The fact that I had befriended her son only served to trigger a goal-seeking behavior in which the narcissist ends up with all the toys and everyone else is dead. I was a perfect foil for her behavior, for two reasons – I had some toys, and I had no idea what she was up to.

Typical of narcissists, Joan avoided the responsibilities and freedoms of adulthood by replacing parental authority with religion or some pseudoscience that serves the same purpose. Such people rarely move past a childish dependence on authority or evolve toward a focus on evidence, on a scientific, rational outlook and acceptance of personal responsibility.

Joan’s intellectual crutch was psychology – she relied for personal guidance on the imagined wisdom of therapists, psychology’s priest class. To put this in the simplest way, Joan, a pseudoperson with no reliable values, had come to rely on psychology, a pseudoscience with no reliable theories.

As with most psychology True Believers, for Joan psychology differed from religion only in name. In every respect psychology offers the kind of narcissistic self-assurance, sense of entitlement and absence of self-doubt that makes human history such a depressing read. But it also meant that to criticize psychology within Joan’s hearing was to criticize her sincerely held religious belief, a fact I would gradually discover.

Digression: Religious fundamentalists and psychology followers both reject evolution, but for different reasons. For a fundamentalist, evolution by natural selection supports the heretical idea that nature rewards those who leave the flock and break new ground. For a psychology follower, evolution contradicts the idea that there is a “normal behavior” to which we should all aspire by curing ourselves of “mental illnesses”. In evolution, there are no mental illnesses, instead there are environmental adaptations, legitimate experiments in nature’s scientific laboratory, any of which might prove superior to existing adaptations in a changing environment.

Asperger’s is a perfect example. For all we know, its behaviors represent a positive evolutionary adaptation to a changing environment, and might become typical behavior in our descendants. I’m not saying this is the correct interpretation, I don’t have the right to say that. But nature has that right – and if she speaks, will we listen?

One day I picked up one of Joan’s many psychology books, read for 30 seconds and remarked that by focusing on hyperactive children, the author was cheating himself out of half the cohort of psychology True Believers, those with hypo-active children. But a quick scan of the later chapters showed that he had redeemed himself – he managed to
say that his miracle cure applied to both hyper- and hypo-active children. Laughing at this transparent absurdity, I looked up from my reading and saw Joan’s icy look.

Consistent with her beliefs, Joan acquired psychological diagnoses for her children at the earliest possible moment, and weekly therapy sessions were the norm for everyone in her family. If a discussion became heated, at a moment when a rational person would apply critical thinking skills and reality-testing, Joan would instead call a therapist and get a ruling. If the issue was of more than average importance, Joan would ... call two therapists. I wish I were making this up – psychologists, people noted for their low intellectual ambition, discipline and social standing, were Joan’s ultimate source of authority.

Because Joan paid her phony authorities, they nearly always agreed with whatever she chose to believe, thus enabling her narcissism – yes, dear, whatever you say, dear. If a rare principled psychologist should dissent, Joan would fire her and find another. At the end of the process, Joan would announce the result as though a scientific discovery had been made. No, dear reader, I’m not kidding – Joan really was this clueless and shallow.

But Joan’s attachment to psychology wasn’t an idle pursuit with no consequence – she had gotten Jim a bogus diagnosis (Asperger Syndrome, described above, a diagnosis that can fit nearly anyone and that psychologists have since abandoned) and forced him into the remedial track at school. When Jim wasn’t present she would recite his past behaviors in a cruel way meant to support the idea that he was mentally broken. She moved heaven and earth to delay his development, then got an unprincipled psychologist to describe him as “developmentally delayed” (today’s replacement for the old term “retarded”), all calculated to attract attention to herself. It became clear that Joan needed her children to be broken, to be in need of special attention, so Joan would appear to be an extraordinary and saintly parent – and get the special attention she craved. (It was at this point that I understood Jim’s low self-esteem.)

**Digression:** On reading this description, mental health and law enforcement professionals will likely recognize the signs of Münchausen Syndrome by Proxy (MSP), a bizarre and dangerous syndrome in which a caregiver, usually a mother, invents or creates physical or psychological ailments in the children under her care. As it happens, at the time of these events, one such professional identified Joan as a Münchausen perpetrator. I say “perpetrator” because MSP is not a mental illness, it is a crime, a variety of child abuse. (This topic is more fully developed below.)

To her everlasting credit, one psychologist examined Jim and, impressed by his superior intellect and reasoning ability, recommended that he be allowed to pursue a normal life, join the mainstream at school and elsewhere. Joan immediately fired her.

Over time it became obvious that Joan’s intent was, not support or nurture, but control. If she had no chance to keep up with her son intellectually, she could instead exploit his trust and inexperience, create bogus authorities and diagnoses to reinterpret his intellectual gifts as symptoms of mental disease, undermine his personal effort to shape an identity based on reason and evidence, and turn him into someone she could control. But all this activity only postponed the moment when Jim, in spite of Joan’s blocking maneuvers, would acquire enough life experience to realize what Joan was doing and why, and how her scheming worked against his legitimate interests.

At this point my outlook should be obvious – psychology represents an intermediate level between religion and science, with all the bad parts of religion and only the most superficial resemblance to science. People attracted to it tend to be those who are too smart for religion but not smart enough for science. Psychology wants to be perceived as part of medicine but it doesn’t have the basis in evidence that would require. With respect to Jim, a focus on psychology could only postpone essential steps in his personal development that he would have to make up later, for a simple reason – he wasn’t mentally ill, instead he had a severe case of intelligence, an affliction his parents showed no sign of, and one that psychologists haven’t identified as a mental illness – yet.
2.1.4 The Family Outing

John, Joan’s husband, was equally dysfunctional, equally clueless, but with a different orientation to his mental defects. One day John proposed a “family outing” that (as he described it) involved hiking to the top of a hill. By this time I had learned not to trust John or Joan’s verbal representations, so I visited the site in advance and discovered a nearly vertical cliff (see Figure 5). To ascend the cliff hikers were obliged to pull themselves up, hand over hand, using a safety line. In retrospect it was a perfect image of what these people thought was a normal family outing – they expected their isolated, sheltered children to ascend a cliff by way of a safety line, reliant on nonexistent technical skills and strength of grip.

