

## Deconstructing Vygotsky's Victimization Narrative:

### A Re-Examination of the "Stalinist Suppression" of Vygotskian Theory

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In recent decades, interest in the twentieth century Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky has increased exponentially, resulting in a proliferation of scholarly publications that recognize this scholar as a leading authority in the fields of developmental psychology, special education, psycholinguistics, and neuropsychology.<sup>1</sup> Arguably one of the most frequently cited Russian psychologists today, Lev Vygotsky has achieved celebrity status, with many of his works now widely praised for their contributions to contemporary theories of child development.<sup>2</sup> This late twentieth century surge of scholarly interest in Vygotsky has been appropriately characterized as a "Vygotsky boom," with his psychological studies and

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<sup>1</sup> René van der Veer and Anton Yasnitsky, "Vygotsky in English: What Still Needs to be Done," *Integrative and Psychological Behavioural Science* 45 (2011): 475; James V. Wertsch and Peeter Tulviste, "L.S. Vygotsky and Contemporary Developmental Psychology," *Developmental Psychology* 28, no.4 (1992): 548-557; Boris Gindis, "Vygotsky's Vision: Reshaping the Practice of Special Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," *Remedial and Special Education* 20 (1999): 333-340; J.F. Ehrich, "Vygotsky and Linguistic Relativity: The Case of Chinese and English Reading," *The Linguistics Journal* 4, no.1 (2009): 91-111; Anneliese A. Pointus, "Model of Ecological (Cultural) Evolutionary Neuropsychiatry," *Perpetual and Motor Skills* 58 (1984): 143-148.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Cole, Vera John-Steiner, Sylvia Scribner, Ellen Souberman, eds., "Editors Preface," in *Mind and Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, eds. Michael Cole, Vera John-Steiner, Sylvia Scriber, and Ellen Souberman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), ix; Elvira Souza Lima, "Vygotsky in the International Scene: A Brief Overview," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 26, no.4 (1995): 490-499; Julia Gillen, "Versions of Vygotsky," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 48, no.2 (2000): 183; Anita E. Woolfolk, Philip H. Winne, Nancy E. Perry, and Jennifer Shapka, *Educational Psychology*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (Toronto: Pearson Canada Inc., 2010), 39.

theoretical models quickly permeating psychology departments and achieving a “cult-like following” amongst scholars and pedagogues alike. Far from being an isolated academic phenomenon, Vygotsky's legacy has also pervaded the public sphere as the writings of a variety of science popularizers molded this early twentieth century scholar into a “pioneering psychologist” and made his terminological innovation, the “zone of proximal development” into a household name.<sup>3</sup> Through juxtaposing Vygotsky's theories with the works of pop-culture icons and widely acknowledged “creative geniuses,” these writers fashioned a new popular image of Vygotsky, one that is now firmly entrenched within contemporary psychological discourse.<sup>4</sup>

Alongside this increased popular and scholarly emphasis on Vygotskian theory emerged a parallel interest in his biography, as both historians and social scientists endeavoured to elucidate the Soviet social context that facilitated the creation of these important psychological works. To satisfy this seemingly insatiable interest in equating theory with social circumstance, authors of both psychological textbooks and pedagogical treatises began to incorporate biographical details into scholarly discussions of Vygotsky's psychology. Although many facets of Vygotsky's life have drawn considerable attention from historians of science, perhaps the most commonly acknowledged feature of Vygotsky's personal narrative was that he was actively chastised by the Stalinist government, with his work being placed under an enforced publication ban that would persist for a period of almost twenty years after his death.

References to this infamous ban pervade contemporary accounts of Vygotsky—almost all of them emphasizing that from the period of 1936 to 1956, it was forbidden to either discuss or disseminate any of

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<sup>3</sup> L. Garai and M. Kocski, “Another Crisis in Psychology: A Possible Motive for the Vygotsky-Boom,” *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology* 33, no.1 (1995): 82-94; Michael Col, “Prologue: Reading Vygotsky,” in *The Essential Vygotsky*, ed. R.W. Rieber and D.K. Robinson (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum, 2004), vii; Anton Yasnitsky, “‘Archival Revolution’ in Vygotskian Studies? Uncovering Vygotsky's Archives,” *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology* 48, no. 1 (2010): 3; Anton Yasnitsky, “Revisionist Revolution in Vygotskian Science: Toward Cultural-Historical Gestalt Psychology,” *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology* 50, no.4 (2012): 3-9.

<sup>4</sup> Examples of such a juxtaposition can be found within Stephen Toulmin's 1978 *New York Times* book review entitled “The Mozart of Psychology,” and in Fred Newman and Lois Holzman's reference to the famous Bob Dylan lyric, “He not busy being born is busy dying,” on the first page of their influential Vygotsky monograph: *Lev Vygotsky: Revolutionary Scientist* (New York: Routledge, 1993), i.

Vygotsky's works within the Soviet Union.<sup>5</sup> According to these historical narratives, it was only after Stalin's death that Vygotsky's ideas were able to resurface in Russia, as a network of his collaborators and associates began to circulate his central tenants within the late 1950s.<sup>6</sup> Despite the political, and, by extension, publication "thaw" that followed Nikita Khrushchev's 1953 ascendancy to power, and these enthusiastic early dissemination efforts, Vygotsky's theories would not become widely available to either Russian or Western audiences until the 1980's with the public release of the first six-volume Russian edition of Vygotsky's collected works (Soviet edition of 1982-1984) and, in the West, *Mind in Society* in 1978, *Thought and Language* in 1986<sup>7</sup>, and finally, *The Collected Works of Vygotsky*, volumes 1-6 in 1987-1999.<sup>8</sup>

Although this ban has been both widely acknowledged and frequently cited by historians of psychology, the exact nature of this "Vygotsky censure" by the Party has been far less straightforward. Although the suppression of Vygotsky's works has been referenced by a variety of scholars, few individuals have been able to provide an effective delineation of the factors underlying the Communist Party's decision to openly denounce Vygotskian theory.<sup>9</sup> Even the most committed scholars of

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<sup>5</sup> For a sampling of the scholarly literature that makes reference to this ban, please refer to: Woolfolk et al., *Educational Psychology*, 39; Newman and Holzman, *Lev Vygotsky: Revolutionary Scientist*, 7; Richard Bickley, "Vygotsky's Contributions to a Dialectical Materialist Philosophy," *Science and Society* 41, no.2 (1977): 192; Alberto Rosa and Ignatio Montero, "The Historical Context of Vygotsky's Work: A Socio-Historical Approach," in *Vygotsky and Education: Instructional Implications and Applications of Sociohistorical Psychology*, ed. Luis C. Mull (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 59-88; Peter Smagorinsky, "The Social Construction of Data: Methodological Problems of Investigating Learning in the Zone of Proximal Development," *Review of Educational Research* 65, no.3 (1995): 191-212; Robert Vanderburg, "Reviewing Research on Teaching Writing Based on Vygotsky's Theories: What We Can Learn" *Reading & Writing Quarterly* 22, no.4 (2006): 375; James Britton, "Vygotsky's Contribution to Pedagogical Theory," *English and Education* 3 (2008): 22-26; Carol K. Sigelman and Elizabeth A. Rider, *Life Span Human Development* (Belmont: Cengage Learning, 2011): 234; Vera John-Steiner and Holbrook Mahn, "Sociocultural Approaches to Learning and Development: A Vygotskian Framework," *Educational Psychologist* 31 (2011): 191-206.

<sup>6</sup> Anton Yasnitsky, "Vygotsky Circle as a Personal Network of Scholars: Restoring Connections between People and Ideas," *Integrative Psychological Behavioural Science* 45 (2011): 444.

<sup>7</sup> Now more correctly referred to as *Thinking and Speech*.

<sup>8</sup> Lev S. Vygotsky, *Mind and Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, trans. Michael Cole (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978); Lev S. Vygotsky, *Thought and Language*, trans. Alex Kozulin (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986); Robert Rieber and Aaron Carton, eds., *The Collected Works of L.S. Vygotsky*. Vol. 1-6 (New York: Plenum Press, 1987); Lima, "Vygotsky in the International Scene," 491; Yasnitsky, "Archival Revolution," 3.

