Chess: A Psychoanalytic Perspective
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There are 3 sections to my presentation:

- 1. Historical psychoanalysis of chess.
- 2. Motivation to win. What really drives the best?
- 3. Anxiety and ways to overcome through relaxation techniques.

• 1. Historical psychoanalysis of chess.
H.G. Wells, Concerning Chess

- “There is a class of men—shadowy, unhappy, unreal-looking men—who gather in coffee houses, and play with a desire that dieth not, and a fire that is not quenched. These gather in clubs and play tournaments...but there are others who have the vice who live in country places, in remote situations—curates, schoolmasters, tax collectors—who must needs find some artificial vent for their mental energy”.

Sigmund Freud

- “He who hopes to learn the fine art of the game of chess from books will soon discover that only the opening and closing moves of the game admit of exhaustive systematic description, and that the endless variety of the moves which develop from the opening defies description; the gap left in the instructions can only be filled in by the zealous study of games fought out by master-hands.”
  —Sigmund Freud

Psychoanalytic perspectives on chess
Dr. Karl Menninger (1893-1990), an aggressive Freudian analyst

- Once declared: "It seems to be necessary for some of us to have a hobby in which aggressiveness and destructiveness are given opportunity for expression, and since I long ago gave up hunting (because it is too destructive), I have found myself returning more and more to the most ancient of all games."

Menninger about chess players:

- "Silently they are plotting (and attempting to execute) murderous campaigns of patricide, matricide, fratricide, regicide (killing of a king) and mayhem."

Ernest Jones 1879-1958), official biographer of Sigmund Freud

- Wrote in 1930: "Chess...is a play substitute for the art of war."
- Moved Freud’s much-debated interpretation of Oedipus onto the chessboard.
  - Paul Morphy (unofficial chess champion 1858-'62), in Jones’ theory, had to sublimate a strong Oedipal urge to "kill the father." [2]
  - His own flesh-and-blood father was already dead, but Morphy had a surrogate father, Howard Staunton, the uncrowned chess champion of the world, whom he needed to kill at chess. (Unfortunately for Morphy’s psyche, Staunton refused to play and submit to being “killed.”) [2]

Ernest Jones

- Emphasized that the king is the father image and that its most savage attacker is the queen of the opposite color. This, say the analysts, is a paradigm of the family in which mother is pitted against father. [2]
- They ignore the fact that the king’s most powerful defender is his own queen. [2]
Reuben Fine (1914-1993)-Chess GM

- Popularized a psychology of chess studded with phallic symbols, spattered with anal-sadistic impulses and imbued with latent homosexuality. [2]

Isador Coriat (1875-1943) American psychologist and Freud disciple

- “The sole object of the game for these individuals was to render the King (the father) helpless through checkmate, that is, castrate him. The winning of the game produced a feeling of intense pleasure, as a checkmate was unconsciously equated as a castration revenge.”

Many psychologists, some Freudians included, now believe that the sexual symbolism in chess is vastly overdrawn. [3]

Pessimistic Comment

- I wonder: what is the unconscious motive activating a computer program? When I play chess against the computer, is it harboring hatred for its central processing unit, while simultaneously yearning for the love of its mother(board)? [3]
Karl Popper (1902-1994)-Philosopher of science

- Freudian psychoanalysis is a pseudoscience
- It’s not so much that the above is not true, but that there is not a single shred of evidence that would count for or against such statements. They are, to use Popper’s phrase, unfalsifiable. [3]
- The unfalsifiability of psychoanalysis in turn stems from the human facility at telling stories. Is it supported by empirical evidence (derives its data by means of direct observation or experiment)? [4]

Dr. Kurt Alfred Adler (1870-1937)-MD and Psychotherapist

- Non-Freudian, and an exponent of his school of individual psychology
- "chess is a game of training in orientation for problem solving ... learning to use the pieces as a cooperative team. I would put little emphasis on the elements of hostility and aggression, and dismiss completely the sexual symbolism. The players are trying to overcome difficulties, and while they are also trying to attain mastery, the game is a form of social intercourse."