To try to prevent the outing I sat the parents down, showed them a picture of the cliff, and explained that this wasn’t remotely a family outing for children with no experience of the natural world. I added that I had a lifetime of outdoor experience, had taught technical rock climbing, and I knew this to be a dangerous activity. But the parents viewed my pictures of the cliff with a peculiar glassy look, uncomprehending, oblivious to the danger the cliff represented. The outing was to go forward.

My initial impulse was to abandon my friendship with Jim and get away from these dysfunctional people, but I realized if I did that, the probability was very high that one of the children would get in trouble on the cliff and no one would be present with either the skills or the sense to rescue them. So I went along on the outing and positioned myself below the children on the cliff. Then, inevitably, Jim lost his grip on the line and fell. Directly below him, firmly gripping the safety line, I arrested his fall with my free hand.

Now the story takes an even stranger turn. Joan regarded herself as a perfect parent, a valiant defender of mentally defective children against the horrors of daily life, and entirely blameless. I had explained the danger to which she was exposing her children, got nowhere, then I reached out and plucked her son out of the air as he fell.
How does Joan rationalize this outcome? Think really hard, dear reader, and for added realism imagine you’re the sickest puppy on planet Earth – faced with this rescue, how do you preserve your imagined status as God’s gift to parenting? If you’ve guessed that, after much time and frustrated rumination, Joan began to describe the rescue as “inappropriate touching”, then you’re exactly right, as well as more cynical than I could imagine being until then.

To readers who wonder how Joan could describe the act of reaching out to someone, of giving a hand to a falling child, as inappropriate touching, the answer is simple – for every event in her life, Joan would (a) deny personal responsibility, and (b) interpret the actions of others in the vilest possible way. That was an outward sign of her dysfunctional inner world, and she couldn’t imagine how her behavior looked to others.

Sometimes nature provides a preview, a miniature set piece, of events to come, at a time when it’s still possible to escape the full version and its consequences. The “family outing” was just such a preview, and I ought to have heeded its warning – when I heard Joan’s interpretation of the rescue, I should have realized how sick she was, and how dangerous. But I was naive – somehow I thought my having rescued her son from a dangerous fall would curb her rabid disposition. I couldn’t have been more wrong, and things were about to get much worse.

2.1.5 Interlude

Aware that this narrative has a distinctly negative tone, I offer this diversion, this pleasant memory. One day, before embarking on a road trip, I arranged to meet Jim at a local park. We sat under a tree and talked about Calculus, a mathematical field that analyzes motion and change. I had recently written a Calculus tutorial, Jim had been reading it, and he asked a few questions. His insightful questions made clear that, in spite of his youth and inexperience, he had quickly absorbed the essentials and was prepared to teach himself much more than my introductory article provided. Then, while thinking about orbiting planets and growing biological colonies, Jim fell asleep in the afternoon sun.

While he slept, I thought about topics I couldn’t raise without jeopardizing our friendship. For example, I thought how much my background resembled his present circumstances. How, in a country that distrusts intellectuals, being above average constitutes an affliction. How Jim would eventually figure out that his superior reasoning abilities didn’t remotely justify a mental illness diagnosis. How psychology is a pseudoscience whose goal is to stigmatize as undesirable those traits that deviate from the norm among its clients, how this posture perfectly dovetails with American anti-intellectualism, and how the now-discredited Asperger’s diagnosis was a perfect instrument for that policy. And how Joan and her psychologist enablers were Jim’s single biggest problem. All Jim knew of these forbidden topics was that I sincerely liked him, I found his choices rational and constructive and there should be a place for him in the adult world, a world where psychology is pushed aside by science and critical thinking.

It was a perfect day and, given a choice, I would have sat under that tree forever. But things were changing – Jim had stopped thinking of himself as Joan’s mentally broken doll and begun to see himself as a human being with a future. Joan would never tolerate that.

2.1.6 Hell Hath no Fury

My view of psychology should have been as obvious to Joan as they were to Jim, but (if this isn’t already clear) Joan was far too dysfunctional to be able to draw a reasonable conclusion from readily available evidence. Instead, seeing how well Jim and I got along, and the marked improvement in Jim’s behavior and outlook over about a year of time, Joan got it into her head that she and I were a match made in heaven. I saw this happening, but (as with “The Family Outing”) my efforts to edit Joan’s picture of reality were unsuccessful. I could have simply and bluntly told her she was imagining things, but that would have ended my friendship with her son, and I didn’t want to take that risk.

Then it came out that Joan’s husband was having an affair. In response, with a mixture of retaliation and wishful thinking, Joan chose a moment sitting next to her husband to announce she loved me. Great, I thought – I’m expected to offer validation to this woman, sitting next to a man with a history of violent behavior who was in a court-ordered anger-management program. Apart from the fact that I and others found Joan to be a catastrophe with arms and legs, how could she not see that no sane person would dare provoke her mate – a man who had recently been dragged a mile outside a car while trying to attack its driver?

Fully aware of what the result would be, I replied to Joan’s amorous overture politely but in a way designed to discourage her fantasies. Joan finally got the point, and within 24 hours it was a classic case of “Hell hath no fury...” – she became intent on removing me from her son’s life.

Joan knew nothing about my values, but everything about my value, and I can’t tell you how often I’ve had that experience.
To those who wonder how Joan could rationalize expelling me given my beneficial effect on her son, I can only say her son’s welfare had never been a priority – not when she acquired a bogus psychological diagnosis, or removed him from the mainstream of life, or did what she could to undermine his self-esteem and the positive impression he created. Indeed, the only real obstacle had become me. So, given this, why didn’t Joan just tell me to leave? That was certainly her right as a mother – but if she did that, Jim would realize he was losing a valued friend for no reason, and Joan would have to accept personal responsibility (something Joan never, ever did). Joan needed a way to expel me in a way that concealed her role.

At this point Joan lost her tenuous grip on reality and her imagination began writing checks that her intellect couldn’t cash – Joan tried to have an original thought. She wrote me and tried to claim that a child sitting on the lap of an adult, in and of itself, constitutes molestation*. No, dear reader, I’m not making this up, and whether Joan realized it or not, no sane person would spend time in the company of someone this irrational, indeed under the circumstances the irrationality of the belief only added to its potency.

