

Masculinity and Antisemitism in Our Day

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We live in an age of the “The New Xenophobia,” where antisemitism suddenly has reappeared in its most corrosive and violent form, and that well before October 7, 2023. Masculinity in all its complex iterations seems—again? still?—to inhabit antisemitic discourse in an ever more present manner. Looking at the world of Donald Trump, MAGA white nationalists, their conspiratorial allies, we in this essay try to tease out not only the “whys” but also the qualities of the manifestations of such hatred and labeling. Trump has sold himself repeatedly as a hyper-masculine figure and has mocked Jews, including his own employees, as somewhat less than his ideal male. Examining such patterns is what historians do best, especially when they acknowledge that they are looking at ever-shifting qualities of mind: as we constantly imagine not only our world but how we know our world and thus how those in our world know us. My own work on COVID-19 has shown that the “lumping” as the primary quality of xenophobia is always contingent.¹

On January 6, 2021, “the bearded nutter with the ‘Camp Auschwitz’ sweatshirt and the thug with the ‘6MWE’ T-shirt (which stands for ‘Six million weren’t enough’) rubbed

¹ Zhou Xun and Sander L. Gilman, “I Know Who Caused COVID-19”: *Xenophobia and Pandemics* (London, 2021).

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2 Niall Ferguson, "America Will Achieve Herd Immunity to Trumpism. I Hope," *Bloomberg Opinion*, January 10, 2021.

3 Laura Adkins and Emily Burack, "Neo-Nazis, QAnon and Camp Auschwitz: A Guide to the Hate Symbols and Signs on Display at the Capitol Riots," *Haaretz*, January 9, 2021. <https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/2021-01-09/ty-article/neo-nazis-qanon-and-camp-auschwitz-a-guide-to-the-hate-symbols-at-the-capitol-riot/0000017f-e177-d804-ad7f-f1ff9aff0000> (accessed January 11, 2023).

4 Neena Satija, "'I Do Regret Being There'. Simone Gold, Noted Hydroxychloroquine Advocate, Was Inside the Capitol during the Riot," *Washington Post*, January 12, 2021. https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/simone-gold-capitol-riot-coronavirus/2021/01/12/d1d39e84-545f-11eb-a817-e5e7f8a406d6_story.html (Accessed January 11, 2023).

shoulders with the 'Q shaman,' Jake Angeli, he of the buffalo horns, tattoos and stars-and-stripes face paint. Nick Fuentes, who leads the far-right 'Groyper Army,' was pictured inside the Capitol next to another fascist who goes by 'Baked Alaska.' There were Confederate flags and nooses, but also QAnon signs ('The Children Cry Out for Justice'), crusader crosses (yes, that red cross on white again), and anti-circumcision placards.² These read in part: "Circumcision is the Mark of (Work) The Beast=Satan! Sue Your Parents, and the Hospital & The F.B.I. & D. O. J." "Make America's Penis Great Again with A Foreskin!"³ All gathered along with Orthodox Jewish anti-vaxxers in fur vests in the Rotunda of the Capital to hear the Jewish physician and Trump supporter Dr. Simone Gold denounce the COVID-19 vaccine while others smeared blood and feces on the walls of the Capitol.

Gold was subsequently charged with "entering a restricted building, violent entry and disorderly conduct" after her image appeared on an FBI wanted poster.⁴ She quickly became a national heroine of the anti-vaxx movement as well as the Trump camp arguing now that the election had been stolen. Somehow the two positions became intertwined in the logic of the American Alt-Right. In June 2022 Gold was sentenced to 60 days in prison after having raised almost \$500,000 for a defense that evidently cost a tenth of that amount. The bulk of the funds went to fund her own anti-vaxx organization. One needs to further add that her medical views were also her religious views. She self-labeled as *baalat teshuva*, one who returned to being Jewish, and shaped her new religious identity in terms of her understanding of medical practice. By March of 2022, Gold was evoking the Nazis and the Death Camps as proofs of her medical beliefs: "we can understand the truth of the Nazism. ... So when the science does not accord with the Torah, as they are telling you now, tell the scientists to go back to the drawing board. When the propagandists fill you with fear, tell them you reject their words. Human freedom is in more jeopardy, in my opinion, than even 1940, because



Figure 1. Photograph of the anti-circumcision activist who was present at the January 6th, 2021, participating in a previous picket at the Supreme Court in October, 2020. Courtesy of Hugh Riminton.

evildoers' most enduring weapon is propaganda, and unlike 1940, today propaganda has swept the entire globe."⁵ The world was manipulated into thinking there was a pandemic, because the "science" that the public health authorities followed did not comport with her admittedly amateur understanding of the Torah. According to her account, her new belief system concerning COVID and her religious identity were now one: "It's this emphasis on action that is essential to the Jewish faith."⁶ Action in support of whom? QAnon?

