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THE NEW BOOK BURNERS

Academic tribalism

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Abstract

In this chapter, we focus on understanding the rise of “book burning” in academia, as a manifestation of far left tribalism. We use the term “book burning” to refer primarily to the coerced retraction of articles in peer-reviewed academic journals at the hands of academic mobs, who produce no evidence of fraud or error in empirical data but are outraged at real or imagined violations of equalitarian beliefs and values. The first section reviews evidence regarding rises in and manifestations of academic tribalism and political extremism in general. The second focuses primarily on the tribalism of the left. This is because, as we document, academia not only skews massively left in the politics of its professors but, increasingly, this includes a large proportion of far-left extremists. We then review recent evidence indicating that equalitarianism – an extreme form of egalitarianism that accepts discrimination as the only source of certain group differences and demonizes those who propose alternatives – undergirds much academic extremism. Next, we review recent studies that have provided preliminary support for equalitarian hypotheses. The final section of the chapter reviews both data and real-world accounts of academics acting in aggressive, punitive, and censorious ways to demonize people and ideas that violate equalitarian values. We close by reviewing several cases of academic equalitarian tribalism that culminated in book burning.

There is more than one way to burn a book. And the world is full of people running about with lit matches.

—Ray Bradbury, 1979 edition of *Fahrenheit 451*.

Book burning has an over 2,000-year-old history. It is a political move in which a powerful group exploits a righteous claim to be a victim of injustice and is used to “reshape the balance of power and send a message” (Boissonneault, 2017). As such, it reflects a rise in tribalism that heralds authoritarianism and oppression. It is a means by which the powerful banish certain ideas or people.

Given that academic scientists are expected to produce new knowledge about the world, one might expect book burning to be anathema to researchers. This is not always the case. In this chapter, we review evidence and examples reflecting an embrace of modern manifestations of book burning among academics. We restrict most of our discussion to the United States because it is the country we know best, although some of our examples have international aspects. We use the term *book burning* as did Bradbury: both descriptively and metaphorically to include burning of actual books, but, especially within academia, to calls to retract, remove, and memory-hole published papers. In the present chapter, we focus on factors that have undergirded book burning for thousands of years: a sense of righteous victimization and a desire by the book burners to impose their values and norms on others.

This chapter contains three main sections. The first reviews some of the common manifestations of tribal or politically sectarian psychology. The second reviews evidence regarding equalitarianism, a form of extreme egalitarianism (Winegard & Winegard, 2018) on the political far left, which likely drives much of the support for book burning among academics. The final section reviews both scientific evidence and real-world events involving academic tribal demonization and book burning.

Tribalism

Regardless of whether one’s preferred metaphor is “tribalism” or “sectarianism,” evidence converges on the idea that, in the modern United States, people have sorted by politics, favor their political in-group, and increasingly despise, demonize, and delegitimize their opponents (Finkel et al., 2020; Iyengar et al., 2019). Tribalism is a metaphor that captures the fierce in-group loyalties that sometimes undergird political intergroup conflicts (see also Bar-Tal; Forgas; Kreko, this volume).

This perspective further argues that tribalism can be (and currently is in the United States) particularly acute in political conflicts and is characterized by intense in-group favoritism and ideological epistemology (Clark & Winegard, 2020). Intragroup processes incentivize in-group favoritism by rewarding loyal and committed group members and punishing disloyalty through ostracism. Ideological epistemology refers to the tendency for ideology to influence and distort perceptions of realities (see also Forgas, this volume). This occurs through processes such as the use of *a priori* beliefs to interpret

ambiguous information, confirmation bias, my-side bias, selective exposure to confirmatory information, and selective avoidance of disconfirming information (see also Crano & Gaffney; Krueger & Gruning, this volume).

Finkel et al. (2020) argued that a better term for these phenomena is “political sectarianism” because it does not require the kinship ties typically associated with tribalism. Instead, they argue that a better parallel is religious sectarianism, which typically involves a “strong faith in the moral correctness and superiority of one’s sect” (p. 533). We see *tribalism* and *political sectarianism* as synonyms and use them interchangeably herein.

Many consequences of political tribal psychology – hatred of the out-group, myopic certainty, moral righteousness, and cognitive distortions – characterize the extremes. In nationally representative samples, American partisans view the other side as holding more extreme views than they actually hold, and these biased perceptions are more extreme (and more erroneous) among extreme partisans (Westfall et al., 2015). The dramatic rise in affective polarization – hatred of one’s political opponents – stems at least in part from partisan identities (see Iyengar et al., 2019, for a review). This goes beyond mere disagreement or opposition; the more strongly people identify with a political party, the more they despise the opposing party (Iyengar et al., 2019).