<sup>9</sup> Vanderburg, "Reviewing Research," 375; Vera John-Steiner and Holbrook Mahn, "Sociocultural Approaches," 191; Harry Daniels, Michael Cole and James Wertsch, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Vygotsky* (Cambridge:

Vygotskian science, including Vera John-Steiner, Michael Cole and James Wertsch, fail to provide readers with a detailed account of this “official ban,” collapsing this interesting instance of “Stalinist” oppression to a one line-long anecdote. These authors also fall short in illuminating the reasons behind the ban, often falling victim to the age-old (and largely inaccurate) Cold War era historiographical heuristic of Soviet science that insinuates indiscriminate Stalinist hostility towards scientific research. Capitalizing on the explanatory power of totalitarian catchphrases, these writers tend to perpetuate ambiguous secondary accounts of the “Vygotsky ban”—often speculating that “ideological disparities,”<sup>10</sup> or “political differences,”<sup>11</sup> between Vygotsky and the Communist Party probably played a role in the censorship of his works, despite the corpus of recent research that points out the many problems with applying the “state-suppression” model to Soviet science.<sup>12</sup> Those historians who resist the temptation to rely on the explanatory power of “totalitarianism” in order to explain-away the ban often fall back on a variety of other well-known, but grossly over-simplified, historical “truisms”, often hypothesizing that the “Vygotsky censure” might have somehow stemmed from Soviet anti-Semitism, or Vygotsky’s alleged “cosmopolitan”<sup>13</sup> sympathies. Although political differences, an ideological departure, religious discrimination, or frequent communication with foreign psychologists may have certainly contributed to his censure, a rote listing of these broad factors can, at best, only ever provide a partial account of any active political effort made to suppress Vygotskian theory. In light of the abstruse nature of pre-existing

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Cambridge University Press, 2007), 213; Uwe P. Glelen and Samuel S. Jeshmaridian, “Lev S. Vygotsky: The Man and the Era,” *International Journal of Group Tensions* 28, no.3 (1999): 285.

<sup>10</sup> Glelen and Jeshmaridian, “Lev S. Vygotsky,” 285.

<sup>11</sup> Vanderburg, “Reviewing Research,” 375.

<sup>12</sup> For a revisionist interpretation of Stalinist science systems, whereby a mutually beneficial symbiosis exists between science and the state, please refer to: Nikolai Kremmentsov, *Stalinist Science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). For a nuanced discussion of Stalin’s (positive) perception of psychological research, please see: George Windholz, “Soviet Psychiatrists under Stalinist Duress: The Design for a ‘New Soviet Psychiatry’ and its Demise,” *History of Psychology* 10 (1999): 329-347; George Windholz, “The 1950 Joint Scientific Session: Pavlovians as the Accusers and the Accused,” *Journal of the History of Behavioural Sciences* 33 (1999): 61-81; Robert C. Tucker, “Stalin and the Uses of Psychology,” *World Politics* 8, no.4 (1956): 455-483.

<sup>13</sup> Although Stalin’s government did launch a political campaign against those who were seen to be “kowtowing to the West,” “cosmopolitanism” was a condemnatory term usually reserved for Russia’s Jewish population during the Cold War era, as this social group was often criticized for maintaining large-scale international communication networks. The majority of written accounts of the Vygotsky ban fail to acknowledge this terminological distinction.

explanations, many aspects of this purported ban remain largely enigmatic, with the reasons underlying this twenty year censure being even more so.

In order to shed light upon this historical mystery, this study takes a closer look at the “Vygotsky ban”. To avoid making the same mistakes as many contemporary Vygotsky biographers, and providing overly-simplified versions of the censure, this paper draws largely upon original Russian sources as well as English-language translations of a plethora of documentary evidence, including political pronouncements, professional publications, posthumous records, and archival studies carried out by Russian-language researchers at the Vygotsky archive. Further, a critical attitude towards all pre-existing historical depictions of the ban has been adopted to ensure that this study does not perpetuate vague, “broken telephone” accounts of this instance of “Stalinist suppression”. Concentrating specifically on the temporal period of 1934—the year of Vygotsky’s death, through 1936—the year of the notorious decree of the Central Committee of the Communist Party that banned *pedology* (alias “paedology”) as the scholarly discipline, mass movement, and related social practice, therefore, and the purported beginning of the “Vygotsky ban”, to 1956—the year when first post-WWII Vygotsky’s volume was published in the Soviet Union, which signifies the beginning of the post-Stalin psychological publication “thaw,” this paper endeavours to set the record straight about this frequently cited period of Soviet censorship by providing interested readers with the information that has long been left out of traditional narratives.

Since this twenty year period of Stalinist censure has been widely cited, but rarely described in sufficient depth by Vygotsky scholars, this study begins by describing the organs of Soviet control over information in the attempt to describe what exactly is meant when the term “ban” is employed by historians of science. By illuminating the institutions affiliated with the censorship process, the mechanisms through which written works were censored by the state, and the types of individuals that were subjected to this very public—yet not necessarily publically advertised—form of blacklisting, the first section of the paper operationalizes the term “ban” and discusses exactly how an author’s writings could be “actively suppressed by the state” in Russia during the mid-twentieth century. After explicating

the methods by which Soviet writers and scientists could be banned during the Stalinist era (and, in fact, all subsequent political eras until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991), this paper then undertakes a critical examination of the documentary evidence that is usually cited by contemporary biographers as proof of the Stalinist “ban” placed on Vygotskian theory. Focusing especially on those sources that have traditionally been either ignored, mischaracterized, or misunderstood by contemporary historians of science, this section will consider official Soviet regulations, trends in Vygotsky's personal publication rate, and references to Vygotsky's work in Soviet psychological treatises. By focusing on the logistics of *how* Vygotsky was allegedly banned, and also, perhaps more importantly, *why* this twenty year-long period of censure was initiated in the first place, this study endeavours to correct a historical narrative that has been so frequently mischaracterized by historians of science, and augment the growing body of revisionist literature that serves to deconstruct the mythologized persona of Lev Vygotsky and his even more mythologized scientific legacy.

### Operationalizing “Official” Bans: The Mechanics of Soviet Censorship

Although this paper was inspired by the inability of contemporary historians to provide a satisfactory answer to the question of why Vygotsky's works endured a twenty-year long period of suppression within the Soviet Union, preliminary research into this issue suggested that this was not the only question that been left unanswered within existing historical narratives of the Vygotsky ban. Not only have historians failed to provide readers with detailed well-researched reasons for the bans implementation, but there is also a startling absence of any sort of information on what exactly an “official ban” was, or the mechanisms underlying this protracted period of state-supported censorship. Before we can provide a comprehensive account of *why* Vygotsky was banned, it is imperative that we define *what* exactly an “official ban” was, the logistics behind Soviet censorship, and the primary causalities of this form of state-supported criticism.

According to historian of Russian and Soviet literature and the leading scholar in the history of Russian censorship Arlen Blyum, by the late 1920s the system of Soviet censorship took the form of a many tiered control mechanism, ranging from direct dictatorial intervention to an author's own self-censorship, whereby an author molds his text to avoid the moral, aesthetic, and other—primarily political—objections his or her text might encounter throughout the course of the publication process.<sup>14</sup> Although the monitoring of literary and scientific works was in many ways a multi-level system, the main body of Soviet censorship was The Main Administration for Literary and Publishing Affairs—commonly known as *Glavlit*.<sup>15</sup> Attached to the *Narkompros*, the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment, and later to the GPU (or security police, later renamed NKVD, then MGB, and later, infamously, the KGB), Glavlit carried out preliminary inspection of nearly all manuscripts, as well as photographs, drawings, and maps, to ensure that all written materials conformed to the *Perechen*—a top-secret series of circular letters issued by the Central Committee that listed the kind of information that should not be published in the open press because of its political or economic significance to the state.<sup>16</sup> Although Soviet censorship appears to be a top-down, unidirectional flow of power from the Politburo censors to the censored, with the Main Administration for Literary and Publishing Affairs operating as a mediator, the Glavlit actually functioned relatively autonomously.<sup>17</sup> Rather than receiving explicit instructions from the Central Committee, Glavlit functionaries often had to reinterpret publically issued Party statements and ascertain whether these proclamations had any implications for the publishing process.<sup>18</sup>

In order to ensure that new written materials were congruent with the *Perechen*, one of the main functions of the Glavlit was pre-publication censorship, whereby functionaries would, “[filter] ten times

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<sup>14</sup> Arlen Blyum, *A Self-Administered Poison: The System and Functions of Soviet Censorship* (Oxford: European Humanities Research Centre, 2003), 3-4; Jan Plamper, “Abolishing Ambiguity: Soviet Censorship Practices in the 1930s,” *The Russian Review* 60 (2001): 526.