For these concepts fitted seamlessly together in her symbolic register. By the end of 2022, after she was released from prison, she had become a fixture on Clay Clark's white, Christian nationalist "ReAwaken America" circuit tour. As Amanda Tyler, the executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, commented, "The ReAwaken America Tour taps into the unholy well of Christian nationalism to sow doubt about the United States' election system and the safety of Covid vaccines while equating allegiance to Trumpism with allegiance to God." Gold made multiple appearances

⁵ Arutz Sheva Staff, "Explosive Question & Answer Session with Dr. Simone Gold," *Israel Nation News*, December 3, 2020. <https://www.israelnationalnews.com/news/292456> (accessed January 11, 2023).

⁶ Simone Gold, *I Do Not Consent: My Fight Against Medical Cancel Culture* (New York, 2020), 74.

7 Peter Stone, "Far-right Project that Pushed Election Lies Expands Mission as Trump Ramps Up 2024 Campaign," *The Guardian*, January 30, 2023.

8 Times of Israel Staff, "Netanyahu Reveals Secret Hezbollah Arms Depot, Warns of Another Deadly Blast," *The Times of Israel*, September 29, 2020.

9 William F. Pinar, "The 'Crisis' of White Masculinity," *Counterpoints* 163 (2001): 321–416.

at ReAwaken America events and spoke in January 2023 at a two-day gathering hosted at the Tennessee church of conservative pastor Greg Locken. Gold announced that she planned to launch an "antidote" to the CDC in March 2023 and denounced "mainstream systems" as being "totally corrupted." Gold's rhetoric in Tennessee veered into a prophetic style as she talked up her vision for changing America: "We will create a separate society that is founded on righteousness, objective standards of right and wrong, good and evil."⁷ A new Jew as a white, Christian nationalist?

QAnon, overtly antisemitic in its rhetoric, rests its moral and political case on their opponents' systematic sexual abuse of children: the medieval (not the nineteenth-century) blood libel against the Jews made present. The sign on January 6 reading: "The children cry out for justice" references children who are claimed by QAnon to have been abducted by Democrats and progressives, funded by the Jewish billionaire financier George Soros, a perpetual target of antisemitic rhetoric in Europe as well as in the United States. This is a global claim can be seen in a poster flourished during a far-right Nordic Resistance Movement march through the town of Ludvika, central Sweden, on May 1, 2018: "The Jews circumcise their babies so rabbis can suck blood from the penises of newborns and according to the Talmud they may have sex with children from the age of 3."⁸ Not subtle at all. But two of the other participants made it also clear that this was the best possible articulation of the intersection between gender, at least masculinity, and sexuality with antisemitism. Indeed, the notion of a compromised masculinity seems at the core of white nationalism in general.⁹ One of the participants in the invasion of the US Capitol you probably remember. He was Jake Chansley, the "QAnon Shaman," dressed in a fur vest with body paint and horns. His outfit screamed: I am a real man, follow me, which too many people did, into the House Chamber. According to Marisa Melzer in the *Washington Post*, "Chansley represents a growing pipeline between New Age male spirituality, new

masculinity movements and QAnon.”¹⁰ The other was Aaron Mostofsky who was one of the first to enter the building also wearing fur pelts, a bulletproof vest and carrying a stolen police riot shield. His father, Kings County Supreme Court Judge Steven (Shlomo) Mostofsky, was the former president of the National Council of Young Israel, an Orthodox synagogue association that has been outspokenly pro-Trump and overtly anti-mask, anti-vax. Aaron “explained to a friend that the fraud in the 2020 Presidential Election was so obvious, even a caveman would know the election was stolen.”¹¹ Were these two furry men articulating some sort of primitive, lost masculinity, as the ultra-right Republican Senator Josh Hawley had claimed in an op-ed piece and expanded ad nauseum in a book?

