

[Find a Therapist \(City or Zip\)](#)

Verified by Psychology Today



Jonathan D Moreno Ph.D  
Impromptu Man

#### EMBARRASSMENT

## Harvard's Experiment on the Unabomber, Class of '62

An odd footnote to Kaczynski's class reunion.

Posted May 25, 2012 | Reviewed by Matt Huston



#### KEY POINTS

- During Ted Kaczynski's sophomore year at Harvard in 1959, he was recruited for a psychological experiment that would last three years.
- The experiment Ted Kaczynski participated in at Harvard involved psychological torment and humiliation.
- For 18 years, using homemade explosive devices, Ted Kaczynski terrorized those he saw as agents of antihuman technology before his 1996 arrest.

The news that Ted Kaczynski was included in the 50th-anniversary alumni directory has roiled the class reunion. Better known via his *nom de plume* (or “*guerre*,” as he might have it) as the “Unabomber,” Kaczynski listed his occupation as “prisoner,” his awards as “eight life sentences” and his publication as his 2010 manifesto “Technological Slavery.” How and whether his responses to the class questionnaire should have been published has caused a lot of finger-pointing and reflection in Cambridge. But his crimes were no joke. Kaczynski's letter bombs killed three people and maimed another 23.

For all the reporting about the 50th-anniversary reunion dustup, an odd twist to the Harvard Unabomber story has not been mentioned: During Kaczynski's sophomore year at Harvard, in 1959, he was recruited for a psychological experiment that, unbeknownst to him, would last three years. The experiment involved psychological torment and humiliation, a story I include in my book *Mind Wars: Brain Research and the Military in the 21st Century*.

The Harvard study aimed at psychic deconstruction by humiliating undergraduates and thereby causing them to experience severe stress. Kaczynski's anti-technological fixation and his critique itself had some roots in the Harvard curriculum, which emphasized the supposed objectivity of science compared with the subjectivity of ethics. Before his arrest, he demanded that *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* publish a 35,000-word manifesto called “Industrial Society and Its Future,” a document that expressed his philosophy of science and culture.

human behavior that has to be modified to meet the needs of the system. The only way out is to destroy the fruits of industrialization, to promote the return of "WILD nature," in spite of the potentially negative consequences of doing so, he wrote.

ARTICLE CONTINUES AFTER ADVERTISEMENT

After Harvard, Kaczynski earned a Ph.D. in mathematics from the University of Michigan, then taught briefly at the University of California, Berkeley, after which he dropped out of society. For 18 years, using homemade explosive devices, he terrorized those he viewed as agents of antihuman technology, especially anyone associated with universities or airlines. By the time he was arrested at his remote Montana cabin in 1996, Kaczynski left behind a trail of mayhem.

The man who conducted the humiliation experiment was the brilliant and complex Harvard psychologist Henry A. Murray. Though his fame has diminished since his death, Murray was among the most important scientists of his day, the pioneer of personality tests that are now a routine part of industrial management and psychological assessments. It is not too much to say that contemporary psychology would be far different without his contributions. (Full disclosure: Murray was a close friend and colleague of my father's, but we knew nothing of this experiment.)

Henry Murray was a native New York blueblood who became a Boston Brahmin. He attended the finest schools, Groton and Harvard, and earned an M.D. from Columbia and a doctorate in biochemistry from Cambridge University. He dropped medicine and natural science for psychology after reading Carl Jung, publishing a landmark work in 1938 called *Explorations in Personality*. Before World War II, the U.S. government asked him to do a psychological profile of Hitler, and during the war, he helped the Office of Strategic Services (later to become the CIA) to assess its agents. In the 1950s, Murray's personality test, the thematic apperception test, or TAT, was used to screen Harvard students.

#### THE BASICS

[What Is Embarrassment?](#)

[Take our Self-Disclosure Test](#)

[Find a therapist near me](#)

Initially, Leary was beginning his research career on psychogenesis. In 1956, Leary returned from a vacation in Mexico with a suitcase full of magic mushrooms. Murray himself is said to have supervised psychoactive drug experiments, including Leary's. According to Alston Chase, author of *Harvard and the Unabomber*, Leary called Murray "the wizard of personality assessment who, as OSS chief psychologist, had monitored military experiments on brainwashing and sodium amytal interrogation."

These curious historical intersections remind us that, as William Faulkner put it in another context, "The past isn't dead; it's not even past."