Digression: In reply to a reader’s inquiry about reasoning with Joan, human to human, by that time I knew such a thing wasn’t possible. Here’s how I found out – some time earlier I began a sentence by saying, “In my own defense...”, at which point Joan interrupted: “What? People who defend themselves only look guilty, or as though they have something to hide!” At that moment it came to me that Joan was permanently out of touch with reality. No rational person, no Earthling, could possibly expect to manipulate events in such a way that she would never need to defend herself. Had Joan been an Earthling, she would have learned – in science, law and elsewhere – it’s exactly the opposite of her belief: one must always be prepared to defend one’s ideas and actions. But Joan found earthly logic too even-handed, unsuitable to her extraterrestrial goals.

Apart from being a symptom of malignant narcissism40, Joan’s belief represented a broken, desperate way to avoid any meaningful interaction with reality. If she made an accusation and the recipient offered no defense, then he was guilty. If he instead spoke up and defended himself, then ... he was guilty. In Joan’s parallel universe, everything was a foregone conclusion, with Joan in the position of infallible moral arbiter.

Joan’s absurd belief, of which I had been completely unaware, caused many things to fall into place – unable to test the value of her ideas, like a bank unable to test the value of its borrowers, Joan lived in perpetual intellectual bankruptcy. And in a self-referential irony, at the center of her untested, undefended beliefs was the idea that people must never doubt or defend their own beliefs.

But the consequences were profound, both for Joan and her children (whose picture of the adult world was constructed out of these nonsense beliefs). Freed from any challenge to her thinking, she was drowning in a toxic cesspool of indefensible and self-serving ideas, like the idea that lap-sitting equals molestation. I instantly regretted allowing myself to get so involved without first discovering this clear sign of mental disorder. Among the thoughts that raced through my mind was the idea that, unwilling to defend her beliefs, Joan would quickly self-destruct in a courtroom. As subsequent events proved, I had no idea how right that was, or how soon I would find out.

On reflection I can’t decide whether “Lap-sitting is molestation” or “Defending yourself only makes you look guilty” was Joan’s personal low water mark for bankrupt thinking, the kind of thinking reserved to those with no measurable core reasoning ability. But more to the point, Joan’s lap-sitting belief instantly ended my friendship with Jim. I realized if Joan could put something this stupid in writing, she would say anything, anywhere, without much concern over the possibility of a collision with reality. It had become apparent that she was not just mentally unbalanced, she was dangerously stupid, Crystal Gail Mangum41 stupid, Nicola Osborne42 stupid, Shannon Taylor43 stupid. Stupid raised to an art form.

2.1.7 The Plea

Jim didn’t understand these issues and wasn’t party to the conversations. Almost perfectly isolated, and now deprived of a temporary dissenting voice, he only knew what his mother told him. Nevertheless, once he realized I wouldn’t be visiting any more, he phoned to ask for a resumption of our friendship. As one would expect from Jim, his plea was perfectly logical: there was nothing inappropriate in our friendship, we both benefited from it, therefore it should continue.

In reply I addressed Jim just as though he were an adult, which had been my practice anyway, but not with respect to this sensitive, adult topic. First, I agreed with him that our friendship wasn’t the problem – his and my

*To Joan this made perfect sense – if stopping a child’s dangerous fall was inappropriate touching, then lap-sitting must be molestation.
choices and actions were perfectly acceptable. Then I explained that Joan’s life was ruled by belief, not evidence – she held true any number of nonsense beliefs and New Age superstitions, including a few that she embraced with religious fervor.

Then I recited Joan’s lap-sitting-as-molestation belief and explained that it was Joan’s dishonest way to drive me away while avoiding personal responsibility. I explained what “molestation” meant to an adult, how unlike a mathematical conjecture it can’t be evaluated logically or falsified, and how people who use the term carelessly or maliciously are quite dangerous. I went on to say that a small minority of women make false sexual accusations and almost always get away with them⁴⁴ ⁴⁵ ⁴⁶, Joan gave every sign that she was such a person, and I wouldn’t take the risk. I really liked having Jim as a friend, but Joan wasn’t merely irrational – she was dangerous.

Jim aggressively replied – there was no way his mother would make a false accusation, and he frankly began to doubt my judgment and commitment to our friendship. Jim’s idealism, his belief in honesty and fair dealing, was perfect, and I would love to have supported it, but I could see what was coming, even if he couldn’t. His was a perfect expression of high principles, and for once I hated being the voice of reason and experience. Jim found this exchange emotionally upsetting – because his mother had isolated him from reality, and to a greater extent than normal for a boy his age, she was the center of his world.

After a long, uncomfortable pause, Jim and I switched to a more pleasant and less emotionally charged topic, discussed the Riemann Zeta Function⁴⁷ for a few minutes, then signed off.

As events were to prove, Jim had no idea how wrong he was, but worse, I had no idea how right I was. Jim’s excuse was that he was 13, inexperienced, unable to imagine what his mother was capable of. I had no such excuse.

About this same time, aware of what Jim and I were discussing, Joan wrote me in high dudgeon, saying, “You’ve said I have told [Jim] you have intentions about him that will/can harm him [...]. That’s your own imagination, not my position.”⁴⁸ Aware that Joan also took the position that lap-sitting constitutes molestation, I archived her email, thinking it might prove useful in the future.

2.1.8 Dangerous Lies

Up to the day of Jim’s plea described above, after her “Hell hath no fury” break with reality, Joan had been backpedaling, asking me to resume my friendship with her son, arguing that my departure would hurt his development (“Your continued presence in his life is more than welcome.”⁴⁹), but now aware of how dangerous she was, I refused. It then dawned on Joan that, despite all her scheming, I and my money had permanently slipped from her grasp. At that point Joan snapped and, in a narcissistic fury, left the realm of reality – cashing in her son’s trust and loyalty, she swore out a bizarre civil court petition, composed of lies from top to bottom, including one egregious lie that assured a hearing.

Digression: For those unfamiliar with the civil court system, it’s meant to deal with disputes between individuals, not crimes or matters in which the state has an interest, but some people try to make criminal accusations in civil court, even though this makes them appear opportunistic and ignorant. To say this in the simplest way, if you want justice, you appeal to the criminal court system, but if you want money, civil court is the right choice. Joan wanted money.

When I first read her petition, apart from being astonished at her stupidity and recklessness, I thought, She doesn’t realize I’ve archived her emails – emails that, in her own words, flatly contradict her claims. But with time and reflection, it came to me that it was much worse – Joan didn’t care that I had her emails. She was a psychopath∗ – lacking any trace of empathy, predatory, exploitative, unreflective and completely indifferent to how her behavior looked to others.

I saw the outline of Joan’s brainless plan – she imagined it unfolding like this: I wouldn’t be able to falsify her claims in court, that would give them credence, then (apart from getting lots of money) she could triumphantly report to her son that I had been judged an evil person, undeserving of his loyalty, this would erase his personal progress and re-establish him as her broken doll.

At first I thought, “How can anyone be so stupid as to think this fantasy could work?” But then I realized her stupidity wasn’t an objection, it was a requirement – only a simple-minded psychopath like Joan could think this way.

Then I thought to myself, “Where did Joan get the idea that the unfalsifiability of a claim gives it legitimacy?” The answer came to me in seconds: psychology. (Read more on this topic in the “Airhead Syndrome” section on page 23.)

∗ Joan possessed the dysfunctional planning behavior common to many psychopaths – she could imagine her next action, but she was unable to imagine its consequences. She lacked a theory of mind, the idea that other people can also make plans and take actions.
Finally, reviewing all that had taken place, I thought, “This woman is an unbelievable social parasite∗.”

It was a very short hearing. Because judges are trained like scientists, not psychologists, Joan’s plan quickly unraveled. I testified that Joan’s past written words flatly contradicted her present claims† and her claims were absolutely false‡. On discovering I had kept her emails and realizing what they contained, instead of meeting her burden of evidence Joan fell silent. On that basis the court concluded she was lying and ruled that it would give no consideration to her claims.

I didn’t know it at the time, but justices hear transparently false sexual accusations with depressing regularity (see “False Accusers” on page 24 for details). I can imagine an experienced judge, given special permission to speak his mind, saying, “Not this again! Can’t you people be a tiny bit original?”

While writing her petition, by including outright lies Joan was betting that I hadn’t kept her emails. She lost that bet, then she lost her case, and she was about to lose her son’s trust. In my opinion, she should also have lost her freedom (lying under oath is a serious crime)§, but the state doesn’t normally punish mental defectives.

2.1.9 The Reckoning

After the hearing I thought about how Joan had confidently and flatly contradicted her own prior written words, as though the courtroom oath meant nothing and she was immune from criminal prosecution. It finally came to me that Joan must have had prior experience lying under oath – she knew she would get away with it. So I ordered a criminal background check and discovered Joan had falsely accused other men in nearly identical circumstances – she had a history of severe mental dysfunctions and false sexual accusations under oath. As I reviewed her background I momentarily stopped breathing – Joan wasn’t just an airhead housewife, she was a full-blown social parasite with a list of past victims. And for failing to run an advance background check, I was a perfect fool.

Meanwhile, being curious and possessing advanced computer skills, Jim found out about the hearing. I can’t imagine what went through Jim’s fertile young mind when he (a) saw himself described as a mentally retarded victim of some despicable if imaginary behaviors and (b) realized that Joan had done exactly what I predicted she would do, but I can say how he reacted – he resolved never to speak to Joan again, and took the first steps to remove himself from a dangerous environment.

As this woman’s sordid history came to light, I regretted not producing a more complete courtroom presentation. I had uncovered some facts about Joan that needed to be in the public record so she would have a harder time victimizing others. But another hearing was unlikely – I’m not one of those brainless people who thinks there’s some advantage to be gained by instituting courtroom proceedings.

2.1.10 Double Down

As it happens, I had once again underestimated Joan’s avarice and stupidity. Six months later, still hoping to cash in and incapable of accepting a responsibility that was clearly hers, Joan swore out another civil court petition that tried to blame me for destroying her relationship with her son, insisted on suppression of an earlier version of this article, and demanded that I not reveal to “anyone, anywhere” what happened in the first hearing. (Conspicuously absent from Joan’s new petition was any hint of the original false accusation, as though courtroom appearances are a child’s board game where, if you lose a round, you get to wipe the board clean and start over.)

On hearing Joan’s unconstitutional demand to deny freedom of expression and enforce silence about her past, the court immediately saw what she was up to. In order for social parasites like Joan to continue victimizing people, and to avoid criminal prosecution, they must keep their victims from speaking out or discovering each other. In a now-famous story from England51, a more accomplished social parasite accused at least seven men, most of whom understandably chose not to reveal their experiences, one of whom was thrown in jail for three years, before she was finally exposed as a psychopath and liar and her innocent victims freed. My point is that daylight – exposure – destroys the sick, dangerous game these people play, and that is one reason for this article.

Apart from that, what was Joan thinking – how could she not realize how I would respond, given her lurid background and the time I had to investigate and prepare? How could she not foresee that her report of her son’s horrified reaction to the first hearing proved that she had lied under oath? Was she really that clueless?

∗Social parasites are people whose life focus it is to find and exploit weaknesses in social institutions.
†I provided this email quote for the record: “During this one year of your interaction, [Jim] has grown up from a child to a teenager, and I credit you with part of his positive outlook on life today.”
‡I certainly needed to speak in my own defense, to say her claims were false, because a failure to respond may be taken as an acknowledgment of guilt.
§As it turns out, people who lie under oath are rarely prosecuted – courts just rule against them.
Digression: At this point I ask my readers to imagine a scene in which a presiding judge, confronted by an irrational housewife, finds that he must explain the meaning of free speech to her, as though she is an overgrown, backward child, unable to grasp that (a) it’s in the public interest that her dangerous behavior become widely known, and (b) the publication (this article) is a fully justified exercise of the right of free speech.

