

'We have to bust up the orthodoxy'

Our editor Jon Sutton meets **Jonathan Haidt** at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association

I have just come from the conference and not ten minutes ago there was a Black Lives Matter march going through, everybody chanting 'This is what psychology looks like'. What does psychology look like to you?

Mostly a profession of people trying to help others, and then a smaller group of people doing research, and these people are mostly on the left, as with teachers and other caregiver types, and as with other academics. Psychology is one of the most anti-racist professions or places that you can go. And this is one of my concerns about the protests; we have spent so long admiring protesters and saying that protesters are good, racism is pervasive, go protest, go change things. While I think Black Lives Matter certainly has valid points about the criminal justice system, I think it's unfortunate that the protesters have often been acting in the most anti-racist places there are, namely universities and psychology.

Preaching to the converted?

They're *turning* on the converted, I'd say. They're not preaching; they're attacking, they're demanding, they're criticising. They are the height of the hypermoralism that I was talking about in my keynote last night.

In that, you said that it's better to try and change things through love. Was that partly aimed at the critics of the APA, over the Hoffman Report on psychologists' involvement in 'enhanced interrogation'?

It's aimed at all the self-righteous people who are angry and often using tactics of intimidation. The big split that I think is fairly new, is the gigantic divide between the liberal left and the illiberal left. In America we screwed up the word 'liberal': we got it wrong. You Brits and Europeans still use it correctly, to mean you believe in freedom, free markets, freedom of speech, and so liberal parties in Europe are those that generally favour free markets. That's as it should be. *The Economist* is a liberal magazine, I love reading *The Economist*. In America, about

a hundred years ago, we began using 'liberal' to simply mean the left. But the left can be liberal, or the left can be illiberal. The left, as it was in the Sixties, there were some illiberal tendencies, but they believed in free speech, they fought for free speech. And now those Baby Boomers, those progressive left-leaning Baby Boomers who basically run the Academy, they're amazed, they don't know what to say when their students demand protection from speech, safe spaces, fire anyone who says something we disagree with. So we've seen an incredible rise of illiberalism on the left, in the Academy, we've seen an incredible rise of illiberalism on the right with Donald Trump, anti-semitism, racism.

And this is when you refer to Karen Stenner's ideas of 'authoritarian conservatism' as something different from 'laissez-faire' or 'status quo' authoritarianism.

Exactly. Stenner is a great guide to the right, which is popping up in very similar form in Europe and in America. These right-wing nationalist parties attract true racist neo-Nazis. So I saw this all over Europe. I was in Scandinavia and in Sweden, there's the Swedish Democrats, who seem to be trying to distance themselves from people who focus on race, like being white, but their heritage is linked back to being neo-Nazis.

So, in your own research, you've found that Trump supporters are characterised by this profile of racial and social intolerance?

With Emily Ekins we did research in which we gave the Moral Foundations Questionnaire along with a lot of other questions about politics, to a representative sample of voters, in November of last year, as the primaries were really heating up. People who said that Donald Trump was their first choice, we could predict that by looking at their Moral Foundations Questionnaire – they were low on care and compassion, they were high on loyalty, authority, and sanctity, that's the blood-and-soil, rally-the-

tribe-around-defending-the-homeland... if you read Hitler and Mussolini, it's all about loyalty/authority/sanctity.

And yet one of your main points is that we need more of these people in psychology?

No, no, no. My main point is that any field that has only one type is guaranteed to get it wrong. We used to have mostly progressives and then a few conservatives here and there. So at least there were people who would stand up and object if something stupid was said. But over the past 15 to 20 years, we've lost everybody who's not on the left, so now you can say something foolish or demonstrably wrong, but if it's politically pleasing, people will just accept it.

Can you give me an example?

The wage gap. Hillary Clinton keeps saying 'and you know women get paid 78 cents to the dollar for the same work'. That's complete garbage. It's true that if you look at all women employed full-time, they make 78 cents to the dollar compared to all men employed full time. But as soon as you equate for doing the same work, most of the gap disappears. And then you have to look at how many hours a week they work. Men work more hours per week. Men choose more dangerous jobs. As long as women are choosing to major in art history, English and gender studies, and men are majoring in engineering and computer science, yeah, men are going to make more. Is that sexism?

