

## The X Club and the Secret Ring: Lessons on How Behavior Analysis Can Take Over Psychology

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In 1864 Thomas Huxley and eight fellow scientists formed a secret organization called the X Club, dedicated to the promotion of Darwinian theory and naturalistic science. Its members active for almost 40 years, the X Club acted as the “power behind the throne” with respect to the governance of the Royal Society and other British scientific groups. In 1914 Sigmund Freud formed the Secret Ring with six other psychoanalysts, dedicated to the covert promotion of their field and to the removal of impediments (persons and policies) to the acceptance of psychoanalysis. After over 20 years of existence, the Secret Ring disbanded, having succeeded in its mission. It is suggested that behavior analysis should adopt a similar arrangement, whereby a group of distinguished scholars quietly but systematically promotes the persons and practices of our field within psychology, with respect to awards, elected and appointed office, and governance.

*Key words:* history of science, history of psychology, behavior analysis

The fate of behavior analysis within psychology is a topic occupying an increasing amount of our professional literature. Regardless of whether one takes a pessimistic (Epstein, 1984; Koch, 1964) or optimistic (Thyer, 1991; Wyatt, Hawkins, & Davis, 1986) view of the present-day status of behavior analysis, we can agree that much remains to be accomplished to ensure that psychology adopts a natural-science perspective to the study of comportment.

Developments that began in the 19th century may prove to be instructive to behavior analysts. Two major conceptual paradigms—Darwinism and Freudianism (or more charitably, evolution via natural selection and psychoanalysis)—emerged, which, following decades of struggle, became by the early 20th century the major, if not dominant, theoretical orientations within biology and psychology. How did this come about? Do these two examples, whose successes behavior analysis

would no doubt like to emulate, provide any lessons for contemporary strategies and tactics to advance our field within psychology? The balance of this paper will provide a look at a little-known feature shared by both Darwinism and Freudianism—the existence of a covert circle of disciples dedicated to the behind-the-scenes advocacy of their perspectives within the disciplinary mainstream. Everything described in this paper is true and is a matter of historical record. The fact that most contemporary biologists and psychologists are unaware of the existence of the invisible hands guiding the adoption of Darwinian evolutionary theory and Freudian psychoanalysis speaks to the success of these inner circles in getting their views adopted while keeping their activities largely hidden. This paper will conclude with an examination of the possible lessons from the history of science that are pertinent to the advancement of behavior analysis within psychology.

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### THE X CLUB

On November 3, 1864, the British scientist Thomas Huxley gathered a group of nine friends and scientific colleagues into a semisecretive organiza-

TABLE 1

**Members of the X-Club and the Major Offices of the Royal Society They Held Between 1853 and 1907**

	Office (total years)
George Busk (naturalist)	Council (5) <sup>a</sup>
Edward Franklin (chemistry)	Secretary (4) Council (12)
Thomas Hirst (mathematics)	Council (6)
Joseph Hooker (botany)	President (5) Council (6)
Thomas Huxley (biology)	President (2) Secretary (9) Council (9)
Sir John Lubbock (anthropology)	Council (6)
William Spottiswood (mathematics)	President (5) Treasurer (8) Council (4)
John Tyndall (anthropology)	Council (6)
Herbert Spencer (journalism, biology)	Not a fellow of the Society

Source: Barton (1990, p. 60).

<sup>a</sup> Average Council term was 2 years.

tion they labeled the X Club (X standing for nothing). The X Club members represented a diverse group of scientific disciplines (see Table 1). Eight of the nine members were Fellows of the Royal Society of London, perhaps the preeminent and certainly the longest lived scientific organization in the world. It is a mark of the Royal Society's wisdom that B. F. Skinner presented a paper before this august body in 1964 (on November 19, very close to the centenary of the founding of the X Club!), titled "The Technology of Teaching," a subject familiar to many readers of this journal (Skinner, 1968, p. vii).

The purposes of the X Club were diverse but related, and included the following:

1. The promotion of serious empirical research.

2. The promotion of a purely naturalistic worldview, with a corresponding diminution of the influence of religion in guiding science.