This is an effort the Left has been at for years now. And they have had alarming success. American men are working less, getting married in fewer numbers; they’re fathering fewer children. They are suffering more anxiety and depression. They are engaging in more substance abuse. Many men in this country are in crisis, and their ranks are swelling. And that’s not just a crisis for men. It’s a crisis for the republic. Because the problem with the Left’s assault on the masculine virtues is that those self-same qualities, the very ones the Left now vilify as dangerous and toxic, have long been regarded as vital to self-government. Observers from the ancient Romans to our forefathers identified the manly virtues as indispensable for political liberty.¹²

Or were they merely performing Robert Bly’s best-selling 1990 *Iron John*, the “wild man,” the bourgeoisie fantasy of a newly acquired, rugged masculine identity as a “primitive being covered with hair down to his feet,” as an answer to the “soft and hairless male” shaped by second-wave feminism?¹³ Antisemite or Jew or antisemite and Jew—but “real men” together? The reality of identification with the aggressor seems here more than likely. Here the world of the new “misogynist” is linked both to QAnon as well as new notions of Jewish hyper- or hypo-masculinity in the age of Trump. “Male supremacism also intersects with other axes of oppression such as racism,

10 Marisa Melzer, “QAnon’s Unexpected Roots in New Age Spirituality,” *Washington Post*, March 29, 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/magazine/2021/03/29/qanon-new-age-spirituality/> (Accessed June 24, 2022).

11 “Statement of Offense,” *United States of America v. Aaron Mostofsky*, January 27, 2022, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/press-release/file/1467926/download> (accessed May 29, 2022).

12 “Senator Hawley Delivers National Conservatism Keynote on the Left’s Attack on Men in America,” *Josh Hawley U.S. Senator for Missouri*, November 1, 2021. <https://www.hawley.senate.gov/senator-hawley-delivers-national-conservatism-keynote-lefts-attack-men-america> (accessed May 29, 2022) and his Josh Hawley, *Manhood: The Masculine Virtues America Needs* (Washington, DC, 2023).

13 Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book About Men* (Reading, MA, 1990), 3.

14 Emily Carian, Alex DiBranco, and Chelsea Ebin (eds.), *Male Supremacism in the United States: From Patriarchal Traditionalism to Misogynist Incels and the Alt-Right* (New York, 2021), 7.

15 While there have been a number of books over the past twenty years on this topic, one of the earliest remains one of the best: Paul Breines, *Tough Jews: Political Fantasies and the Moral Dilemma of American Jewry* (New York, 1990).

16 Daisy Schofield, "How Intactivist's Anti-Circumcision Movement was Co-opted by the Alt-right," *DAZED*, April 9, 2020. <https://origin.dazeddigital.com/beauty/article/48684/1/how-intactivists-anti-circumcision-movement-was-co-opted-by-the-alt-right> (accessed July 8, 2022).

17 Bruce R. Lee, "'Testicle Tanning': Is Tucker Carlson Promoting This New 'Bromeotherapy' Now?," *Forbes*, April 20, 2022. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/brucelee/2022/04/20/testicle-tanning-is-tucker-carlson-promoting-this-new-bromeotherapy-now/> (accessed January 11, 2023).

xenophobia, antisemitism, and heterosexism."¹⁴ The replacement of the stereotyped feminized Jewish male, symbolically castrated by his Jewish identity, a commonplace of the stereotyping of the Jewish male in Western Europe and the United States (think Woody Allen) by the tough Jew, the Jewish gangster or the stereotype of the hypermasculine Israeli male is a clear move towards answering the antisemitic charge of Jewish demasculinization, a state that makes the male "Jew" even more dangerous.¹⁵ Remembering at all times that one of the strongest anti-public health movements in the United States (a circumcising culture) on the far right was the anti-circumcision movement, antedating the wide-spread anti-vaxxing movement by decades. And equally adapted recently by the radical far-right world of White Nationalism as part of its antisemitic rhetoric, and appearing on January 6, 2023, as part of the rhetoric of the new Right.¹⁶ And, one can add, just as successfully, with the overall rates of infant male circumcision dropping in middle-class communities, just as the rates of vaccination subsequently did. Being truly male is defined over and over as being intact, being a "caveman." The analogy between the two "furry" men in the Capitol is powerful because each is using the notion of a powerful masculine identity to conform to the politics of QAnon.

But one can only understand this if one recognizes that the far Right, as we have noted, sees masculinity in general under attack and that masculinity in this world is defined by the genitalia. Weakened genitalia means weakened masculinity. Tucker Carlson, on his special entitled "The End of Men" "included footage of a naked man standing spread eagle with a red light shining right at his crotch. Carlson's use of the term 'testicle tanning' apparently was referring to red light therapy that was directed specifically towards one part or perhaps two parts of the body."¹⁷ To recuperate the genitalia, and thus to recuperate today's faltering masculinity, use the tanning beds in your neighborhood beauty salon. As with the fear at the end of the nineteenth century that the degeneracy

of a people, represented by the feminizing of men, was the precipitating cause of the decline of nations, Carlson is convinced that the vanishing of the real American male is the result of their physically weakened genitalia. Would that they had had tanning beds in the salons of nineteenth-century Berlin and London!