So it's about equality of opportunity rather than complete equality in everything.

The big foolish thing that social scientists now do, because of the political homogeneity, is take any gap, any difference, and say, 'well, obviously it's sexism/racism'. It's so surprising because as scientists, if you point at two things and say, 'they're correlated, a caused b', we all instantly say, 'no, you can't say that', correlation does not imply causation, we all know that. But as soon as it's 'men earn more than women': gasp, 'sexism'.

So what I'm trying to say is not that we need more authoritarians – we don't – but we've got to bust up the complete political orthodoxy of the left in psychology, sociology, anthropology. Political sciences is not so bad, economics has diversity. English, history, philosophy, we have to bust up the orthodoxy, the homogeneity. And that's why I started an organisation called Heterodox Academy.

It's not necessarily about encouraging

more of a certain kind of political leaning into a discipline, it's about all of us.

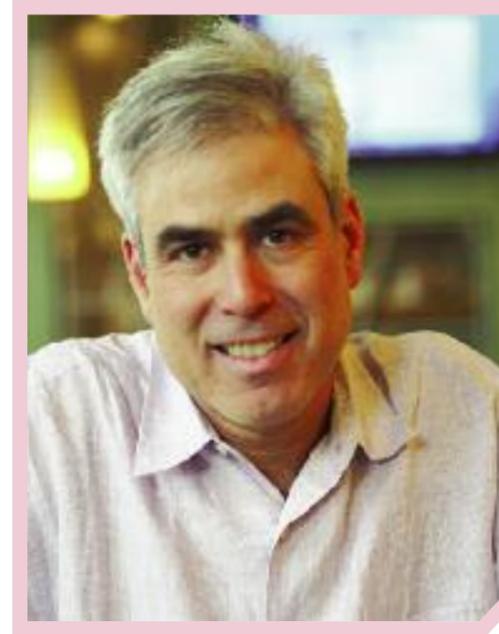
We don't need everybody, but we must not all be the same. And I can go further – the smartest people out there are libertarians. There's a lot of arguments, a lot of data about 'Are liberals smarter than conservatives? Do we dominate the Academy because we're smarter?'. And in terms of IQ tests and other things, people who are socially progressive are a little bit higher than people who are socially conservative. That's true. But if you want to go down that road, the people with the highest IQ are people who are, quote, 'conservative on economic issues', which means, actually, classical liberals. Libertarians have the highest IQs of all. They're very analytic, they're very high-IQ people. So how can you say, 'Oh, well, we're so smart, but we don't have many libertarians'. Libertarians, or laissez-faire conservatives, as Stenner calls them, or the status-quo conservatives, those are very valuable, insightful perspectives. We do need them in the social sciences.

Morality is fundamental to that. In your talk last night, I was really impressed by your showing that actually, a person's moral compass had more impact over their voting decisions in something as major as Brexit than their income level would do. It's not 'It's the economy, stupid', it's morality.

Exactly. The ironic thing here is that it's a long-standing error of the left to interpret everything in economic terms. Of course economics matters. But the left seems to see everything in a reductionist, Marxist, economic framework. The right, the status-quo conservatives, better understand that people have a need to live in a cohesive moral community. Issues of country, issues of loyalty, patriotism, family: these are not economic issues primarily. If we had more conservative social scientists, we'd see this. This is the mistake the Democrats in America have made for all my adult life. Al Gore, John Kerry and now Hillary Clinton, they're all trying to explain the dissatisfaction in the country by saying, 'We'll give you a tax break! We'll get this benefit for you!' They miss the centre of the problem.

