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The Psychology Department, Brandeis University in the 1960s: A Comment on Feigenbaum's Memoir

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Kenneth Feigenbaum has written a colorful account of his time as a faculty member of the Department of Psychology at Brandeis University from 1962-1965 and his interactions with Abraham Maslow (*Comparative Civilizations Review*: No. 82. 63-73, 2020). This view, from the perspective of the graduate students, supplements Feigenbaum's account.

I applied to the Department of Psychology in 1963. I was finishing up my B.A. in psychology at St. John's College, Cambridge University, and I had decided to emigrate to the United States. (I had met a family in California who agreed to sponsor me.) I applied to the University of California, Berkeley. I did not know that American undergraduates applied to several graduate schools, and so I was content with that one application.

However, I noticed a flier on a bulletin board from Brandeis University offering fellowships for foreign students, and I decided to apply, even though it was on the other side of the country from Berkeley.

My psychology advisor and I checked on the psychology faculty at Brandeis, and we had not heard of any of them, including Abraham Maslow. (The psychology department at Cambridge University was a *Department of Experimental Psychology*.) Berkeley did not offer me a scholarship. Brandeis did, and so I chose Brandeis.

I did not get the foreign student fellowship, but instead a Charles Revson Science Fellowship which paid my tuition and \$3,000 a year for living expenses. (The foreign fellowship went to John Benjafield from Canada who graduated and rose to become a Full Professor at Brock University in Canada.) Since Kenneth Feigenbaum was in charge of graduate admissions, I must thank him sincerely for admitting me.

In my first year, I was assigned to Jerome Wodinsky to run a rat study for him, and that led to my interest in animal research. During my three years there, I carried out and published many studies on exploratory behavior in rats. The psychological department paid for the food and shavings for the rats and for the first few batches of rats.

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I eventually started my own breeding colony to save the department expenses (even keeping the rats in my apartment). The department never asked me what research I was doing or even about my research publications.

Having now learned who Maslow was, I wanted to take a course with him. He was not offering graduate courses because, he said, graduate students were too angry and, therefore, a nuisance. I took an undergraduate course on utopias with him that he team-taught with Frank Manuel. It was an interesting course, and Maslow let Manuel, a dynamic individual, take the lead in the course. Since I was now the only current graduate student that Maslow knew, he asked me to be his teaching assistant for his undergraduate course. Of course, I accepted.

His teaching style continued to be low-key. At one point, the students in the seminar told Maslow that he was talking too much and that he should be quiet until they asked him a question. He agreed – for two weeks. Then he shut them up and took over again.

In my first year there were eight entering graduate students, and, under the Maslow culture, we were the last students who were allowed to choose our own topic for our dissertations. (Thereafter, graduate students were assigned to help faculty with faculty research.) I chose suicide. Since no one in the department knew anything about suicide, I was assigned to a new faculty member, Melvin Schnall, who was a developmental psychologist.

The psychology department, led by Ricardo Morant as chairperson, had three groups: experimental psychologists, humanistic psychologists and clinicians, and the three groups did not seem to get along. However, in my three years there, I got to know and to learn the theories of three major figures in the field. There was Maslow, of course, and in my second year George Kelly came. In addition, for one semester each year, Walter Toman, an Austrian psychoanalyst, came and taught his modern, rational version of Freudian theory. Maslow thought that a major, but ignored, theorist of personality was Andras Angyal, and Maslow convinced me that Angyal had, indeed, proposed a powerful theory of personality. (Eugenia Hanfman and Richard Jones of the psychology department edited Angyal's essays for a book on his theory.)

These three theorists (Angyal, Kelly and Toman) are the underpinnings of my own theory of personality, and I am still amazed that this small department of psychology should have introduced me to three major theories of the mind.

What was the mood of the graduate students? We had our own lounge in the department and a few offices for the senior graduate students. The mood was one of gaiety and support. We had a pet gerbil in the lounge named Harry Harlow.

On one occasion, a new faculty member (Harvey London) was showing his undergraduate students the film of Stanley Milgram's obedience research, but he would not let the graduate students in to view it. We called Maslow at home to protest, and Harvey had to let us in.

As for supporting one another, we were allowed to attend dissertation defenses and ask questions and, on one occasion a graduate student (Myron Arons) asked a question. We took him aside and told him that the unwritten rule was that, even though we were allowed to, graduate students never asked questions.

An interesting contrast came when George Kelly arrived. He brought his best graduate student with him (Jack Adams-Webber), and he developed some followers in the department. Early in his seminar, Kelly said that he wanted to split the seminar into two groups – one for him and one against him. This was despite Kelly's own theoretical construct of *constructive alternativism*. His supporters argued him out of this because, they said, they wanted to hear the critical questions and his response to them.

Maslow was on my dissertation committee. I went to his office where he was lying on his couch. I sat in his chair at his desk and waited. "David, I would never write a dissertation like this." My stomach churned. "But who I am to tell you how to write *your* dissertation? I think you will be a good psychologist. Are you happy with it?" "Yes, Dr. Maslow," I replied. "If you're happy with it, then I am," and he signed the form. Maslow was true to his theory. I was allowed to self-actualize rather than help him actualize his potential.

What of my path through the psychology department? I continued my research on rats (eleven published papers by the end of 1967). The department did not offer a master's degree. You were given an M.A. if they threw you out. I told them that I wanted an honest M.A. I applied for an M.A., much to their dismay. I had published articles in *Psychological Bulletin* (on the fear of death) and some research articles on the fear of death, and so the department awarded me an M.A. on that topic, using my published papers.

My thesis advisor (Schnall) had a rule passed that graduate students could not publish without faculty permission. I went to Ricardo Morant, the chairperson, and protested. I had published far more than Schnall, and so he also should have to get approval. Morant calmed me down, and we found a way around the rule, basically letting me ignore it.

The result was that Schnall threw me out, and I asked James Klee to be my thesis advisor even though it was already written. He agreed.

My thesis defense was scheduled while Schnall was teaching, and the thesis defense of Schnall's student was scheduled while Klee was teaching. And no graduate student asked me any questions at my defense!

Myron Arons, a graduate student starting in 1965, left with only a master's degree and persuaded James Klee to join the faculty at West Georgia College in 1970. (Feigenbaum has his dates wrong here.) Klee died in 1996. Maslow retired in 1969 and moved to California where he died in 1970. Kelly died in 1967. Schnall was denied tenure and became a child psychologist in Massachusetts.

Feigenbaum is correct in that the psychology department at Brandeis shows no interest in its history. Several years ago, I tried to get their help in tracing all the graduate students from the early years. They declined to help. Of my group of eight, three finished their PhDs – myself, John Benjafield and Clair Golomb.

A final note. At one point, as an angry young man, I said to Marianne Simmel (a professor in the psychology department) that Maslow had produced only one good idea in his life. "David, if you have one good idea, you'll be very happy," she said.

I am still waiting for that one good idea.

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