In my prepared remarks, I described how Joan spent seven months trying and failing to get me together with her son, finally forcing a meeting. She saw her son’s outlook improve greatly as a result of my presence in his life, but made furious by my rejection of her amorous overtures she drove me away with her bizarre lap-sitting belief, then reversed course and insisted that I stay involved in her son’s development. Then, having failed in all these schemes, in the first hearing she tried to accuse me of something vile and false, an accusation flatly contradicted by her prior written words. I added that Jim’s teachers and others, aware of the advanced courses he was taking, vigorously objected to Joan’s effort to brand him “developmentally delayed.” I concluded by saying Joan’s earlier accusation was just one in a history of false sexual accusations under oath, and she was severely dysfunctional.

It seems Joan, who had been served with my statement in advance, had been warned what “severely dysfunctional” meant in a legal sense, apart from its self-evident truth. If she didn’t object and thereby made it a stipulation (an issue on which both sides agree), she would no longer be able to enter into legally binding contracts, but if she did object and thereby made her mental state material to the proceeding, I was ready to prove she was a Münchausen Syndrome by Proxy perpetrator, and she would very likely lose custody of her children. Now trapped in her own web, Joan once again fell silent and failed to meet her burden of evidence, thus conceding the truth of my claims – they were placed in the public record, where they stand today, waiting for her to make another false accusation.

Because of the detailed recitation of fact I provided, in which Joan exploited her children to craft a series of dangerous lies against multiple victims, and because she offered not one word in defense, by the end of the hearing the court’s contempt for Joan finally equaled my own. Noting Joan’s inability to defend herself and her self-contradicting statements, the court congratulated me on my presentation, dismissed all her claims and gavelled the hearing to a close.

In a country that views motherhood with a saintly perspective, a particular mother would have to be a perfect nightmare to demolish a long tradition of deference, solicitude and good will. Without trying particularly hard, Joan exceeded this dubious requirement.

2.1.11 Summary

In the overview, from the beginning of the first hearing to the end of the second, Joan recklessly squandered her limited moral capital. Along a trail paved in exposed lies, she sprinted from respected mother of minor children to archetypal psychopath, without any grasp of how she appeared to others, all the while thinking, “Now I have the attention I deserve.” And in a way she couldn’t imagine, she did.

This episode has given me a new way to identify a narcissist: someone who, with no grasp of irony, swears under oath to pretend facts about a real person, takes a breath, then objects to real facts about a pretend person (this article).

I remind my readers this was Joan’s hearing, not mine – as with the first, she struggled and lied to acquire it. Now, because of what she has forced into the public record and because of changing public perceptions, if she makes another false accusation, notwithstanding an official reluctance to punish mental defectives, she is to be prosecuted. Also and ironically, because of her history of false claims, if a real sex criminal should appear in her life, the authorities would reject her report – she has willingly demolished her personal credibility. She has erased the distinction between truth and falsehood, and cowers in the resulting moral twilight.

When I review these events, I imagine a scene in Joan’s elementary school. Each girl is asked to describe what she wants to be when she grows up. Joan’s classmates express their ambition to be astronauts, explorers, scientists. Now it’s Joan’s turn – she stands up and says, “I’m going to tell horrible lies about men and make them give me money ... why are you all looking at me that way?”

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*Because of the danger these people pose – from 9 to 31 percent of the children die at their mothers’ hands.*

†“People who defend themselves only look guilty!”

‡In civil court, the parties are on an equal footing – both must be prepared to defend their statements and actions.

§Because this was civil (not criminal) court, the option of throwing Joan in jail didn’t exist.

¶Regardless of the nature of her claims, a mother of minor children can always get a hearing. This doesn’t mean the hearing won’t backfire spectacularly.
2.1.12 Coda

As soon as he liberated himself, Jim contacted me and we resumed our friendship. Now that psychologists have abandoned Asperger Syndrome, it’s difficult for anyone to try to claim it for themselves (in spite of its attractiveness, as mental illnesses go), so he says little about that, except to assure me he never reveals it to employers.

I see Jim as a person well-suited to modern times – he will be a successful adult and have rewarding occupations. Indeed, in spite of a severe economic downturn, upon leaving school he immediately acquired a high-technology position with substantial responsibility (apparently Joan wasn’t able to persuade Jim’s employer that he is “developmentally delayed”). He is not mentally ill. He is not handicapped – in my view, to try to describe intelligence as a handicap is a crime without a name.

Jim’s self-esteem now corresponds to his abilities and prospects, he has a number of close friends, and he works productively in team environments – all behaviors believed difficult or impossible for Asperger’s sufferers. It’s well-established that many Asperger’s sufferers improve on reaching adulthood, in some cases eventually showing no symptoms at all, an outcome psychologists can’t explain. In this case and in my opinion, the explanation is obvious: Jim never had a mental illness – the entire episode was fueled by Joan’s mental illness, hence the title of this article.

It may be years before Jim acquires the social perspective required to understand what was done to him as a child, why Joan and her therapist enablers did it, and what it reveals about the field of psychology and about society. But I don’t have that burden – psychology represents the worst variety of pseudoscience, one that encourages beliefs and practices having no basis in evidence, panders to the narcissistic fantasies of intellectually handicapped clients, and offers phony authority to people like Joan.

2.2 Analysis

2.2.1 First Impressions

When I first met Jim, we immediately began discussing an advanced mathematical topic and this discussion set the pattern for our many future encounters. I tried to thank Joan for introducing me to such an intelligent, creative boy, only to see her strenuously object that he was actually retarded (“developmentally delayed”) and mentally ill. I was at a loss for words – she was speaking of a boy who taught himself Calculus at age 12.

When I heard Joan’s description I knew it was completely wrong, but in this and later conversations I failed to consider the possibility that she was anything more than a narcissistic airhead, that she might be dangerous. In the months that followed, particularly during the “Family Outing” episode that risked the lives of her children, I kept discounting the possibility that she was really as dangerous as her actions suggested. This was a classic case in which a psychopath exploits a normal person’s reasonableness and optimism.

2.2.2 Jim’s Strategy

While observing these people, it came to me that Jim’s enthusiasm for mathematics had multiple sources. Apart from the fact that mathematics is a productive and fascinating endeavor in its own right, it was also Jim’s way to escape Joan’s authority-based control over the meaning of his life, as well as establish a basis for self-respect and positive personal feelings.