Thinking about *The Psychologist* itself,

in my time as editor I've been accused of being everything from a 'warmongering neo-Con' to 'bleeding-heart liberal' depending on the content of any particular month. And I don't know if that's just the make-up of the profession. I've had people who admit to being at the conservative end of the spectrum phone me up and say they're going to cancel their Society membership because of what's going



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in the publication, and when you say, 'If you have a different perspective, let's hear it, I'm very happy to publish it', it all goes very quiet. Why is that? Do you think that conservatives are feeling like a minority and therefore not wanting to come forward?

There are very few conservative psychologists. Things have gotten really purified in the last ten or fifteen years in America. Generally, trends in America are found in Britain too, your particular political landscape is different, your conservatives are much more reasonable, centre-right, not the Christian-right of America, but the trends tend to be similar. I've heard from British students that the same shift to the purification of the Academy is happening in Britain, you're getting so many of the safe-space movements, you guys have 'no-platforming'...

So people aren't allowed to come and talk in certain academic circles because...

...they represent points that are 'hateful'. And there's a very serious problem with what's called 'concept creep'. I wrote an essay with Nick Haslam, an Australian psychologist, on that. Terms that are useful to the left in prosecuting their war against the right, they creep down and down, so that it's ever easier to convict the right. For example, violence used to mean actually hurting someone's body, you had to actually hit someone. Now, simply, like what I just did, questioning the wage gap: well, what if that makes women feel uncomfortable? I've 'committed violence' against them. Once you can charge professors and students with violence for simply saying something, now you can prosecute them all.

So we live in hyper-polarised times. The Academy, as it's gotten further and further left, have behaved more and more outrageously, and so what few conservatives are left, what few conservatives are reading your magazine, are more and more on edge, more and more angry, and they might overreact, often to things that are innocuous.

You've compared the feeling they have these days, in that position, to coming out in the 1980s or 90s in terms of sexuality.

That's right. If you are a group and you represent 20 per cent of the population, you're not in the closet, you don't have to hide. But as your numbers shrink and shrink and shrink, and as the hatred against you rises and rises and rises, I think when you're down below 10 per cent, certainly by 5 per cent – if you have a room with 10 people, probably none of them there feel free to speak. Psychologists are all immersed in a world not just where the majority hate Trump and conservatives, but where everybody takes it for granted that everybody they're talking to shares that view. Now we're in an intense moral matrix, it's like a giant electromagnet that polarises our thinking, prevents us from thinking clearly, prevents us from thinking new thoughts, and basically renders our thinking useless on anything that's politically charged.

You've highlighted how technological advances such as the introduction of cable TV have made that even more polarised, in that we can select viewing purely in line with our own political views. In recent years, that must have ramped up – I think of something like

Twitter as a liberal echo chamber.

There's a lot of conservative Twitter, and right wing and racist and neo-Nazi Twitter.

But the two won't interact, so we're developing countries where half the country has no idea what the other half is thinking.

So many academics don't know anyone who is planning to vote for Trump.

Not only have you got those social networks where it's natural that people are always going to affiliate with people like each other, but you've got algorithms increasing online directing you towards your own particular group, so it becomes more and more polarised.

Exactly. We are tribal creatures by nature, and that's why we love sports, and that's why kids form gangs, and fraternities. The genius of liberal institutions – and thank you very much Britain – is that in the West, and particularly in Britain and Holland, arose institutions that allowed people to live together and function together with people who weren't exactly like them. This was the origin of religious tolerance, freedom of the press, freedom of speech, and we developed ways of counteracting our tribal tendencies, and boy did everything take off. It's been a great couple hundred years. I mean, sure, there were world wars, but we've made enormous progress and now we're sharing that progress with the world. Asia is adopting many Western innovations and is thriving. That's all been great. But now what's happened, we have this new technology that hyper-activates the tribalism.

The metaphor I like to think of about this is – imagine we went back to 50,000 years ago, when human tribes were leaving Africa, colonising the world. It was very bloody, they would fight each other, there's been tremendous warfare between tribes for a long time. There's been all these human groups, going around, living with spears for 500,000 years, they're used to spears. But now suppose aliens came to Earth around then, with all this tribal stuff going on, and then they air-lifted millions of loaded handguns, and they drop handguns all over the world. And some tribes found a basket of handguns. 'Wow, what's this? I can just kill you – wow!' What would life be like in those first years?