Cognitive rigidity, and its corresponding “us versus them” dogmatic thinking, when accompanied by tribal-ideological attachments, can lead to a willingness to self-sacrifice and aggress against political out-groups (Moghaddam, 2018; Zmigrod et al., 2019). In many cases, individuals become radicalized due to a sense of grievance or injustice that they perceive as affecting their own group or groups they support, leading them to seek out like-minded individuals who share their views (Hogg et al., 2010). Once they become part of a radical group, individuals may be exposed to extremist narratives that further reinforce their “us versus them” worldview and justify aggression against out-groups (Moghaddam, 2018; see also Crano & Gaffney, this volume). Over time, these individuals may become more entrenched in their beliefs and less willing to consider alternative viewpoints, leading to further polarization and intergroup tensions. Tribalism begets tribalism.

The problems of tribalism, political sectarianism, polarization, dogmatism, zealotry, and extremism characterize both the left and the right (Zmigrod et al., 2019). The White supremacist Charlottesville riot of 2017, the January 6 Capitol insurrection, and widespread beliefs in conspiracy theories (QAnon, anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, stolen election conspiracies, etc.) are plausibly viewed as manifestations of rightwing tribalism. However, in this chapter, our focus is not on tribalism generally (see Finkel et al., 2020, for a review).

Our focus is on academic tribalism. We later review evidence that academia is now populated by people almost entirely left in their politics, with a

large minority on the far left. As such, most manifestations of tribal psychology among academics express left-wing politics. Therefore, before proceeding to discuss tribalism in academia, it is necessary to understand the tribal psychology of those on the left.

Equalitarian tribalism

One of the central components of far-left tribalism is equalitarianism: an extreme, phenomenologically unfalsifiable set of egalitarian beliefs (Winegard & Winegard, 2018). In the first empirical assessment of equalitarianism of which we are aware, Winegard et al. (2023) measured the construct by assessing endorsement of 18 items, including “The only reason there are differences between men and women is because society is sexist” (see also Baumeister, this volume) and “Racism is everywhere, even though people say they are not racist.” Their key findings across eight MTurk samples and a meta-analysis (including over 3,200 participants) were the following:

1. Liberalism (in the United States, progressivism) substantially correlated with equalitarianism, usually more than $r = .5$.
2. In six experiments, people evaluated the credibility of findings with equalitarian results (e.g., a test showed women outperforming men) or anti-equalitarian results (e.g., the same test showed men outperforming women). Their left-wing participants evaluated the same result as more credible when the results portrayed a victim group more favorably than a privileged group.
3. This latter finding held even though two studies showed that participants believed that the same standards should apply to evaluating such findings, regardless of which group was favored.
4. Conservatives showed the reverse pattern, albeit weaker: They evaluated the result as more credible when it portrayed a privileged group more favorably. Moderates generally showed no such biases.

One limitation of this research is that Winegard et al. (2023) did not assess whether their participants also rejected social and cultural explanations for inequality. Nonetheless, there is ample evidence for equalitarian rejection of *any* explanation other than discrimination for racial inequality from outside the lab. For example, when Wax and Alexander (2017) argued that differences in the adoption of “bourgeois values” explain many of the outcome differences between Black and White people in the U.S., the flood of denunciations from members of the U.S. academy was immediate (Haidt, 2017).

We also think that Winegard et al.’s (2023) claim that equalitarianism includes the belief that “society can, and should, make all groups equal in society” is too limited. Even their own results were that equalitarians favored

studies in which oppressed groups outperformed privileged groups, so it is possible that this reflects collective narcissism as much or more than a desire for equality (see Golec de Zavala, this volume). People on the progressive left rarely raise objections to pervasive academic achievement gaps favoring girls and women, gaps favoring Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC; such as ethnic Asians) over White people, and the like (see Honeycutt & Jussim, in press; see also Baumeister, this volume). Therefore, we adapt Win-egard et al.'s (2023) definition of equalitarianism to go beyond rejecting biologically based group differences and beyond “making all groups equal.” We define equalitarianism as involving three core beliefs and attitudes:

1. Discrimination in the present is the predominant reason for lower status or poorer outcomes among groups that equalitarians care about (e.g., people who are BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, women, etc.).
2. Support for coercive social justice. Society needs to be mobilized to institute laws, policies, and practices to indoctrinate into and impose equalitarian values on others, and to eliminate all processes (e.g., those involved in hiring, admissions, publication, grant awarding, etc.) in which groups deemed oppressed have worse outcomes.
3. *Equality* means equal outcomes across identity groups, and not equality of opportunity, equality before the law, equal application of standards of merit, or any other principle of “equality” (see also Forgas, this volume).

