Forty Years of Psychotherapy: What Have I Learned? What Am I Still Doing Here?

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At the beginning of my practice, I was very young—in fact I thought I was too young. So I grew a substantial beard and put on scholarly glasses, and hoped that would cover it. The irony is not lost on me that, while I was basically in disguise, I was urging my patients to get real and be authentic.

INTRODUCTION

I'VE SPENT 40 YEARS DOING A LOT MORE LISTENING than talking, so as I prepared for this address I was surprised to find that I have so much to say. Here's a brief road map: I'll discuss what it means to have been a psychotherapist for so many years, and what brings us to this work in the first place. I'll describe important influences and mentors in my life, and reflect on the process of mentoring. I'll talk about the gifts and the wounds that come with living the life of a psychotherapist. I'll share thoughts about what I've learned over the years, some of it serious and some playful. I'll talk about the theoretical and bureaucratic language we psychotherapists tend to use—and what that costs us. And, finally, I'll talk about what I am still doing here, after all these years.

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In starting out I want to ask the question: Why would anybody do the same thing day in, day out, for 40 years? What is that? Is it merely a habit? Is it a lack of imagination? An obsession? Or is it a spiritual calling which we choose, and which chooses us in some way? Jung says that one of the best ways to get to a deeper meaning is through fantasy or imagination, so I want to start by talking about two fantasies. In the first fantasy, a couple is walking down a back street, 63 years ago, pushing a baby carriage with a little boy in it. The husband notices an old woman sitting in a window, wearing a big, floppy black hat. She's holding a broomstick and she's got a big wart on the end of her nose. He says to his wife, "Look at that ugly old witch!" But

the old woman hears him. "Old witch?!" she shouts. "I'll show you! That boy in the carriage there; let him grow to manhood and, every day for 40 years, let him go to a small room where people come piling in, complaining and kvetching about their husbands, their wives, their sex lives, their pets, their neighbors, their hemorrhoids… And let him stagger out at the end of each day asking the question, 'Why are these people telling me these things?'" The husband turns to his wife and says, "O*h my God, I thin*k she really is a witch, and I think she just cursed our Stevie!"

That's one version of what this profession can feel like. But a much more frequent feeling is captured in the second fantasy, where the same people (obviously, my parents), pushing me down the street, pass an old Rabbi carrying a copy of the Kabbala, a book of Jewish mysticism. My mother, who is very beautiful and sweet, smiles at the Rabbi. The old man comes over to the couple and says, "That baby, may he grow to be a man, and then may he dwell in a walled garden, with people traveling near and far to confide in him their fears, their longings, their wishes and their secrets. And may he be touched, and feel his humanity expanded every day as he sits there. And, also, may he make a pretty good living!"

In fact, for the most part, my life as a psychotherapist has felt like a blessing, and I live in that walled garden most of the time. But whether I am feeling that my parents encountered the witch or the Rabbi is mainly about what's going on with me internally. I believe that's true for all of us. This work can be either a curse or a blessing depending on what's cooking in us. In 40 years, I could have had three or four different professions, but instead I have had one. So my life has been somewhat narrow in that way, but it has also been incredibly deep. I've been places that are just astounding.

Someone once asked Flannery O'Connor, the great Southern novelist, "Why do you write?" She said "Because I'm good at it." I really like her answer. I think all of us are drawn to the work because we have some facility at it. A sense of mastery and accomplishment is very rewarding, and it keeps us going. If we are really in our element, that's a reason for staying at it for a lifetime. A swan on land is a very awkward creature, but the moment it hits the water it is transformed. It glides, because it is in the right place, in its element. I don't pretend to have that kind of grace, but there is something about feeling I am in the right place that has propelled me during these years. And I think that's true for many of us.

There's a question I find very interesting: What brings us here in the first place? Why come to sit in the chair, out of all the different things we might have done? There is a body of experimental work done by developmental psychologists, showing that some infants are more drawn to human faces, and other infants are more drawn to patterns. It seems to be a hard-wired difference. Researchers have extended their thinking to say that there are hard-wired differences in the capacity for empathy. Looking out at the faces in this audience, I think that there are a lot of grown-up infants in this room who were drawn to human faces. That is one of the things that moves us to sit in the chair, and I think this is a path that many of us are on very early in life.