That moment on January 6, 2021, showed that xenophobia was indeed a Venn diagram of hatred that enables those who inherently despised one another to find common enemies. Thus, the notion of a hegemonic masculinity is both confronted by and reenforced by the presence of antisemitism, of male Jews who mask their identity as non-conforming.¹⁸ Here I am bracketing the question of the role that women have in this culture. Clearly sexualized and often reduced to clichés of an imagined Ur-patriarchy, they form an analogous set of contradictions, with fecundity replacing aggression, with abortion replacing circumcision in our Venn diagram.

Structures of Stereotyping

But how can we critically examine such models of difference? Every community and those who constitute them define themselves in terms of their own symbolic register and against what they perceive as its antithesis. Sigmund Freud in his *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921) outlined his take on this after the First World War. British psychotherapists, including some of his English followers such as Wilfried Trotter, appropriated a psychology of difference popularized by Gustave Le Bon to define the valorous “Tommy” crusading against the inherently evil “Boche.” And Freud was in those terms indeed a “Boche.” Freud, as was his wont throughout his career, saw this antithesis as a universal rather than a national problem, as a psychological rather than a political one: “We are no longer astonished that greater differences should lead to an almost insuperable repugnance, such as the Gallic people feel for the German, the Aryan for the Semite, and the

18 R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” *Gender and Society* 19 (2005): 829–59 and Mike Donaldson, “What is Hegemonic Masculinity?” *Theory and Society* (Special Issue: *Masculinities*) 22 (1993): 643–57.

19 Sigmund Freud, "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego (1921)," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey with Anna Freud, 24 vols. (London, 1953–74), 18:65–144, here 100, 68.

20 Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca, NY, 1985), 15–36.

white races for the coloured." In his 1921 essay, he began with the claim that had long been established in the psychological literature of the late nineteenth century concerning collective behavior that "a group is extraordinarily credulous and open to influence, it has no critical faculty, and the improbable does not exist for it." But what he adds is that collectives "think in images, which call one another up by association (just as they arise with individuals in states of free imagination), and whose agreement with reality is never checked by any reasonable agency."¹⁹ For Freud this concretization of the crowd's fears is a problem to be overcome, but for him the irrationality of the fear of the Other is not "unnatural." Is fear of difference an aberration or a natural phenomenon? And, as we shall discuss below, how are these various phenomena linked?

In the 1980s I argued in *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (and I was not the first) that such splitting mirrors the process of individuation that the infant manifests, defining the "good" caregiver (our community) and the "bad" (The Others) now in a greater symbolic context.²⁰ What I noted then was that if this were true, and I assumed that it was, this would actually not be a very interesting claim. In other words, this would be banal, if this was simply a stage of human development that shaped the antithesis that we later construct as social beings. Are we merely employing infantile fantasies of control and fear when we, now integrated into a greater community with our superegos now developed, define our world as consisting of in- and out-groups? What I argued is to show that what is truly important is not the underlying structure but its real time manifestation in historical and social terms. That is, even if splitting is "normal," the xenophobias, including antisemitism, can be pathological. Freud's need to universalize such phenomena meant that he stresses the adaptive behavior as one necessary to the preservation of the ego. But such attempts are always fraught as they focus inward rather than outward into the world of relationships that defines the ego despite itself.

Whether geographic, “racial,” cultural, or narrowly political, xenophobia seems to be a category that arises when “we” define “them”. The social fascination with the “phobias” had its origin in nineteenth-century medicine, which quickly devolved into social metaphor, as such diagnostic categories of behavior tend to do rather quickly. As antisemitism becomes a part of the evolving “science of race” so too does the science of sexual pathology—both defining the normal in all spheres. If this is imbedded in the transition from a theological to a scientific model of antisemitism, a truism of antisemitism research over the past fifty years, then the science of sexuality, in which Freud is clearly embedded, reacts to and reshapes the xenophobic labeling of a pathological “Jewish masculine sexuality,” once thought of as the result of the Jews’ backwardness in rejecting Christianity, and replaces it, or perhaps better, has it morph into an innate biological fact. (This is equally true of the stereotypes of female Jewish sexuality, the “belles dames sans merci,” the Jewish woman as seducer and corrupter that haunts much of the discussion of Jews and syphilis at the same moment. She, however, is often contrasted with the empathetic, asexual Jewish woman: Veronica, who wipes the sweat from Jesus’s brow with her cloak. That never happens with Jewish masculinity.)

