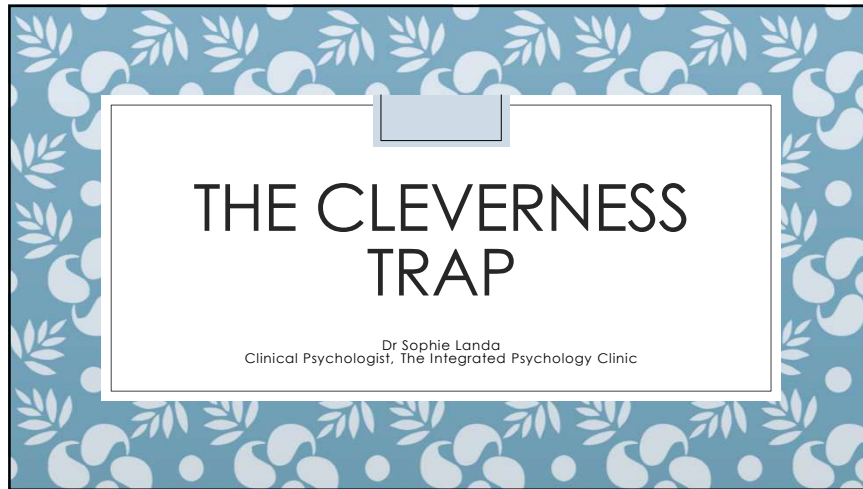
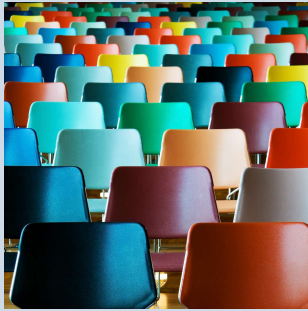




1

On cleverness

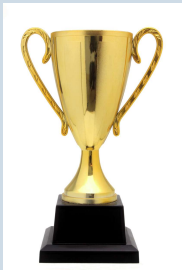
- Limmud values curiosity, openness, and willingness to learn
- The purpose of this talk is not to defend or deny the intelligence of anyone in this room, but to examine our *relationship* to it!



2

Are Jewish people unusually clever?

"Ashkenazi Jews in North America, Europe and elsewhere have been remarkably successful in their socio-economic and intellectual achievements. During the twentieth century, they have surpassed non-Jews in average earnings, socio-economic status, and in high level intellectual achievement indexed by the award of the Nobel prize, the Fields medal for mathematics, the Turing prize for computing, the Pulitzer prize for literature and similar distinctions." (Lynn, 2011)



3

Is there a biological basis?

- Lynn (2004): Jewish people have IQ advantage of 7.5 IQ points (based on assumptions linked to vocabulary)
- MacDonald (1994, p. 190): "taken together, the data suggest a mean IQ in the 117 range for Ashkenazi Jewish children, with a verbal IQ in the range of 125 and a performance IQ in the average range"
- Cochran, Hardy & Harpenden (2005, p13) on a suggested selective process for Ashkenazi Jews: "Verbal and mathematical talent helped medieval businessmen succeed, while spatio-visual abilities were irrelevant." They link this selective process to genetic conditions co-occurring with high IQ in a "bottleneck hypothesis"

How does it feel to hear all this?

4

Except... according to the Southern Poverty Law Centre

"Kevin MacDonald is the neo-Nazi movement's favorite academic."

... MacDonald also argues that anti-Semitism, far from being an irrational hatred for Jews, is a logical reaction to Jewish success in societies controlled by other ethnic or racial groups."



5

And...



"Richard Lynn is one of the most unapologetic and raw "scientific" racists operating today, arguing, among other things, that nations with high average IQs must subjugate or eliminate lower-IQ groups, which he associates with particular racial groups, in order to preserve their dominance."

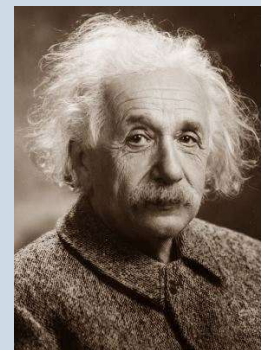
6

Why praise Jewish cleverness?

