

# Toward an Interdisciplinary Field of Hate Studies: Developing a Framework

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## I. THE RELEVANCE OF HATE STUDIES

In the last volume of the *Journal of Hate Studies*, Ken Stern of the American Jewish Committee (AJC) wrote an article addressing the need for what he calls an interdisciplinary field of hate studies. For too long, he argued, academics have studied “hate”<sup>1</sup> in isolation. A social psychologist may have approached the subject looking to study the relationship between an individual hater and the hate group to which he belongs; a political scientist or economist might have studied how economic instability or political disenfranchisement contributed to the behavior of some racist or anti-Semitic. To put it simply, academics from a variety of disciplines have the resources to examine why people hate, but very few (if any) have had the opportunity to participate in a broader dialogue that includes a plurality of voices. A unified field of hate studies would provide a more complete picture of what hate looks like, why it looks the way it does, and finally (and perhaps most importantly) what we can do to help combat it.

The chief strength of this field of hate studies is that it would somehow represent a synergistic whole that encompasses more than a mere sum of its academic parts. By enlisting academics and others with specific expertise, we can do what the interdisciplinary model is designed for: break down the overarching subject of hate (more on a definition later), analyze every constituent subject and related topic therein, and reassemble these various analyses by searching for continuities and connections among them. As Stern has pointed out, the most important process in asking and eventually answering the relevant questions about hate is to create “a framework in which we can address” such questions.<sup>2</sup>

We must now begin to define the framework for hate studies and, in doing so, to help clarify why an interdisciplinary field is the preferred framework for dealing with hatred. The most obvious place to start this examination is with semantics: What is hate? How are we defining it? And the question that is on everyone’s mind: How can we *ever* define hate? In a sense, it is impossible to answer any of these questions but the last one. Though Stern and others have proposed excellent working definitions of hate, it might be best here to begin from a different standpoint altogether. We need not define what hate specifically means so much as how we can

“position it,” to use Kathleen Blee’s phrase.<sup>3</sup> The idea behind a field of hate studies is that we are free to amass as many definitions of hate as we like, as long as we keep ourselves from straying too far afield. Hate is an emotion, yes, but we are primarily interested in what it motivates individuals or groups of people to do to one another. And unfortunately, there is an infinite supply of case studies in hatred.

First and foremost, creating a field of hate studies will facilitate sustained and concentrated interest in studying hate—in gathering case studies, in thinking abstractly and theoretically about hate (its causes and effects), and in solidifying definitions of hate that are useful and up-to-date. There is a tendency to define hate with examples, which is helpful (and certainly understandable), but only to a point; we live in a world with an ever-expanding population capable of all sorts of hatred, bigotry, and persecution. A decade ago, for instance, anti-Americanism and Islamophobia would hardly have been considered relevant in any study of hatred (or for that matter, politics). So what we need is an approach to hate that works on two levels simultaneously—the empirical (i.e. case studies) and the theoretical. Helpful definitions of hate will come only from the dynamic interplay between the empirical and the theoretical—which brings us to the second benefit of creating a field of hate studies.

Questions that loom large in any discussion of a new academic discipline are: Why add it? What unique perspective would this new discipline afford us? To begin with, the study of hate as a concept is nothing new. A number of academic disciplines already deal with studying hatred, if not in the abstract, at least in the form of political, sociological, anthropological, historical, or literary examples. What *is* original, however, in the creation of hate studies is that it will not only unify a variety of different subjects, but will also integrate the theoretical and the empirical aspects of these subjects in a number of compelling ways.

To address the interplay between the theoretical and empirical, hate studies can involve both academicians and non-academic practitioners—politicians, human rights advocates, law enforcement officials, and so forth.<sup>4</sup> In this sense, a field of hate studies serves two purposes: it is an academic discipline (that can equip students with a particular body of knowledge, a sort of literacy in the subject) on the one hand, and a virtual think tank (for policy making) on the other.

