

Let us not honor researchers who have caused harm: removing or contextualizing eponyms for Dr. Hans Asperger and Dr. Albert Kligman



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Our Study

- We conducted lengthy face-to-face or phone INTERVIEWS with 13 participants who had varying degrees of expertise or stake in autism and/or morality and ethics. Questions varied as a function of the interviewee's unique vantage point.
- We included relevant questions about the Asperger eponym as part of a larger SURVEY administered to 36 undergraduate students.
- We personally CONTACTED people at Penn State (UPark) and at Penn to push for change in the use of the Kligman eponym.

Eponym Removal

- ***Dr. Hans Asperger (1906-1980)***
 - Known for his research with high functioning autistic children in the 1930's and 40's.
 - The eponym "Asperger Syndrome" has been applied to patients/clients since the 1980's.
 - Archival records (Sheffer, 2018) reveal that Asperger's Clinic became part of Nazi operations.
 - Dozens of children who he declared as unworthy were sent to a "euthanasia" ward.
 - Due to these actions, we think that this eponym should be removed or at least contextualized.
- ***Dr. Albert Kligman (1916-2010)***
 - Faculty researcher from the 1950's to early 2000's.
 - Best known for his discovery of Retin-A.
 - Hornblum (1998) reveals Kligman's exploitation of prison inmates and other vulnerable populations in research from the 1950's to the 1970's.
 - Large donations from Kligman to Penn State and to Penn have led to naming rights or eponyms for awards, fellowships, etc.
 - We think this eponym should be removed or at least contextualized.

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it

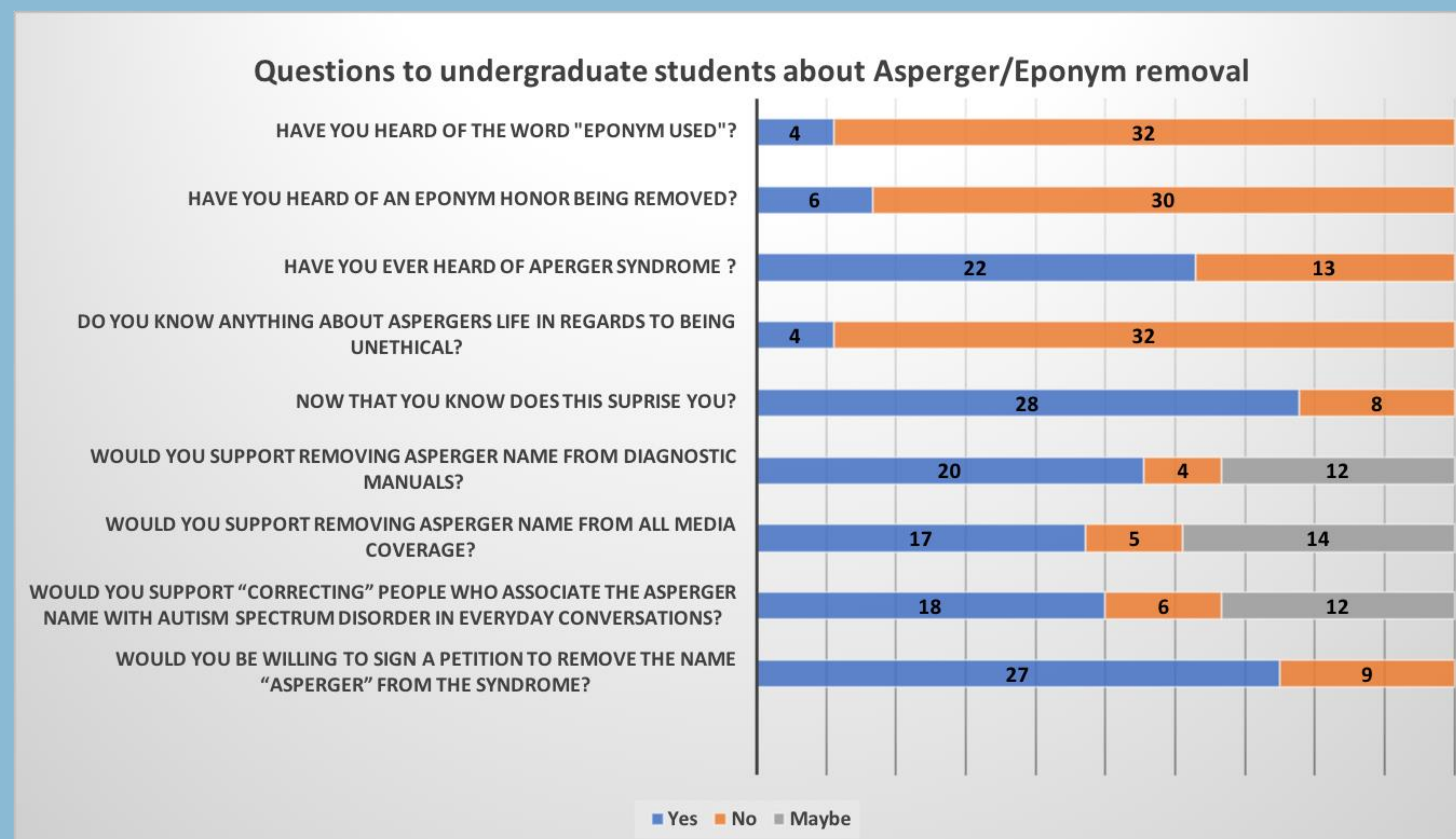
- George Santayana -

**Dr. Judith Newman, Anxhela Zere, Casey Kane
Penn State Abington**

Results

We will highlight just a bit of what we learned from our participants:

- **Bioethicists-** Activism begins with students; University policies regarding Kligman eponym need to be modified.
- **Philosophers and other faculty-** Shared relevant concepts for our project (e.g., radical vs ordinary evil; Objectivism = universal values like *Do No Harm*; Lustration = exposing people who have done wrong).
- **Young Men on the Autism Spectrum-** Information about Asperger's past does matter and should be shared with diagnosed persons and families sensitively (e.g., "The emotional connotation of this history may now be stronger than my connection to the word Asperger.").
- **Mothers of Children on the Spectrum-** Sad to hear about Asperger's past and concerned that doctors and media continue to use his name (e.g., "I was recently advised to say *Asperger* when trying to get services for my child").
- **Directors of Autism Organizations-** One had altered their organization's name to not include "Asperger"; the other is not sure that Asperger did what the historical records indicate.
- **University Contacts-** Our concerns about the Kligman eponym are being discussed at Penn State (UPark) and at Penn. We are hoping for action soon.
- **Undergraduate Students: N=36**
 - 88% were not aware of Asperger's unethical behavior
 - 77% were surprised about this behavior
 - 80% thought that eponym removal is justified for unethical behavior/research misconduct
 - 75% would be willing to sign a petition for removal of the Asperger eponym
 - 55% would support using the term "high functioning Autism" instead of Asperger Syndrome



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Future Directions

- We will continue to be in touch with relevant persons at two local Universities regarding the Kligman eponym.
- We will also enlist the assistance of student organizations at both Universities.
- Dr. Newman will be co-organizing a symposium and podcasts from Penn State -University Park in Spring 2021 to inform a wider audience about our concerns.
- We had hoped to have you sign petitions endorsing the removal or contextualization of the 2 different eponyms at the APS (face-to-face) conference, but we will instead insert our virtual on-line petitions at the bottom of the poster for you to sign, and we will then share them with relevant institutions and organizations.

Some References

HARRIS, L. M. (2020). Higher education's reckoning with slavery. AAUP Newsletter, Winter 2020. <https://www.aaup.org/article/higher-education%E2%80%99s-reckoning-slavery#.XkQKDiN7k2y>

HORNBLUM, A. (1998). *Acres of Skin: Human experiments at Holmesburg Prison: A story of abuse and exploitation in the name of medical science*. New York: Routledge.

KAFKA, A. (2019). This researcher exploited prisoners, children, and the elderly. Why does Penn honor him? *Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 8th. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/This-Researcher-Exploited/247515>

KONDZIELLA, D. (2009). Thirty neurological eponyms associated with the Nazi era. *European Neurology*, 62(1), 56-64.

SHEFFER, E. (2018). *Asperger's Children: The origins of Autism in Nazi Vienna*. W. W. Norton & Co., New York.

Acknowledgement

We are grateful to our participants for their input. They provided us with a more defined sense of direction as we continue our activist efforts to have the eponyms of Drs. Asperger and Kligman removed or contextualized wherever they still exist.

Please read and sign our virtual petitions by clicking [Here](#)

Knowledge is power

- Francis Bacon -