

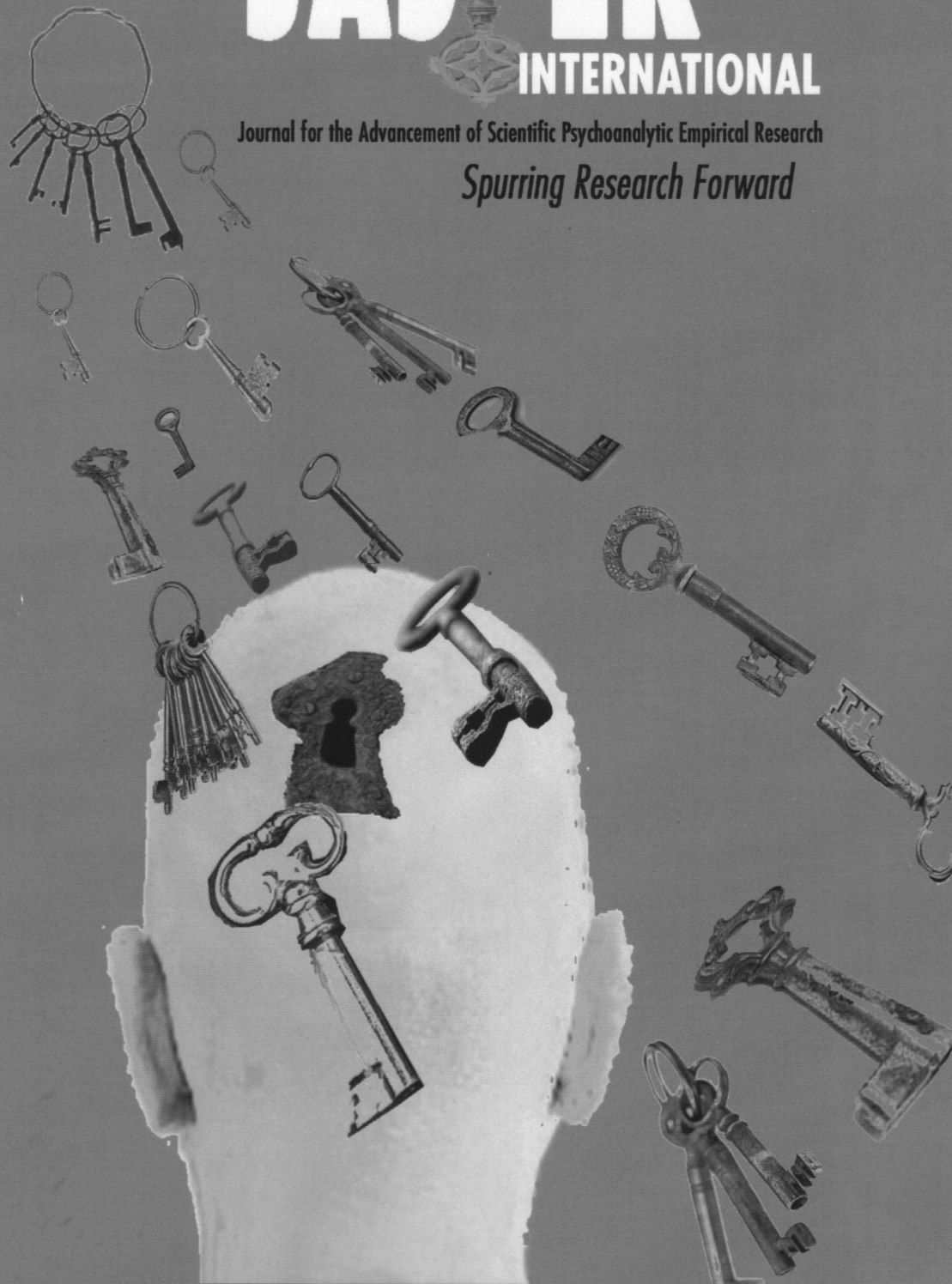
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The Scandal on Whiteness Theory in Psychoanalysis

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Abstract:

I discuss an international scandal that transpired after the publication of Donald Moss' controversial theory on Whiteness in the *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*. Moss' theory is illogical at best, uses racist rhetoric and emotional hyperbole that implicitly casts all white people into a homogenous pathological category, and makes universal statements that are not tenable, supported by empirical evidence, or true. He (a) essentializes all people based on race, (b) makes drives (*Triebe*) in infancy the locus of hate toward all non-white others based on differences in skin color alone (as if race could even be conceptualized as a social-political category by the infantile mind), (c) fails to take into account cognitive and moral development and familial/socialization/ cultural practices that undermine such broad-sweeping propositions, and (d) ignores racial, ethnic, and cultural contexts that inform our being in the world. Such

provocations are destructive to race relations that are currently tempestuous in our multicultural societies. This type of identity politics actually reinstalls and reinforces racist thinking and racialized categories into our social discourse and schemes of conceiving distributive justice that polarize groups even further rather than facilitate dialogue and reconciliation. It is in the spirit of scholarly critique that I offer this rejoinder in the hope that any tarnished misperceptions of the profession are remediated, as they do not represent the views of all psychoanalysts. Furthermore, JAPA should issue a public apology and allow open criticism, scholarly critique, and debate on the Moss paper.

Keywords: Whiteness, Racism, Antiracist Theory, Critical Race Theory, Identity Politics

There is a scandal that has recently developed in the world of psychoanalysis, and I want to tell you about it. Some would prefer to have it simply go away quietly, hush it up, or sweep it under the rug, but, organizational politics aside, I think it is best to confront such matters head-on rather than bury our heads in the sand, remain silent, deny it, blame the accusers, or worse, try to pulp it from the record by a spin doctor. Psychoanalysis already has an image problem, which now has become worse.

After reading the Abstract of Donald Moss' (2021) recent provocative and controversial paper, "On Having Whiteness," published in the *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, at first glance I thought this might be a joke, satire, or a hoax, like the Sokal affair, using some postmodern nonsense as argument; but when I saw that Moss is the Chair of the Program Committee of the

American Psychoanalytic Association, I realized it was not. And this inflammatory text has garnered international attention in the news and social media outlets largely condemning it as racist hate speech (Bandyopadhyay, 2021; Brown, 2021; Chasmar, 2021; Jackson, 2021; Leeman, 2021; Mulraney, 2021; Schrader, 2021; Wilford, 2021). As esteemed evolutionary biologist Jerry Coyne (2021) puts it,

it's a horrid, racist *gemisch* of obscurantist chest-beating in the guise of antiracism, ... a steaming pile of psychoanalytic scat. ... Second, the Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association has no credibility and, apparently, no standards. ... Imagine if this paper used any ethnicity other than "whiteness." It would not have been publishable, and the author would have been damned and demonized forever for racism.

A very damning indictment indeed, if not damaging to the profession, especially when the American Psychoanalytic Association is accused of promoting anti-white racism (Huff, 2021). Not only is Moss' essay viewed as a racist embarrassment by an Emeritus Professor from the University of Chicago, JAPA may have also suffered a serious if not irreparable blow to its credibility as a premier psychoanalytic journal. To make matters worse, the Editor of JAPA, Mitchell Wilson, has attempted to wash the scandal by not allowing responses to Moss' article that do not promote his version of the narrative he wants to control. Before I critique Moss, I want to tell you about the backdoor shenanigans that go on behind the scene, as it is most concerning to the integrity of psychoanalytic publishing and the greater issue of academic liberty.

I wrote a response to Moss' article as a Letter to the Editor, which Wilson wanted to chop in an attempt to downplay the disgrace he

has contributed to for publishing a non-peer reviewed article that has brought shame and castigation to the profession. Wilson essentially wanted me to say what he wanted said, to omit my own arguments, water down the controversy, and mention nothing of the journal, the American Psychoanalytic Association, or how psychoanalysis is being publicly perceived and denounced in international news and social media forums in the United States, Canada, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand, just to name a few. Since when does an Editor edit a letter to the editor, especially when the established protocol of the journal is to publish letters in response to an article and then allow the author to reply? I have not encountered this level of censorship before, as I find it an affront on free thought, and hence this is why I am offering this criticism. I cannot in good conscience allow someone else to tell me how to think or what I should say in print, as this violates the very premise, veracity, and honor of academic freedom. Not only do I believe Wilson is abusing his power as Editor by hegemonically wanting to silence a particular voice he finds irritating, as it does not support his view of reality, but this type of cronyism of publishing a colleague who serves as a program chair with the same organization I find most egregious, especially as he tries to protect his own ass over publishing a non-peer reviewed paper that created a scandal. He has not done us a favor by doing so. But the greater issue at stake here is allowing a free exchange of ideas, which Wilson is deliberately blocking. This exploitation of authority should not go unnoticed, as it affects us all.

