

Franziska Baumgarten (1883 - 1970):
Early Female, Jewish, Peace Psychologist

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Although there are now numerous women psychologists, a majority in many jurisdictions, in the early 1900s, women psychologists, with PhDs, were relatively rare. Equally rare were psychologists committed to using their knowledge, skills, and status for purposes of promoting peace. Franziska Baumgarten (1883 - 1970) was an early female psychologist engaging herself in research to understand the psychological consequences of war and in writing about the underlying causes of war. She was also Jewish, surviving the Holocaust in Europe from the safety of Switzerland, but witnessing both the devastation of Nazism as well its endorsement by some psychologists.

Biographic Sketch

According to Bloch (2002), Baumgarten was born November 26, 1882, in Lodz, Poland, then a part of Russia. Her father was an industrialist manufacturing textiles. The family valued education, had a full library, and the children were privately tutored in addition to their academic schooling (Baumgarten, 1975). She began university studies in 1905, but changed universities frequently, enrolling and resigning from the University of Krakow and the University of Paris, as well as attending lectures in Bonn and Berlin (Bloch, 2002; phil.I Philos.Psychol. WS 1908 Baumgarten, n.d.). In 1908, she began doctoral studies in Zurich, completing her thesis in 1910 on "The Theory of Knowledge of Maine de Biran" who was a French

psychologist noted for arguing that perception is an active psychological process and that freedom is phenomenologically self-evident in acts of effort (Boas, 1925). It was in Berlin, in 1910, that she occasioned to hear Hugo Münsterberg's lectures on Industrial Psychology and decided to specialize in that field (Baumgarten, 1975; Harrington, 1997).

During World War I, Baumgarten was in Warsaw. Among her activities at that time was to translate into Polish, under the editorship of Florian Znaniecki, the child psychology text of Edouard Claparède (1918). At that period, Znaniecki was Poland's most renowned sociologist and Claparède was Switzerland's most renowned psychologist, showing their confidence in her abilities. Baumgarten (1941) would write a biography of Claparède after his death in 1940. In 1919, she began lecturing on applied psychology at the University of Berne and in 1929 passed her professorial habilitation there resulting in her teaching in Berne until 1954 (Bloch, 2002; Canziani, 1975). In 1924, she married Moritz Tramer, a child psychiatrist; hence, her name is sometimes hyphenated as "Baumgarten-Tramer." A full biography on Baumgarten was published in German by Daub in 1996, but was not available for this report.

The bulk of Baumgarten's career was focussed on industrial psychology and, to a lesser extent, on educational psychology. Her peace psychology developed in four lines of research and writing:

- 1) Psychological reactions to war experiences;
- 2) Psychologists' war resistance or collaboration;
- 3) Psychological causes of war; and
- 4) Education to prevent war.

Psychological Reactions to War Experiences

Her most interesting focus, and very original, was to document some of the psychological consequences of war. For example, during World War I, in Warsaw, she asked 700 school children about the cause of the war, how it has changed their living conditions, what affected them most, and what they wished for the Germans. The results showed that children were most affected by explosions and by the cries of the wounded. The children expressed extremes of hatred for the occupation soldiers, wishing for their death and, wrote one child, that they “all should come to Hell alive” (Baumgarten & Crescott, 1928, abstract).

Baumgarten (1946b) repeated this study during World War II. She asked school children "Which was your most powerful experience during the occupation?"

“The early loss of the security enjoyed in a parental home, the separation from parents who were sent to the gas chamber, the witnessing of persecution, conflicts between the drive for self-preservation and the loss of the beloved family, and similar experiences form the content of the excerpts. Unhealthy phenomena are: the loss of a belief in God's justice, and a precocious reasoning under war circumstances with a tendency to generalizations. This furnishes the young person with a false image of reality, making difficult, if not impossible, his adjustment to the community of his fellow-men” (Baumgarten, 1946b, quoting from PsychINFO abstract).

The negative effects of war on children persist. Several years after the war, Baumgarted (1949b) analyzed the drawings of Polish children and noted the high frequency of drawings of destroyed homes compared to drawings by children in

other countries, showing the enduring impact of war on children's sensibilities.