<sup>15</sup> Herman Ermolaev, *Censorship in Soviet Literature, 1917-1991* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1997), 3.

<sup>16</sup> Ermolaev, *Censorship*, 6.

<sup>17</sup> Plamper, “Abolishing Ambiguity,” 527.

<sup>18</sup> Blyum, *A Self-Administered Poison*, 17; Robert Rogers, “Censorship and Libraries in the Soviet Union,” *Journal of Library History, Philosophy and Comparative Librarianship* 8, no.1 (1973): 26.

water that was already distilled,” subjecting the text, “. . .not only to the excision of ‘inconvenient parts’<sup>19</sup>, but also to substantial changes and, not infrequently, to censors’ additions.”<sup>20</sup> In addition, the Glavlit was also responsible for ensuring that all existing literary works were supportive of contemporary Party policies. This type of post-circulation censorship could take several forms, however the two most common actions taken against reactionary literary products already in distribution were removal and revision, whereby undesirable parts of products could be eliminated (ex. the blackening of names), or entire books could be taken from library and bookstore shelves and stored in a restricted-access special collection known as the *spetskhran*.<sup>21</sup> Although contemporary accounts of the “Vygotsky ban” do not specify the type of censorship endured by Vygotsky’s works over the course of this twenty year ban, it is likely that “officially censored” would experience both pre-, and post-circulation censorship, whereby their works would be removed from library shelves, and with his or her future writings being denied publication.

Although censorship was commonplace within the Soviet Union, with almost every author experiencing some form of either pre-, or post-circulation censorship during the 1920s and onwards, explicit Party bans on individuals were far less routine. Even authors whose works showcase a variety of Glavlit insertions, deletions, or blackened portions, or were frequently denied publication by the censors were rarely banned from publishing further, and usually faced few long-term consequences for their moral, political, or ideological literary errors.<sup>22</sup> After scouring histories of Soviet censorship, publication prohibitions aimed towards specific individuals seem to be restricted to “enemies of the people,” or those individuals who had been arrested, legally condemned, and executed in the public purges endemic within

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<sup>19</sup> Inconvenient parts included those passages that 1) contained propaganda against the Soviet regime, 2) divulged military secrets, 3) stirred up public opinion through false information, 4) aroused nationalistic and religious fanaticism, or 5) were considered to be pornographic. Ermolaev, *Censorship*, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Blyum, *A Self-Administered Poison*, 6.

<sup>21</sup> Rogers, “Censorship,” 27; Plamper, “Abolishing Ambiguity,” 531. Marianna Tax Choldin, “Access to Foreign Publications in Soviet Libraries,” *Libraries & Culture* 26, no.1 (1991): 140.

<sup>22</sup> Ermolaev, *Censorship*, 51-97.



the Soviet Union during the 1930s.<sup>23</sup> Whereas the majority of pre- and post-circulation censorship efforts had few long-term consequences for authors, personal publication bans were usually the end-result of highly condemnatory statements issued by Stalin or, less often, by the highest state officials. While these statements were usually a political rally commentary or a letter to official Party mass media rather than publically issued Party decrees, they likely would have been interpreted by the Glavlit as an "official" publication ban. Such an example can be observed in the case of Trotsky, "the prophet outcast," exiled from the Soviet Union in 1929, whose pre-exiting works were placed under a "Vygotsky-like" publication ban in the wake of a 1932 article authored by Stalin, dubbing Trotskyism "the vanguard of counterrevolutionary bourgeoisie fighting against Communism, against Soviet power, and against the building of socialism in the USSR."<sup>24</sup>

In light of this information, the authors of this paper endeavoured on a search to find any sort of Party-authored document that was overtly critical of either Vygotsky's personality, or his psychological theories. Upon further research it appears that no scholar, either professional or amateur, has been able to unearth any sort of documentation authored by Stalin, or by any other leading members of the Central Committee, that explicitly mentions the name of this scholar, and thus suggests that Vygotsky's work was formally banned within the Soviet Union. Further, Vygotsky's personal narrative makes the likelihood of an explicit ban on his work even more suspect. Given that the 1930s was a decade characterized by the Great Terror, it might seem surprising that Vygotsky lived out his last few years peacefully, dying of natural causes in 1934, while so many of his contemporary scientists were publically arrested, imprisoned, and in many cases executed. As Rene van der Veer aptly notes, "[i]n a period when people were charged and sentenced to 'ten years without the right of correspondence'<sup>25</sup>...on grounds of having planned to dig a tunnel from Moscow to Great Britain...the fact is that Vygotsky was [never] arrested."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ermolaev, *Censorship*, 67.

<sup>24</sup> Ermolaev, *Censorship*, 67.

<sup>25</sup> Soviet newspeak euphemism for a "death sentence". See: Stephen F. Cohen, *The Victims Return: Survivors of the Gulag After Stalin* (London : I B Tauris & Co Ltd, 2011), 68.

<sup>26</sup> René van der Veer, "Criticizing Vygotsky," *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology* 38, no.6 (2000): 5.

Furthermore, one needs to remember that after his death Vygotsky's body was entered into the ground and has always stayed in its final resting place—Novodevich'e Cemetery—one of the most prestigious national cemeteries within the USSR, second only to the necropolis of Kremlin Wall, which seems to indicate Vygotsky's fairly high official status within Soviet scientific hierarchy.<sup>27</sup>

Given the lack of documentary evidence suggesting that Vygotsky was formally criticized, or personally persecuted, by either Stalin, or any high ranking members of the Central Committee, it appears as though an "official" Stalinist censure of Vygotsky's works simply never existed.

### Vygotsky's Declining Publication Rate: Multiple Meanings?

While it appears as though the contemporary historians of science may have been wrong about the formal nature of the ban against Vygotsky's theories, quantitative data cited by Vygotskian biographers seems to suggest that there may still have been some type of concerted effort on the part of Glavlit functionaries to actively suppress his work. Many scholars have lent support to the Vygotsky-victimization narrative by noting a dramatic drop in Vygotsky's publication rate after his death, whereby from 1936-1956, no Vygotsky's work was published within the Soviet Union.<sup>28</sup> This decline is seen as strong corroborating evidence for a sustained period of Soviet suppression, as one would expect that an author's publication rate would wane in the midst of a targeted censorship program aimed towards their work. Although the cause-effect relationship between Stalinist censure and publication decline makes logical sense, a critical examination of the data must be undertaken before this hypothesis is accepted by historians and permanently attached to Vygotsky's personal narrative.

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<sup>27</sup> Yasnitsky, "Lev Vygotsky," 129; For a discussion of Novodevich'e Cemetery, please refer to: Caroline Brooke, *Moscow: A Cultural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 119.

<sup>28</sup> Newman and Holtzman, *Lev Vygotsky: Revolutionary Scientist*, 7; Bickley, "Vygotsky's Contributions," 192; Rosa and Montero, "The Historical Context," 59-88; Smagorinsky, "The Social Construction of Data," 191-212; Vanderburg, "Reviewing Research," 375; Britton, "Vygotsky's Contribution," 22-26; Sigelman and Rider, *Life-Span*, 234; John-Steiner and Mahn, "Sociocultural Approaches," 191-206.