Now back to Moss, where I offer this rejoinder in the hope that any tarnished misperceptions of the profession are remediated, as Moss does not represent the views of all psychoanalysts. I will let you be the judge of whether this critique lacks scholarship or deserves to be pulped.

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Moss' central thesis is that being white or having the properties of whiteness is a parasitic affliction that is inherently pathological, "a way of being" (p. 356) with "no cure," where hatred, epistemological entitlement, superiority, and the need to dominate all other non-white peoples based on difference and otherness is present "at birth" (p. 358), as it "infiltrates our drives early on" (p. 356) in "infancy" (p. 357). Although Moss offers a nebulous disclaimer that Whiteness is not the same as being phenotypically white, since Whiteness is an inherent property of being white, his distinction is unconvincing at best if not indefensible—as phenomenal properties cannot be independent from their ontological source, only the way in which they appear. For Moss they appear "as a condition one first acquires and then has—a malignant, parasitic-like condition to which 'white' people have a particular susceptibility" (pp. 355 & 356). He further states this condition is "foundational," hence essential and deterministic to a baby's sense of being, which is acquired after coming out of the womb instantiated as the pulsional desire to dominate, enslave, and exploit others without scruple. On face value, the claim is absurd.

Contrasting Whiteness with whiteness is an ontic distinction without ontological difference (as an ordinal property of a property) and is itself incitive. Whiteness is a synecdoche for racism, something Moss confusingly asserts is at once socially acquired, presumably through the attachment system, and inherent to white people as part of their embodied thrownness. Instead of using a parasitic *metaphor*, he concretizes it as if it were an infectious medical disease that is uniquely susceptible to whites when psychoanalysis has long identified prejudice to be a universal human proclivity.

It is important to note that Moss' claim is quite different from the claim that racism is institutional, structural, or societally systemic, hence based on (largely discredited) implicit bias research

(Church, 2020; Pluckrose & Church, 2020), which assumes implicit (unconscious and conscious) biases in individuals scale up in aggregate forms to systemic discrimination. Since drives are innate to our embodiment, Moss makes racism an a priori *inborn* capacity inherent to infantile development and personality formation, which is pathological from the very beginning of life by attributing causality to simply being born white. In other words, all white people are biologically condemned to be racist by virtue of being thrown into a white-skinned body with certain morphological features. Whether or not Moss considered the political implications of such generalizations is moot, for this is a tacit assumption most readers would reasonably conclude from his essay, as it has already spurred international outrage on social media forums and in the news, hence calling it a “racist and pseudo-scientific claim” (Lendrum, 2021).

Let us apply Moss’ (2021) assertion, passed-off as if it is a scientific fact, that “Whiteness . . . [is] a malignant, parasitic-like condition” (pp. 355 & 356) to other racialized groups:

Blackness is a malignant, parasitic-like condition that is foundational, generating characteristic ways of being in one’s body, in one’s mind, and in one’s world. Parasitic Blackness renders its hosts’ appetites voracious, insatiable, and perverse. These deformed appetites particularly target non-black peoples (quote adapted).

How does that make you feel? Are you offended? Sounds like racist cant, does it not? The language is inflammatory, abusive, hostile, and incites outrage. To continue on a gratuitous point, let us compare Moss’ proposition to a Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda book, *The Pestilential Miasma of the World*, published by Robert Ley (1944).

head of the German Labor Front, where he says: “*Who is the Jew? . . . We call destructive elements in nature parasites. . . . They devour their hosts. They fall like locusts on them, suck their life away, destroy them. . . . The Jew is such a parasite!*” (Bytwerk, 2004, translation, italics in original). What a lovely sentiment from a hating humanity. Here are just some of the troubling quotes from Moss’ paper:

Any infant is vulnerable to the parasite of Whiteness (p. 357).

