Cambridge 02138

Dani Rodrik, opioid associations, origins of life

OTHER TRUTHS

Like Professor Stuart Schreiber, I found out by accident that my dad was not actually my biological father (“Truth: A Love Story,” July-August, page 53). Unlike Schreiber, however, I discovered this at age 16, and was able to determine within 24 hours the identity of my bio-dad, when I walked into my girlfriend’s home room and told her “I found out the most amazing thing last night.” She replied, “I know what you’re going to tell me. Everyone in Logan [our small town in southeastern Ohio] has known about it for years.” I learned that bio-dad was a doctor who had graduated from Ohio State and who had met my mother when she was a nursing student.

The discovery explained a lot of mysteries, such as why both my younger brothers were six inches taller than me, why I received much more physical and especially mental abuse from my dad, and why he would go into a rage whenever my mother even talked with a doctor.

We never talked about this in the family until after Dad died. At that time, around 2001, I wrote a letter to my bio-dad, but never received a response. Then, in 2016, my wife determined that she was going to get some answers, and finally located my half-sister in Fort Bragg, California. After a series of letters and emails, we finally met with my half-sister.

I had often wondered how my life would have been different if I had grown up in a family headed by a successful doctor rather than in the abusive environment that I was so happy to escape when I headed east to Harvard. When I finally met my half-siblings, however, I learned that they too had been abused by their father, my bio-dad.

Not until my twenty-fifth reunion did I come to the realization that I had quitted dwelling on the past and concentrate on the future. My classmates have been so helpful and supportive in my healing process, and I thank them for that.

JEFF GERKEN ’71
Leland, N.C.

STUART SCHREIBER’S STORY is extraordinary on many levels: for its honesty and intimacy, but also for what it tells us about the false nature-nurture dichotomy. Schreiber couldn’t be more successful in the terms the world and the world of Harvard value. We credit his intellect, hard work, character traits, resilience, and luck among other factors. Without knowing the back story told by his DNA/family tree studies, we would look to his “brilliant” father and “angel” mother and muse that “the apple does not fall far from the tree.” We might also give due credit for his success to the environment he grew up in—“zip code” advantages. But then he tells us of abuse, adultery, prostitution, moonshine, and even murder, all part of his family story. It’s also likely that being Cajun in Louisiana/Mississippi didn’t confer much advantage.

I gained from Schreiber’s story a new respect both for the science he practices and for the vast unknowns that make us what we are. It also gave me a new appreciation of the variegated fabric that makes us this amazing American people in this amazing “land of opportunity.” From “wretched refuse,” slaves, refugees, indentured servants,
One of Trump’s themes has been globalization’s negative impact on “the working classes.”

and convicts, as well as pious pilgrims and planters, emerges a strong diverse people that includes stars like Stuart Schreiber.

Ann Barnet, M.D. ’55
Washington, D.C.

I was struck by the amount of domestic violence in this article. The author says that his maternal grandmother was forced into prostitution at the age of 14 and that both he and his mother were physically abused by his father for what seems to be at least 10 years. Both the author and his mother were trauma victims. For the effects of trauma, which are severe and long lasting, see Trauma and Recovery by Dr. Judith Herman and other works in this field. I was very impressed that the author eventually gained the respect of his father and was able to come to terms with his father by his own, unaided efforts. I think that’s rare for trauma victims.

Lynn Lichtenstein ’65
Chevy Chase, Md.

I see that the Ford Foundation professor of international political economy at the Kennedy School, Dani Rodrik, thinks promoting unionization and Elizabeth Warren’s proposal for worker participation on corporate boards marvellous ideas (“The Trilemma,” July-August, page 46). Gee whiz, I would never have guessed that.

John Braeman ’54
Champaign, Ill.

I skimmed the article because it is longer than need be. I was irritated right at the beginning with the author’s characterizing Trump’s administration as “authoritarian,” which is false. Had she thought some more about what she was writing she might have more accurately described the Trump government as concerned with the same aspects of globalization that Professor Rodrik is. One of Trump’s central themes has been that globalization has had an extraordinarily negative impact on “the working classes” in this country. Unlike Rodrik, Trump has been able to do something about it. The reality is that Rodrik, as an academic, has reached many of the same conclusions that Trump and his advisers have: globalization has hurt the American working class and severely weakened our manufacturing ability; has benefited those in the upper income/investment classes disproportionately; has not had the beneficial impact hoped for in developing countries; and has endangered American sovereignty by subordinating our interests to countries like China. I know it would get the editor fired if he/she had taken this approach, but it would have been interesting to read what Rodrik sees as beneficial about Trump’s trade moves.

Charles C. Kessler ’64, M.B.A. ’71
Houston, Minn.

Editor’s note: Neither editor nor author is at risk of, or in fear of, being fired for the magazine’s reporting.

OPIOID ASSOCIATIONS

As a concerned alumnus and physician, I would urge Harvard to take a strong stand against the purveyors of opioids in the current health crisis that is contributing to declining life expectancy in the United States. In my view, the best way to do this is to sever ties to the Sackler family and remove the Sackler name from the museum that is part of the Harvard Art Museums.

The Sackler family needs to be held accountable for their role in the opioid epidemic in this country, much as the tobacco magnates were held accountable in a past era. There hasn’t been any remorse expressed by the Sacklers for their role in the opioid epidemic, which is particularly troubling.

By not taking a strong stand for victims of opioid addiction, my concern is that Harvard’s reputation on this issue is being sullied. The public outcry against the Sacklers is growing, and it is seems clear at this point...
that history will not view these purveyors of opioid addiction in a favorable light.

Theodore T. Suh ’88, M.D., Ph.D., M.H.S.
Ann Arbor, Mich.

Editor’s note: The University has issued this statement in response to questions about the use of the Sackler name: “Dr. Arthur M. Sackler generously donated funds in 1982 that contributed to the construction of the original building that housed the Arthur M. Sackler Museum at 485 Broadway. In 2014, the Arthur M. Sackler Museum was relocated to 32 Quincy Street, as part of the renovation and expansion of the Harvard Art Museums. Dr. Sackler died in 1987, before OxyContin was developed and marketed. Given these circumstances and legal and contractual considerations, Harvard does not have plans to remove Dr. Sackler’s name from the museum. The Arthur M. Sackler Foundation does not fund the Arthur M. Sackler Museum at Harvard.”

For Harvard Magazine reporting on the crisis, see “The Opioids Emergency” (March-April 2019, page 37) and harvardmag.com/opioids-summit-19.

NOMENCLATURE

Cynthia Wachtell’s wonderful article on Ellen Newbold LaMotte in the July-August issue unfortunately uses the word “suffragette” (Vita, page 54). The diminutive -ette ending was used by opponents of suffrage and those who thought it cute that the “girls” were asking for a vote. As my Random House Dictionary notes, the suffix tends to have a “trivializing effect.” Suffrage supporters were asking for a vote.

Senior editor Jean Martin responds: Women associated with Emmeline Pankhurst’s movement in Great Britain are generally referred to as “suffragettes,” which is why Cynthia Wachtell used the term in one sentence of her Vita. The other two references to the suffrage movement in her text use “suffragist,” the term preferred by suffrage activists in the United States such as Alice Paul (Vita, November-December 2010, page 46). But “suffragette” is still the term many people think of first in connection with “Votes for Women.”

I suspect I’m not the only reader who noticed the interesting juxtaposition of cover “headlines” for two pieces in the July-August issue—“Life’s Origins” and “Commencement”—since for many the latter is in fact what the former is. If not intended, a nice stroke of continuity. Among certain ethnic groups, the theological question of when life begins is reputed to be “On graduation from law school.”

Robert H. Goldstein ’53, Ph.D.
Professor emeritus of psychiatry (psychology)
University of Rochester School of Medicine
Rochester, NY.

VERSE DEBUGGED

In a letter to this department (July-August, page 1), Murray Levin recalls from Chem 1 with Eugene Rochow a couplet about bugs being bitten by smaller bugs. The version I am familiar with is:

Big fleas have little fleas upon their backs to bite ‘em,
And little fleas have lesser fleas, and so ad infinitum.

When Levin took chemistry in 1953, I would have been nine or 10 years old, but I knew the above lines already: my parents had been taking night courses, and my mother enjoyed that couplet, from a text in (I think) parasitology.

A few years ago I did an online search, and found that this goes back to Jonathan Swift, who in a poem, On Poetry, wrote:

So, naturalists observe, a flea
Hath smaller fleas that on him prey,
And these have smaller still to bite ‘em,
And so proceed ad infinitum.
Thus ev’ry poet in his kind
Is bit by him that comes behind.

George Bergman, Ph.D. ’68
Orinda, Calif.

LONG-TERM INVESTING

Tell me you’re kidding, right? That’s my comment on “Long-Term Investing, Short-Term Thinking” (July-August, page 9). Anyone who thinks that “some top institutional managers move to the private sector, where they will be paid more but are scrutinized less” may have an opinion relative to the vagaries of markets, but few should take them seriously. To also add that “patience is more than a virtue, it pays,” would have some credibility, but only if they added “sometimes yes, sometimes no.” Pros, or anyone else who think they can measure up, are...
LETTERS

judged versus their peers, and know that performance is measured year to year, and that they have a chance of being among the missing at next year’s commencement.

MARSHALL STERMAN, M.B.A. ’55
Beverly, Mass.

MORE ON POLICING

The letter “1969” on anti-police bias and its response (July-August, page 5) reminded me of numerous experiences as a student. I mention only one. During a peaceful antiwar demonstration in 1968, I appreciated the polite uniformed police, but also noticed some tough-looking apparent “plain clothes” officers. When I asked one of them if he were a policeman, he asked why, and I said I wanted to know from whom I should take orders. He responded “no,” with a sneer. As the crowd moved, I turned my head and he clubbed me to the ground. I did a pushup to hold myself off the body of a uniformed officer who had lost his footing, and on whom blood from my face was dripping.

After receiving stitches at the hospital, I visited my usual Harvard Square liquor store and had to explain why my face looked so bad. The burly man behind the counter smiled and shared with me that he was a former police officer and that the technique was to slide your billy club down the sleeve so one could show an open hand and still club someone in the face unexpectedly.

A point is: there was no one profile of police officers; many were dedicated professionals who practiced their role with integrity and courage, but others were indeed bullies, and did take out a resentment of “privileged” students with sadistic enthusiasm.

ROY SMITH ’64
Silverdale, Wash.

ADMISSIONS AND DONATIONS

“THINNER ICE” and the letter concerning Harvard’s and other selective schools’ admission challenges and the reference to the “complication involving a Harvard coach,” raise additional questions regarding this behavior of exchanging money for admissions (7 Ware Street, page 3, and letters, page 5, July-August). It would be of great interest for Harvard to conduct a detailed review of all the incidents where parents whose children were applying for admission gave donations to the school prior to their admission. Are these incidents not to be considered direct “legal” bribes to the University rather than to individuals, as in the current episodes involving athletic coaches? How prevalent were and are these “donor preferences”?

ARTHUR M. FRIEDLANDER ’61, M.D.
Montgomery Village, Md.

OVERSEERS OVERSIGHT

An announcement in the July-August issue of the new Harvard Overseers (page 71) reminded me that as a graduate of both Tufts (’77) and Harvard, I have the chance to reflect on one of President Lawrence S. Bacow’s accomplishments at Tufts that should be replicated at Harvard: the removal of the word “overseer” from various boards.

Once brought to their attention, most people grasp immediately that “overseer” has a negative connotation dating back to slavery and that there are less offensive and more inclusive alternatives. In an era in which statues and other relics of prior eras are being ques-
“Overseer” has a negative connotation dating back to slavery. There are less offensive terms.

Seth A. Barad, M.B.A. ’81
San Rafael, Calif.

DIVESTMENT REDUX
I remember writing this same letter, or a very similar one, 30-odd years ago, about Harvard pulling its considerable endowment investments out of South Africa.

Now it’s fossil fuels. The University once again deplores the politicization of its investment decisions.

Gentlemen and ladies, the decision to put those investments into fossil fuels in the first place was political. The status quo is not pristine apolitical.

If the University officials who chose to make those investments did not see them as political at the time [given the large number of Harvard alumni who hold these positions], that was a failure of Harvard. Now that everyone seems to be questioning the value of a liberal education, here is more ammo for that questioning. If the status quo can be changed by political action, then it was political in the first place.

Marian Henriquez Neudel ’63, Div ’67
Chicago

AMPLIFICATIONS & CLARIFICATIONS
“EDUCATING EDUCATORS” (July-August, page 25) reported that the Graduate School of Education faculty had voted to approve a “new framework” for the school’s master of education (Ed.M.) program, in part by “elevat[ing] the status of the education profession by defining its key aspects, including core knowledge and skills that all educators should have.” That suggested identifying the “core skills, knowledge, and ways of thinking that are central to the profession of education,” and embedding them in 13 separate Ed.M. tracks. That account was based on a misunderstanding. As part of revisiting its Ed.M. program, the HGSE faculty is focusing on core competencies it considers essential for all degree candidates to prepare them for diverse careers in education. Students would also apparently choose areas of special, focal interest, within their courses of study—but the number of such areas, how they are defined, and how students’ one-year degree programs (a limiting constraint, as opposed to the multiyear courses of study in other professional schools) will be reshaped are all in the process of being determined by the faculty during the coming academic year.

“The Director’s Half Decade,” based on a conversation with Harvard Alumni Association executive director Philip Lovejoy (May-June, page 78), referred to the Harvard Gay and Lesbian Caucus. It has long since been renamed the Harvard Gender & Sexuality Caucus, as its president, John Sylla ’81, noted. The classes studied in the legendary Harvard Student Study (Commencement Confetti, July-August, page 20) enrolled in 1960 and 1961, respectively, but were the graduating classes of ’64 and ’65, not those of ’60 and ’61. That is why Michael Kaufman spoke at the class of 1964’s fifty-fifth reunion dinner.

See Venice with an Ecologist

Expert travelers know that local expertise can transform a place. Context tours are led by chefs, architects, historians, archaeologists, and artists—all passionate professionals in their fields. With half- to multi-day tours in over 60 global capitals, let us show you the world with Context.

Visit https://alumni.contexttravel.com to learn more and get 15% off your first tour.

CONTEXT
Privately guided tours for travelers who love to learn