Understanding the role of equalitarianism in sectarian hostility within and beyond academia clearly requires more research. We therefore propose six hypotheses regarding how people high in equalitarian absolutism differ from others (and list papers that provide at least some preliminary support for each, adding an asterisk [*] when the evidence is about academics). Higher levels of equalitarian absolutism in academia should predict the following:

1. A greater willingness to demonize people for real or imagined prejudice against identity groups deemed deserving of special protections by the progressive left
2. A heightened sensitivity to “detecting” racism, sexism, oppression, and other bigotries. This includes seeing more “isms” (racism, sexism, etc.) and “phobias” (transphobia, Islamophobia, etc.) than seen by others and a greater willingness to conclude many social phenomena reflect isms (Jussim, 2022a), especially among one’s opponents (Bernstein et al., 2023).
3. An overestimation of manifestations of discrimination (McCaffree & Saide, 2021)
4. A greater willingness to engage in censorship of speech and science that is perceived as violating equalitarian norms on grounds that it is somehow “harmful” to marginalized groups, typically without feeling any onus for

- presenting evidence of such harms (Carlos et al., 2023; Kaufmann, 2021; Rausch et al., 2023)
5. Greater social vigilantism: a willingness to publicly shame and ostracize those who engage in expression seen as violating equalitarian values (Proulx et al., 2022)
 6. A willingness to violate basic and universal human rights, such as due process, for those accused of wrongdoing, if the wrongdoing includes allegations of expressions of prejudice or discrimination against some marginalized group

Left-wing authoritarianism

Historically, equalitarianism has sometimes manifested among far-left extremists. The prototypical case is communism, which implemented brutal totalitarian regimes wherever it gained power, in the name of producing greater equality. Thus, we now turn our attention to left-wing authoritarianism.

For a half-century, academics denied that there was a substantial endorsement of authoritarianism among the left in the democratic West (e.g., Altemeyer, 1996) or of its psychological underpinnings, such as dogmatism (Jost et al., 2003; see also Forgas, this volume). More recent research, however, has found ample evidence of left-wing authoritarianism (LWA; Conway et al., 2018; Costello et al., 2022). LWA is characterized by dogmatism, social vigilantism, prejudice against out-groups, antihierarchical aggression, and a willingness to censor one's opponents (see also Forgas, this volume).

We (Honeycutt et al., 2023) recently completed data collection and preliminary analysis for a project examining whether conventional liberalism and LWA predicted endorsement of virulently anti-American propaganda with antiracist themes. To do so, we exploited some of the ugliest anti-American propaganda from the Cold War. Soviet-era anti-American propaganda routinely denounced the United States as deeply racist. Sometimes, this was communicated with political cartoons, such as the Statue of Liberty hiding Ku Klux Klansmen (KKK; see the online supplement for all images and measures reported herein). To test the hypothesis that people high in LWA would be most likely to endorse these sorts of virulent images, we used a Qualtrics panel to conduct a U.S. survey ($n = 1,268$), with a sample matched to the population on gender, age, race, geographic region, and education.

Participants viewed and rated eight images. Four were Soviet anti-American propaganda images with antiracist themes. Two of these images used KKK imagery and two did not use KKK imagery yet were virulently anti-American/antiracist (e.g., a graphic image of a Black man lying in a pool of blood against the background of a U.S. city). We called the remaining

four images “humanistic” for short. Their provenance was not Soviet. Two of these images depicted labor movement themes, and two images depicted modern-day humanistic antiracist themes (e.g., racially diverse people working together).

In our survey, participants viewed the series of images and rated how true the message of the image is, how accurate the meaning of the image is, and whether the image captures reality in America. These three variables were highly correlated, and results were similar when analyzed separately; therefore, we only report results for the combined variable here (i.e., the average of true, accurate, and captured reality for all Soviet propaganda images). Henceforth, we refer to this variable as “endorsement” of the images.