FAMILY INFLUENCES

In her book, *The Drama of the Gifted Child,* Alice Miller writes about what it means to grow up in a narcissistic family. This would be a family where either one parent or both are very self-absorbed, and they give a message to the child: "Don't be too interested in what *you* feel. And don't be too interested in *expressing* what you feel. If you are going to be interested in feelings, be interested in what *I* feel." In supervising and working closely with a lot of therapists, I've seen that many of us come from families where the message is "Don't be too interested in what's going on here." Lots of secrets. I think there is something natural in going from an environment with that message to a career where we, first and foremost, are interested in what the other person is feeling, and we don't necessarily tell them what we feel. There is something very powerful about that early process that I think nudges us towards the chair.

Jung said that each generation is, in some way, living out the unconscious or unfulfilled lives of the previous generation. Somehow we receive a message from our parents about the nature of their frustrations—or what their best hopes for themselves would have been—and that nudges us toward a choice. I think that was true in my family of origin. My parents were both first-generation children of Eastern European Jewish immigrants. In their respective families there was a lot of hardship. Their parents died young, and both of them had to drop out of high school and go to work to help support the family—as did their younger siblings. So, in my extended family, as I grew up, there was only one person who had gone to college and then graduate school. That was my Uncle Joe, who was a psychoanalyst in New York. I have vivid memories of conversations in the family; when his name would come up, there would be a tone of reverence and respect. It was clear that he was the educated one; he was the financially successful one. Talk about a message.

When I was 14 or 15, we went for a weekend visit at Joe's. At the end of the first evening, even though there was an additional guest room for me to stay in, Joe said, "Why don't you come and sleep in my office?" So I said, "Fine," and I went with him into his office. The first thing I saw was a black analytic couch and a big stuffed chair. He explained to me that this is where he sits, and the patient lies there, and talks to him and he helps them. It was very perplexing. So, he sits there, talking to the tops of their heads, making them feel better? *What is that?*

After he left, I noticed some big book shelves. I walked over, and the first book I saw was entitled *Totem and Taboo.* As soon as I saw the word "taboo" I went and locked the door. Then I looked at the book, which turned out to be written by a guy named "Frood"—F-R-E-U-D—very weird name. I was getting ready to open it when I spied a different book, by Krafft-Ebing, that some of you may be familiar with: *Psychopathia Sexualis.* To this day that is one of my favorite words—it's like sex with something extra added. Sexualis—beautiful! So I checked again that the door was locked and then I went and sat in Joe's big stuffed chair. I was not about to sit on the couch—I felt that if my body touched it, I'd be possessed—very dangerous. But I stayed up a good part of the night reading that book, which was an 1880s compendium of sexual perversions. It was amazing. There were things in there that, to this day, I don't want to think about! I read and read, and in the morning I felt like I was living in Merlin's lair. It felt magical—like the room was filled with sex and magic, and vibrating with it. I didn't realize that it wasn't the room vibrating with sex and magic, it was me.

This was an incredible gift from my Uncle Joe. At that time—fifteen years old—I was failing every subject in school. The guidance counselor had told my parents that the best thing for me was to drop out of an academic curriculum and perhaps, with a lot of help, I could become a printer. I think Uncle Joe understood that what I was lacking was inspiration. His inviting me to spend that time in his office did inspire me. Ten short years later I was again sitting in an over-stuffed chair in an office, but it was my own. I feel deeply indebted to Joe.

This brings me to the subject of mentors and mentoring. As I said, I think our parents give us messages that nudge us toward this job, and that is a kind of mentoring. *How* we wind up being in the chair—*who* we are in the chair—that comes in part from who our parents were. The ways that we identify with them and the ways we *dis*identify with them shape how we do the work. My mother was a very emotionally open, empathic, available woman, but she didn't defend herself well when confronted with difficult feelings. My father was the exact opposite. He was a man of action, very disinterested in feelings—his or anybody's—and very bounded. As a result of a botched dental procedure in his twenties, my father was extremely hard of hearing. So, if he had had enough or didn't want to be engaged, he would just turn off his hearing aid.