One rather important issue remains in the discussion of hate studies and its viability, and that is how we will organize the study: what concepts we shall look into and through which lenses. In short, how can we create a framework within which to study hate?

## II. WHAT A FRAMEWORK REALLY MEANS

The goal of the interdisciplinary approach is to find commonalities in various fields in order to produce continuities and better insights concerning a given subject. With hate studies, we must be able to show exactly how a unified field will help us learn or synthesize new insights about hate.

What is especially interesting with hate studies is the way in which we can draw the various disciplines together. Typically, each discipline's contribution to the interdisciplinary field is clear-cut and, in a sense, dictates the concept studied. For example, studying African-American music begins with the study of music and then works more specifically toward a study of African-American music. We are oriented from the general (the discipline, music) to the specific (African-American music), and eventually to the hyper-specific (rap music, jazz, hip-hop, etc.). In the hate studies model, we can work, as it were, from the inside-out—thinking first about the specific concept we want to explore, and then about how that concept might “link up” with other concepts within the field. So although a standard interdisciplinary approach may be to select the fields and subject areas with potential contributions to the study of our topic, our hate studies model operates differently; we shall begin with the concepts we want to study, and only then—after we have defined a framework this way—will we assign specific fields to contribute the relevant analysis. As an example, let us look at a topic like self-hate.

Take (a) self-hate (experienced by a victim of hate) and (b) the identity crisis (if we can call it that) experienced by a member of a given hate-group. Ordinarily, a study would investigate these two concepts separately, treating concept (a) as one specific to the object of hate and concept (b) as one specific to the subject of hate. With a unified field of hate studies we could make a more detailed connection. We could link concepts (a) and (b) through the notion of assimilation. The member of a hate group may hate in order to conform to the in-group (to stay assimilated), and a self-hating victim may punish himself as a way of internalizing his struggle to assimilate an identity dictated by the dominant culture. We now must provide the “interdisciplinary route/itinerary”—in other words how we are going to move from concept (a) to concept (b) and then, critically, to a synthesis (ab). We might begin with psychoanalytic theory to study self-hate; history to index various incidents of self-hate that would prove useful as case studies; sociology to contextualize such self-hate; psychology to identify the characteristics belonging to the self-hating minority and the assimilative group-hater; and so on.

The idea behind nearly every academic discipline is to keep the theoretical and empirical—the abstract and the concrete—entwined so that think-

ers can use abstract models to explain real-world scenarios and, of course, vice versa, to use examples from the world as springboards for thinking deeply about a concept. Hate studies not only affords us the opportunity to work critically as thinkers, but also promises to keep our work practically oriented. So long as there is hate in the world, there will be a concerted and determined effort to study, diagnose, and combat it.

### III. HATE STUDIES: AN ORGANIZATION-SYNTHESIS

Ken Stern initiated the first step in creating a field of hate studies; he outlined the unique contributions of different disciplines by discussing why and how these disciplines would enhance our study of hate. The fields Stern envisioned included history, psychology, social psychology, sociology, religion, and political science—subjects that seem especially compatible in an interdisciplinary approach.<sup>5</sup> If we are to fully realize the perspectives and contributions of these subjects, our next step must be to define the actual concepts that will comprise our theoretical framework, allowing us to organize the disciplines in a useful way.

#### A. *Defining Hate in Terms of Subject and Object, the Hater and Victim*

The most common conclusion among social scientists regarding an individual's or group's capacity to hate an "other" is that such hate hinges on a threefold process: the objectification, dehumanization, and demonization of a particular person based on his/her race, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, gender, and so forth. This triad—objectification, dehumanization, and demonization—is a prominent topic in a variety of disciplines, and to parse its relevance to hate studies, we must approach it against the backdrop of hater as subject and "hated" or victim as object.

##### 1. A Little on the Subject

T.W. Adorno, in his oft-cited *Authoritarian Personality*, argues that hatred is more about the hating subject than the hated object.<sup>6</sup> His suggestion has shaped a body of sociological literature dealing primarily (almost exclusively) with the subject—that is, the hater—in hate paradigms. Who is he—culturally, economically, philosophically, educationally? And how does his background make him more or less inclined to hate a particular object? Studying the subject is, of course, only one element in assessing why people hate and how they do so. Sociologist Kathleen Blee has insisted that to understand hate completely, we must study it as both an individual and a social phenomenon. She fears that studying hate is somehow treated as an

inquiry into either the hating individual or the politics of a group, but rarely as an inquiry into both simultaneously. Her call, and one we should take very seriously, is to look at the complete picture, “positioning hate” in a context that treats bigotry as a subject for psychologists and sociologists alike.

Others have studied the hater-subject from another perspective entirely, examining the role dehumanization plays among subjects and objects (victims). In *Prophets of Deceit: A Study of the Techniques of the American Agitator*, Leo Lowenthal and Norbert Guterman treat the idea of dehumanization in different terms altogether.<sup>7</sup> They write of “distance”—the distance between subject and object literally and figuratively. Most interesting about their work is that they invite us to compare the distance erected between hater and hated to the distance between a so called agitator<sup>8</sup> and his followers. The idea, for Lowenthal and Guterman, goes something like this. An agitator or leader of a hate group gains his power and authority by browbeating his listeners—not dialoguing or discussing with them, but talking at them—“breaking them down” and desensitizing them to their own humanity. We can see how this process, whether intended or not, serves as preparation for the eventual dehumanization of a victim. In fact, the similarities in how leaders of some hate groups recruit and condition their followers and how those followers, in turn, “hate” a given victim are staggering. Defining hate in terms of subject and object, hater and victim, will provide us with the opportunity to make connections like these, studying the subject in the context of (a) his individual psychology and (b) his relation to a group (whether that group involves other hating subjects or hated objects).

Inherent in the subject-object dichotomy are four related but more specific areas of investigation. They are: (1) Creating/Constructing an Other; (2) Motivations of Hate (from a theoretical standpoint); (3) Hate and Action; and (4) Techniques and Strategies in Hate Dissemination.

## 2. Creating or Constructing an “Other”

In this context, we might enlist sociologists, social psychologists, political scientists, and historians to examine the dynamics of in-group and out-group relations. Social scientists and philosophers over the years have used different terms to describe what is essentially the “Us and Them” binary, the idea that there will always be a perceived “other” onto which the social or political in-group projects assumptions.

### 3. Hate Motivations from a Theoretical Standpoint

There are several theoretical models that describe why and how people are inclined to hate. Two in particular have been historically opposed. There is Adorno's "authoritarian personality" model, which explains an individual's capacity to hate in terms of the predispositions of his personality. An authoritarian personality, according to Adorno, is the type of person that gravitates toward hate and is capable of inciting others to do the same. On the other hand is Hannah Arendt's slightly more controversial "Banality of Evil" model.<sup>9</sup> According to Arendt, individuals hate because they are too weak to resist entrenched bigotry or mainstream sentiments. Her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem* describes, in Adolph Eichmann, not the barbaric killer we all imagined, but a simple, relatively average citizen who persecuted Jews in order to conform (literally to follow orders) to the popular Nazi logic of the 1930s and '40s. Of course, the work of Adorno and Arendt makes up only a small part of the analysis that exists on why people hate. There was the famous Robbers-Cave experiment conducted in the 1950s that demonstrated how arbitrarily individuals form identity groups and how quickly these individuals antagonize members of groups other than their own. Other experiments have shown that individuals will forge identities over things as trivial as coin flips – forming groups around who flips "heads" and who, "tails," at random. These experiments point to a phenomenon slightly more complex than the visions of Adorno and Arendt: that hate, as social psychologist James Waller explains, is a natural human inclination—a fundamental and unavoidable part of the human experience.<sup>10</sup>