Our primary prediction was that LWA would most strongly correlate with such endorsement (see supplement for preregistration). As predicted, LWA was strongly correlated with an endorsement of the Soviet anti-American antiracist image ($r = .50$, all standardized regression correlations reported herein greater than r , $\beta = .15$ are statistically significant at $p < .001$). In contrast, LWA was not correlated ($ps > .05$) with an endorsement of the humanistic antiracist images ($rs < .07$). People high in LWA were not broad-spectrum antiracists; they specifically embraced authoritarian anti-American anti-racism propaganda. This pattern was clearly driven by LWA rather than progressive liberalism per se (though they were correlated, $r = .39$). Even after controlling for liberalism/conservatism (in regression), LWA predicted endorsement of the Soviet anti-American antiracist images (standardized $\beta = .44$).

Progressive liberalism/conservatism did predict endorsement of the Soviet images but more weakly ($\beta = .17$). LWA (controlling for left/right political identity) did not predict endorsement of the labor and humanistic antiracist images. Although LWA did predict some endorsement of the labor images, these relationships were extremely small (standardized betas of about .1).

We also examined whether the LWA embrace of Soviet authoritarian propaganda extended to behavior. Participants were led to believe that they could vote to share one of the images on social media and that the researchers would do so with the image that received the most votes. Those who were higher on LWA were also more likely to select one of the Soviet images to be shared on social media ($r = .26$). LWA was also substantially higher among those who chose a Soviet image to share than among those who chose a humanistic image, $t(1265) = 9.37$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.13$.

These analyses supported the equalitarian demonization hypothesis. People higher in LWA much more strongly endorsed Soviet propaganda demonizing the United States in the name of antiracism. Progressive liberals did so as well but more weakly, albeit still statistically significantly. This sort of demonization of opponents is a central characteristic of political sectarianism.

Endorsement of Hitler's rhetoric applied to White people

Bernstein and Bleske-Rechek (2023) examined the extent to which modern American college students and college graduates (MTurk samples, total $n = 424$) would endorse Hitler's rhetoric if Whites or Blacks replaced references to Jews. An example is presented here (the others are in the supplement): *To achieve their goal, Whites proceed as follows: they creep up on the workers in order to win their confidence, pretending to have compassion.*

The main outcome assessed was how many participants agreed with at least one of the modified Hitler quotes. Of college student participants, 55% agreed with at least one Hitler quote when it was applied to White people. Endorsing the Hitler quote when referring to White people was significantly higher across the board. This was especially true for U.S. liberals, who also showed the highest overall endorsement (55% vs. <40% for moderates and conservatives) of the Hitler quote when applied to Whites. Bernstein and Bleske-Rechek (2023) found a very similar pattern of endorsement of the rhetoric in DiAngelo's *White Fragility* as was obtained for Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. Conservatives more often endorsed Hitler's rhetoric when applied to Blacks and Jews than did liberals, albeit at far lower levels than liberal endorsement when it applied to White people. Unfortunately, Bernstein and Bleske-Rechek (2023) did not assess LWA, so we do not know how much of this reflects LWA versus conventional liberalism. Nonetheless, like the results for the Soviet antiracist propaganda, these are consistent with equalitarian hypotheses regarding the demonization of White people.

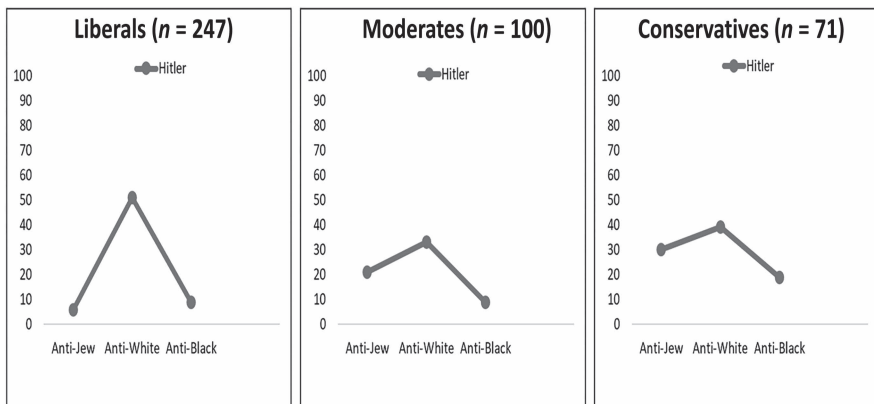


FIGURE 12.1 Percentage of people who “probably” or “definitely” agree with the statement

Academic tribalism and book burning

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The hard-left turn

Surveys of university faculty conducted over the past 50 years have consistently demonstrated that faculty are decidedly left-leaning, and this skew is growing (see Honeycutt & Jussim, 2020 for a review). However, even more relevant to the ideological climate on campus than such lopsided ratios is the increasing overrepresentation of the far left within the academy (compared to their single-digit representation in the population – see Honeycutt & Jussim, in press, for a review).