2. Motivation to win.
What really drives the best?

Allegedly, even Freud once said that sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.
How much raw competitiveness depends on the culture

In collective societies such as Russia, the player plays the board rather than his opponent. Competitiveness becomes more pronounced in Western Europe and is rampant in the U.S. [2]

Biochemist Aaron Bendich, of Manhattan's Sloan-Kettering Institute, summarizes his motivation: "I play as an intellectual exercise, and I don't see my opponent as an adversary. But there is an adversary—and that's me! If I lose and allow myself to get angry with my opponent, I am really projecting onto him the anger I feel with myself for having played badly." [2]

Motivation to play

Dr. Ariel Mengarini, a nonanalytic psychiatrist, asserts that the typical amateur chess player has had a formal education and has a job that does not come up to his intellectual capabilities. He needs the kind of mental workout that he gets in chess. [2]

Equally important, to Mengarini, is the struggle. "But the beauty of chess," he says, "is that the rules are clear-cut. If you win, no one can take away your victory. In life, most of your wins are not clear-cut. If you've lost, there's nothing to do but shake hands with your opponent. This is most refreshing compared with most human relationships, including the world of business and sexual relationships."

"Chess," said Goethe, "is the touchstone of the intellect." To many better-than-average players, a well-played game embodies something more: it is a work of art, owing as much of its beauty to imagination and creativity as to the exercise of intelligence.

"offers freedom, unlimited travel with all expenses paid. To me, the opponent is a neutral figure. Winning pays the rent."
motives and methods of chess players are as varied as their personalities.

- Emanuel Lasker (1864 to 1921), was a philosopher, mathematician and thoroughgoing "square" by most psychological standards. His satisfactions from chess appear to have been entirely intellectual. [2]
- Jose Capablanca (1901 to 1927), who gave up a projected career in engineering to become a chess giant and his country's hero, enjoyed competition in other lines than chess, notably tennis, bridge and the pursuit of women. [2]
- Alexander Alekhine (1927-35, 1937-46) is best described in Fine's words as "the sadist of the chess world." He went through five marriages, was involved in a campaign of anti-Semitism, dipsomania (insatiable craving for alcoholic beverages), and enough other psychopathology to fill a casebook. [2]

Bobby Fischer (1943-’68)-Chess Champion ’72-’75

- American chess player and the eleventh World Chess Champion.
- widely considered one of the greatest chess players of all time. [6]
- He won the 1963–64 US championship 11–0, the only perfect score in the history of the tournament.
- In the early 1970s he became the most dominant player in modern history - winning the 1970 Interzonal by a record 3½-point margin and winning 20 consecutive games, including two unprecedented 6–0 sweeps in the Candidates Matches.

Bobby Fischer

- "use chess to satisfy their fantasies of omnipotence." [6]
- For Fischer, these fantasies are confined to chess. Chess was his whole life, leaving little room for conventional social relationships. Much of his openly outrageous behavior can be attributed to his emotionally deprived childhood. And his struggle to the summit since then has left him still without the inner security needed to accept defeat. [6]
- He is a killer—not necessarily in the Oedipal sense—because he must win. [6]
The match was played during the Cold War, but during a period of increasing hostility. The Soviet chess system had long held a monopoly on the game at the highest level. Spassky was the latest in an uninterrupted chain of Soviet World Chess Champions, stretching back to the 1948 championship. [5]

A very different Bobby Fischer

Bobby Fischer tells the truth and nothing but the truth
"Psyching out" the opponent

- Ruy Lopez de Sigura advocated placing the chessboard so that it would reflect light into the opponent’s eyes. [2]
- Smoke blowing
- Finger drumming
- Humming and singing.
- Many players have been accused of trying to hypnotize opponents. Former World Champion Mikhail Tal has been credited with a “laserlike gaze,” and Bobby Fischer with a “strange magnetic influence.” [2]
- Russian charge that the Americans had installed “brain-boggling” electronics in Reykjavik. [5]

Magnus Carlsen

- For some, the confidence necessary to win and succeed, seems to come naturally with apparent ease.
3. Anxiety and ways to overcome through relaxation techniques.

Relaxation Technique

- Any method, process, procedure, or activity that helps a person to relax; to attain a state of increased calmness; or otherwise reduce levels of anxiety, stress or anger. [7]
- Relaxation techniques are often employed as one element of a wider stress management program and can decrease muscle tension, lower the blood pressure and slow heart and breath rates, among other health benefits. [7]

Akobian

- Akobian featured on MTV’s True Life: I’m a genius.
- Anxiety hinders performance.
- Made use of CBT utilizing relaxation techniques

Akobian Vs. Nakamura
Five techniques to help you control competition anxiety

1. Establishing your ‘winning feeling’
   - Think carefully about the last time you were performing at the top of your game then list every detail you might associate with your ‘winning feeling’. [8]

2. Centering
   - Focusing attention on the centre of your body, the area just behind your navel. Centering has a calming and controlling effect, providing a simple but effective way to counteract the negative effects of anxiety. [8]