3. The reduction of the role of aristocratic patronage and administration in science.

4. The promotion of pure science, rather than applied research guided by commercial or utilitarian purposes.

5. The promotion of the infrastructure of science within education and government.

At the time Huxley founded the X Club, science was to a great extent conducted by amateurs and dilettantes who lacked professional training, were patronized by the aristocracy, and were strongly influenced by the clergy. In part stimulated by the hostile reception accorded Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, members of the X Club believed that religion and aristocracy exerted a stifling influence on the conduct of science. Ruth Barton (1976, 1990; see also Jensen, 1970; MacLeod, 1970), whose work I have heavily drawn upon in preparing this paper, described the agenda of the X Club as follows:

Its members were engaged in developing and propagating naturalistic accounts of physical and human phenomena. They opposed all suggestions that there were supernatural interventions in the natural order and any attempts to constrain scientific investigations with theologically determined boundaries. (Barton, 1990, p. 56)

The members of the X Club were united by preexisting friendships and their early acceptance of the doctrine of evolution via natural selection as outlined by Darwin. Indeed, Desmond and Moore (1991) describe the group as "a sort of masonic Darwinian lodge, invisible to outsiders: a dining club devoted to science 'untrammelled' by any theology" (p. 526). In existence for almost 40 years, the X Club exerted a seminal influence on British science; its positive effects are felt to this day. Little known at the time, one young contemporary scientist described the group at the height of its power (in 1873) as follows:

This "X Club" that I dined with last Thursday, is the most powerful scientific coterie in England. . . . They have dictated the affairs of the British Association (for the Advancement of Science) for three years past. Hooker is Presi-

dent of the Royal Society; Huxley is Secretary; and Spottiswood is Treasurer. So you see they are an influential set of chaps. (Barton, 1990, p. 58)

Apart from the Royal Society, members of the X Club also provided an invisible hand guiding the directions of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, the Linnean Society, and other major scientific groups. Francis Galton, an early British psychologist (and Darwin's cousin), was closely affiliated with the X Club, although not a member. Galton is known for his application of Darwinian evolutionary theory to account for individual differences in intelligence, as a pioneer in mental testing, as the developer of a correlation coefficient, and for his systematic use of questionnaires to gather psychological data.

The agenda of the X Club can be grouped into the domains of professional scholarship, politics, and philanthropy. Their activities in each of these will be described below.

### *Scholarship*

As one of their first acts, X Club members used their influence to arrange for Darwin to be awarded the Royal Society's Copley Medal, "the ancient olive crown" of the Royal Society (Desmond & Moore, 1991, p. 526). The Copley Medal could be seen as an imprimatur, or mark of acceptance, by mainstream science of Darwin's work (even though the testimonial specifically excluded *The Origin of Species* as one of the factors going into the award, much to Huxley's disgust). The X Club was very active in nominating talented scientists (not excluding themselves) for future Copley and Royal Medals and for awards granted by other scientific groups.

X Club members were instrumental in founding the British science journal *Nature*, which exists to this day as one of the world's most prestigious periodicals. *Nature* has been characterized as the X Club's "permanent press outlet" (Desmond & Moore, 1991, p.

572), being used to favorably review each other's books and other books worthy of promotion as consistent with the goals of the X Club. Several other journals were founded by the X Club (*The Reader*, the *Natural History Review*), which, although not as enduring as *Nature*, served as additional outlets to promote the views of X Club members. Huxley, for example, responded to a papal encyclical that was critical of Darwin with a slashing rejoinder published in *The Reader* (Desmond & Moore, 1991, pp. 526–527). The X Club also helped to improve the refereeing system used by scientific journals in the selection of articles for publication.

The X Club members also helped to develop curricula and policy for science education in England and served on royal commissions and as scientific examiners (Barton, 1990, p. 58). They promoted a system of government grants for scientific research and for scientific libraries and equipment, the systematic collection of scientific data by government agencies (such as the navy), and supported the appointments of their colleagues to various academic positions maintained by the state. In general, anything that promoted the dignity and status of science was grist for the X Club mill.

### *Political*

X Club members had an ambitious plan to secretly govern the Royal Society and other scientific organizations. Typically, the X Club met for dinner at a London club shortly before the monthly meetings of the Society to discuss current developments in the body scientific. They held at least one special meeting a year, usually in early October, devoted to the forthcoming nominations for Society officers. Then, with their privately prepared slate in hand, they attended the Society meetings in late October or early November when officers were elected (Hall, 1984, p. 112), put forth their nominations, lobbied, and supported one another's

candidates. In between meetings of the Royal Society, X Club members also corresponded by mail concerning nominations and elections (Barton, 1990, p. 59).