Although Vygotsky's publication rate does experience a marked decline from the period of 1934 to 1956, this overarching trend is by no means linear, as fewer of his published works were released to the public in both the mid-1920s, and early 1930s. One such example being his doctoral dissertation.<sup>29</sup> Confusing the alleged temporality of the "ban," Vygotsky's 1925 doctoral thesis *Psychology of Art*, although contracted for publishing in November, 1925<sup>30</sup>, was most likely barred from circulation until 1965—when it was eventually first published in the Soviet Union by the famous Russian-American linguist and semiotician Vyacheslav Vs. Ivanov—as a result of his tendency to reference several 'subversive' Soviet public figures and political leaders in his work.<sup>31</sup> Most important among these individuals was Leon Trotsky, the Marxist revolutionary and Soviet politician, who had fallen from grace within the Soviet Union's political leadership during the mid-1920s.<sup>32</sup> An enthusiastic follower of Trotsky, Vygotsky repeatedly and approvingly incorporated many of his quotations into his professional writing, including his published book *Educational Psychology* (1925) and unfinished manuscript *The (Historical) Significance of the Crisis in Psychology*.<sup>33</sup> Although Soviet editors usually censored Vygotsky's political missteps during the posthumous publication process by either removing the punctuation surrounding borrowed quotes, or by deleting citations referring to these ostracized figures, censors would sometimes withhold publication of certain works that portrayed unpopular individuals in a

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<sup>29</sup> L.S. Vygotsky, *Psychology of Art*, trans. Scripta Technica.(1925; repr.,Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1971); Yasnitsky, "Lev Vygotsky," 113.

<sup>30</sup> Vygotskaya, G.L., and T.M. Lifanova. 1996. *Lev Semenovich Vygotskii. Zhizn'.Deiatel'nost'. Shtrikhi k portretu*. Moscow: Smysl, p. 91.

<sup>31</sup> van der Veer, "Criticizing Vygotsky," 4.

<sup>32</sup> van der Veer and Yasnitsky, "Vygotsky in English," 484.

<sup>33</sup> van der Veer and Yasnitsky, "Vygotsky in English," 484; For further discussion of Vygotsky's enthusiastic support of Leon Trotsky please refer to: Peter Keiler, *Lev Vygotskij - ein Leben für die Psychologie* (Weinheim und Basel: Beltz 2002), Yasnitsky, "Lev Vygotsky," 112, Yasnitsky, "The Vygotsky that We (Do Not) Know," 53-54, Zavershneva, E. I. (2012). Investigating LS Vygotsky's Manuscript "The Historical Meaning of the Crisis in Psychology". *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 50(4), 42-63, Zavershneva, E. I., & Osipov, M. E. (2012). Primary Changes to the Version of "The Historical Meaning of the Crisis in Psychology" Published in the Collected Works of LS Vygotsky. *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 50(4), 64-84; Zavershneva, E., & Osipov, M. (2012). Sravnitel'nyi analiz rukopisi "(Istoricheskii) Smysl psikhologicheskogo krizisa" i ee versii, opublikovannoi v t.1 sobraniia sochinenii L.S. Vygotskogo (1982) pod redaktsiei M.G. Yaroshevskogo. *PsyAnima, Dubna Psychological Journal*, 3, 41-72 (open access publication available online at <http://www.psyanima.ru/journal/2012/3/2012n3a3/2012n3a3.1.pdf>). .

particularly positive light. This was most likely the case for Vygotsky's *Psychology of Art*, as he ends his thesis with this lengthy quote drawn from Leon Trotsky's well-known *Literature and Revolution*:

[Man] will try to master first the semiconscious and then the subconscious processes in his own organism, such as breathing, the circulation of the blood, digestion, reproduction, and, within necessary limits, he will try to subordinate them to the control of reason and will. Even purely physiologic life will become subject to collective experiments. The human species, the coagulated *Homo sapiens*, will once more enter into a state of radical transformation, and, in his own hands, will become an object of the most complicated methods of artificial selection and psycho-physical training. This is entirely in accord with evolution... Man will make it his purpose to master his own feelings, to raise his instincts of consciousness, to make them transparent, to extend the wires of his will into hidden recesses, and thereby to raise himself to a new plane, to create a higher social biologic type, or, if you please, a superman.<sup>34</sup>

Not only did *Psychology of Art* experience pre-circulation censorship in the 1920s, but it also underwent "self-censorship" during the 1960s for political correctness, with all references to L.D. Trotsky, N.I. Bukharin and other "enemies of the people" were removed by the editor of this edition of 1965 (second, expanded edition of 1968), only to be fully restored in a 2008 Russian edition of the text. Quite characteristically, all those censored were Russian authors, whereas the list of foreign references remained intact. Apparently the 1928 edited volume *Social Sciences* enjoyed a somewhat similar fate, as a variety of the book's contributors (including Vygotsky) made references to political "outcasts," including a characteristically Trotskyian passage found within Vygotsky's textual contribution.<sup>35</sup> Thus, unlike Vygotsky's *Psychology of Art*, which remained unpublished during his lifetime, this volume was released to the public, but was subsequently censored by authorities and relocated to the *spetskhran*. Despite the fact that these two works were initially withheld from public audiences, this publication prohibition had little effect on either Vygotsky's personal life, or his professional career, as Vygotsky was able to subsequently secure a variety of academic positions, and went on to have most of his writings published in spite of his reverence for highly provocative figures within the Soviet Union.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> L.S. Vygotsky, *Psikhologiya iskusstva [Psychology of Art]* (Moskva: Labirint, 1926/2008), 207.

<sup>35</sup> See Vygotsky, L.S. (1928/2012). The Science of Psychology. *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 50(4), 85-106.

<sup>36</sup> Yasnitsky, "L.S. Vygotsky," 113; Friedgut and Friedgut, "A Man of his Country," 36-38.

Another complication that arises when trying to ascribe Vygotsky's publication fluctuations to a demarcated period of censorship (1936-1956) is the intense decrease in Vygotsky's publication rate observed within the early 1930s, specifically, 1931-1933 (Figure 1).<sup>37</sup> With the exception of several textbooks and curriculum materials, neither of his major works written in this period, or before (e.g., *History of the Development of Higher Mental Functions*, *Tool and Sign in Child Development*) were released to the public, and even the publication of his most famous book, *Thinking and Speech*, experienced an indeterminate delay.<sup>38</sup> This period also saw a proliferation of criticisms aimed towards Vygotsky, with individuals such as Talankin (1931), Abel'skaia and Neopikhonova (1932), Feofanov (1932) and Razmyslov (1934), critiquing his mechanism, "menshevizing idealism" and ultimately condemning his theories for uncritical borrowing from the West, and thus, 'bourgeois' sympathies.<sup>39</sup> This period of publication rate decline and popular hostility can perhaps be partially attributed to a series of Uzbekistan experiments overseen by both Vygotsky and Luria during the early 1930s, as some contemporary scholars criticized this psychological project as colonialist and (even worse) racist, and stated that both its methodology and research results opposed Marxist theory.<sup>40</sup>

While these external critiques might have certainly played a role in dissuading Vygotsky from submitting some of his more recent studies for publication, alternative revisionist biographies of Vygotsky's life also suggest that self-criticism might have impacted his waning publication rate during the early 1930s.<sup>41</sup> These scholars suggest that during the period of 1929 to 1931, Vygotsky's career was

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<sup>37</sup> Anton Yasnitsky, unpublished manuscript. Graphical representation based upon a critical interpretation of T.M. Lifanova's compilation of Vygotsky's published works: T.M. Lifanova, "Bibliography of the Writings of Lev Semenovich Vygotsky," *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology* 37, no.5 (1999): 79-102; Yasnitsky, "Lev S. Vygotsky," 124.

<sup>38</sup> Yasnitsky, "Lev S. Vygotsky," 124.