That was what was behind colonialism, wasn't it – guns drove colonialism.

Okay, sure. That's right. But the metaphor I want to work with here is this – spears



'...suddenly the whole world was arguing about capitalism, inequality, politics'

played a very important role in human social evolution, but if you get used to one technology, and you learn to live in a way where you're not killing each other all the time, and then you're given a brand new technology in which you can kill people relatively easily, there'll be a lot of killing. And that's where we are with social media. We had started with cable TV, which perhaps we were adapting to, perhaps not, and then we got something vastly more powerful, which was the internet. And that's where I think we are. Especially for young people. Young people now have grown up since they were 13 on Facebook, they're really afraid to stand out and contradict the prevailing sentiment. They're already established on social media.

I wonder if they actually adapt to it a lot better, because they have grown up with it, maybe they're more adapted to handle it better than we do.

I don't think so. They're anxious, they are focused on what will happen to them on social media. If you tell me that British young people are now so accustomed to it that they're pretty fearless about speaking up and saying what's on their mind, because they know that if they're condemned on social media, it's no big deal... if you tell me that, I'll agree with you.

I can't tell you that. So what's your next book about? Is it on this kind of topic?
No, not really, my next book is called

Three Stories about Capitalism: the Moral Psychology of Economic Life. It picks up where *The Righteous Mind* left off. Just as I was finishing *The Righteous Mind*, that's when Occupy Wall Street broke out. I had just moved to the Stern School of Business, in New York City, I had no interest in business, I didn't intend to stay at Stern, it was just a one-year visiting position, but suddenly the whole world was arguing about capitalism, inequality, politics, and it got really interesting. We were still going through the global financial crisis. And in Europe, it was amazing, economists on the right were all convinced that austerity was necessary. And economists on the left were all convinced that austerity was the worst thing in the world. And to this day, we don't know who was right, because it's so politicised. And I started realising – wow, economic thinking is so crucial to get right. If you do bad economic thinking, like in Venezuela, you're condemning your people to misery, disaster and ultimately starvation. It's so important to get economic thinking right, and we can't do it because we're political moral creatures.

Plus, it's a good way for you to get a Nobel Prize, isn't it? You can't be a psychologist, you have to swap to being a behavioural economist. But seriously on that point, one of the things that's most impressive about you is that you pull in things from all kinds of different disciplines, from history, to the arts, to

politics, economics.

I enjoy making connections. All of our brains are pattern matchers, that's what neural networks are. Some people proceed more by pattern matching, some by logic and deduction. I've always been more of a pattern matcher.

Academia is not set up to reward pattern matchers. I think the drive to specialise in early career really does make us lose a lot of creative researchers.

I think that's right, but it does depend on the discipline. That's probably true in economics or mathematics and the sciences, I suppose. I think social psychology is open enough. We like new ideas, we like bold new counterintuitive theories. So despite my concerns that social psychology lacks diversity, I must say in praise of my colleagues that since I've been raising the alarm about this, nothing bad has happened to me. Social psych is not so far left that they've treated me as a traitor. I talk about diversity, I explain why viewpoint diversity matters, and they mostly say, 'Huh. That makes sense. Okay, yeah. You're right. Now what are we going to do about it?'

And you've got answers for that.

The first thing we have to do is to get our hearts in order, which means we need to really accept the wisdom of the Ancients, that we are moralistic hypocrites, that we are over-judgemental, we are so good at seeing the speck in our neighbour's eye and can't see the plank in our own. If we can accept those ancient truths as individuals, then I think we can work on our field and our organisation, and try to welcome viewpoint diversity. Not necessarily authoritarians, but at least I try to make the case that we need – really need – more status-quo conservatives and laissez-faire conservatives, and even moderates. We do have moderates but they're afraid to speak up.