This change is demonstrated by comparing an older survey of faculty to a recent large-scale survey of faculty. Gross and Simmons (2014) recruited a national sample of faculty (in 2006) and, as a part of their questions, asked faculty how much they identified with various left-wing labels. Honeycutt (2022) asked similar questions to a large national sample of faculty (in 2022). Findings from the two surveys are shown in Table 12.1. More faculty identified as a part of the extreme Left or as activists in 2022, compared to 2006, and massively so, with 40% indicating that at least one of the labels described them at least moderately well. It is not just that the left skew is extreme: The extreme and activist left is massively overrepresented in academia.

The voracious White parasite

We know of no research that has directly assessed whether academics endorse Hitler's rhetoric as applied to White people, as found by Bernstein and Bleske-Rechek (2023). However, a paper titled "On Having Whiteness" (Moss, 2021, p. 355) begins thus:

Whiteness is a condition one first acquires and then one has – a malignant, parasitic-like condition to which "white" people have a particular

TABLE 12.1 Faculty Identifying as Radical, Political Activist, Marxist, or Socialist and Those Who Selected "At Least One of These"

	<i>Gross and Simmons (2014)</i>	<i>Honeycutt (2022)</i>
Radical	11.2%	17.2%
Activist	13.5%	22.3%
Marxist	3%	7.9%
Socialist	not asked	26%
Selected at least one*	unable to determine	40.4%

Source: Data from Honeycutt (2022).

* Percentage of faculty who indicated these labels described them at least moderately well (i.e., with a score of 4 or higher).

susceptibility. The condition is foundational, generating characteristic ways of being in one's body, in one's mind, and in one's world. Parasitic Whiteness renders its hosts' appetites voracious, insatiable, and perverse. These deformed appetites particularly target nonwhite peoples. Once established, these appetites are nearly impossible to eliminate.

In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler (1939, p. 16) wrote:

This pestilential adulteration of the blood, of which hundreds of thousands of our people take no account, is being systematically practised by the Jew to-day. Systematically these negroid parasites in our national body corrupt our innocent fair-haired girls and thus destroy something which can no longer be replaced in this world.

In evaluating Moss's (2021) statement, it is important to keep in mind that

1. we are not implying that anyone involved in the Moss article is a Nazi or sympathizes with Nazi views (including those set out in *Mein Kampf*) and that the comparison is purely in relation to the similarity between the language in the passages.
2. typically, to appear in a peer-reviewed journal, an editor and at least two reviewers must concur that the paper is of sufficiently high quality to warrant publication.
3. it received an award for writing about racism from the American Psychoanalytic Society (Karbelnig, 2022). That means elite members of this society thought highly enough of Moss's paper that it deserved a special honor.

This means that some unknown number of academics and elite members of the American Psychoanalytic Society evaluated Moss's article very positively. We leave it to readers to decide for themselves what to make of that.

Old right-wing and new left-wing McCarthyism

The McCarthy era is an infamous stain on the history of the United States. Anti-communist witch-hunts, led most famously, although not exclusively, by Senator McCarthy included firings and blacklistings of all sorts of people for real or imagined associations with communists (even real associations were not illegal). Although we could find no definitive tally of professors fired during the McCarthy Era (roughly 1947–1957), Schrecker (1980) reported that “over 100” academics testified before the House Un-American Activities Committee, many of whom were fired; she also documented several firings resulting from more local investigations. Nonetheless, Schrecker's (1980,

p. 326) sentiments about that era reverberate today: “In retrospect, it would be heartening to report that the academic community rose up in opposition to the firing of these people. But this did not happen.”

The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression maintains, and updates weekly, a Scholars Under Fire (SUF) database, which offers the most comprehensive documentation to date on attempts to sanction scholars for legally and contractually protected expression at American institutions of higher education. Data are collected from campus, local, and national news stories, as well as from other sources tracking similar incidents. The following numbers reflect those reported in the most recent SUF report (Frey & Stevens, 2023), but, because the database is updated weekly, new incidents are being regularly added.

Since 2000, 1,080 sanction attempts of American scholars have been documented, with nearly two thirds of them (698 of 1,080) resulting in some form of official sanction. This has included 225 terminations, with 60 of these involving tenured professors. SUF counts presented herein do not always add up to exactly 1,080 because the sources of sanction attempts are not always mutually exclusive and some tallies refer to sanction attempts from the left or right but exclude those that are not ideological.