<sup>39</sup> A.A. Talankin, "On the Vygotsky and Luria Group," 1931; repr., *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology* 38, no. 6 (2000): 10-11; R. Abel'skaia, and Ia.S. Neopikhonova, "The Problem of Development in German Psychology and its Influence on Soviet Pedology and Psychology," 1932; repr., *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology* 38, no.6 (2000): 31-44; M.P. Feofanov, "The Theory of Cultural Development in Pedology as an Eclectic Conception with Basically Idealist Roots," 1932; repr., *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology* 38, no.6 (2000): 12-30.

<sup>40</sup> P. Razmyslov, "On Vygotsky's and Luria's 'Cultural-Historical Theory of Psychology'," 1934; repr., *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology* 38, no.6 (2000): 45-58.

<sup>41</sup> Yasnitsky, "Vygotsky in English,"; Yasnitsky, "Lev Vygotsky," 129.

affected by a profound theoretical and personal crisis that emerged in the wake—or rather during and, furthermore, as a result—of the Cultural Revolution and the rapid social and economic developments that corresponded with the first Five Year Plan.<sup>42</sup> Within this period Vygotsky was intensely critical of his work<sup>43</sup>, as evidenced in his rare official publications, private correspondence, and personal records, often resulting in his failure to prepare some of his more recent manuscripts for publication, including a 1930s draft manuscript entitled *Development of Higher Mental Functions*.<sup>44</sup> While this document was published by Vygotsky's colleagues in 1960, it appears as though Vygotsky never intended for its public release, as it does not appear in Vygotsky's authorial bibliography of his published works, or within his self-made list of unpublished manuscripts.<sup>45</sup>

Therefore, while it may be true that fewer of Vygotsky's writings were released during the second half of the twentieth century, fluctuations in his publication rate are by no means solely attributable to Communist Party hostility as a variety of mitigating factors all served to affect the amount of work published by Vygotsky within a given year. In fact, evidence shows that one of the biggest censors of Vygotsky's work might have been Vygotsky himself, for it is after his death in 1934 that we observe an explosion in the number of his published works. This 1934-1936 surge in Vygotsky's posthumous publication rate (see Figure 1), sometimes referred to as the "Golden Age of Vygotskian Psychology," has been attributed to the efforts of a number of his colleagues and associates, who enthusiastically endeavoured to make Vygotsky's unpublished theories available to the wider public.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Yasnitsky, "Vygotsky in English,"; Yasnitsky, "Lev Vygotsky," 129.

<sup>43</sup> For example, in a 1931 letter to his colleague Luria, Vygotsky writes: "I am still beset with thousands of petty chores. The fruitlessness of what I do greatly distresses me. My scientific thinking is going off into the realm of fantasy, and I cannot think things through in a realistic way to the end. Nothing is going right: I am doing the wrong things, writing the wrong things, saying the wrong things. A fundamental reorganization is called for—and this time I am going to carry it out." L. S. Vygotsky, "Letters to students and colleagues," *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 45, no.2 (2007): 11-60.

<sup>44</sup> L.S. Vygotsky, *Development of Higher Mental Functions. From the Unpublished Works* (Moscow: APN RSFSR, 1960).

<sup>45</sup> Yasnitsky, "The Vygotsky that We (Do Not) Know," 54.

<sup>46</sup> Yasnitsky, "The Vygotsky that We (Do Not) Know," 57.

While it is hoped that the aforementioned arguments have revealed the non-linear nature of Vygotsky's publication rate, and have problematized pre-existing interpretations of the "Vygotsky ban's" temporality, the fact remains that historians of science are fundamentally correct when they state that Vygotsky published fewer works after the mid-1930s. Although this drop has been previously conceptualized as an active period of Soviet suppression, it is important to remember that this drop might be related to Vygotsky's early death in 1934.<sup>47</sup> Since Vygotsky was no longer alive to actively and publically promote his own research, it only makes sense that fewer of his works would be published from the period of the late 1930s to the 1950s. Further, it should be noted that fluctuations in Vygotsky's publication rate seem to mirror the publication trends occurring within pedology, his chosen field of study (Figure 2).

### Pedology as a Possible Culprit: The 1936 Decree

Although the discipline of pedology emerged as a primarily Western phenomenon, characterized by the work of individuals like G. Stanley Hall, Ernst Meumann, Wilhelm Preyer James Mark Baldwin, and many others, interest in this growing child-study movement soon spread to Russia in late Imperial Russia.<sup>48</sup> Anchored primarily within the fields of psychology and education, this pioneering group of Russia pedologists, like their European and North American counterparts, drew upon the disciplines of psychology, sociology and pediatric medicine to define a new approach to the study of the character and development of children.<sup>49</sup> Following the October Revolution, pedological activity assumed a new dimension, as the newly established political climate within the Soviet Union fostered child-study research efforts and advocated for the reformulation of educational systems upon materialistic, empirical, and scientific foundations.<sup>50</sup> Disciplinary endorsement from at least three People's Commissariats<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Yasnitsky, "Lev Vygotsky," 109.

<sup>48</sup> Andy Byford, "Turning Pedagogy into a Science: Teachers and Psychologists in Late Imperial Russia (1897-1917)," *Osiris* 23 (2008)..

<sup>49</sup> Ewing, "Restoring Teachers to their Rights," 476; Petrovsky, *Psychology in the Soviet Union*, 246.

<sup>50</sup> David L. Hoffmann, *Cultivating the Masses: Modern State Practices and Soviet Socialism, 1914-1939*. Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 2011

(including the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment, Health, and Railways) resulted in the proliferation of pedological institutions that were established for the purpose of training enthusiastic teachers and advanced pedagogues in the science of child development.<sup>52</sup> Seeking to fulfill the claim that their discipline had both scientific legitimacy and social significance, many new graduates saw educational institutions as a site for both empirical research and practical experiments.<sup>53</sup> Charged with the task of improving Soviet schools, many of these pedologists began to administer sets of mental and personality tests within the classroom in order to measure the learning potential of children and expedite annual enrollment decisions. Under these facilitative social circumstances, a variety of leading Soviet psychologists, educators, psychiatrists and medical doctors led by Konstantin Kornilov, Mikhail Bassov, Aron Zalkind, Pavel Blonsky and a few other spokesmen for the emerging scientific discipline and social practice began to perform research into child problems, and as a result were subsumed into the administrative and organizational sphere of pedological leadership.<sup>54</sup> Vygotsky was also recognized as a leading pedologist in the USSR, as he participated actively in the field within the 1920s and 1930s, delivering a series of pedology lectures at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Moscow State University, and publishing a variety of pedological textbooks including *Pedology of the School Age* (1928), *Pedology of the Adolescent* (1929, 1930, 1931), and *Lectures on Pedology* (1934, 1935).<sup>55</sup>

The discipline of pedology did not always enjoy such a fruitful existence though, as a variety of pedological theories and practices came under attack in the 1930s, as many teachers and educational policy makers thought that pedology was of "little benefit to the [educational] system."<sup>56</sup> These complaints eventually culminated in the 1936 resolution of the CPSU Central Committee, "On

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<sup>51</sup> Later renamed "Ministries".

<sup>52</sup> Andy Byford, "Turning Pedagogy into a Science: Teachers and Psychologists in Late Imperial Russia (1897-1917)," *Osiris* 23 (2008): 51; Petrovsky, *Psychology in the Soviet Union*, 247.

<sup>53</sup> Ewing, "Restoring Teachers to their Rights," 477.

<sup>54</sup> Petrovsky, *Psychology in the Soviet Union*, 251.

<sup>55</sup> Yasnitsky, "The Vygotsky That We (Do Not) Know," 55.

