

## OPINION

# Monument to lack: The new university

Andee Jones

We know less about the sexual life of little girls than boys. But we need not feel too ashamed of this distinction; after all, the sexual life of adult women is a dark continent for psychology.

Sigmund Freud (1932)

The Dark Continent is neither dark nor unexplorable. It is still unexplored only because we have been made to believe that it was too dark to be explored. Because they want to make us believe that what interests us is the white continent, with its monuments to Lack.

Hélène Cixous (1996)

'You'll have to be less critical of Freud!'

'Oh?'

On first hearing the comment, 'You'll have to be less critical of Freud,' I was more than a year into post-retirement postgraduate study, previously having worked as a psychologist and academic, retired into writing and, craving collaboration, returned to the academy to undertake a second PhD. The department to which I applied turned out not to be a good fit (Jones, 2014), and I sought refuge in a related discipline. The admonition, 'You'll have to be less critical of Freud,' comprised the bulk of the supervisory content of the first meeting proper with my new supervisor. I'll call her Sue.

Did I detect a note of fear in Sue's voice, or am I reading too much into things, two years on? After all, how things stand now is . . . not well. Both Sue and my co-supervisor were recently sacked and a supervisor who adopted me was sent home on stress leave. Don't get me wrong; I make no claims of correlation (let alone causation) among any of these events. Yes, I write mildly annoying opinion

pieces, but for my trouble I am merely smudged, not black listed.

The present article is the fourth in an unintended series charting my experiences of academic censure via social exclusion. Or 'amicable exclusion,' as the Vietnamese reprint has it (Jones, 2012, 2013, 2014). Here, in talking about academic censure, I touch on former psychoanalyst Jeffrey Masson's (1990) excoriation by the psychoanalytic establishment for, among other things, criticising late-twentieth-century Freudian anti-feminism.

As a former insider, Masson is famous for his warts-and-full-names exposé of the kind of psychoanalytic sexism that would turn women's stomachs and, more to the point, turn them away from psychoanalysis *per se*. Masson turned to writing about animals: 'I'd written a whole series of books about psychiatry, and nobody bought them. Nobody liked them. Nobody. Psychiatrists hated them.' In contrast, *Dogs Never Lie about Love* reportedly sold a million plus.

But I digress.

'You'll have to be less critical of Freud,' was the first of many proscriptions about my doctoral work:

'You can't refer to Masson; his criticism of Freud has been discredited.'

'But I'm citing his translation of the Freud/Fliess correspondence.'

'But can we take it seriously? Did he . . .?'

Although Sue did not know (nor should she) of the Masson (1985) translation (authorised by the Freud Archive), she did know that Masson's name was not to darken any dissertation emanating from her department.

Masson's was not the only verboten bibliographic entry; another was that of nonconformist commentator, Adam Phillips. And as to the not-exactly-verboten but not-very-nice-either: 'Our advice,' said Sue, 'is to omit Nussbaum's critique of Butler. . . . Nussbaum is not a patch on Butler!'

Furthermore, from the academic symposium:

'Your work sounds exclusionary to me.'

'In what way, do you think?'

'You say your conceptual position is feminist and secular. That means you're excluding religious feminism.'

'Surely,' I wanted to say, 'surely, scholars know the difference between setting limits and policing borders.' Was my interlocutor just point-scoring in the obligatory zero-sum game?

'It's not your place to question the lecturer (my next interlocutor was visibly upset at my visibly upsetting his favourite teacher by questioning her endorsement of Freud's theories about women) she's spent decades working in this field.' The field was film studies, specifically, film's use of classical Freudian notions of femininity, hysteria and masochism. Despite apologist claims - 'Well, Freud did say he didn't understand them' - the historical record shows that Freud clung to his essentialist prescriptions for women until he died (Breger, 2000). As to another common apology - 'Well, there are multiple Freuds' - yes, and I'm writing about *this* one.

Let me tell you something I know about Woman, says Freud: When the female gives up her penis envy, 'the appeased wish for a penis is destined to be converted into a wish for a baby and for a husband, who possesses a penis' (1937, p. 251). Only by accomplishing her biological destiny, says Freud, can women avoid falling prey to hysteria. In a parallel universe, Barack Obama (2014), in a speech to the White House Correspondents' Dinner, noted that any statement prefaced with, 'Let me tell you something I know about the Negro,' is unlikely to turn out well: 'You don't really need to hear the rest.'

At least in psychology departments, Freud's theories on women have been discredited to the point of annulment, but they still soldier on in some wind-swept corridors in cultural studies. Not that I am choosing sides, mind. I lament the dearth of scepticism in all of their houses. As a psychologist and researcher, I don't always agree with Masson and I do cherish a few Freudian ideas, just not the ones about women. Or Oedipus.

Take another example of academic self-censorship; the setting is a doctoral presentation on the elite players in commercial film making. No clearer evidence of this stellar group's demographic bias could possibly be had than that depicted in the presentation's portrait gallery.

Yet the presenter did not speak to it. The photographs bore witness to this upper echelon's comprising, almost without exception, post-middle-aged, middle-class men. Mostly white. And, although the portraits did not divulge these men's hetero-normativity, their movies did.

At the end of question time, neither presenter nor audience having raised the issue, I enquired whether the dissertation itself noted the bias. No, said the presenter, '[the field] is too fraught.' 'Fraught,' she explained, referred to the risk of being shunned for academic naiveté: 'You are universalising.'

'Surely,' I wanted to say, 'surely, scholars can distinguish a cautious generalisation from a universal claim.' Yet I know that is not the point. Of course we are capable of making such distinctions. The point is whether we prefer to belong or be exiled. Given its enormous clout, groupthink prevails and, wittingly or not, most of us preemptively hush our own mouths (Jones, 2014).

One cannot help but notice that unacknowledged sexism underpins several of the abovementioned scenes. But, then, I would say that; sexism is the topic of my dissertation. And, despite the fact that Sue was currently co-organising a germane conference that was short on proposals, she went to ground. Only by accident did I hear about the conference, fortunately in time to submit a late application that was accepted by the co-organiser. A little later, my affiliation to the university was expunged from the program and I was billed as 'independent scholar.' Smudged, not black-listed. After duly delivering my paper to an audience of half a dozen, the chair remarked that I could have saved myself a lot of trouble had I read so-and-so, who said it all in the 1970s. Sure.

Speaking of the 1970s, 'the personal is political' still goes. Personally, I'm fed up with being sent to Coventry for pointing out the bleeding obvious. Politically, while academic censure by the mere threat of social exclusion has always been around, it is a hallmark of the neoliberal university. The idea, in Australia at least, is to drive out all those annoying 1970s-entry, Jeffrey-Masson types who should never have gained entry in the first place. And then raise the fees so high that the new ones will forego Humanities for Accounting.

In these neoliberal times, it may be a symptom of cognitive health - as well as bloody-mindedness - to be censured and to resist self-censoring. But I take Raewyn Connell's (2014, p. 56) point that rattling the cage toward the end of one's career is one thing; it is quite another to contemplate years or decades ahead in the New University - with its monuments to Lack.

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