Whiteness originates not in innocence but in entitlement. . . . We [whites] are *licensed at birth*, and therefore entitled, to find, capture, dissect, and overpower our targeted objects. As such, we will finally come to know and take dominion over them (p. 358, italics added).

The voice of Whiteness’s entitled dominion, inside or out, is firm and final: You [non-whites] are not a people; you are labor. You are not a person; you are a deviant. This is not desire; this is sickness. You are not in need; you are a failure. You are not your own; you are ours (p. 361).

And this one:

Color provides a universe of suitable objects, placed there like gifts, to be captured and crushed, all at a whim, like, for so many Gullivered children, ants are there to be crushed underfoot, butterflies to be locked in a jar. These crushed ants and suffocated butterflies—victims of a nearly cellular narcissism—offer Whiteness a platform on which to begin (p.361).

One might wonder why a white man would write such sensational things, if only to garner attention based on identity politics under the guise of appeasing diversity optics, yet it reads as subversive ideology at the expense of truth and rigorous scholarship. Whether Moss is indulging in identity politics is subject to debate, so I will leave that for others to decide, but it is an increasing phenomenon gathering popularity as psychoanalysis continues to adopt the postmodern turn (Gherovici, 2017; Layton, 2020; Mills, 2017, 2020) including *woke* sensibilities and critical race studies (Andrews, 2020; Frosh, 2013; George & Hook, 2021; Thakur, 2020; Tuhkanen, 2009) where Whiteness theory has become an offshoot.

As an academically trained philosopher and psychoanalyst, my reading of Moss' essay is that it is illogical at best, uses racist rhetoric and emotional hyperbole that implicitly casts all white people into a homogenous pathological category, and makes universal statements that are not tenable, supported by empirical evidence, or true. He (a) essentializes all people based on race, (b) makes drives (*Triebe*) in infancy the locus of hate toward all non-white others based on differences in skin color alone (as if race could even be conceptualized as a social-political category by the infantile mind), (c) fails to take into account cognitive and moral development and familial/socialization/cultural practices that undermine such broad-sweeping propositions, and (d) ignores racial, ethnic, and cultural contexts that inform our being in the world. For example, if a so-called white person were born and raised in India, Japan, or Brazil, let's say, the tables would be turned around, as per Moss' logic, whites would innately be bad objects for others to loathe and sadistically defile. How then can the universal proclamation of whiteness apply without taking

into account historicity, context, and social identity that informs a collective cultural ethos? Even the founder of postcolonial theory, Edward Said (1993), rejects such racial and cultural binaries when, reflecting on the hybridized nature of contemporary life, he writes:

Partly because of empire, all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogenous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic. . . . Far from being unitary or monolithic or autonomous things, cultures actually assume more “foreign“ elements, alterities, differences, than they consciously exclude. Who in India or Algeria today can confidently separate out the British or French component of the past from present actualities, and who in Britain or France can draw a clear circle around British London or French Paris that would exclude the impact of India and Algeria upon those two imperial cities (pp. xv, 15)?

Moss’ provocative essay appears to be based on ideological deference to far-left politics (postmodernism, critical race theory, whiteness studies) informing the need to address diversity imbalances and power differentials, but it has gone too far afield and is conceptually unsophisticated, if not dangerous incendiary incitement. Moreover, it is destructive to race relations that are currently tempestuous in our multicultural societies. This type of identity politics actually reinstalls and reinforces racist thinking and racialized categories into our social discourse and schemes of conceiving distributive justice that polarize groups even further rather than facilitate dialogue and reconciliation. Every deplorable sin in culture is now because of whiteness or white privilege/entitlement/supremacy, a rather pathetic reaction formation where “whitey” (see Horowitz, 1999) must pay for the sins of their

forefathers. More ridiculous is the premise that STEM subjects such as mathematics should be taught in school that they are historically based in white supremacy (Klainerman, 2021) despite the fact that major advances in the field have come from Egyptians, Babylonians, Greeks, Chinese, Indians, and Arabs—and whatever ethnicity a mathematician is they seem to get similar results.

Another recent deplorable event by a psychoanalyst was a lecture given by Aruna Khilanani at Yale University's School of Medicine who said: "There are no good apples out there. White people make my blood boil," further claiming that all "White people are out of their minds," are "psychopathic," and that she publicly confessed to having murderous "fantasies of unloading a revolver into the head of any white person that got in my way, burying their body, and wiping my bloody hands as I walked away relatively guiltless with a bounce in my step. Like I did the world a fucking favor (Time stamp: 7:17)" (Herzog, 2021; Shetty, 2021), a lecture that was widely denounced as hate speech and an incitement to violence (Gustavo, 2021; Malekoff, 2021). This kind of race-based vitriol is a symptomatic expression of extremist ideology that has gained wide currency both in the academy and broader society. This trend in our culture is the complete opposite of Martin Luther King's exhortation to judge people not on the color of their skin but on the content of their character (see Taibbi, 2020 contra DiAngelo, 2018). Now skin color is primary and "whiteness" is an index of debasement and pathology. Although I have no need to be a defender of being white and perpetuate the current polarization in race-relations, it is a further embarrassment to the profession when psychoanalysts now look like "racist psychobabble" buffoons who get on *Fox News* (Halon, 2021; Kudlow, 2021; *Sky News Australia*, 2021) bequeathed with the titles "Dr. KhilaWhiteMan" (Mercer, 2021) and "Dr. Woke" (*Human Events*, 2021).

The undisciplined use of racist tirades by professionals only foments more abhorrence, disgust, and hurt, especially when they are perceived by others as undermining the legitimacy of what we write in professional journals, which further sullies our image to the public, one already plagued by crisis and ideology (Mills, 2021; Richards, 2015). Furthermore, I find value judgements making universal statements based on skin color to be inane, if not immoral, socially divisive, and gravely irresponsible as they simply stoke more division and animus that already exist in our troubled racist times. How could the claim that the inherent or innate pathological disposition of “whiteness,” itself a social construction, applies to all people who are identified or labelled as white, let alone advance any constructive discussions about social justice, systemic power imbalances, cultural/ethnic differences, race matters, and their possible amelioration, where this is where the work lies?

There is current debate surrounding antiracist theory among the black intelligentsia, i.e., Adolph Reed (*New York Times*, 2020), Thomas Chatterton Williams (2015), Glenn Loury, John McWhorter (Loury & McWhorter, 2021; Perry, 2021; Weiss, 2021), and others (see Hughes, 2020, 2021; Riley & McWhorter, 2020), and we should be mindful that these ideas do not represent black people across the board, but I point to them as evidence of a diversity of views contested by black professionals themselves (Weinstein, 2020). Among these are critiques of Ibram X. Kendi’s (2019) *How to Be an Antiracist*, what Coleman Hughes (2019) calls “anti-intellectual” based on its empirical inaccuracies and ideological drift over rigorous data-based analysis, as well as against diversity consultants like Robin DiAngelo’s (2018) *White Fragility*, what John McWhorter (2020) refers to as a “racist tract,” which Jonathan Church (2018, 2020) further denounces as flawed science based on epistemologically dubious implicit bias

research generalized to society as a whole. These critics point out how a dehumanizing, supercilious condescension occurs when antiracist sentiment is used as an argument to dignify BIPOC when it in fact diminishes them as people, like the racism Moss attributes to all whites. All this does is, predictably, lead to provoked defensiveness, outrage, and white backlash, hence making social rifts, indignation, resentment, and animosity more pronounced.

Despite the fact that critical race theory (CRT) originated in legal studies examining how race and racism is correlated with institutional, structural, and systemic practices as well as other social justice inequities, these historical antecedents have been interpreted and subsumed within contemporary critiques in the phenomenology of culture that are predicated on “race” itself, or it would not have attracted such fervor from common citizens and U.S. legislators who have introduced proposed bills and have already passed laws that ban teaching CRT in elementary and secondary schools (Ali, 2021; Friedersdorf, 2021; Gerstmann, 2021; Greenfield, 2021; Iati, 2021; Wallace-Wells, 2021). Despite misinterpretations or distortions of CRT, not to mention the silly notion of making it illegal to teach or even talk about race in schools and society, which violates free speech amendments and academic freedom alike, the culture wars on the very concept of race have stoked deep resentments and social-political divisions surrounding identity. When identity is reduced to the color of one’s skin, we have devolved into a very ignoble economy of signifying difference based on splitting. Here we will never be able to reconcile opposites when we remain oppositional to one another.