The annual number of attempts to sanction scholars for expression has dramatically increased since 2000, with four sanction attempts documented in 2000, compared to 145 in 2022. In the first decade (2000–2009), 108 (10%) sanction attempts occurred; in the following decade (2010–2019), 463 (43%) occurred; and in the last 3 years (2020–2022), 509 (47%) occurred. Sanction attempts, to date, are more frequently initiated by individuals and groups from the political left of the scholar targeted than those from the political right of the scholar (560 of 1,080, or 52% from the left; 442 out of 1,080, or 41% from the right). Since 2000, 818 sanction attempts have been initiated by groups within the academy (299 from administrators, 177 from scholars, 89 from graduate students, and/or 402 from undergraduate students). Sanction attempts from within the academy have disproportionately been from the left of the scholar (506, compared to 239 from the right, 73 from neither). Conversely, most sanction attempts by groups outside of the academy – members of the public and/or politicians or government officials – tend to come from the right. Since 2000, there have been 147 sanction attempts initiated by groups off campus (77 from the public, 77 by politicians, and/or government officials, 7 by both). Of those 147, 118 came from the right of the scholar, 26 from the left, and 3 from neither.

The New McCarthyism has some differences and some similarities with the original. The original occurred amid the Second Red Scare and was led primarily by investigations occurring in the U.S. Senate (although it was always local administrators, rather than the Senate, who blacklisted or fired academics). In contrast, The New McCarthyism is occurring amid what is

plausibly described as a moral panic (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994; Rozado et al., 2023) over racism and other forms of oppression. Another difference is that, in the New McCarthyism, calls to punish are being instigated at the grassroots – often by social media mobs – and even meted out primarily by other academics (including administrators) rather than being led by the government. One similarity is that communist infiltration of the U.S. government in the 1940s and 1950s was a real problem (Haynes et al., 1999), as is prejudice today.

Book-burning peer-reviewed articles

In 2017 (retracted), Gilley published a paper in *Third World Quarterly* titled “The Case for Colonialism.” It was a narrative review without original data and accepted as a “viewpoint essay” (Gilley, 2021). This chapter does not critically evaluate or endorse the article. Indeed, colonialism included horrific events that Gilley (2018) did not discuss, such as Belgian mass murder in the Congo and French atrocities in Algeria. We present some of Gilley’s arguments to give some sense of the substance of the article rather than to express support for them. Gilley (2018) argued that, in some places, indigenous people flocked to colonial centers of control because life was better there (higher standards of living, less vulnerability to violence) and that some failed states today would benefit from freely choosing to invite a return of colonial administration. Because of widespread revulsion at colonialism, the morally panicked book-burning reaction was swift: Within days, thousands of academics signed two separate petitions calling for the article to be retracted. Gilley eventually removed it when he and the editors were subjected to what he considered to be credible death threats (Gilley, 2021).

The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE, n.d.) produces principles for retraction that focus entirely on data fraud, rampant data error, double publication, and plagiarism. Although no journals are bound by them unless they choose to be, our judgment is that they constitute the only justified scientific reasons for retracting an article. Neither “political opposition,” “moral revulsion or panics,” nor “thousands of offended academics call for retraction” are among its standards.

Another similar case involved Tomas Hudlicky who was an eminent chemistry professor who published a retrospective on a classic 30-year-old paper in the prominent journal, *Angewandte Chemie*. He criticized diversity efforts as a form of discrimination and as a rejection of merit-based hiring, called for a “masters and apprentice” model of training, and characterized Chinese academics as disproportionately publishing papers characterized by “fraud and improper publication practices” (Hudlicky, 1990, p. 5). Again, we are not evaluating the (de)merits of his arguments. Regardless, this was enough to get him and his paper denounced by hundreds of academics on social

media, many calling for retraction. Capitulating to the mob, the journal retracted the paper (Kramer, 2020). It can still be found online (Hudlicky, 2020). As with Gilley's article, there was no data fraud or error because there was no original data.

Another case is Gliske (2019, retracted) who published a new theory of gender dysphoria in the journal *ENeuro* involving social, biological, and behavioral components, which also ran afoul of an academic outrage mob. Within days, a petition obtained over 900 signatories calling for retraction (Roepke et al., 2019), claiming that the paper caused "harm" (with no evidence of such harms) and calling for changes to *ENeuro*'s review process to include activists as reviewers. *ENeuro* caved to the mob and retracted the paper. Again, there was no evidence of data fraud because the article was a review and had no original data.

Retraction Watch (2020) published a scathing criticism of the retraction that included this:

We can't comment on the merits of Gliske's paper as a work of science. But we do feel comfortable saying that the journal appears to have badly botched this case. It admitted reviewing Gliske's manuscript and accepting the article as a "theory/new concept" piece – one "not based on novel" data but which "serves to question existing dogma."

In other words, it can't fairly hide behind the claim – which it now seems to be making – that it had inadvertently accepted a poorly-done study.

In yet another case, in 2022, Klaus Fiedler, former editor of *Perspectives on Psychological Science* (*PoPS*), accepted five papers that were critical of a previously published paper (Roberts et al., 2020) advocating for greater racial diversity in psychological science. After some back and forth with Fiedler regarding publishing his reply to the critical commentaries, Roberts (2022) pulled his reply from consideration for publication and denounced Fiedler and the invited commentators as racists. Roberts (2022) reserved particular opprobrium for Jussim (2022b), who used a line from *Fiddler on the Roof* ("there was the time he sold him a horse but delivered a mule") as a metaphor for the disingenuousness of diversity discourse in psychology (wherein diversity is often characterized as being important in order to capture different perspectives, life experiences, and backgrounds, but what is often delivered is a narrow view of diversity as based exclusively on identity groups progressives view as deserving special benefits). Roberts (2022, p. 21) denounced Jussim (2022b) for "explicitly parallel[ing] people of color with mules . . . which is a well-documented racist trope used to dehumanize people of color." More details about this part of the story can be found in the supplement, including evidence that no such trope exists, even in the source Roberts (2022) cited for its existence.

Nonetheless, within days, an academic outrage mob organized on social media and gained almost 1,400 signatories for a petition (Ledgerwood et al., 2022) that called on *PoPS* to fire Fiedler and withdraw the papers criticizing Roberts et al. (2020). The specific phrasing called to make them “available only as supplementary online material for context.” Within days, Fiedler was ousted. The online supplement goes into more depth about the facts surrounding this call for book burning. Regardless, none of the papers violated COPE guidelines, and many of the arguments for retracting them as found on academic social media are, like the arguments for retracting the Hudlicky and Gliske papers, strange or just plain wrong (see the online supplement).

Furthermore, this incident raised academic book burning to a new level. Prior to this, we are not aware of academic mobs targeting more than a single article at a time. In contrast, this was an attempt at simultaneously book-burning an entire set of commentaries in one fell swoop. Inasmuch as book burning has, historically, been a harbinger of authoritarianism, it is instructive to compare what was called for in the *PoPS* open letter to historical authoritarian practices (see Table 12.2; Forgas, this volume). Although this stops well short of the worst abuses of totalitarian regimes, that even soft authoritarianism is ascendant in academia should be troubling for anyone committed to liberal democratic principles and free and open inquiry. These examples of book burning were consistent with our speculative hypotheses about the illiberal manifestations of equalitarianism: demonization of others for real or imagined prejudice; heightened sensitivity to detecting bigotries that may not be there; willingness to engage in censorship and violate due process, vigilantism (using social media to ostracize and punish those seen as violating equalitarian values).

Conclusion: the dangers of academic tribalism and book burning

In this chapter, we have reviewed evidence about the nature of tribalism/political sectarianism in general but with a special focus on academia. As illustrated here and in other chapters in this volume (e.g., Bar-Tal, Forgas, Baumeister, this volume), tribalism is corrosive to democratic norms and values. It is also corrosive to scientific rigor and the quest for truth (Clark; Fiedler, this volume). As such, academia in general and psychology in particular may be in the process of becoming one of the “dystopian groups” described in Crano and Gaffney (this volume).

Because the U.S. academy skews heavily to the left, including massive overrepresentation of the far left, we then focused on the nature of far-left tribalism. We reviewed recent evidence suggesting that *equalitarianism* often undergirds left-wing tribalism. We also reported results from recent surveys showing disturbing levels of endorsement of some of the most toxic rhetoric that emerged from the two most brutal totalitarian regimes of the

TABLE 12.2 Comparison of Authoritarian Practices and the *Perspectives on Psychological Science (PoPS)* Open Letter

<i>Practice</i>	<i>Authoritarian Regimes</i>	<i>PoPS Open Letter</i>
Denunciation, Demonization, Public Shaming	“In the Soviet Union, the practice of shaming during group meetings, known as <i>prorobotka</i> (literally “working over”), was one of the central rituals of public life.” Svetlana Stephenson (2021, p. 2), who lived it. See also Maoist “struggle sessions.”	“The racism, general editorial incompetence, and abuse of power enacted against one of our colleagues (detailed here) is atrocious . . .”
Rejection of Due Process	Kangaroo courts, common behind the Iron Curtain. Conviction w/o right to confront accusers, present a full defense, right to sufficient time to present a full defense. (Legal Dictionary, 2017)	“We demand [the] immediate . . . resignation of the current editor of <i>Perspectives on Psychological Science</i> .” Counterfactual: They could have demanded a <i>full investigation</i> , including granting his right to defend himself. They did not.
Motivation	Induce conformity to socialist morality, egalitarian Utopia, “dictatorship of the proletariat.”	Induce conformity to “anti-racist” morality, egalitarian Utopia, and “flip the script” (domination by the previously “marginalized”).
Re-education and Thought Reform	Mao, modern China (Uighurs)	“Conduct remedial training for all editors on editorial ethics and anti-racism.”
Censorship	Pervasive in authoritarian regimes (Soviet Union, China, Nazi Germany, & many more)	Call to “unaccept” the accepted commentaries on Roberts et al. (2020): “. . . with the 4 other articles . . . available only as supplementary material. ”
Confiscation of Private Property	Soviet Union (en masse), Nazi Germany (Jews)	“ available only as supplementary material ” Authors hold copyright to unpublished papers. Neither the Open Letter signatories nor <i>PoPS</i> has any right to make them available “only as supplementary materials.”

Note: Bold text in the third column highlights the specifically text in the Open Letter that constitutes the authoritarian practice indicated in the first column.

20th century – the Nazis and Soviet communists – *if* that rhetoric was framed as some form of social justice. In addition, we summarized both extensive data and several real-world incidents of demonization and book burning, each of which is plausibly interpretable as evidence for our equalitarian hypotheses.

Limitations and qualifications

The last few years have seen a spike in political violence in the United States (Charlottesville, the January 6 riots, and some Black Lives Matter protests; RealClearInvestigations, 2022). Whereas right-wing extremism played a role in right-wing violence, it is plausible that so has left-wing extremism in left-wing violence. Because work on left-wing extremism is in its infancy in social psychology, we need more research to better understand it.

Empirical research on equalitarian-based tribalism, both as a psychological phenomenon and its concomitant corrosive effects on scientific validity, is in its infancy. Although our review included at least some evidence that bears on the six equalitarian hypotheses articulated herein, more work is needed. However, the far-left skew of the academic social sciences means that it is not likely to blossom quickly and, instead, is likely to emerge as a small trickle. This is not because it lacks importance but because social scientists know they risk difficulties getting such work published, reputational damage for engaging in it, and, as shown here, punishment for producing such work.

Furthermore, we have not addressed every known case of academic book burning (see, e.g., Savolainen, 2023; Stevens et al., 2020, for more). Nonetheless, even all known cases are a tiny drop in the bucket of hundreds of thousands of academic papers published each year. Although one might be tempted to therefore dismiss the problem as trivial, we think this would be a mistake. Public shaming and punishment for wrongthink can have a chilling effect (Penney, 2021) on social science. Once it becomes widely known that certain conclusions commonly evoke mob calls for punishment, scholars may eschew presenting those conclusions, even when strong evidence supports them. Thus, the chilling effects on scholarship may go well beyond the small number of known cases of book burning.

Academic book burning undermines scientific credibility

The central argument of the present chapter is that the retraction of academic articles in response to morally panicked outrage mobs is the disturbing modern manifestation of book burning. The psychology of book burning may be an enduring feature of our tribal nature: demonizing one's opponents is central to the psychology of tribalism.

In addition to exacerbating tribal/sectarian intergroup hostilities, social pressure to *not* make certain claims corrupts the scientific literature (Clark, this volume; Joshi, 2022). The academic literature can become filled with articles with little or no reliable evidence (Fiedler, this volume; Honeycutt & Jussim, 2020, ~~in press~~; Joshi, 2022). Our review documents the punishment and book burning by which academic outrage mobs victimize many of those who question equalitarian ideologies in psychology. Although the evidence reviewed here only included “Whiteness,” colonialism, diversity, and transgender research, many other punishment attempts involve criticisms of microaggressions, implicit bias, stereotype threat, and “systemic racism” (see the SUF database). We conclude, therefore, that the academic literature on these topics is likely a distortion of the underlying realities.

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