I know that without my mother—who she was, and my identification with her—I would have nothing receptive to offer my patients. But without my father, I would be lost. I'd be swamped by what comes at me. So I have needed both of them, and I have been shaped by the lively difference between them. Powerful

parental legacies also have impacted the many therapists I have supervised. Important personal attributes they bring to their work flow from an interesting mix of early identifications and *dis*identifications with their parents.

MENTORS

There are two mentors who stand out from the years of my formal education, and they stand out for opposite reasons. The first was my dissertation chair, a man named Steve Karp. During one of the last meetings I had with him before the oral defense of my dissertation, he told me that I was going to have a real problem. The head of the clinical department was displeased that I was completing the doctoral program two years earlier than previously had been the case. This man told Steve that, even without having yet read my final draft, he intended to find some problems with it in order to slow me down. He really did not want me to finish so early.

To help me get through this, Steve Karp advised me to omit areas of analysis in my dissertation. He said, "If the shark wants meat, let's decide where he sinks his teeth." So I went home and removed certain analyses from my paper, as Steve had suggested. Then, when I was attacked in my orals, I agreed to do the additional work that this predator wanted. Happily, the omitted work was sitting at my feet in my briefcase. A few weeks later—rather than the year later that it could have required to re-do my work—Steve Karp approved my dissertation and I was on my way. The shark was still circling, but I was out of the water and on dry land.

These two powerful men were significant mentors to me in opposite ways. Karp mentored me in the best of ways. His intent was to foster my growth, interpret reality as it existed in my graduate program, and celebrate my early coming-of-age. He was selfless, and present in the best sense. On the other hand, the chair of my department reflected an important, darker face of what can occur in a men-

toring relationship. His intent was for me to conform to his agenda, which was an outgrowth of his narcissism and need for control, rather than concern for my well-being. He was a modern-day version of Uranus or Kronos, the gods in Greek creation stories, who either imprisoned their children or ate them, rather than be surpassed or threatened by them. To this day, I think about those two men and I am informed about both the light and the dark possibilities in myself, as I am now the mentor. These opposing poles are both within me—whether I will be selflessly present for the other, or whether my own agendas or self-aggrandizing needs will complicate things. I consider both men mentors to me—not just the one that was positive. The one that was negative was also really important.

Following graduate school, there were two very important mentors in my early professional life. They were both highly accomplished, and very interested in helping me get on with my work. The first, Hank Ward, was an older man who was considered a renegade analyst. He was a remarkable therapist. The way Hank worked was that he never went straight at the character defenses. He always went around, or underneath, where there was deeper material. And he had a deft and light touch. I had a supervisory hour with him early on that illustrates this. I was sitting in his waiting room before a session when the door opened and a man with a big beard walked out. I was startled. I had seen pictures of Shelly Kopp on his book jackets, and it looked like Shelly. Shelly Kopp, for those of you who don't know, was one of the foremost humanistic psychologists of the time, an AAP member, who had written many books. I went in and said to Hank, "I'm not sure, but I think that was Shelly Kopp, and if that's the case, I must be sitting at the top of the mountain." Hank leaned forward. He had these amazing eyebrows, like a jungle in the middle of his forehead. He said, "Steve, what you should know is that after you leave here, I go to *my* guy—an analyst named Herb Cohen. And I know that, later in the day, Herb goes to *his* guy. What you think is a straight line up a mountain is really a circle."

It feels like such a gift for him to have said that to me. Through all these years I have supervised other therapists, I have the ongoing feeling that I am a point in a circle rather than a point in a straight line. This has fundamentally shaped how I feel in the work. If Hank had gotten busy with my intrusiveness, my pushing on his boundaries with my question, or with my self-aggrandizement in terms of "Look where I am"—I'm sure it might have been useful, but something deeper would have been missed, something which has stayed with me forever.

The other fabulous mentor in my life during those early years was former AAP president Fred Klein. Fred was Hank's polar opposite. With Fred it was: You go straight at the character, you go straight at the defenses, you push. Hank's assumption was that if you go around the defenses and get to the underlying material, then the defenses soften. Fred's assumption was: You go at character, you open it up, and then you get to the underlying material. And, of course, they were both right, and they were both brilliant at what they did.