The problem with treating white people *en masse* as a homogenous category is that it succumbs to a *reductio ad absurdum* argument that fails to take into account pluralities and a whole array of mutable differences in people mediated by other complex social factors, as

if whites as a social collective are responsible for the suffering of all non-whites. Given the historical fact that human civilization was largely built on slavery orchestrated by numerous races, nations, and ethnicities before white imperialism, the focus on parasitic colonial white supremacy as determinate ontological oppression in contemporary society neglects the most egregious problems with universalizing race in the most totalizing ways. This pseudo-reasoning is not only a category mistake, it is a prejudicial ideology based on the bankrupt circular premise that claims (implicitly or explicitly) that all whites oppress alterity by virtue of being white, hence an obtuse causally reductive proposition, itself a racist belief—nothing short of bigotry. If “race“ is used as a dog whistle to condemn one group while condoning another based on skin color alone, then we have an inherent contradiction or antimony based on the paralogism of pitting one identity against another in the service of identity politics that will meet with no resolve. This will only produce vehement resistance, reproach, and retaliatory rebuke by the targeted group under assault.

People speaking on behalf of a whole category of peoples, such as race, ethnicity, or skin color, fail to recognize the infantilization, if not frank racism, in such attempts to universalize representations of a whole class of social collectives, as if every individual could be represented by a generic generalization. How can you represent them? To assume that you can is to already reduce them to being an object or thing that devolves into classification alone. How could such totalizing claims/universal representations be empirically valid? By making such sweeping generalizations about whites, Moss is also inviting people to adopt and attribute his views of whites by non-whites, which is not accurate nor fair-minded for him to impose on any group of peoples.

In my book *The Ontology of Prejudice* (Mills & Polanowski, 1997; also see Mills, 1998), I was one of the first contemporary psychologists to address the notion of universal racism based on unconscious predisposition, but provide ethical arguments for why we (as humanity) must transcend this primitive form of thinking based on a simple economy of identity and difference. It pains me to witness the growing split and social rupture I anticipated 25 years ago when I wrote that book. People should be called out when they violate a humanistic collective ethos, especially when it potentially justifies and leads to retaliatory racism, such as we are currently witnessing with the rise of anti-Semitism and anti-Asian hate crimes, as it perpetuates more disdain and a perverse, distorted logic directed toward alterity as the evil Other (Mills, 2019a,b), when this type of mentality is under the sway of unconscious ideology looking for an emotional whipping boy to pillory regardless of what skin color, ethnicity, or (trans)gendered subject is pointing the finger.

It is my understanding that Moss has received threats as well as the organizations he is affiliated with, which is most unfortunate, but not surprising. Given that JAPA published a racist piece under the guise of antiracist sensibility, no wonder why people would get worked up and there would be counterattacks on social media. When racist sentiments are disseminated in professional public space, liberally minded people on the left as well as the conservative right get pissed off, especially those who take offense at being labelled white racists.

Not only Moss, but the reputation of the journal, the Association, and the greater image of psychoanalysis is now under scrutiny. Given this scandal has gone viral, there is no use trying to cover it up or dress it up in new garb intended to dismiss or placate dissent. The worse possible thing to do is to try to deny the racist overtones of the paper through a pompous justification, patronizing excuse, or redirecting

shift to focus blame on aggressive critics or threats from others as if the journal did nothing wrong. Nor should they try to conceal the deed by manipulating the APsaA's presence on the web, and act like other "crazies" out there are attacking them—like the Tucker Carlson's and David Duke's of the world. This will only look like a public relations ploy in order to save face and redirect culpability. The Editor made *argaux pas* and should not have allowed such an incendiary text to be published without undergoing a blind review process, as such gaffes and racist remarks would have been prevented from appearing in their current form. Because the paper cannot be retracted, JAPA should issue a public apology and allow open criticism, scholarly critique, debate on the Moss paper, and the greater social issues that are at stake, rather than trying to whitewash it, pun intended.

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