Albert Bandura yesterday was talking about the dehumanising language that Trump uses and how it's working for him because that's how the media works. He says, who wants to listen to moderates? Moderates are boring to listen to.

Sure, in the news. But the news is driven by outrage. The Academy, or at least the sciences or social sciences, is driven by institutionalised disconfirmation. And so, if somebody says, 'Oh, women are underrepresented in the sciences, clearly it's discrimination', anyone on the left, this includes centrists, will say, 'Wait, maybe there's different levels of interest'.

As long as someone can raise that hypothesis, which is amazingly true, the evidence is overwhelming – girls and boys have very different play preferences, very different levels of interest in human versus abstract drive – so as long as somebody is there to question, then the science can work. This is what I mean by viewpoint diversity. It doesn't have to be people on the far-right. It just has to be people willing to question the left.

At an organisational level, with the APA and the BPS, are we at the stage where we need positive discrimination to ensure that happens? Given that these institutions are driven by a democratic process, if an authoritarian conservative candidate puts themselves forward for President of the BPS or the APA, they're not likely to get voted in.

No, they're not. But there are ideas popular on the left, like we have to do this bean counting, that we have to use forceful methods to assure that we have one of this and three of that and seven of that, that's not what I'm saying. I'm not saying we need affirmative action, where we have to end up with proportional representation. I'm saying we need systemic safeguards to ensure that we never have orthodoxy.

And that's something we can all do.

Yes, that's right. So if you're editing a journal and you have a whole set of reviewers, make darn sure that you have a few that are right of centre. When you get a paper about anything on race and gender, if it shows that there's discrimination et cetera, many reviewers will wave it in. I mean, I'm exaggerating. But they'll be less critical. Make sure you have at least one conservative, or even a moderate, somebody who has not drunk the Kool-Aid. The crucial thing for every science is institutionalised disconfirmation. That's something we can build in. That's not discrimination, it's not affirmative action, that's making sure systems work.

Do you take this kind of thing into your personal life?

My wife says I'm always thinking and talking about it. But I've always been that way. My obsession with viewpoint diversity has gotten much stronger in the last year because of the craziness on American campuses. The mood on campus is really frightening. Students are afraid of speaking up because they're afraid of a small group of illiberal students and now professors are afraid of speaking up. So the situation on American campuses is now really dire.

There I go again – here I am off on a rant! So yes, I do think about it all the time.

Do you think whichever way the US election goes, all the problems that you're talking about in terms of psychology as a discipline are likely to be exacerbated?

Well if Trump were to win, everybody on the left, and many on the centre, and some on the right, would be in open revolt, and it would seem virtuous to subvert him, and the government, and I wouldn't say they're wrong. Trump is an authoritarian, he would be a terrifying president, so if Trump were to win, polarisation would go through the roof.

Do you think he will win?

I don't think so. He may not be Machiavellian enough to win. He's such a narcissist that he keeps saying and doing things that alienate ever more voters. He doesn't seem to be thinking strategically, at least after winning the primary. So unless Clinton really messes it up, I expect her to win.

I read a very interesting comment on the news this morning, I think it was a Colorado senator, and he said that he wanted to meet him to see what he was really like in person, to see if it was just a schtick. What he found is that he is who he appears to be.

He's an intense narcissist with possible hypomania, according to a few clinical psychologists I have spoken to. He is who he is. All he had to do to win was say a few things, like, 'If you're Mexican, you came here legally, you're a citizen, more power to you, that's the American Dream, I want to be your president. I don't believe in illegal immigration, but look, we're a nation of immigrants'. That's all he had to say. A few things like that. And he would have won.

I think he will win. I've got money on it. I've got money on him losing.

Finally, if you had to choose a headline for this piece that would include a pun based on your name, what would it be?

Given that my name is pronounced 'height' not 'hate'...

That completely changes it. I've got about a dozen options I need to throw away now.

Please don't talk about 'Haidt speech'. I was on the Colbert show and that was his opening thing. They had it on the screen below, that was about 'Haidt speech', and I told him my name was pronounced 'height' and he went, 'Oh. Oh no!'