### 4. Hate and Action

With expertise in the philosophy of emotions, Aharon Ben Ze'ev—currently the President of Haifa University—has explored the paradox of hate: that while a hater may have specific goals for the eradication of a certain victim, the hater rarely manages to carry out his ultimate plan successfully. Ben Ze'ev encourages us to think about the relationship between hate and action.<sup>11</sup> What are the stated goals of a given hate group? Are these goals ultimately realizable? And on a political note: Might a group benefit from the irresolution of its goals?<sup>12</sup> Bound up in these questions are, of course, even more intricate ones. Research shows that haters can sometimes (and in fact often do) hate in isolation—that is, without a tangible victim at all. White supremacists, for example, may subscribe to anti-Semitism as part of their accepted ideology even though many have rarely, if ever, encountered a Jew. We might, then, prefer to think of hate *as* a kind of action. Renae Cohen has advanced some interesting ideas on the matter,

positing that hate “is sometimes an emotion, sometimes an attitude, and sometimes a behavior. . .with two intersecting dimensions: passive to active, and thought to behavior.”<sup>13</sup> Her intuition gets at hatred as a composite of emotions, attitudes, and actions. Hatred *is* action, and yet it is also a posture and a mindset.

### 5. Techniques and Strategies in Hate Dissemination

There is an abundance of literature—historical, sociological, anthropological, and political – concerning how hateful ideologies gain traction in societies. The crux of this topic is the idea that hate is a process rather than a static attribute. Human beings are inclined to hate by their very nature. But when hate becomes the outgrowth or the linchpin of ideology, individual haters participate in a process, conditioning themselves and others to hate specific groups of people in prescribed ways.<sup>14</sup>

#### B. *Questions of Identity*

An examination of identity—what it means and implies—is central in the study of hate.

When hate becomes a part of someone’s identity, that person cannot help but define himself (if only in part) in terms of the group he hates. The belief structure of any bigot is contingent upon having a victim available to victimize, even if that victim remains an abstract concept. To put it crudely, what is a neo-Nazi without a Jew? A Klan member without an African-American? A hater is in a sense bound by the group or people he hates, since hating is a crucial part of his identity.

Conversely, the victim straddles two contradictory identities at once. In one sense, he is utterly anonymous, dehumanized, and stripped of any life aside from, say, his race or his religion. But at the same time, the victim confronts a profound sense of identity. In being targeted by a bigot, one’s identity is affirmed—peremptorily and violently, yes—but unequivocally nevertheless.

Identity is complex. We each have multiple identities at once, and these different identities do not always fit neatly or compactly together to form some overarching sense of self. That said, I do not want to oversimplify; studying identity, especially as it relates to hate, involves an almost impossible unweaving of what it means to be a citizen, a man or woman, a family member, a professional, an ideologue, a religious believer, someone with a race, with a history, or even someone without some of these attributes. And of course, circumstances complicate not only each layer of one’s identity, but also the relationships among them. Economic disempower-

ment is often cited as a defining situation in the evolution (or devolution) of one's identity, though there are of course many other events – at once personal and political, economic and abstract – that shape an individual's sense of self, and more importantly, the relation between that self and an other. For now, we can only sort out some questions. How does ideology impact identity? How does victimhood impact identity? How might self-hate emerge for a victim struggling to assimilate into the dominant culture? How might some—like Arendt's Eichmann—hate in order to assimilate mainstream beliefs? What types of institutions are pressuring individuals to assimilate? And what sorts of things are these institutions pressuring individuals to do in order to assimilate? This question in particular is of incalculable importance now with the rise of fundamentalism throughout the Middle East. (Whose approval are suicide bombers seeking? Whose encouragement are they getting?)

We might think of assimilation and its relation to nationalism or to religion, exploring the attitudes certain cultures or religious groups have about cultures and people other than their own. When Sartre wrote *Anti-Semite and Jew*, for example, being French meant, in large part, being anti-Semitic. French nationalism fostered a certain social permissiveness concerning hatred of the Jews; anti-Semites were tolerated, even condoned to an extent.

### C. *Self-Hate*

Self-hate has been remarkably underexplored within the context of hatred and bigotry. In a sense, we might think of self-hatred as an outgrowth of prejudice perpetuated by a victim as he struggles to assimilate the dominant culture. Psycho-analytic work is extensive on the subject, though there is a dearth of analysis from fields like literature or comparative literature, the performing arts, history, sociology – in short, fields with a lot to contribute in the form of case studies. It is impossible to discuss self-hate without psychologizing, and we can fully realize the potential of hate studies by using its framework to integrate existing psychoanalytic accounts with other inquiries into self-hate coming from literature. Again, our governing premise remains. We will begin with the concept—self-hate—and use the relevant disciplines (here psychology/psycho-analysis and literature) to present and explicate a case study. Who better an example of the self-hater than Philip Roth's infamous Alexander Portnoy, pioneer of the “complaint genre”—a genre that joins our interests in literature with our interests in psychology? Portnoy is a stereotype, yet he possesses such bewildering idiosyncrasies that he resists easy classification. He may be fictional but he is

real enough to some of us, the creation of a real live Jewish-American mind. Here he delivers a characteristic tirade:

[W]eep for your own pathetic selves, why don't you,  
and sucking on that sour grape of a religion! Jew Jew Jew Jew Jew Jew!  
It is coming out of my ears already, the saga of the suffering Jews!  
Do me a favor, my people, and stick your suffering heritage up your  
suffering ass—I happen also to be a human being!

*Portnoy's Complaint*<sup>15</sup>

With these words, Alexander Portnoy tries once and for all to sever ties to his people. "I happen also to be a human being," he exclaims, distancing himself (albeit in vain) from his Jewishness, an identity that he cannot evade whether he believes he can or not. Of course, Portnoy's excoriation of the Jews is laden with irony. For one, the entire book, as its very title reinforces, amounts to a long and extended complaint, in effect a sustained "weep[ing] for [Portnoy's] *own* pathetic self." Even as he expresses exasperation with his people for their "saga of suffering," he somehow conforms to (and participates in) the very stereotype he is so determined to antagonize. He is stuck, as it were, between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand is his Judaism, which he cannot help but resent for all the anxiety it causes him, and on the other a world of indistinguishable gentiles—the "All-American goy[s] . . . their fathers . . . never use double negatives, and their mothers the ladies with the kindly smiles and wonderful manners who say things like, 'I do believe, Mary, that we sold thirty-five cakes at the Bake Sale'" (145-6). Portnoy, it seems, is in an impossible position. He simply cannot reconcile his unconscious attachment (bordering on obsession) to the Jews with his competing impulse to be a human being first and a Jew second, if at all. Put simply, if he is a Jew, then he is at least someone with a distinct identity even though that identity exasperates him, whereas if he were a gentile, he would be (in his eyes at least) "just like everybody else," a severe blow to a narcissist like Portnoy.

Portnoy presents a fascinating case study in self-hatred because his deep psychological problems have observable literary effects, as though his writing represents an ongoing symptom of a classic paralysis in identity. Moreover, Roth (with his neurotic Portnoy) shows us the nexus of hate and culture played out in an individual who hates himself and his people for the apparent incompatibility between their cultural identity (Jewishness) and a more mainstream "American" (secular if not at least gentile) identity. Self-hate is a proxy for what is a profoundly cultural struggle, assimilation—a reconciliation of multiple (sometimes competing) components of one's identity. Portnoy is several people at once—a Jew, an American, an American Jew, a man, a son, a human being—and he cannot be happy until he

learns to manage his multiple identities, to reassemble them into his own unified personhood.

Our discussion of self-hatred extends beyond the confines of fiction, though Portnoy's neurosis may serve as a helpful model as we turn to Jewish Americans who use their Jewishness as a bid for credibility in their persistent attacks on Israel. Academics like Norman Finkelstein and Noam Chomsky suffer from a particularly insidious form of self-hate since they both use their identity as Jews to galvanize the far left behind what is nominally anti-Zionism but functionally anti-Semitism. The two demonstrate the reality and pervasiveness of self-hate on a scale that Roth may help us to anticipate but never fully comprehend. Finkelstein and Chomsky have catalyzed a new breed of anti-Semitism (if we can call the bigotry they practice "new") that stems from the explosive mixture of leftist ideology, academic obfuscation, and—above all—intense self-hatred.