<sup>56</sup> Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System, Schedule A, Vol. 25, Case 493 (interviewer R.S., type A4). Female, 55, Great Russian, Teacher (Cambridge: Widener Library, Harvard University, 1951), 22-23.  
<http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/5363199?n=23&imagesize=1200&jp2Res=.25&printThumbnails=no>



Pedological Distortions in the System of People's Commissariats of Enlightenment," which called for the elimination of pedology as a scholarly discipline, mass movement, and social practice.<sup>57</sup> Although there are several different hypotheses explaining this denunciation of pedology, the 1936 decree was mainly a methodological critique of pedological practice, as many party members were growing increasingly concerned that unqualified pedologists were abusing and misinterpreting psychometric test results and over-ascribing mental deficiencies to Soviet children—a fear that is far from unjustified when one notes that in Leningrad, from 1935-1936, approximately fourteen percent of 7 to 13 year old pupils were asked to stay behind to repeat their secondary school grades.<sup>58</sup> Stalin appears to have been especially disillusioned with the pedological practice of mental testing upon his reception of a pedological assessment suggesting that his son was mentally deficient.<sup>59</sup> Pedology was also critiqued for its incompatibility with Marxist doctrine and the emerging 'New Man' theory of psychology, as Soviet leaders rejected any suggestion that heredity or environment presented limits that could not be overcome with the proper combination of enthusiasm and dedication.<sup>60</sup> The 1936 decree was primarily effective in banning mental testing as a method of research and psychological assessment and, then, eradicating pedology as a scholarly discipline, with the decree immediately resulting in the closure of all pedological centers located in the Soviet Union<sup>61</sup> and reorienting all practicing pedologists towards pedagogical practice, which for an unbiased contemporary observer looks pretty much like a mere change of labels.

Although the 1936 decree never openly gave an order for the active suppression of pre-existing literature on pedology, the public nature of this political pronouncement and the political clout of the administrative body that issued it, inspired Glavlit officials to take pre-emptive measures, preventing the publication of recently written pedological works, and indiscriminately sanctioning all pre-existing

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<sup>57</sup> On Pedological Distortions in the Commissariats of Education: A Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, July 4, 1936, in *Soviet Psychiatry*, edited by Joseph Wortis (Baltimore: The Williams and Wilkins Company, 1950), 242–245.

<sup>58</sup> Minkova, "Pedology as a Complex Science," 93.

<sup>59</sup> Minkova, "Pedology as a Complex Science," 93.

<sup>60</sup> Ewing, "Restoring Teachers to their Rights," 482; Bauer, "The New Man," 129-150.

<sup>61</sup> Glelen and Jeshmaridan, "Lev S. Vygotsky," 282.

materials that touched on pedagogical topics.<sup>62</sup> This ban had clear implications for Vygotsky's pedagogical writings, as more than one hundred and twenty pedagogical textbooks were blacklisted at once, "among the authors being such prominent educators and psychologists as Blonsky and Vygotsky."<sup>63</sup> Thus, in the context of the 1936 Party decree, the censure of Vygotsky's works appears to be less of an "official" attack, or informal suppression, and more of an inadvertent result of the increasingly anti-pedagogical Soviet political zeitgeist. Nevertheless, even an indirect and impersonal ban is a ban, and while we can critique contemporary Vygotsky scholars for their lack of primary-source research and for their gross over-simplifying of this particular historical instance, it appears as though we cannot fault them for arguing that from the period of 1936 onwards Vygotsky's works did experience a demarcated period of active suppression.

### Vygotsky's Posthumous Legacy and the Many Meanings of Ban

Or can we? Although common-sense tells us that an explicit Party ban against Vygotsky's works, however accidental or inadvertent, would result in a marked decline in both his public image and publication rate, a closer examination of contemporary data suggests that the Communist Party ban on pedagogy had little impact on Vygotsky's posthumous legacy even during the years immediately following the 1936 decree.

Rather than being actively chastised, or strategically ignored in the years following the 1936 ban on pedagogy, the late 1930s saw Vygotsky venerated within the Soviet Union, as his name was neither

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<sup>62</sup> This is indicated in M.V. Zelenov's, "Literary Cleansings in 1932-1937 in Soviet Russia," *International Journal for Russian & East European Bibliographic, Library, and Publishing Studies* 14 (2000): 42-57, where he states that the cleansings of libraries are closely linked with the policies of the Central Committee of the CPSU(b). For example, after the Central Committee's Decree on "Pedagogical Perversions in the System Narkompros'es", among the local organs of censorship a list was distributed of 121 textbooks, educational, and methodical manuals on pedagogy, issued since 1926, all of which had to be withdrawn and relocated to *spetskhran*.

<sup>63</sup> Rogers, "Censorship and Libraries" 26. As aptly noted by Arlen Blyum in his *A Self-Administered Poison*: The pettiness and pathological captiousness displayed by *Glavlit* officials were, very often, not in the least activated by any possible 'danger' posed by a text totally lacking in subversive intent. But that is the whole point: totalitarian censorship makes no distinction between the important and the unimportant, the material and immaterial. It seizes equally on a 'criminal', anti-Soviet text, and on a trivial misprint in a crossword or an odd turn of phrase in a translation.<sup>63</sup>

avoided, nor omitted from a variety of important public forums. With the exception of two particularly harsh and, presumably, politically motivated critiques of Vygotskian theory that were released in the late 1930s, including A.V. Kozyrev and P.A. Turko's "Professor L.S. Vygotsky's 'Pedological School,'"<sup>64</sup> (1936) and E.I. Rudneva's infamous, "Vygotsky's Pedological Distortions,"<sup>65</sup> (1937), Vygotsky—as a psychologist—faced very few long-term consequences for his non-pedological work, as his name and theories were referenced (and celebrated) at various times within influential texts during the period of 1936 to 1955. Perhaps the two most striking examples of this phenomenon are a) over thirty references to Vygotsky found within S.L. Rubinstein's 1940 edition of *Foundations of General Psychology*<sup>66</sup>, and b) his presence within the volume of 1940 of the highly prestigious (and rigorously censored) *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*.<sup>67</sup> His presence in both of these works is startling as Rubinstein's book—presumably highly censored publication that was approved and officially prescribed by Narkompros of Russian Federation as the handbook for pedagogical colleges—was subsequently the recipient of the prestigious Stalin prize for 1941 (awarded in 1942),<sup>68</sup> which appears to have notably contributed to Rubinstein's appointment to a range of highest administrative positions in Soviet psychological establishments (in 1942) and his election to the Academy of Sciences of USSR (in September 1943), as the first ever psychologist in Russia awarded the title of the Academy's Corresponding Member. At the same time, the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, the "Soviet Britannica", a multi-volume book series created with the purpose of "furthering the aims of [both]... party and the state," celebrated Vygotsky's work for, "[laying] the foundation in Soviet psychology for experimental investigation of the development of such most complex psychical

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<sup>64</sup> A.V. Kozyrev and P.A. Turko, "Professor L.S. Vygotsky's 'Pedological School,'" 1936; repr., *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology* 38, no.6 (2000): 59-74;

<sup>65</sup> E.I. Rudneva, "Vygotsky's Pedological Distortions," 1937; repr., *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology* 38, no.2 (2002): 75-94.

<sup>66</sup> S.L. Rubinstein, *Foundations of General Psychology* (Moscow: Uchpedgiz, 1940).

<sup>67</sup> Alexander Luria and A.N. Leontiev, "Psikhologiiia [Psychology]," in *Bolshaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia* [The Great Soviet Encyclopedia], ed. Otto Schmidt, vol. 47 (Moscow: Soviet Encyclopedia Publishing House, 1940), 525.

<sup>68</sup> The Stalin Prize was the highest honor that could be bestowed by the Soviet state in recognition of a single piece of work in science or culture. This award included a large monetary prize of 100 000 roubles. For more information on the Stalin Prize, please refer to: Oliver Johnson, "The Stalin Prize and the Soviet Artist: Status Symbol or Stigma?" *Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies* 70, no.4 (2011), 819-843.