A good Fred Klein story comes from the earliest months of my work with him. One week he missed a session. The next week I came in and sat down and said,

"I was here last week and you weren't, and, you know, I'm wondering what happened." Fred looked at me and got busy with his pipe and tobacco. After about a minute he said, very quietly, "I fucked you over."

Well, my eyes rolled into the back of my head. I was glad I didn't pass out. It was the last thing I was expecting to hear. And, you know, it was perfect. At that time in my life, I had a hard time knowing or expressing anger. Fred's message to me was, "You don't need a drop more information to know what you feel, and I'm not going to play that game." Just so deft. With that, he brought the fight right into the room. With Fred it was all action, all in the moment, and we'll get to what else is around later. He was as brilliant at working that way as Hank was brilliant in his way. We all have different mentors who teach us different things, and our work is to integrate the confusion of that. I think this was all the more compelling to me because my mother and father were so different as characters. There was something about extreme differences in people I loved that was deeply familiar and comfortable.

The other thing I feel about Hank and Fred is how much, in these early years, I identified with them, and how much their work came to inform mine. There are a couple of stories from the beginning of my private practice that are ultimately Hank and Fred stories, since they illustrate their ways of working. One day this enormous motorcycle guy walked into my office, dressed to the hilt in his biker gear. He sat down and was silent. I smiled at him and was quiet, too. This went on for 20 or 25 minutes. Finally, his face reddened and, looking at the floor, he stammered out, "My girlfriend said I should come and see you. She says I'm a pervert." A couple of minutes passed and then I asked, "Why is that?" He said, "When I ride my bike I get really charged up, and I come." He still didn't look up. I felt as if Hank were literally speaking words through my mouth as I said, "That sounds great. Really great. If you can teach me how to do that, I'll pay *you*."

The postscript to this story is kind of wild. A year went by without my seeing him again. One day as I was walking in front of my office, I suddenly heard the

loud "vroom, vroom" of a motorcycle. I looked up and there he was, sitting on top of his bike, smiling and giving me a thumbs up as he roared off. I know that therapy hour and that moment would never have happened if not for Hank.

My Fred Klein story comes from around the same era. I received a call from a man whose name I immediately recognized as a powerful, well-known politician. He came to his first session and, as he was crossing the threshold of my office, held up his hand, palm towards me, and said, "I've got to make an urgent call to the White House." This was before we'd even started. I sat down in my chair and then, all of a sudden, I guess Fred was there, because I said, "*Put the phone down!* Everybody who comes here has a job. You can either put the phone down and talk about your mother, or get out." I was looking around—"*Fred??*"

As it turns out, this man did sit down. We did talk about his mother. We spent four or five years, actually, talking about his mother, and he was terrific. But without my instinctively taking on his defenses and dealing with his control issue in the first moment, the work never would have happened. The power of identifying with people who have mentored us is just so important. It's a sweet, powerful piece of business.

Other relationships that have mentored me are less traditional. I've been shaped by years of being a husband and a father, and I am delighted that members of my family are here today. I've also been mentored by my co-therapy relationships with Helen West and Ellen Libby—both phenomenal therapists—for over 30 years. My AAP peer group members, who are present here today, are also very important to me. We have supported and held each other for longer than I can track. There are significant relationships with men from my graduate school days that have spanned my years of practice. One was Larry Tirnauer, a former President of the Academy, whose thinking was just amazing—very different from mine. I learned so much from Larry about primary process communication. Eliot Blum and Will Compton have kept me company as they have also mentored generations of therapists in the Academy. Bob Caldwell, my first Academy roommate, was extraordinary in his capacity to be authentically interested in other people. Craig Cleaves, who, despite our geographical distance and occasional contact, continues to return to the honest and deeply personal conversation we last had. I think about all those relationships as mentoring relationships. Finally, and most importantly, I have been mentored constantly by my patients and supervisees. Their willingness to trust me has kept me in the work all these years. I think mentoring is of huge importance; none of us gets to where we're going without a lot of holding, comfort, and encouragement. I've certainly had a very rich life, filled with many kinds of mentors.