Baumgarten's studies of the psychological consequences of war were not limited to studies of children. For example, Baumgarten reported in a 1948 article entitled, "The psychology of the bombed-out":

"Some psychological peculiarities observed in people who were bombed out or stood in terror of the Nazi regime are enumerated and briefly discussed: dropping out of many habits which had been previously acquired; a change over to a need for very limited dwelling space; a disinterest and indifference in the sense that nothing now makes an impression on one; no desire for work, for production; unemotional receipt of communications and news; indifference towards people; fear of new social ties; loss of social feelings; a very strong critical attitude which produces estrangement; altering of time sense in such manner that every minute a danger threatens and the future appears worse than the present; no "elan." These peculiarities are to be seen in the type of the bombed-out in whom there have been heavy, irremediable psychic wounds such as the temporary or permanent loss of relatives, friends, and possessions. The psychic shock of the bombed-out produces an attitude of mind which sees all as vanity and transitoriness" (Baumgarten, 1948, quoting from PsychINFO abstract).

Note that these observations were made prior to contemporary understanding of Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome.

A similar such study was on “the psychology of refugees” (Baumgarten, 1958, abstract). She noted that some refugees are “unable to detach themselves from their past and to adjust to a new situation.” However, others are able to move on from the past and to adapt to their new environment with energy and creativity. Baumgarten (1958) argued that refugees need that their traumatic experiences and injustices be recognized by others.

Psychologists' War Resistance or Collaboration

Herself having witnessed German occupation of Poland during WWI, and witnessing from a safe distance the Nazi destruction of whole societies as well as the horrors of the Holocaust, Baumgarten (1949a) wrote about roles of German psychologists in supporting or opposing militarism:

“In both world wars, the German psychologists have not done anything to avert the enormous world catastrophe. Men like Max Scheler and Wilhelm Wundt have glorified war. During the last war many German psychologists were especially pro-Hitler, pro-militaristic and antisemitic. Outstanding in this respect were Feliz Krueger, Fritz Giese and A. Busemann. Only very few fought actively against National Socialism, among them Wolfgang Koehler and Otto Bobertag” (Baumgarten, 1949a, PsychINFO abstract).

On the other hand, Baumgarten (1950a) documented and praised women academics who resisted the Nazis and who suffered as a consequence:

“Tribute is paid to the World War II record of Polish, Dutch, French, and Austrian women in medical, educational, and literary fields. They

suffered, resisted, or met death under Nazi rule. It is held that eminent intellectuals endured most. None could be viewed as a traitor”

Baumgarten, 1950a, from PsychINFO abstract)

Psychological Causes of War

Baumgarten (1940) hypothesized that one of the causes of war is the glorification of soldiers. She reported a study in 1940 in which she asked 218 Swiss children to describe “What is a soldier?” This question was used in the Binet-Simon IQ test:

“Definitions of the 10-year-olds refer principally to the functions and the external characteristics of a soldier. Those of the 13-year-olds include the concepts of duty and honor, as well as an appreciation of the different kinds of soldiers” (Baumgarten, 1940, quoting from PsychINFO abstract.

In a brief paper on aggression, Baumgarten (1947) argued that war cannot be explained and perhaps prevented, without a better analysis of aggression. She argued that distinct terms defining different types of aggression, for example, “death instinct”, “hate”, “pugnacity”, etc. are often muddled and then defined as pathological.

The author would clarify the concept of aggression. Five species or partial-instincts of aggression are to be distinguished: self-preservation instinct; covetousness or greed; reactive aggression upon provocation; urge to seizure by force, and pugnacity. Some of these forms of aggression are healthy; some unhealthy. In greed the author sees

aggression in its most unhealthy manifestation and the primary cause of discord among human beings. If wars are to be circumvented this deeply anchored form of aggression must be so weakened through training and reconditioning that it no longer possesses effective force" (Baumgarten, 1947, quoting from PsychINFO abstract).

Education to Prevent War

Looking more particularly at Germany, Baumgarten (1944) wrote about positive, individual character formation as necessary for the development of democracy in a society. Hence, one of her prescriptions for preventing future wars was that educational systems must strive to promote positive character development in children (Baumgarten, 1944):

"The basis of all character is in youth-training, and the democratic atmosphere or its lack, have a profound influence on character development. Goals for character achievement are often made, and as often are not achieved. Opportunities for such development may be lacking or the incentives may not be present. Democratic ways of life are needed, and also, they should be exemplified in adult living, if the desired character traits of democracy are to be achieved"

(Baumgarten, 1944, quoting from PsychINFO abstract).

In 1950b, Baumgarten described in detail what she would argue are "The psychic presuppositions of education for peace".

Conclusion

Clearly Franziska Baumgarten was one of the forerunners of contemporary psychologists seeking to use science to understand and minimize war and its consequences. Her efforts seem to have been relatively solitary, with only one co-authored paper on these topics. She should now be acknowledged and her scholarship should be appraised and appreciated.

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