[mental] processes as the processes of concepts formation in children, development of oral and written speech..." and created a basis, "...for [the] experimental investigation of higher psychical [mental] functions after brain lesions and brain development defects."<sup>69</sup>

Vygotsky's memory continued to be venerated well into the late 1940's and early 1950s, with his name appearing a dozen times within A.R. Luria's ground-breaking volume "Traumatic Aphasia"<sup>70</sup> (1947) that was the first ever major publication of his neuropsychological work (translated into English in 1970) and the second, postwar edition of 1946 of S.L. Rubinstein's prize-winning *Foundations of General Psychology*. A characteristic example of Soviet scholarly discourse on Vygotsky and his legacy can be found in B.G. Ananiev's Russian article "The Progressive Traditions of Russian Psychology"<sup>71</sup> (1945), later republished as "Achievements of Soviet Psychologists" in 1948 as an English translation in *The Journal of General Psychology* in 1948.<sup>72</sup> In this commemorative account, Ananiev—another major official in the hierarchy of Soviet science and the leader of the so-called "Leningrad psychological school"—refers to Vygotsky's work as a series of "splendid investigations," and notes Vygotsky's contributions to the contemporary understanding of the general laws associated with the human thought process.<sup>73</sup>

Another remarkable publication during this period is B.M. Teplov's public lecture "Soviet Psychological Science" (1947) that was publically released as a brochure in truly astonishing numbers, with 100,000 copies made.<sup>74</sup> Although Teplov did criticize Vygotsky for a variety of pedological mistakes

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<sup>69</sup> Alexander Luria and A.N. Leontiev, "Psikhologiya [Psychology]," in *Bolshaya sovetskaya entsiklopediya* [The Great Soviet Encyclopedia], ed. Otto Schmidt, vol. 47 (Moscow: Soviet Encyclopedia Publishing House, 1940), 525.

<sup>70</sup> A.R. Luria, *Traumatic Aphasia* (Moscow: AMN SSSR, 1947): pgs. 56-231. This was a particularly prominent book within the field of psychology—often informally referred to as the "Bible" of Soviet Neuropsychology.

<sup>71</sup> B.V. Ananiev, "The Progressive Traditions of Russian Psychology" *Scientific Notes of Moscow State University* 90 (1945): 234-246.

<sup>72</sup> B.V. Ananiev, "Achievements of Soviet Psychologists," *The Journal of General Psychology* 38 (1948): 257-262.

<sup>73</sup> Ananiev, "Achievements," 261.

<sup>74</sup> B.M. Teplov, "Soviet Psychological Science over the Period of Thirty Years," *Pravda* (October 13, 1947): 1-32. This was a booklet of a popular lecture created on the thirtieth anniversary of the October Revolution, with over 100,000 copies published. To put the publication numbers in context: only 10,000 copies of each of the titles--

and theoretical digressions, the lecture was ultimately favorable to Vygotsky—glorifying him as one of the leading and most prominent Soviet psychologists. Thus, on a number of occasions, Teplov referred to the “splendid experimental research initiated by Vygotsky” (p. 14) and “the great many very valuable works that he created as a first-rank Soviet psychologist” (p. 18); and praised him and his associates for “several works of great significance on the problems of memory and thinking” (p. 22), for creating “original methods of experimental investigation of [higher psychological] processes in children,” and for the “discovery of the most interesting facts and particular regularities in this field” that were presented in a few monographs that “belong to the number of best works of Soviet psychological science” (p. 16).

However, a relatively brief period of the post-WWII “thaw” was followed by a period of social and political unrest of roughly 1948-1954 caused by a number of particularly alarming and terrifying domestic processes in the Soviet Union of the early Cold War (such as the state sponsored campaigns of xenophobia and anti-Semitism, renewed political show trials and massive executions, the enforced administrative control in science, etc.) and the change in the political leadership after the death of Stalin in 1953 (i.e., it was only in early 1955 that the new leader of the country, Nikita Khrushchev eventually got full control over the Party and the state). This period of 1948-1954 demonstrates a notable decline of scientific publications in psychology, as it is clear from a number of available scholarly bibliographies of the official leaders of the psychological sciences in the USSR, such as Rubinstein, Luria, Leontiev, and Teplov. However, as early as the end of 1954, the first specialized post-war psychological journal titled *Voprosy psikhologii* was officially launched and a new series of psychological publications followed. The name of Vygotsky yet again figures prominently in a few publications and oral presentations of 1955, such as Luria's published paper “The role of the word in the formation of temporary connections in normal and abnormal development” or his talk titled “Speech and organization of behavior” that he

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Vygotsky's original “Thinking and speech” (1934), Rudneva's “Pedological distortions” (1937) or Rubinstein's “Foundations of General Psychology” (1940)—were circulated within Soviet Union.

delivered at the Scientific session dedicated to the 200th anniversary of Moscow State University, May 9-13, 1955.<sup>75</sup>

Then, according to the “suppressed Vygotsky” traditional narrative, it was only in 1956 that the mythical “Vygotsky ban” was finally lifted. In 1956, the newly established journal *Voprosy psikhologii* published a landmark paper by the journal’s Deputy Editor V.N. Kolbanovskii titled “On psychological views of L.S. Vygotsky,”<sup>76</sup> the first postwar thematic journal publication on Vygotsky and his scientific legacy that had Vygotsky’s name in its title. Eventually the first major postwar publication of Vygotsky’s work took place: his *Selected Psychological Investigations* was publically released in Moscow during 1956, followed by yet another volume of his oeuvre in 1960—in retrospect, yet again severely problematizing the notion that Vygotsky’s works experienced any sort of active suppression within the twenty year period of 1936 to 1956.<sup>77</sup> This conclusion necessitates a reframing of our original research question, as the issue at hand is not so much a question of *why* Vygotsky was suppressed, but *if* he was “banned” at all. While the answer appears to be “yes”—as a recently discovered 1961 edition of the top-secret government document *Perechen* reveals that a couple of works of Vygotsky, including yet another of his “Trotskyist” works of the mid 1920s, the *Pedagogical Psychology* of 1925, were in fact “blacklisted” (even until well after the first two postwar volumes of his works were published!), this study suggests that there is still much to be learned about what it meant to be “banned” within the Soviet Union.<sup>78</sup> Despite the fact that some of Vygotsky’s works do seem to have been on a list of “officially” banned works, the personal, professional, and posthumous consequences of the alleged “Stalinist

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<sup>75</sup> See Luria, A.R. The role of the word in the formation of temporary connections in normal and abnormal development. Moscow: APN RSFSR, 1955; Luria, A.R. Speech and organization of behavior. Proceedings of the philosophical department. Scientific session dedicated to the 200th anniversary of Moscow State University, May 9-13, 1955. Moscow: MGU, 1955; pp. 31-32.

<sup>76</sup> Kolbanovskii, V.N. On psychological views of L.S. Vygotsky. *Voprosy psikhologii*, 1956, issue 5, pp. 104-114.

<sup>77</sup> L.S. Vygotsky, *Selected Psychological Investigations* (Moscow: APN RSFSR, 1956); Vygotsky, L. S. (1960). *Razvitie vysshikh psikhicheskikh funktsij. Iz neopublikovannykh trudov* [Development of higher psychological functions. From the unpublished works] (Moscow: APN RSFSR)

<sup>78</sup> “Cumulative List of Books Subject to Removal from Libraries and Book Retail Stores, Part II (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Vsesoiuznoi knizhnoi palaty, 1961).

suppression" may not have been nearly as dramatic as contemporary historians of science have portrayed them. Consider the following example.

Between the publication of the book of 1960 and the release of the first volume of Vygotsky's *Collected Works* in 1982 only one his book came out in the Soviet Union. Vygotsky's *Psychology of Art*, published in 1965 by *Iskusstvo* [The Art] publishers, was prepared for publication, edited, and extensively commented by a non-psychologist—Soviet linguist and semiotician Vyach. Vs. Ivanov. The editor of the book in Soviet academic circles had a reputation of a brilliant young scholar, yet a dissident, who in 1958 had been fired from Moscow State University for his public support of the banned in the Soviet Union Leonid Pasternak's Nobel Prize winning novel *Doktor Zhivago*, the friendship with its author, and the intense scientific and personal contacts with Russian-American linguist Roman Jakobson. Given the rarity and scarcity of the Soviet period publications of Vygotsky, one might assume that publishing the works of this author was virtually impossible matter, especially for a scholar of relatively lower administrative rank and somewhat suspicious political standing. However, it was only three years later, in 1968, that the second, expanded edition of this volume—including Vygotsky's "Psychology of Art", a large scholarly essay on Shakespeare's "Hamlet" of 1916 (the author's first known written major work), and sixty pages long editor's commentary—came out, in the same publishing house and yet again under the editorship of Ivanov. Apart from an eight-page Preface to the book signed by the name of A.N. Leontiev no trace of a psychologist's involvement can be detected in this publication.