#### IV. CONCLUSION: HATE AND CULTURE

A unified, interdisciplinary field of hate studies may be the most direct and effective way for us as intellectuals to understand what hate and culture truly mean and why their pairing is so inevitable. A field that draws from philosophy, psychology, anthropology, religion, political science, and literature (to name a few) provides us with the widest range of academic resources available to explore in full the cross-section of hate—its role in the human experience and its impact on cultural life. I hope the outline I've begun to sketch will further the genesis of a hate studies program, offering the rudiments of an organization that will work. I must stress, though, that if we are truly serious about the prospect of creating and eventually implementing a hate studies field, we must have a clearly defined framework in mind. We must continually reassess our goals, our expectations in achieving those goals, and our specific interests in terms of a course of study. We need to unify the discipline around something, and for us to do so, we will have to think deeply about what it is exactly that we want a variety of academic disciplines to investigate. If hate is a part of the human experience, we must marshal any and all the tools that can help us understand why such a common human emotion can bring about such destructive and catastrophic behavior.

## NOTES

1. I put *hate* in quotes because the word is very much open for definition. In fact, there has been a bit of contention over what exactly hate means and how best we might define it. For now, I would like to leave it as is—undefined—and I will return to the question of definition later.

2. Ken Stern, "Interdisciplinary Hate Studies," *Journal of Hate Studies* 3 (2004): 11.

3. Kathleen Blee, "Positioning Hate" (paper presented at the International Conference to Establish a Field of Hate Studies, Spokane, WA, 20 March 2004).

4. A fine example of such collaboration is ODIHR's—that is, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights—Law Enforcement Training Program for Combating Hate Crimes.

5. It is worth stressing that the disciplines at play need not be limited to the social sciences nor, for that matter, to the humanities. There are several literary examples that might elucidate the processes of objectification and dehumanization. Weisel's *Dawn*, Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Wright's *Native Son*, Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* come to mind, to name only a few. Scientists should not be excluded either. The field of neuroscience might even help us approach the topic of hate and action in a novel way, leading us to explore exactly how someone hates (chemically or physiologically).

6. See T.E. Adorno, E. Frenkel-Brunswick, D.J. Levinson, and R.N. Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality*. (1950). New York: Harper.

7. Leo Lowenthal and Norbert Guterman, *Prophets of Deceit: A Study of the Techniques of the American Agitator* (1949). New York: Harper.

8. The word *agitator*, for Lowenthal and Guterman, is nearly synonymous with *demagogue* here. We may treat the agitator as the leader of a hate group, someone who articulates and advocates an ideology of hate.

9. See Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963). New York: The Viking Press.

10. See James Waller, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing* (2002). New York: Oxford University Press.

11. See Aaron Ben Ze'ev, *The Subtlety of Emotions* (2000). Cambridge: MIT Press.

12. Ben Ze'ev looks at hate and action against the backdrop of a more particular comparison—the comparison between the goals of a hate group and those of a reform movement. The reform movement, Ben Ze'ev, explains, works more concertedly towards change, whereas a hate group may speak abstractly about the need for change but is never fully geared or prepared to enact such societal change.

13. Wayne Winborne and Renae Cohen, "Hate: A Concept Examined," The National Conference for Community and Justice, 1999 qtd. in Stern's "Interdisciplinary Hate Studies," *The Journal of Hate Studies* 3 (2004).

14. Kathleen Blee, in the aforementioned "Positioning Hate," speaks of this process when she describes the concept of hate "as accomplished." (Blee, "Positioning Hate," *Journal of Hate Studies* 3 [2004]: 98-100).

15. Philip Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint* (New York: Vintage International, 1994, p. 76). Henceforth all references to the novel will refer to this edition. (The page numbers cited correspond accordingly.)