But of course, this notion of the permanent nature of Jewish difference versus the malleability of the Jews, a hallmark of the theology of the early Church, simply replicates itself in the seeming shift from theological to biological models. And this in the age in which, within biological models of sexuality, there are both permanent and transitional models, all of which take on pathological qualities based on whether they are seen, from the perspective of the observer, as dangerous or benign. Think of the rapid movement of labels for sexual pathologies from Richard Krafft-Ebbing in 1886 into Victorian and Wilhelminian popular sexual discourse: “sadist” and “masochist” being terms that today we rarely even see as diagnostic.²¹ That these metaphoric flights of labeling

21 Matti Bunzl, “Desiderata for a History of Austrian Sexualities,” *Austrian History Yearbook* 38 (2007): 48–57, 55, as well as the special issue *The Construction of Sexual Deviance in Late Imperial Eastern Europe*, ed. Keely Stauter-Halsted and Nancy M. Wingfield, *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20, no. 2 (May 2011).

22 Sander L. Gilman and J.M. Thomas, *Are Racists Crazy? How Prejudice, Racism, and Antisemitism Became Markers of Insanity* (New York, 2016).

using the “phobias” are a complex historical phenomenon was shown in our study of the labeling of racism as a mental illness. Thus, the nineteenth-century origins of other such “phobias” as Hebrewphobia (Richard Lalor Sheil in 1848) or, for very different audiences and purposes, Judeophobia in 1882 by Leon Pinsker change the meaning of the phobic.²²

You cannot have a theory of mind without a theory of history; you cannot have a theory of history without a theory of mind. Historians imagine, whether they admit it or not, how individuals (and the collective that they inhabit) process the world in which they live; every psychological theory of mind is filtered through the historical and cultural context in which both the imagined individual and the collective (as well as the historian) functions. Thus, when we speak of human sexuality, we are simultaneously imagining how we as human beings deal with that historically defined category and how that historically defined category brackets that which we experience as sexuality. Freud labeled this the function of the superego, but it is substantially more for it not only shapes and focuses how we, consciously or unconsciously, deal with ourselves as sexual beings (however we wish to define this) but also shapes, through our imagination those limits on precisely those experiences.

The Sense of the Past

That today’s pathologizing of masculine sexuality and the rise of modern anti-Judaism in the age of nineteenth-century scientific racism should be linked is of little surprise as all form a Venn diagram of the Other in the time. What we need to focus on is the antithesis: How are healthy peoples and their healthy sexuality delimited? Remembering that the Halle philosopher Hans Vaihinger, well before Georges Canguilhem and Michel Foucault, observed the creation of the “celebrated statistical fiction ... of a normal, average man. This fiction is not of value for statistics alone, for in medicine we meet the average man

in whom all abnormal deviations have disappeared.”²³ Health and illness, the normal and the deviant, already in the late nineteenth century are asymmetrical: one is not the opposite of the other nor is it defined by it and vice-versa.

Let me use an example from Heinrich Kaan’s Latin study of sexual pathology of 1844 and the evocation of the new science of sexuality. For Kaan it is the ecological difference that defines Jewish sexuality: “The circumcision of the Jews, which is a prophylactic against prematurely developed sexuality, finds (in this disposition of regional climate) its explanation.”²⁴ For Kaan masturbation, a sexual deviation that leads to further pathologies, a given since the early eighteenth century, is a reflex of climate and those of a Southern climate, such as the Jews, are more “subject” to it than Kaan’s fellow inhabitants in Northern climes. Ecological arguments function widely in the age of science, indeed lay the groundwork for much of the late twentieth-century notion that climate shapes the world and its inhabitants and shifts in climate, usually seen as negative, have impact on the health of human beings. Ernst Haeckel systemically defined this more broadly in terms of the context of animal development in the 1860s and labeled it “ecology.” By the close of the century, the French philosopher Ernest Renan then employs it to define Jewish difference as “peoples of the desert.” Renan saw in the Jews the survival of the “nomadic nomos” of the Jews into modern times.²⁵ Renan expanded this ecological view in his 1887 *History of the People of Israel*, seeing the Jews as having kept to themselves to maintain their “purity of blood.”²⁶ What keeping to oneself meant was decoded by the anti-clerical Italian physician Paolo Mantegazza evoking the Jews’ sexual practice of circumcision:

Circumcision is a shame and an infamy; and I, who am not in the least anti-Semitic, who indeed have much esteem for the Israelites, I who demand of no living soul a profession of religious faith, insisting only upon the brotherhood of soap and water and of honesty, I shout and shall continue to shout at the Hebrews,

²³ Hans Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of “As If”: A System of the Theoretical, Practical and Religious Fictions of Mankind*, translation of *Die Philosophie des Als Ob* by C.K. Ogden (New York, 1925), 23.