For Jim, mathematics was a perfect counterpoint to Joan’s toxic outlook. In the spectrum of human thought, only mathematical ideas can be demonstrated to be absolutely true or false, without ambiguity, forever. Compare mathematics to the natural sciences, where a theory can only be proven false, never true, and any theory, however well-established, can be falsified by new evidence. Then compare mathematics to psychology, where ideas are never resolved as either true or false and outcomes favor whoever pays the psychologists, as shown in the “Pseudoscience in Psychology” section on page 5. Finally, compare mathematics to Joan’s scheme – what was true depended on her unpredictable moods, and those who pointed out the inevitable contradictions faced hostile and bewildered incomprehension.

In mathematics by contrast, a conjecture, once proven, becomes a theorem – a fact, a truth. And because mathematics beyond the trivial was beyond Joan’s grasp, this meant Jim had found a rich well of creativity that Joan couldn’t poison, only because she couldn’t locate the well.

Jim’s strategy, the pursuits he most favored, placed him outside (a) Joan’s understanding or control, and (b) an average person’s interests. Unfortunately, item (b) made Jim a candidate for an Asperger’s diagnosis, which Joan’s

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*Philosopher David Hume expressed this idea best, saying, “No amount of observations of white swans can allow the inference that all swans are white, but the observation of a single black swan is sufficient to refute that conclusion.”

†In an unguarded moment someone familiar with Joan said, “I learned the hard way to get everything in writing.”
psychologist enablers were more than happy to assign. Put another way, the early activities that prepared Jim for a productive role in the adult world also stigmatized him with a bogus mental illness diagnosis as a child.

I ask my readers to think about this, using a better-known example. By applying published lists of symptoms, psychologists “diagnosed” Bill Gates∗ with Asperger’s (along with many other famous people) ex post facto. But Gates was spared a bogus and stigmatizing mental illness diagnosis in his formative years because (a) the diagnosis didn’t become popular until recently, and (b) had it existed when Bill was a child, the educated and self-respecting Gates family wouldn’t have been so grotesquely stupid as to listen to psychologists.

2.2.3 Münchausen Syndrome by Proxy

I listened to Joan describe Jim’s “medical plan”, even though psychology isn’t a medical field and Jim had no medical difficulties. Over time, with the aid of research, observation and the advice of professionals, I reluctantly concluded that Joan was a Münchausen Syndrome by Proxy (MSP) perpetrator†. Consistent with this diagnosis‡, over a period of years Joan had constructed an elaborate fantasy in which every behavior that placed Jim ahead of the average child was actually a sign of mental illness and retardation.

If Jim had been Joan’s only victim, there might have been room for doubt, but each of her children got the same treatment – at a very early age each was diagnosed with one or more bogus psychological ailments, each then received an elaborate, nonsense “medical plan,” a plan only fully understood, and raptly described, by Joan. Then, with a diagnosis as cover, Joan did all she could to induce abnormal behavior in her children, each of whom eventually became suicidal.

In its series of MSP reports, the FBI surmises that the perpetrator’s motive is to outwit medical professionals and manipulate the system to give the perpetrator unearned attention. But having observed Joan at close range over about a year, I witnessed the details of her dysfunction. When Joan saw the bare flame of her children’s youthful optimism spring to life, she found it personally offensive and moved to extinguish it. Maybe she feared that the flickering light would cast a silhouette of her dark character, expose her irrational hatreds, or maybe it was jealousy at the thought that someone might have reason to laugh.

Joan’s two-part strategy was to recite horrible events from the news as though her children were the victims (“Terrorists just killed a girl about your age ...”), and to indoctrinate her children in the dangers of being touched§. As time passed she became more aggressive and less guarded around adults who might see how much damage she was doing. Eventually her children would enter a room, on a sunny day with flowers growing in the yard, sit down and say, “I wish I was dead.”¶ In this way Joan’s children were sucked into her dark world.

For those who doubt Joan’s diagnosis, I offer this exchange:

- Me: “By reciting news events in this lurid way, as though she’s a victim, you’re terrorizing your daughter!”
- Joan: “Parents have always terrorized their children. Besides, she’s been in therapy, so everything will be all right.”

Joan actually talked this way, quite oblivious to how she sounded. I tried to imagine Joan’s daughter on a couch, analyzing a childhood that had scarcely begun.

I later found out that, before Joan persuaded me to meet them, her children regularly expressed suicidal sentiments. During the time of my visits, the suicide talk ended and the children smiled – but there was touching going on. After Joan drove me away with her false beliefs and claims, the suicide talk resumed. Way to go, Mom.

MSP perpetrators are extremely dangerous people. Many of their children die at their hands, and they spend much of their time accusing others of vile behaviors in a strategy meant to deflect attention from themselves. And in a tragic irony, because of a lack of scientific and professional discipline in the field, psychologists often become unwitting accomplices to these crimes.

Digression: Why is the FBI the primary information source about MSP? Why do psychologists fail to recognize and diagnose this dangerous condition? Easily explained – virtually all MSP perpetrators

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∗Yes, that Bill Gates – the super-rich philanthropist.
†MSP is officially defined as a dangerous syndrome in which a caregiver, usually a mother, invents or creates physical or psychological ailments in the children under her care.
‡For readers who detect a seeming inconsistency in which I dismiss the Asperger’s diagnosis but give credence to MSP, I can only say, “The primary symptom of MSP is that children die.”
§Joan didn’t feel the need to provide a “good touching, bad touching” lecture, because all touching was bad touching.
¶To which Joan might reply, “No! It’s ‘I wish I were dead.’ ”
are women, the majority of psychologists and psychology clients are women, and many of those clients are mothers with minor children. If word spread that psychologists were willing to diagnose MSP, clients would bail and the psychology business would collapse. As explained above, psychology is a business, not a science.

To summarize the distinction between the Asperger’s and MSP diagnoses, to discover why one condition is so often diagnosed and the other never is, one need only ask, “Who pays the psychologists?”