In order to yet further problematize the notion of suppression as it applies to Vygotsky and his scientific legacy, one might wonder why the six-volume collection of Vygotsky's works did not come out in the Soviet Union immediately after it was sanctioned for publication by the State authorities in 1966 and the preparation of this publication started in late 1960s<sup>79</sup>. Indeed, although a number of highest

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<sup>79</sup> For various testimonies on this major publication of Vygotsky's works anticipated to come out in the second half of 1960s or early 1970s see Vygotskaya, G.L., and T.M. Lifanova. 1996. *Lev Semenovich Vygotskii. Zhizn'. Deiatel'nost'. Shtrikhi k portretu*. Moscow: Smysl; also see recent reminiscences of these events in Elkhonon Goldberg; Goldberg, E. (2005). *The wisdom paradox: How your mind can grow stronger as your brain grows older*.

administrative positions in science were occupied by a few of Vygotsky's former associates and, from theoretical standpoint, Soviet psychology appears to have been dominated by A.N. Leontiev's so-called "activity theory" the collected works of Vygotsky did not come out until after the death of a number of official "followers of Vygotsky" in power such as A.R. Luria (in 1977), A.N. Leontiev (1979) and A.V. Zaporozhets (in 1981)<sup>80</sup>. From certain perspective this phenomenon of Soviet non-publication of Vygotsky throughout the 1970s may also be seen as a case of the "suppression of Vygotsky"—perhaps even more dramatic and harmful to psychological science than the alleged, mythological suppression of the Stalinist period.

## A Revisionist Reading of Vygotsky

Although this conclusion is somewhat unexpected, it is perhaps not as surprising when considered against the wider context of Vygotskian historiography. While it is clear that this mythologized tale of victimization has been cemented within our collective memory of Lev Vygotsky, there has been a growing historiographical trend whereby many central tenets of his personal and professional narrative have been increasingly challenged by twenty-first century educators, psychologists, and historians of psychology.<sup>81</sup> This explosion of critical literature endeavors to correct both the distortions and mischaracterizations of Vygotsky's ideas present within both the English translations of his writings, and the biographical accounts authored by many of his self-proclaimed "Western-followers." Determined to debunk the many inconsistencies, contradictions, and fundamental flaws within the "Vygotskian literature" that have been perpetuated by North American scholars such as Michael Cole, James Wertsch,

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New York: Gotham books; Goldberg, E. (2012). Thank you for sharing this fascinating material-very interesting. *PsyAnima, Dubna Psychological Journal*, 5(1), 118-120.

<sup>80</sup> To Luria's credit, though, it is absolutely necessary to point out that his endless effort and persistence in publishing Vygotsky's works in English translation outside Soviet Union can hardly be overestimated.

<sup>81</sup> Gillen, "Versions of Vygotsky," 183-198; van der Veer and Yasnitsky, "Vygotsky in English," 475-493; René van der Veer, and J. Valsiner, *Understanding Vygotsky: A quest for synthesis* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); M.E. Gredler, and C.S. Shields, "Does No One Read Vygotsky's Words? Commentary on Glassman," *Educational Researcher* 33, no.2 (2000): 21-25; R. Miller, *Vygotsky in Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).



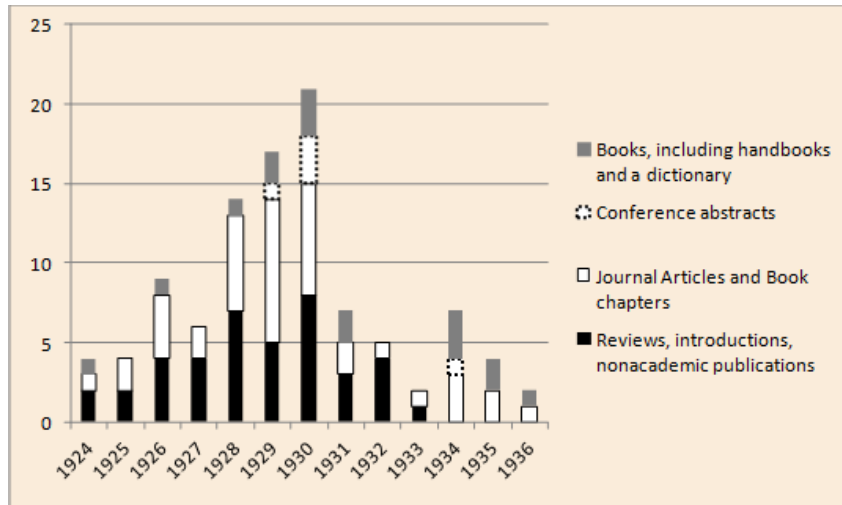
and their associates, this new generation of scholars has started to criticize the many inaccurate “versions of Vygotsky” that have been in currency throughout the late twentieth century.<sup>82</sup> These individuals have all undertaken the complex task of deconstructing the popular image of Vygotsky and have effectively undermined the historical persona that has been embedded into the disciplines of history, psychology, pedagogy and education studies. By questioning previous interpretations of the ‘Vygotsky ban’ and by providing readers with an accurate and coherent account of the events that took place within the years of 1934-1956, this study can be seen as augmenting this growing body of critical literature that advocates for a ‘revisionist reading’ of both Vygotsky’s life and developmental theory.

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<sup>82</sup> Yasnitsky, “Revisionist Revolution,” 5.

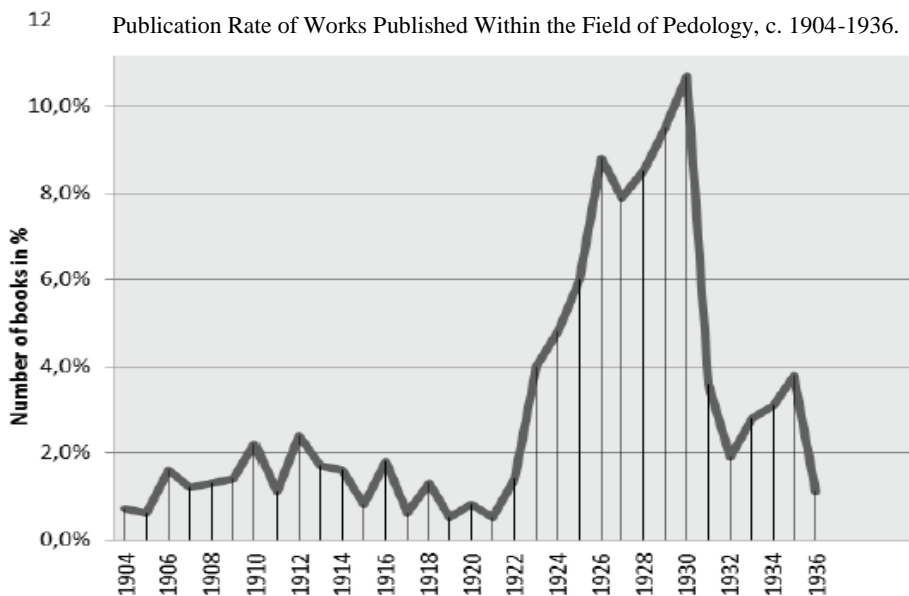
## Figures

Vygotsky's Publications in 1924-1936.



**Figure 1**

Graphical representation based upon a critical interpretation of T.M. Lifanova's compilation of Vygotsky's bibliography: T.M. Lifanova, "Bibliography of the Writings of Lev Semenovich Vygotsky," *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology* 37, no.5 (1999): 79-102. The figures have been recalculated taking into account only actually published works.



**Figure 2**

Source: Elena Minkova, "Pedology as a Complex Science Devoted to the Study of Children in Russia: The History of its Origin and Elimination," *Psychological Thought* 5, no.2 (2012): 86.

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(open access publication available online at

<http://www.psyanima.ru/journal/2012/3/2012n3a3/2012n3a3.1.pdf> )

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