²⁴ Benjamin Kahan (ed.), *Heinrich Kaan’s “Psychopathia Sexualis” (1844): A Classic Text in the History of Sexuality* (Ithaca, NY, 2016), 84.

²⁵ Cited by Vadim Joseph Rossman, *Russian Intellectual Antisemitism in the Post-Communist Era* (Lincoln, NE, 2020), 8.

²⁶ Ernst Renan, *History of the People of Israel*, 3 vols. (London, 1888–91), 1:14.

27 Paolo Mantegazza, *The Sexual Relations of Mankind*, trans. Victor Robinson (New York, 1935), 99.

28 Johann David Michaelis, *Orientalische und Exegetische Bibliothek* (Frankfurt am Main, 1773), 94.

until my last breath: Cease mutilating yourselves: cease imprinting upon your flesh an odious brand to distinguish you from other men; until you do this, you cannot pretend to be our equal. As it is, you, of your own accord, with the branding iron, from the first days of your lives, proceed to proclaim yourselves a race apart, one that cannot, and does not care to, mix with ours.²⁷

While circumcision is seen as creating a communitarian identity, this is seen negatively, separating the Jews from their peers and redefining masculinity. Indeed, the entire debate about circumcision from the Enlightenment on is not merely a continuation of the Pauline attempts at creating a “universal” church, but at defining acceptable and unacceptable notions of male sexuality, now in the realm of “science,” which according to popular myth replaced “religion” at the core of modern thought.

Accordingly, Johann David Michaelis, the noted Orientalist of the German Enlightenment, detested the practice from a theological position, fueled by Paul’s antagonism. Michaelis, also living amid a scientific world that firmly believed in male masturbation as the origin of a myriad number of physical and psychological ailments, relied on the understanding that circumcision had no curative powers to reverse or prevent illnesses due to masturbation as an argument against its conferral of any advantage. Paul’s views now underpinned by Michaelis’s “scientific” understanding of sexuality. Circumcision, he states, is not a cure for male masturbation. Michaelis notes that the character of the Jewish male is not improved even if their contemporaries claim that they have a diminished sexual urge through the removal of the prepuce.²⁸ We, he implies, know better. In the debates both about human sexuality and about the nature of the Jews, here overlapping, the key always is the notion of an inherent, deviant masculine character that shapes and is shaped by the collective.

By 1860, a London practitioner, Dr. Fowler, writing in the *Lancet* could claim the complete efficacy of circumcision in med-

ically combating one of the widest-spread etiologies of illness of the time, male masturbation:

Has the operation of circumcision any effect in diminishing the habit or practice of onanism amongst the male children and the young lads of the Jewish community? Practising in a neighbourhood where this community abounds, I do not remember ever having had either a confessed or even a suspected case of this description amongst our Hebrew brethren. I wish I could say the same respecting juvenile Christians.²⁹

29 Robert Fowler, "What are the Effects of Circumcision?" *The Lancet* 75 (1860), 382.

30 Peter Charles Remondino, *History of Circumcision from the Earliest Times to the Present* (Philadelphia, 1891), iii.

One of the only persistent factors in debates on circumcision is the coexistence of extreme opinions on its efficacy. Does it improve the health of Jewish males already at risk from a wide range of potential diseases or does it exacerbate them, leading to a further collapse of Jewish masculinity? Is it community building or community destroying? The American physician Peter Charles Remondino projects his nineteenth-century fascination with circumcision as hygiene into the world of the Egyptians: "In ancient Egypt ... the nobility, royalty, and the higher warrior class seem to have adopted circumcision as well, either as a hygienic precaution or as an aristocratic prerogative and insignia."³⁰ While arguments relying on the health exception to show the dangers of circumcision persist, the image of the health exception that Remondino successfully argues for in late nineteenth-century America contributes to the creation of a climate that makes the United States into a circumcising culture. Indeed, the notion of a healthy or a damaged masculinity because of the practice is one of the keys to understanding Anglophone ambivalence about Jewish masculinity.

In the 1920s, a debate in the Royal Academy of Medicine in Ireland saw a Dr. Solomons defend the practice of circumcision: "Most educated people ask to have their sons circumcised." It helps "in preventing masturbation." Circumcision is advised as "a real help to the weakest spot in the human character." The "ordinary schoolboy was not taught to keep himself clean." Solomons argued that the procedure did not

31 "Reports of Societies from June," *British Medical Journal* 1, no. 3203 (June 5, 1920): 768.

32 "Die rituelle Beschneidung bei den Juden und ihre Gefahren," *Journal für Kinderkrankheiten* 59 (1872): 367–372.

33 Sander L. Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (New York, 1991).

require anesthesia: "In fact it was harmful." Our Darwinian physician Hastings Tweedy argued the case against Solomons and stated that circumcision does not "reduce sexual desire."³¹ Such claims were regularly made throughout medical science in the nineteenth century, advocating circumcision as a preventative against a range of diseases from the evils of masturbation to sexually transmitted diseases. Jewish males, following this argument, are exemplars of how one can, in the age of eugenics, "improve the race" through medical intervention.

But the antisemitic undertone of this medical debate was also apparent in the time. As an anonymous author stated in the leading German pediatric journal, *Journal für Kinderkrankheiten*, in 1872: "The circumcision of Jewish children has been widely discussed in the medical press as is warranted with topics of such importance. But it is usually discussed without the necessary attention to details and the neutrality that it deserves. Indeed, it has not been free of fanatic antisemitism."³² No discussion of circumcision within medicine was without an ideological perspective. Antisemitism and sexuality are linked, especially in the new age of "Sexual Science," well beyond the more specific interests of Magnus Hirschfeld and his clinic. And, as I argued decades ago, Jewish masculinity was perceived as damaged or effeminate, because of circumcision, or, indeed, as hypermasculine, in a most destructive vein, for the same reason.³³ Modern civilization is built upon such notions of sexual difference, which is simultaneously defined as "racial" difference.

Sigmund Freud spends virtually his entire career critiquing the notion of "Civilization" that rests on these two poles of the healthy as opposed to the normal. In his 1910 essay on "The Taboo of Virginity" he evoked the British anthropologist Ernest Crawley's notion of difference defining the difference between male and female sexuality:

each individual is separated from the others by a 'taboo of personal isolation,' and that it is precisely the minor differences in

people who are otherwise alike that form the basis of feelings of strangeness and hostility between them. It would be tempting to pursue this idea and to derive from this 'narcissism of minor differences' the hostility which in every human relation we see fighting successfully against feelings of fellowship and overpowering the commandment that all men should love one another. Psycho-analysis believes that it has discovered a large part of what underlies the narcissistic rejection of women by men, which is so much mixed up with despising them, in drawing attention to the castration complex and its influence on the opinion in which women are held.³⁴

34 Sigmund Freud, "The Taboo of Virginity," in *The Standard Edition*, 11:191–208, here 198.

35 Marie Bonaparte, "Female Mutilation Among Primitive Peoples and Their Psychical Parallels in Civilization," in her *Female Sexuality* (New York, 1953), 153–161, here 153.

Here the question of female sexuality as damaged by what is perceived as sexual excess, by masturbation, lies at the back of Freud's dichotomy. Freud writes in "Some Psychic Consequences of the Anatomical Difference Between the Sexes," "the elimination of clitoridal sexuality is a necessary precondition for the development of femininity." In abandoning clitoral sensuality, in nineteenth-century terms, masturbation without a specific reproductive goal, for vaginal sexuality, the imagined woman is abandoning her infantile fantasy of having a penis, and thus castrating herself. This is inherently a psychic process, but his model was "physical" circumcision, as is evident from what Marie Bonaparte reports in her essays on female genital mutilation composed shortly after Freud's death. She notes in her discussion of the excision of the clitoris in "primitive" societies that this "seemed to Freud a way of seeking to further 'feminize' the female by removing this cardinal vestige of her masculinity. Such operations, as he [Freud] once said to me, must be intended to complete the 'biological castration' of the female which Nature, in the eyes of these tribes, has not sufficiently effected."³⁵ In other words, the mirror image of male circumcision. Male circumcision alienates the psyche from its normal course; female circumcision allows it to take its course.