- To legitimise scientific racism using the idea of the model minority (as a counterbalance to the argument that black people are genetically inferior)
- To feed into antisemitic tropes: Jews are powerful, sly, physically weak
- To reinforce the idea of Jews as separate/different



7



"If my theory of relativity is proven correct, Germany will claim me as a German and France will declare that I am a citizen of the world. Should my theory prove untrue, France will say that I am a German and Germany will declare that I am a Jew."

8

Is there any truth to it?

- The immigrant effect: research indicates that first-generation immigrant youth have better educational outcomes and higher levels of parental engagement with education (e.g. Liu & White, 2018)
- Pew research found 2 in 10 Jews moved across national borders as of 2020
- More time in education is linked to higher IQ (Ritchie & Trucker-Drob, 2018)
- How much might our relationship to immigration and experience of in/stability determine our academic outcomes?

9

What does this mean for us?

There isn't a robust evidence base to suggest that Jewish people are inherently unusually clever

Studies on norms of academic success might be influenced by our high levels of migration

The narratives/tropes about Jewish intelligence are pervasive, ironically due to reasons that are unfavourable to us!

10

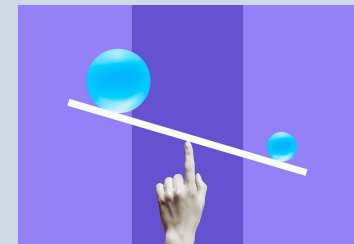
Finding balance

- Not everyone is destined for academic success for a wide range of reasons
 - High-IQ/"clever" individuals can still struggle in school
 - People whose strengths lie in skills not showcased in the classroom
- And yet most students in the UK endure a LOT of testing and at a younger age than any other country, so academic success gets extensive focus
 - It's very hard to escape the idea that success = academic achievement
 - Exiting the standard academic pathway usually requires students to struggle or fail
 - This is probably part of why our country is facing a crisis in child and adolescent mental health

11

What should we aim for?

- Our community may be predisposed to value academic success – and success isn't a bad thing!
- Neither cleverness nor academic success determine our value as a person
- Failure to live up to this may bring up a particular sense of threat
- We need to be aware of this when we (and our children) are navigating the balance between academic success and wellbeing/happiness



12

Our language matters

- Even when we are aiming for success, calling children "clever" and attributing their success to cleverness can backfire
- Praising young children for being smart may make them more likely to cheat, perhaps to protect this image (Zhao et al., 2017)
- Seeing traits such as intelligence or social skills as implicit rather than learned teaches children that they cannot grow and change



13

"an incremental versus entity theory shapes students'

- **goals** (whether they are eager to learn or instead care mostly about looking smart and, perhaps even more important, not looking dumb)
- **beliefs about effort** (whether effort is a key to success and growth or whether it is a signal that they lack natural talent)
- **attributions for their set-backs** (whether a setback means that they need to work harder and alter their strategies or whether it means they might be "dumb")
- **learning strategies in the face of setbacks** (whether they work harder or whether they give up, consider cheating, and/or become defensive)"

(Yeager & Dweck, 2012, p.314, formatting mine)

14

Alternatives to cleverness

- Growth mindset:
 - I can't do it... yet!
 - I need to practice that
 - Maybe I'll try another way
- Recognising our areas of relative strength and weakness, and learning how to ask for help, is a skill in itself
- Emotional intelligence
- Resilience



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Beyond cleverness

- To build self-esteem, children don't need us to tell them they're the best – they need us to *delight* in them
- When we praise our children, we are communicating to them about our own values



16

When we instinctively praise cleverness, what do we really mean?

- In babies:
 - "Child development is miraculous!"
 - "I love you so much."
 - "Wow, that was amazing!"
- In children:
 - "You're so kind."
 - "You're such a good friend."
 - "That was incredible problem-solving."
 - "You couldn't do that last time but you kept trying, I'm so proud of you!"



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To summarise

- The idea of the clever Jew is pervasive, but not necessarily for our benefit
- We live in a society that praises and values achievement, even if that doesn't make us happy
- Focussing on intelligence can actually get in the way of success
- Limmud values can give us pointers here!
 - Learning is for everyone
 - Connection
 - Participation



18

THANK YOU FOR COMING!

Any ideas or
questions?

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