After getting themselves well established on the Royal Society Council, successful maneuverings lead to Spottiswood's election as treasurer in 1871, a post he occupied for 8 consecutive years. By 1873, with Spottiswood as treasurer, Huxley as secretary, and Busk, Hirst, and Hooker as members of Council, the X Club managed to get Hooker elected president of the Royal Society, a post he held for 5 consecutive years, followed by Spottiswood's 5 years and Huxley's 2 years—12 straight years of X Club members serving as president! Between 1870 and 1882, there were at least three members of the X Club on the Council of the Royal Society. During a 40-year period, X Club members were elected to the Royal Society Council on 92 occasions (Barton, 1990, p. 59). These events should not be construed as self-serving. Members' concern was the advancement of science, not persons, except to the extent that the election of persons for various offices directly led to the promotion of the X Club agenda. Many leading British scientists knowingly and unknowingly benefited from X Club support.

National politics were a sideline for the X Club. One area in which they were active was in moderating the antivivisection movement. The X Club successfully promoted legislation permitting animal experimentation under license by inspectors (one of whom, Busk, was an X Club member) (Hall, 1984, p. 172), thus helping to prevent cruelty to animals while permitting legitimate scientific research. In another area of national politics, as president of the Royal Society, Spottiswood (prompted by psychologist Francis Galton) arranged for Darwin to be buried in Westminster Abbey in 1882, a signal honor that represented official recognition of his contributions by the nation.

### *Philanthropy*

For the X Club, philanthropic concerns were an area of lesser endeavor than scholarly or political issues. Nevertheless, these arenas sometimes overlapped. The X Club successfully promoted a publication fund to defray costs of scientific publishing, and an endowment to subsidize the Royal Society dues for poorer members. In 1873 X Club members raised over 2,000 pounds to assist an overworked and exhausted Huxley with medical care (Desmond & Moore, 1991, p. 598).

### *Summary*

The X Club was amazingly successful in its behind-the-scenes maneuvering of the governance of the Royal Society and in accomplishing its original objectives. With passage of time, the X Club grew smaller, because replacements were not sought for those who died. Moreover, its *raison d'être* had diminished. Members of the nobility were no longer elected heads of scientific societies, irrespective of their scientific attainments, wealthy amateurs were no longer elected to the Royal Society, a naturalistic worldview had superseded a teleological and supernatural one, and Britain witnessed the rise of a legitimate scientific meritocracy.

Moreover, the X Club had largely retained its cloak of secrecy. To all outward appearances, nominations and elections to scientific office and recognition within the Royal Society and other organizations proceeded through established democratic procedures. Rules and procedures were adhered to, yet the X Club agenda was attained. Barton accurately labeled the X Club the "Cabinet of Science" (Barton, 1990, p. 67), albeit an invisible one.

## **THE SECRET RING**

In Vienna in 1913, Sigmund Freud formally established a group called the Secret Committee, also known as the Secret Ring because each member had

TABLE 2

**Members of The Secret Ring and Selected Contributions**

	Selected contributions
Karl Abraham (physician)	Founding President of the Berlin Psychoanalytic Society President, International Psychoanalytic Association
Max Eitingon (physician)	President, International Psychoanalytic Association Facilitated the establishment of the U.S. <i>Psychoanalytic Quarterly</i> Founded the Palestinian (later Israeli) Psychoanalytic Society
Sandor Ferenczi (physician)	Founder of the Hungarian Psychoanalytic Society President, International Psychoanalytic Association Coeditor of <i>International Zeitschrift für arztliche Psychoanalyse</i>
Ernest Jones (physician)	Founder of the British Psycho-Analytical Society President, International Psychoanalytic Association Translated many of Freud's works into English Coeditor of <i>International Zeitschrift für arztliche Psychoanalyse</i> Cofounder of the Verlag (publishing house)
Otto Rank (D. Lit.)	Cofounder of the Verlag (publishing house) Coeditor of the <i>Internationale Zeitschrift für arztliche Psychoanalyse</i> Editor of <i>Imago</i>
Hanns Sachs (lawyer)	"Silent partner" Editor of <i>Imago</i>
Anton von Freund (brewer)	"Adjunct member" Established philanthropic von Freund Foundation

been given a special ring of friendship by Freud. Each gold ring was constructed around an ancient intaglio (a small engraved gem) from Freud's personal collection of antiquities. Freud's own ring was incised with the head of Jupiter ("the god ruling over all other gods and all people"; Guralnik, 1980, p. 765). In Grosskurth's words, "The rings were pledges of eternal union, symbolizing the allegiance of a band or brothers to their symbolic father, Freud the ring-giver" (1991, p. 57).

The Secret Ring was formed to ensure the perpetuation of psychoanalysis. Freud was the unchallenged leader of the group, which was composed of the leading practitioners of psychoanalysis: Max Eitingon, Otto Rank, Karl Abraham, Sandor Ferenczi, Ernst Jones, and Hanns Sachs (see Table 2). Ernst Jones, in a series of letters, described the Secret Ring as follows:

The idea of a united small body, designed like the Paladins of Charlemagne, to guard the kingdom and policy of their master, was the product of my own romanticism. (Grosskurth, 1991, p. 47)

and

My wish has long been to form a ring round you of men who will deal with the opposition while you progress with the work itself; and the outlook for such an ideal situation seems highly promising. (Grosskurth, 1991, p. 64)

Freud's reaction?

What took hold of my imagination immediately is your idea of a secret council composed of the best and most trustworthy among our men to take care of the further development of and defend the cause against personalities and accidents when I am no more. I daresay it would make living and dying easier for me if I know of such an association existing to watch over my creation. I know there is a boyish, perhaps romantic element too in this conception. (Grosskurth, 1991, p. 47)

and

Freud felt it necessary to gather about him a small group of henchmen in order to maintain the faith and to search out deviance. . . . The chief importance of the Committee is that . . . it established psychoanalysis on a firm international basis. (Grosskurth, 1991, p. 23)

This was needed. Psychoanalysis met with strenuous resistance from the medical and popular establishment. Freud was forced to resign from professional associations, was hindered in his appointment to academic rank, and was accused of being a dangerous quack. Lord Alfred Douglas (Oscar Wilde's former lover) was the head of the British Catholic Purity League, and he had sworn to uproot psychoanalysis in Great Britain. Ernst Jones was specifically targeted by Lord Douglas (the source of such animus is intriguing). Like the X Club, the activities of the Secret Ring may be categorized as scholarly, political, and philanthropic.

#### *Scholarly*

The foremost agenda of the Secret Ring was the promotion of psychoanalysis as a scholarly discipline and its acceptance as a science. To this end, ringbearers established a number of scholarly journals modeled after those employed in other accepted academic disciplines. Psychoanalytic societies were established in numerous countries and in major cities by Ring members and their associates. A regular program of national and international scientific congresses and conventions was maintained, largely guided by Secret Ring leadership. Ring members served as journal founders, editors, and manuscript reviewers, exercising the sword of psychoanalytic purity to root out deviations from Freudian-revealed truths in the journal publication system. In 1920 Jones and Rank founded the *Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag*, a psychoanalytic publishing house, thus providing an outlet for books and journals independent of the established system of publication. Certain personages (both within the Ring and without) had their interests promoted via accepted journal and book manu-

scripts, election to professional office, favorable book reviews in psychoanalytic journals, and recommendation for academic or clinical appointments, whereas other persons' reputations were disparaged and professional opportunities were deliberately hindered.

#### *Political*

Most of the political involvement of the Secret Ring occurred within the context of psychoanalytic societies and journals. For example, the choice of which country should serve as the venue for a particular international meeting was fraught with perils. Selection of Dr. A's country could be seen as a mark of Freud's favor of Dr. A, or as a sign of Freud's displeasure with Professor B, who lived in another country. Members of the Secret Ring sought to reinforce adherence to Freudian thought by contingently awarding the location of such scientific meetings. Sandor Ferenczi arranged for the Fifth International Psychoanalytic Congress to be held in the hall of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1918, a mark of acceptance of the emerging field by mainstream science.

Another example of the political agenda of the Secret Ring was their behind-the-scenes work to force Carl Jung to resign the presidency of the International Psychoanalytic Association in 1914, when the breach between Freud and Jung became too wide. Karl Abraham (ringbearer) was appointed in Jung's stead as interim president. Such manipulation went on for over 20 years.

#### *Philanthropic*

Individual members of the Secret Ring supported philanthropic causes related to psychoanalysis. Max Eitington financially supported a Berlin *Poliklinik* offering psychoanalytic therapy. Anton Von Freund, an "adjunct member" of the Secret Ring, was a Hungarian brewer who Freud treated after von Freund had a cancerous testicle surgically removed. Enamored

with the apparent power of psychoanalysis, von Freund became a benefactor to the movement, giving substantial sums to Freud, who used the money to subsidize lay analysis. Von Freund also established a privately funded foundation used to support an independent psychoanalytic publishing house. The von Freund Foundation also financially supported medical care for Hanns Sachs, a member of the Secret Ring.

### *Summary*

Internece rivalries took their toll on the membership of the Secret Ring, and by 1927 the group consisted of Freud, Eitingon, Ferenczi, Jones, Anna Freud, and Johann van Ophuijsen. At this point the group was effectively disbanded. Psychoanalysis was well established within medicine and psychology, and Freud's ill health precluded his exercising continuing leadership over the group.

### **LESSONS FOR BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS?**

What has been the point of this excursion into the history of science? The typical portrayal of the advancement of science is that of the triumph of truth over falsehood, ever more closely approximating a clearer understanding of nature. That this is done dispassionately and represents merit overcoming personal influence almost goes without saying. The history of the X Club and the Secret Ring provides clear evidence that this version is incorrect. The book *In Search of Excellence* (Peters & Waterman, 1982) describes how in the corporate world certain ideas emerge and come to fruition through the actions of a small number of individuals these authors describe as "champions," persons with an *idée fixe* that overcomes all obstacles in a relentless pursuit towards some end. Darwinian biology and positivist science had their champions in the X Club. Psychoanalysis had its champions in the membership of the Secret

Ring. Where are the champions of behavior analysis?

Do we remain wedded to the hope that through patient work, doing our research, publishing our results, and extending our purview into ever broader and more complicated areas of human activity, eventually the rest of the world (or at least the rest of psychology) will see the error of their mentalistic and teleological conceptualizations, abandon the search for mental way stations, and fall quiescently into the ranks of behavior analysts marching on to ideological victory? If so, the history of science tells us that this may not be the optimal strategy to promote the rapid and enduring acceptance of behavior analysis as the preeminent configuration of philosophy, experimental methodology, and subject matter within psychology. Ignaz Semmelweis proved that puerperal (childbed) fever was transmitted by physicians conducting vaginal examinations on their patients just after working in the autopsy room, and that maternal mortality could be greatly reduced by antiseptic measures (Slaughter, 1950). Yet it took decades before his findings were accepted by mainstream medicine, eventually persuaded by the much later work of Louis Pasteur. The cost in human suffering was immense between the demonstration of a functional relation between environmental contamination and human illness, the role of antisepsis in preventing disease, and the widespread adoption of these views. Perhaps Semmelweis needed his own Secret Ring?

One reviewer of this manuscript commented that the immense strength of contemporary economic contingencies surrounding the provision of health care services (managed care, treatment guidelines, insurance reimbursement policies, diagnostic related groups, pharmaceutical lobbying, etc.) has more to do with the lack of progress towards the development of psychology as a natural science than does an insufficiency of behind-the-scenes maneuvering by behavior analysts.

This may be true, but such a perspective seems to possess even fewer leverage points for effective action than the historical-political model being proposed here. So, to pursue possible parallels further, let us look at the American Psychological Association (APA), for example.

Each year, the APA solicits nominations for appointment to numerous committees, political, scientific, and applied; dozens of elective offices are available annually, as are scientific, practice, and service awards by the score that are offered by the APA itself and by the individual divisions. What is to prevent a small group of distinguished behavior analysts from developing a coherent plan to ensure that a talented behavior analyst is a viable candidate for each such administrative appointment, elected position, or meritorious award being given? The work would be immense, but in these days of electronic communication, faxes, and overnight express mail, it is surely not overwhelming. Perhaps an incremental approach would be in order. Target the APA scientific awards this year, scientific *and* practice awards next year, and so forth. When editorial vacancies are announced and nominations are sought, the group could submit the names of several well-qualified nominees at the same time, apparently from unconnected sponsors across the country. Once in place, behavior-analytic editors of APA journals could groom potential replacements by offering selected individuals opportunities to guest edit special issues, with such experience providing great leverage and positioning for a subsequent appointment as an editor of an APA journal. Our diverse field certainly does possess the talent to enable us to submit quality nominees for virtually every recognition, honor, appointment, or office available in the APA.

Apparently the APA governance structure is amenable to change by concerted but covert action. According to Hayes (1987, 1991, 1992), the last few years of the 1980s saw immense

shifts in APA governance caused by the coordinated action of practitioner interests, culminating in the election to the APA presidency of "a person with no significant scholarly accomplishments" (Hayes, 1991, p. 20). As Hayes describes it, "The same people and the same forces are systematically electing APA presidents today. No one who opposes the Practice Directorate or any of its major goals can be elected" (Hayes, 1991, p. 20). This all sounds disturbingly familiar. Is there a Secret Ring of *nonbehaviorists* out there? I do not know, and the existence of such has little bearing on the argument that we do need such a group to advance behavior analysis.

Now the possibility has not escaped me that a secret group of behavior analysts already exists, quietly pursuing the strategy outlined above, but that these distinguished but anonymous personages have not chosen to invite me to join their inner circle! If such is the case I am delighted. I wish you well in your work, and let me know if I can help in any way. If such a group does not yet exist, however, perhaps this article will be a stimulus to action. I have given some thought to the name of such group, and the Committee for the Advancement of Behavior Analysis suggests itself, because it yields the descriptively accurate acronym of CABAL.

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