2.2.4 Child Protective Services

Readers of earlier versions of this article have asked why I didn’t call Child Protective Services – isn’t this a textbook example where intervention is called for? Well, of course I did call them, and their reply was essentially, “Yes, thank you, we know about Joan, we’re monitoring the situation.” As it turns out, MSP and related conditions are common enough that social agencies won’t take action unless a child is injured or dies. And before you complain, ask yourself whether you’re willing to pay the higher taxes a more aggressive approach would require.

But the foregoing means these people are at large in society, free to manifest their dysfunctions on their children, on teachers, and on anyone foolish enough to trust them. Notwithstanding my age and wide experience, Joan was the most toxic organism I’ve ever encountered, possessed of the bizarre conceit that destroying lives counts as an accomplishment, and because of a complete absence of personal responsibility or common sense, an ideal candidate for modern psychology, which took her money and did all it could to support her psychopathic behaviors.

2.2.5 Parental Rights

As readers can see from the above, during my friendship with Jim I tried to make Joan aware of how much harm she was doing, but eventually Joan got frustrated and terminated the exchange – she invoked the time-honored rule that parents can treat their children any way they see fit. She was right of course, but Joan’s eggshell-thin thought processes, her inability to think deeply, prevented her from seeing that by exercising her absolute adult right to treat her children any way she pleased, she granted her children a reciprocal absolute adult right to treat her any way they pleased. So it was, and so they did.

If Joan had possessed any intellectual depth, she would have been able to imagine this exchange with her adult children:

• Parent: “Can’t you reciprocate all the loyalty and sacrifices I’ve made for you?”
• Child: “That’s exactly what I’m doing. And if I were to consider acting differently, at whose knee would I have learned the required behavior?”

2.2.6 Airhead Syndrome

There isn’t a listing for airhead syndrome in the DSM (psychology’s “bible”), but there ought to be – it’s trivial to diagnose and very common. First, let me state its opposite: scientists, jurists and educated people understand that claims are assumed to be false unless proven true, and a claim’s originator has the entire burden of evidence. But airheads (and children) think claims are assumed to be true unless proven false, and the burden of evidence belongs to someone else. In case you wonder how TV production companies can air phony documentaries about Bigfoot, ghost encounters and alien abductions, it’s airhead syndrome – no one has proven these ideas false, therefore they must be true.

Why is it a mistake to assume claims are true unless proven false? Easily explained – let’s say I’m an airhead who believes in Bigfoot. According to the airhead thesis, Bigfoot exists unless someone can prove he doesn’t exist. But think about this – Bigfoot cannot possibly be proven not to exist somewhere in the universe, hiding under some rock. In formal logic, such a disproof would require “proof of a negative”63, an impossible evidentiary burden. Therefore a skeptical, scientific outlook, the opposite of airhead syndrome, is essential to avoid wasting time on childish fantasies.

Joan had a severe case of airhead syndrome, but by the time I realized this, I was already committed to getting her son past the more toxic parts of her world view. Her later collision with legal reality was an ugly thing to watch – as far as Joan was concerned, if she could pen a list of ridiculous (and unfalsifiable) claims and spell all the words right, that was the end of the process, she had won. But because the legal system honors the scientific outlook, Joan was required to defend herself, to substantiate her claims, which meant writing a petition could only begin

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61 In science this is known as the null hypothesis, in law it’s known as the presumption of innocence, elsewhere it’s known as common sense, although in modern times I can’t imagine why.
the process. In each of her courtroom appearances Joan offered no substance, in fact said nothing at all∗, then was outraged that her victims didn’t disprove her claims, never understanding that they didn’t have to – the burden of evidence was hers and hers alone, just as in science. And the reason she wasn’t prosecuted for the repeated felony crime of lying under oath wasn’t because the court found her credible, but because the authorities didn’t want to make her children wards of the state.

My point? A given person’s capacity for skepticism and critical thinking lies on a spectrum. On one end of the spectrum are scientists, who humbly and sincerely test their ideas against reality – who defend their ideas – and who dispassionately discard ideas unsupported by reliable evidence. On the other end are airheads like Joan, people for whom the expression “constructive dialogue” means flying an airplane into a building.

There’s a reason airhead syndrome doesn’t appear in the DSM† – most psychologists suffer from it. To become a psychologist one must accept as true any number of ideas that lack evidence and that sometimes contradict each other, as a result of which modern psychological training has become a filter that selects mental mediocrities and expels any science-minded students skeptical enough to say, “Wait, what?”

On that basis, I must warn my readers that if they want to learn the value of critical thinking, of testing ideas against reality, don’t bother going to a psychologist for help, because if psychologists actually understood the value of critical thinking, they wouldn’t be psychologists.

2.2.7 Asperger Syndrome Update

Since this article’s original publication in 2005 and in part because of it, psychologists have abandoned Asperger Syndrome, on the ground that it doesn’t refer to anything real – or, as one prominent psychologist says, “it’s not an evidence-based term.”

As shown in the “Pseudoscience in Psychology” section on page 5, the history of human psychology is a narrative of seeming breakthroughs followed by embarrassed abandonments. Asperger’s followed the classic pattern – initially seen as a way to identify mentally ill people on the Autism spectrum, psychologists reluctantly abandoned Asperger’s after a phony epidemic of nonsense diagnoses of otherwise normal people, most above average in intelligence, but usually too young and inexperienced to understand the long-term consequences of receiving a mental illness diagnosis.

Asperger’s has something in common with many other psychological diagnoses – it relies too much on the personal beliefs of psychologists and too little on objective reality. After its inclusion in DSM-IV, Asperger’s became wildly popular because it seemed applicable to nearly anyone (which makes psychologists happy), but things quickly got out of control. In response, and to prevent further damage to psychology, the same people who voted Asperger’s into DSM-IV did an about-face and voted it out of DSM-5, published in 2013. (Psychologists create and destroy mental illnesses, not with science, but with votes.)

To understand the reason for the Asperger’s epidemic and its aftermath, readers should realize this article’s narrative represents just one of tens of thousands of similar stories – of people too smart for religion but not smart enough for science, people too twisted and insecure to offer conventional nurture to their children, people who think themselves extraordinarily clever but who can’t imagine how they look to others. In other words, malicious airheads – psychology’s natural constituency.

In a related development, in 2013 the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) ruled that the DSM will no longer be accepted as the basis for scientific research proposals, for the simple reason that it has no scientific content. In explanation, NIMH director Thomas Insel said about the DSM that “… each edition has ensured that clinicians use the same terms in the same ways. The weakness is its lack of validity.” Many see this historic ruling as the first step in the demotion of psychology to the status of astrology.

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Imagine if science were run like psychology: “Is there life on Mars? Rockets are expensive – let’s vote!”

Better, imagine if medicine were run like psychology: “We’ve finally cured cancer – see? We voted the word ‘cancer’ out of this medical textbook.”

2.2.8 False Accusers

Recent advances in forensic science, in particular DNA testing, have produced a shocking statistic – in a multi-year study, FBI Crime Labs has found that 20% of sexual accusations are proven false in laboratory tests and another

∗As before: “People who defend themselves only look guilty!”

†Its official abandonment doesn’t mean therapists can’t assign the Asperger’s diagnosis if they choose. Remember, psychology isn’t a science – nothing is ever falsified.
20% are doubtful. This finding is influential among law enforcement officials because of its source – FBI Labs had every incentive to discover that the evidence gathered by its field agents turned out to be factual, but they simply couldn’t. Expressed in everyday terms, of 100 sex crime reports filed by women, somewhere between 20 and 40 are false.

Wendy McElroy, editor of ifeminists.com, said about this finding, “... even a skeptic like me must credit a DNA exclusion rate of 20 percent that remained constant over several years when conducted by FBI labs. This is especially true when 20 percent more were found to be questionable. False accusations are not rare. They are common.”

This is not to suggest that women are less truthful than men overall – the above applies only to those who report sex crimes. But even though men and women are equally untruthful, the lies told by men differ from those told by women. A man’s most toxic lie might ruin someone’s day, but a woman’s most toxic lie might ruin someone’s life.

2.2.9 Equality

A number of people have written to complain about my blunt description of “Joan Smith”, as though women should not be so described (example: “What Do You Have Against Women?”). But I wasn’t describing women, I was describing a criminal who happened to be a woman, and whose particular crimes are unique to women. The fact that she was a woman deserves mention (only women make this particular kind of false accusation under oath, and only women suffer from Münchausen by Proxy Syndrome) but is otherwise irrelevant. Interestingly, no one has written to complain about how I describe her husband – remember, the borderline psychopath who was dragged outside a car while attacking its driver? It’s as though women belong in a sheltered category, on a pedestal, beyond criticism regardless of how outrageous their behavior.

But that attitude reflects an embarrassing level of sexism, and those days are past. In modern times, women justly demand equality at the voting booth and the pay window (equal rights). The next equality frontier, just coming into view, will change how women are treated in courtrooms and elsewhere (equal responsibilities). Together, these rights and responsibilities are called “gender equality” and they’re here to stay. The women I most admire are those who look forward to gender equality and who are fully prepared to meet its requirements.

To put this in the simplest way, if you are a woman and want to be a scientist, an astronaut, or a captain of industry, then you must be treated just like a man – it’s the law. In the same way, if you are a parasite like Joan who abuses her children and victimizes people in the community around her, then ... wait for it ... you must be treated just like a man – it’s the law. Gender equality means women must be treated just like men. Does anyone find this either confusing or undesirable?

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I see modern gender politics as a conflict between these three outlooks:

1. “I want to make a scene.”
2. “I want to make a baby.”
3. “I want to make a difference.”

I have no idea (and neither does anyone else), but I think 99% or more of women fit into outlooks 2 or 3 (or both). For those who object that you can’t make a difference without making babies, I reply, “Can you name Einstein’s children? How about those of physicist Lisa Randall?” Joan and a handful of others belong in outlook 1, with outlook 2 as a convenient disguise.

Feminist Maureen Reagan said, “I will feel equality has arrived when we can elect to office women who are as incompetent as some of the men who are already there.” This is an astute observation, one I agree with. As for myself, I will feel equality has arrived when women like Joan, women who repeatedly lie under oath about sex crimes, must be listed in online sex predator registries, so their neighbors will know how dangerous they are.

2.3 Conclusion

Lest my readers forget, Joan insisted that I meet and befriend her son. She refused to take no for an answer, then she refused to take yes for an answer. What followed wasn’t remotely according to plan: Joan changed Jim’s diapers, then I and others changed his mind. Jim struggled to reach independence and adulthood, Joan fought to keep him a helpless broken doll, and the psychologists enabled her twisted goals. Any intelligent adult would have given Jim the same support and encouragement I did, indeed several tried, but (I discovered later) each who did was accused of something vile and false.

• • •
To close on a positive note, we can look at Jim, an intelligent boy who came to a crossroad – to remain his mother’s broken doll, or to become a functioning adult, able to distinguish fantasy from reality, unburdened by a bogus mental illness diagnosis, ready to positively influence the world – and who made the rational choice.

Jim represents just one of many thousands of young people given the Asperger’s diagnosis, or any of scores of similar diagnoses\(^1\), diagnoses having no scientific basis but aggressively promoted by psychiatrists and psychologists, practitioners of the last major pseudoscientific field\(^2\) still taken seriously by an uninformed public.

### 2.4 Related Links

- No Theory, No Science
- An Insider’s Perspective
- Not Fair!
- What Do You Have Against Women?
- Selected reader replies to this article

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46. Woman gets prison for false rape claim
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Münchausen Syndrome by Proxy

False Allegation of Child Sexual Abuse

Day Care Sex Abuse Hysteria

A Vanishing Diagnosis

Autism Improves in Adulthood

Münchausen Syndrome by Proxy (FBI, 1991)

Münchausen Syndrome by Proxy (FBI, 1995)

Münchausen Syndrome by Proxy (FBI, 2003)

Null Hypothesis

Argumentum ad Ignorantiam (proof of a negative)

A Vanishing Diagnosis

What’s a Mental Disorder? Even Experts Can’t Agree

Transforming Diagnosis (Insel, NIMH)

False Rape Accusations May Be More Common Than Thought

ifeminists.com

The Trouble With Psychology

What Do You Have Against Women?

Professor Lisa Randall – notable modern physicist whose discoveries are widely quoted.