PROFESSIONAL WOUNDS

I want to shift and think about a different form of learning. We grow not only from being mentored but we also learn from the wounds we've accumulated. I think anybody who is in practice gets banged up along the way. During the

1980s, at a time when I was still coming into my own as a therapist, I had two experiences that were professionally wounding to me. In their own way they were equally formative, because I had to grow in order to be able to meet them. The first was the suicide of a patient.

During his six months in a group I co-led, a member of the group continued to grow more seriously depressed and to talk of suicide. In between two hospitalizations, I happened to meet him on the street. He was holding his son, who was perhaps two years old. We talked for a moment, and as we said good-bye I said to him, "Your son is so beautiful. You have so much to live for."

Later that day he returned to the hospital. He was released without notice a few days later, and he went home and hanged himself. Each night during the next two months I replayed, over and over, every exchange I'd ever had with this man, searching, I suppose, for something I could have said that would have changed this tragedy. After awhile I was able to sleep again, but over the years that two-year-old boy is occasionally in my thoughts. By now, he would be grown and maybe have a son of his own. It occurs to me that—in thinking about that boy—I am also working out something about my own lost innocence. I had believed that my caring and my work with this man would certainly make a difference, that there would be a happy ending to his struggle, not an end to his life. What I learned was that I don't really have the power or the ultimate responsibility to keep someone else alive. I can only do my best work, and the rest belongs to them. The only life I can save is my own. It's been very important for me to accept this truth, with regret and relief, in the years that followed.

The second professional wound was an ethics complaint filed against me by a woman I had seen in a group. During an 18-month period, she had been in two destructive relationships with men, both of which ended with abortions. She was very angry at my confronting her about having some responsibility in these losses. Having discovered the wonders of a Xerox machine, she filed a wide-ranging complaint against me with five different professional organizations. This

occurred during an era when concern with victims' rights was a growing social movement. The pendulum had swung from this being an under-appreciated issue to one that was being pursued by professional organizations with an irresponsible ardor. While the complaint against me was ultimately rejected as groundless by each organization, the process stretched over a two-year period, with little or no cooperation between organizations.

During this time I learned to defend myself so that I would not become a victim of dysfunctional organizational process. The gift, in the end, was that I learned I could protect myself in these situations. I could continue to maintain mandated professional standards while being guided by my own internal sense of ethics. I learned to worry less about the possibility of an intrusive organizational knock at my door and focus more on simply doing solid work. I also learned I was capable of staying at my work with an open heart, even while removing a bloody knife from my back. Both of these experiences speak to how, in the end, we are responsible for the alchemy we bring to these kinds of wounds—whether we turn lead into gold is up to us; no one else can decide that. Often, it depends on whether we reach out for support from colleagues and mentors, or whether we retreat into shame.

There are times when we are not aware enough of the wounds we carry from doing this work. It isn't always possible; we don't always know how we are wounded. Recently, my wife and I went to see the movie, *The Soloist*—the true story of a gifted contrabassist who was living in the streets, homeless. This man was classically schizophrenic. In some scenes in the film his chaos and pain were excruciatingly portrayed. As the film ended, I began unexpectedly to weep. What came with these tears were vivid memories of my training, when I worked with profoundly disturbed patients at DC General and St. Elizabeth's Hospital. The faces of these patients came flooding back to me as I was crying, after not having thought about a single one of them for years. What I now understand is how much I needed to *not* feel, at the time, being there at such a young age. I couldn't contain that much. I was deeply touched and wounded by living so close to that kind of pain, but it was only with the passage of many years, and with the stimulus of that film, that I was able to open up to it. We don't always know what an experience is costing us. Sometimes we never know; sometimes it's to be discovered in a moment like this. In the language of Wordsworth, there are "Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

SOME THINGS LEARNED

I've done a lot of work with therapists, in supervision and in therapy over the years, and I'd like to share some didactic thoughts I have about being in practice which might be useful. But first I'd like to describe a time when I was so new in the work that every single day had major revelations. During my first month in full-time practice, a colleague in my new office suite asked me to do diagnostic testing with one of his psychotherapy patients who, he thought, might be suffer-

ing from a form of brain damage. I was eager for the work, and I immediately saw this man for many hours of psychological testing. (I filled a big portion of my open hours for the week, thank God.) Then I reported to my colleague that there were no signs of an organic process whatsoever. And for the first time I thought to ask my colleague "Why did you think there might be brain damage? I should have asked you this before." My colleague replied that he had been seeing the man for many months and the client had memory lapses. He could not seem to remember to pay my colleague's bill. Needless to say, when I sent in my bills, the client, contrary to my diagnosis, was afflicted with brain damage all over again! I felt like I was in two thirds of a *Three Stooges* movie. These were my humble beginnings. But here are some of the things I've learned:

*** I've noticed how much better a therapist's work becomes when their practice is busy enough that they no longer worry about filling an hour or losing a patient. With this freedom it becomes easier to confront defenses, to challenge character. It's less intimidating to deal with negative transference and easier to draw up and maintain boundaries and treatment contracts. While a practice grows from doing good work, good work also flows from having a good enough practice. Sometimes the most important and undermining dependency needs of a therapist are those that are well-grounded in reality.

*** Well-therapized therapists have a fairly easy time talking about the problems in their work which are grounded in childhood histories. If we are well-therapized, we know a lot about that. It's harder, though, to look at what stems from the problematic here-and-now of our lives.

*** Many therapists over-function in the hour. It's helpful to appreciate that just one thing—one new thought or deepened feeling or vivid moment of contact with the therapist—can be enormously precious and meaningful. It can be helpful to remember that music is about what happens between the notes. In therapy, much of what is important happens between sessions, unconsciously for the client, without the therapist being present. It's important to remember that, and to let the work be carried by the person sitting across from us. It's theirs.

*** Conversely, how often do we blame the patient and speak of their resistance rather than speak to our own difficult feelings in doing the work? Perhaps it is our need that the patient change. How often do we recognize that it is *our* work with the patient that is stuck, or that *we* may not be a good match for the patient.

*** When therapists are tired or stressed, their work slowly gravitates towards the content of the hour and away from more demanding aspects. When I'm more awake and more rested, I have more energy to attend to affect, transference and countertransference, and in-the-moment relational work. When I'm in a more depleted place, this kind of work may feel too difficult. It's unrealistic to expect that we will always be at our best.

*** We do not always know ahead of time what part of our waking or dream lives are being carried into the session. If it goes well, we may *become* aware of what we are bringing during the flow of the hour. Also, it is not always easy to know how the affect, energy, or our countertransference reactions from one therapy hour bleed into another hour. I think we often don't pay attention to what's happening inside us during the flow of the day. The cumulative impact can be profound. Even if you started your day as a fresh, blank slate, how can anyone stay that way after a few hours of doing the work?

*** Whether we understand it or not, it's helpful to assume that the texture and flow of our unconscious life is always shaping what the patient is feeling and talking

about. Always. Likewise, the cumulative unconscious material of our patients affects us in ways that we don't necessarily understand. Why would it be otherwise?

*** We all have transferences, not just to individual patients or a session, but to our overall practice. It's helpful to think of our practice as an object in and of itself. If it represents an overly demanding parent, we'll be exhausted by it, and it won't grow. If it represents an unpredictable parent that didn't feed us well, we may never feel safe in the work. This may result in our overworking to guard against our practice disappearing or failing us. There are many more examples. These transferences to the practice itself shape whether we thrive in it or not.

*** How we feel in doing the work over many years is not going to be unwavering. As with any attachment or commitment, it helps to know that this changes over time, because it should. How or if we stay in healthy relationship to our work, like every other important detail in our life, is a matter of our character and our karma. Related to this idea are a few questions that I find valuable for myself, and that I sometimes articulate in supervision. First: Is this work healthy for me? Does it enrich or deplete the rest of my life? And, second: Have I developed a financial life and a lifestyle that frees me up? Or have I created a reality that disappoints and encumbers me? What we feel in our work is related to the kind of pressure or abundance that we have created in our life. A third question is: Has my practice changed over time to reflect shifting developmental changes in my life? For example, I've worked with some women who, after they have a child, just don't have the same feeling about their practice. A mother's milk may now be spent mostly at home. My point is that, unless you have a clear picture that things should change and that you'll need to navigate and negotiate the changes, you can run into trouble. As we age, this question needs to be looked at over and over again.

*** