

Remembering The Life & Work of Joseph Biederman**Adam Bied****Doctor of Psychiatry, ABC Medical, Reading, Massachusetts, USA****Corresponding Author**

Adam Bied, Doctor of Psychiatry, ABC Medical, Reading, Massachusetts, USA.

Submitted: 2023, Jan 23; **Accepted:** 2023, Mar 02; **Published:** 2023, Aug 31**Citation:** Bied, A. (2023). Remembering The Life & Work of Joseph Biederman. *J Edu Psyc Res*, 5(2), 683-684.

According to an ancient tradition there are people among us who, in the face of crisis, combat adversity with ingenuity, courage and strength. Joseph Biederman was such a man. I met Yossi early in my career, eventually studying his work, presenting shared findings alongside him, and authoring a well cited study as his collaborator. My experience with him would translate into an extensive study of his field and later a career. I had the pleasure of working alongside a pioneer who transformed my trade. Biederman's passing earlier this year attracted the concern, admiration, and respect of many. In the years prior to his passing, I would be asked of the man, his work and the controversies surrounding him. Posthumously I offer this response.

Biederman's life was as fascinating as his scientific achievements. Born in Prague, two years after the Second World War, his parents, Holocaust survivors, were spared by the courageous effort of Oskar Schindler. Schindler would become recognized later for his courage and tenacity in both a popular biography and Academy Award winning film - Schindler's List. Nine months after Biederman birth, he, and his family, migrated to Argentina, adapting a new nation and culture. He went on to graduate from the University of Buenos Aires before migrating to Israel. Biederman studied psychiatry, among the first at Hadassah University during a period of uncertainty for the nation. The Yom Kippur War began midway through his Israeli training - Operation Entebbe in the final months. After his spouse's health declined, he migrated a third time - to America. While completing his second residency his spouse perished. He, however, would thrive.

At the time he began training, psychoanalysis remained a dominant and influential movement in psychiatry. He remarked that during his fellowship training he 'didn't medicate a single child' but later developed, 'a totally new idea - that is pediatric psychopharmacology.' In the five decades that followed Biederman authored over nine hundred peer reviewed journal articles, placing him in the top 0.01% of scientists across all disciplines, and orchestrated studies for an extensive number of drugs in contemporary psychiatry. His career was not without detractors. A multi-year federal investigation commenced in 2008 during which his honesty and character were questioned. He was disciplined by both the Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical

School but remained on faculty. The federal adoption of the Sunshine Act and a seismic shift in hospital policies quickly followed. He would continue his work and at times confronted his critics. In the words of his friend, Dr. Pablo Gomery, 'he won the battle.' In the final year of his life, faced with declining health, he averaged a publication every twenty-three days, orchestrated two clinical trials and lectured at multiple forums. He won the Lifetime Achievement Award from APSARD, passing nine days before it was to be conferred. His funeral became a who's who of psychiatric achievement. It was the culmination of an astonishing life.

Biederman remains a controversial figure with an evolving legacy. A placid take on his life would likely reference his achievements and the practice evolution he hastened. Biederman's work has influenced virtually all practitioners in our field, with his works read widely, and cited often. Many of his articles have been the subject of journal clubs across the planet, his book chapters featured prominently in leading texts of our trade, and his findings the basis of our board certification exams. The required disclosures of The Sunshine Act are a widely acknowledged part of medicine. The brief introductions in which we state our conflicts of interest are now virtually without exception. Training programs have largely accepted the model of Biederman - simply stated, physicians caring for the mentally ill better be prepared to provide medication, at least some of the time, for at least some patients. The organization he founded, APSARD, continues to host yearly conferences attracting academics from throughout the world. Its journal remains a leading publication. Consumers recognize television advertisements, with colorful imagery, memorable songs, and branded drug names in large part due to Biederman.

An adversarial view portrays Biederman as a disingenuous charlatan who hastened the decline of an artform. Psychopharmacology has largely supplanted psychoanalysis in particular, and psychotherapy in general. Some sources have suggested that perhaps all psychiatrists offered psychotherapy in their visits as recently as the early 1980's while the minority due today. The financial ramifications of his findings are also far reaching. The cost of behavioral healthcare is increasingly linked to the price of prescription drugs. Nearly twice as much money is now spent on pharmacy expenditures than on the providers prescribing the

drugs. Diagnostic achievements abound in Biederman's work though many express doubts and the debate is at times heated. Direct-to-consumer advertising of medication is now banned in over thirty nations.

For those who knew, and admired the man, a more philosophical interpretation prevails. Few figures are transcendent, and work upon both our mind and imagination. In the absence of an analytic psychiatry – some fear we might pursue vacuous pursuits or meaningless entertainment, fall into nihilism or bury our existential angst deep down. Biederman's critics viewed his

school of thought as an apathetic, shallow, distracted humanity. For those who admire him, he is instead the inspiration of a radical self-improvement he also modeled. He believed another world was possible, which instilled an inconceivable hope that light would pierce the darkness, and that a new inspiring humanity was already on its way. He taught also that this light is within each of us and can give us the strength to work for the world he desired, to work towards that dream others found impossible. In the aftermath of his death, we not only recognize this light amidst the darkness, but through our works, we can hasten its arrival.



Joseph Biederman (left), Stephen Faraone (center), Adam Bied (right) APSARD Conference, Washington D.C., 2016

Copyright: ©2023 Adam Bied. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.