3. The five breath technique
   - Inhale slowly, deeply and evenly through your nose, and exhale gently through your mouth as though flickering, but not extinguishing, the flame of a candle. [8]

4. Thought-stopping
   - Thought-stopping can be used to block an unwanted thought before it escalates or disrupts performance. The technique can help to create a sharp refocus of attention keeping you engrossed in the task at hand. [8]

5. Letting go
   - As you focus on each part of the body, tense the associated muscles for a count of five and then ‘let go’. [8]

Common anxiety symptoms include:

- Feeling apprehensive
- Feeling powerless
- Having a sense of impending danger, panic or doom
- Having an increased heart rate
- Breathing rapidly (hyperventilation)
- Sweating
- Trembling
- Feeling weak or fatigued

Practicing relaxation techniques can reduce stress symptoms by:

- Slowing your heart rate
- Lowering blood pressure
- Slowing your breathing rate
- Increasing blood flow to major muscles
- Reducing muscle tension and chronic pain
- Improving concentration
- Reducing anger and frustration
- Boosting confidence to handle problems
Relaxation techniques [6]

- **Autogenic relaxation.** Comes from within. You use both visual imagery and body awareness to reduce stress. You repeat words or suggestions in your mind to help you relax and reduce muscle tension. You may imagine a peaceful place and then focus on controlled, relaxing breathing, slowing your heart rate, or feeling different physical sensations, such as relaxing each arm or leg one by one.

- **Progressive muscle relaxation.** In this relaxation technique, you focus on slowly tensing and then releasing each muscle group. This helps you focus on the difference between muscle tension and relaxation. You become more aware of physical sensations. One method is to start by tensing and relaxing the muscles in your toes and progressively working your way up to your neck and head. Tense your muscles for at least five seconds and then relax for 30 seconds, and repeat.

- **Visualization.** In this relaxation technique, you form mental images to take a visual journey to a peaceful, calming place or situation. During visualization, try to use as many senses as you can, including smell, sight, sound, and touch. If you imagine relaxing at the ocean, for example, think about such things as the smell of salt water, the sound of crashing waves and the warmth of the sun on your body. You may want to close your eyes, sit in a quiet spot and loosen any tight clothing.

Other common relaxation techniques include:

- Yoga
- Tai chi
- Listening to music
- Exercise
- Meditation
- Hypnosis
- Massage

Relaxation techniques are optimal when focus and concentration are of utmost importance.

SSRI’s may be good option

Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) [1]

- Number of people using CAM is on the rise.
- Estimated use range from 8% to 57%.
- Most frequently used for depression and anxiety.
- MEDLINE search shows studies using psychotropic meds, dwarfs even the most common CAM treatments.
- Due to few studies, risk to benefit ratio for CAM is difficult to calculate. Thus, CAM is difficult to recommend as first line treatment.
Evidence of effectiveness of yoga for anxiety disorder

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<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Group Description</th>
<th>Outcome Measure</th>
<th>Findings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vahia et al., 1973</td>
<td>36 pt's randomly assigned to yoga vs. control relaxation</td>
<td>Reduction in TAS (Taylor anxiety scale)</td>
<td>Yoga showed significantly greater reduction in TAS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vahia et al., 1973</td>
<td>36 pt's receiving yoga vs med (amitriptyline)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sahas et al, 1989</td>
<td>91 pt's receiving yoga vs diazepam</td>
<td>Reduction in IPAT (anxiety scale) vs diazepam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sharma et al, 1991</td>
<td>71 pt's receiving yoga vs placebo pill</td>
<td>HAM-A (anxiety rating scale) showed signif. Lower anxiety for yoga vs placebo</td>
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Exercise for Anxiety

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<tr>
<td>Broocks et al, 1999</td>
<td>46 pts with panic d/o randomly assigned to running, clomipramine, or placebo pills</td>
<td></td>
<td>Both clomipramine and exercise decreased sx's, but clomipramine improved earlier and more effectively</td>
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<td>Merom et al, 2008</td>
<td>21 pt's with panic d/o or GAD randomly assigned to GCBT and walking program or education sessions</td>
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<td>GCBT plus walking had significant effect compared to GCBT plus education sessions</td>
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Dietary supplements for anxiety d/o

- Various studies on Kava by Pittler et al., 2003, Witte et al., 2005, and Sarris et al., 2009 revealed that when compared with placebo, kava significantly reduced anxiety compared to placebo, measured by HAM-A score.
- Studies on Inositol by Benjamin et al 1995 and Palatnik et al., 2001 showed improvements in anxiety and panic attacks compared with placebo in the HAM-A.

Garry Kasparov funny reaction video

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References