ADVERTISEMENT

## About the Author



**Jonathan D. Moreno, Ph.D.**, is Professor Emeritus at the University of Pennsylvania.

Online: [Jonathan D. Moreno, UPenn](#), [LinkedIn](#)

## More from Jonathan D Moreno Ph.D

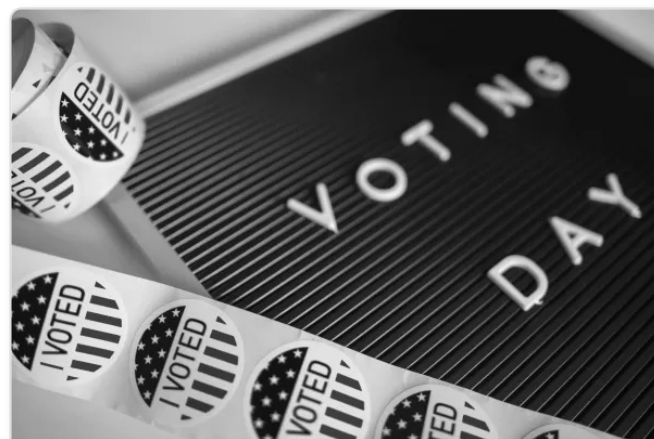


THERAPY

4 MIN READ

### The Psychodrama TV Show that Never Was

The founder of psychodrama, JL Moreno, had a keen interest in using new media.



POLITICS

3 MIN READ

### Obsessed About the Polls? Blame the Psychologists

The roots of today's polling industry lie in psychology and sociology.



PSYCHOPHARMACOLOGY 2 MIN READ

### What Are the Rules for Ethical Medication of Migrant Kids?

There is a well-established framework that the administration must follow.



PSYCHOANALYSIS 3 MIN READ

### The Passing of a Primal Therapist

The last of the "big personalities" of the 60s therapies.

## More from Psychology Today



EMBARRASSMENT 6 MIN READ

### The Psychology of Humiliation

What is humiliation and can it ever be justified?



EMBARRASSMENT 5 MIN READ

### 8 Things Not to Say to Someone Who's Estranged from a Parent

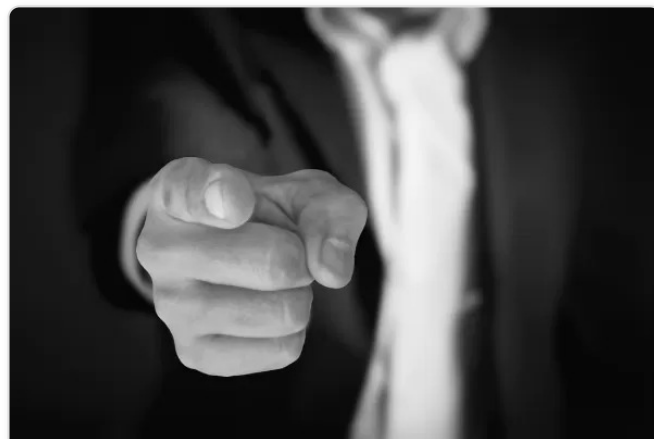
While adult child-parent estrangement isn't uncommon, it remains a taboo and can bring harsh judgment.



SELF TESTS 3 MIN

### Self-Disclosure Test

Are you sharing too much, or not enough?



EMBARRASSMENT 4 MIN READ

### The Psychology of Embarrassment, Shame, and Guilt

What is the difference between embarrassment, shame, and guilt?



EMBARRASSMENT

8 MIN READ

### Overcoming the Paralysis of Toxic Shame

Shame, when toxic, is a paralyzing global assessment of oneself as a person.



EMBARRASSMENT

4 MIN READ

### 9 Things You Need to Know About Shame

Shame and guilt are different emotions.



EMBARRASSMENT

7 MIN READ

### 10 Ways to Stop the Spiral of Self-Destructive Behaviors

Breaking self-destructive shame-based patterns requires taking deliberate, informed action—not just willpower, talking, or insight.



EMBARRASSMENT

4 MIN READ

### Recognizing the Pain of Emotional Invalidation

Emotional validation is the core of a healthy relationship.

#### Find a Therapist

Get the help you need from a therapist near you—a FREE service from Psychology Today.



Cities:

Atlanta, GA

Austin, TX

Baltimore, MD

Boston, MA

Chicago, IL

Columbus, OH

Dallas, TX

Denver, CO

Detroit, MI

Houston, TX

Indianapolis, IN

Jacksonville, FL

Las Vegas, NV

Los Angeles, CA

Louisville, KY

Memphis, TN

Miami, FL

Milwaukee, WI

Minneapolis, MN

Nashville, TN

Orlando, FL

Philadelphia, PA

Phoenix, AZ

Pittsburgh, PA

Portland, OR

Raleigh, NC

Sacramento, CA

Saint Louis, MO

San Antonio, TX

San Diego, CA

San Francisco, CA

San Jose, CA

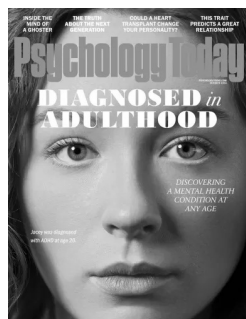
Seattle, WA

Tucson, AZ

Washington, DC

Are you a Therapist? Get Listed Today

### Recent Issues



Subscribe Today