By 1921, Freud returned to this notion of inherent but opposing difference, but now thinking not of the antithesis of male

36 Freud, "Group Psychology," 80:100.

and female sexuality but between the stereotypes of national and political difference:

The same thing happens when men come together in larger units. Every time two families become connected by a marriage, each of them thinks itself superior to or of better birth than the other. Of two neighbouring towns each is the other's most jealous rival; every little canton looks down upon the others with contempt. Closely related races keep one another at arm's length; the South German cannot endure the North German, the Englishman casts every kind of aspersion upon the Scot, the Spaniard despises the Portuguese. We are no longer astonished that greater differences should lead to an almost insuperable repugnance, such as the Gallic people feel for the German, the Aryan for the Semite, and the white races for the coloured.³⁶

By 1930, with the rise of Austro-Fascism and the growing awareness of the politics of antisemitism, in what was and is perhaps his most widely-read essay, "Civilization and its Discontents," Freud then moves difference into his discussion of masculinity as defined by antisemitism:

It is clearly not easy for men to give up the satisfaction of this inclination to aggression. They do not feel comfortable without it. The advantage which a comparatively small cultural group offers of allowing this instinct an outlet in the form of hostility against intruders is not to be despised. It is always possible to bind together a considerable number of people in love, so long as there are other people left over to receive the manifestations of their aggressiveness. I once discussed the phenomenon that it is precisely communities with adjoining territories, and related to each other in other ways as well, who are engaged in constant feuds and in ridiculing each other—like the Spaniards and Portuguese, for instance, the North Germans and South Germans, the English and Scotch, and so on. I gave this phenomenon the name of 'the narcissism of minor differences', a name which does not do much to explain it. We can now see that it is a convenient and relatively harmless satisfaction of the inclination to aggression, by means of which cohesion between the members of the community is made easier. In this respect the Jewish people, scattered everywhere, have rendered most useful services to

the civilizations of the countries that have been their hosts; but unfortunately all the massacres of the Jews in the Middle Ages did not suffice to make that period more peaceful and secure for their Christian fellows. When once the Apostle Paul had posited universal love between men as the foundation of his Christian community, extreme intolerance on the part of Christendom towards those who remained outside it became the inevitable consequence. To the Romans, who had not founded their communal life as a State upon love, religious intolerance was something foreign, although with them religion was a concern of the State and the State was permeated by religion. Neither was it an unaccountable chance.³⁷

In a very different manner, so does the sociology of the time, as mirrored in works of its founders, such as the textbook *Sociology* (1908) by Georg Simmel (a baptized German Jew) with its now famous appendix on “The Stranger.” Who is strange and how did they come to be so, asks Simmel, and answers by imagining the mindset of those who both label and are labeled as a stranger as well as their social location. Mind as a reflex of social location: the symbolic register of difference defines the political. Freud’s fascination with circumcision and masculinity has been well documented; Simmel’s notion of how you define yourself as a “stranger” in complex ways echoes this debate.³⁸ Freud is both opposed to circumcision in practice as well as in theory. Refusing to have his sons circumcised, he also denounced the circumcision of boys practiced in his fantasy of secular America as a “cure or punishment.”³⁹ Difference matters, whether as a religious or, as in the United States, primarily a hygienic practice. Difference defines masculinity, defines belonging, and frames the very notion of xenophobia.⁴⁰ Circumcision is a form of social isolation and thus for Freud a form of castration as it makes one perpetually different. How antisemitism figures in such debates is not limited to the rise of modern medicine and sexual science in the nineteenth century.

The core of this argument is that the stereotypes of human sexuality as deviant and the images of the Jew as their

37 Sigmund Freud, “Civilization and its Discontents,” in *The Standard Edition*, 21: 57–146, here 113.

38 Sander L. Gilman, *The Case of Sigmund Freud: Medicine and Identity at the Fin de Siècle* (Baltimore, 1993).

39 Sigmund Freud, “New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis,” in *The Standard Edition*, 22: 1–182, here 87.

40 George Makari, *Of Fear and Strangers: A History of Xenophobia* (New York, 2021).

41 Marjorie Mayo, "Book Review: A Perverse Feeding of People's Worst Fears," *Morning Star*, October 24, 2021. <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/f/perverse-feeding-peoples-worst-fears> (Accessed January 11, 2023).

exemplary presence in the world has neither vanished nor ameliorated. As one review of my recent coauthored COVID-19 book asked: now what do we do about it?⁴¹ How very likely it is that we can change the future employment of such images in a way does not deter us from trying to understand how such images are employed and where our own sets of stereotypes are present. Learning to recognize our own "lumping" may mitigate such experiences but can certainly never eliminate them. We ask how this can be overcome: the answer is critical thinking about the historical nature of the process of creating the Other. Perhaps in examining our own anxieties and mitigating them: but perhaps not. That is the dilemma we face each day as we confront a world that too easily is divided into the "good," the "bad," and the "ugly."

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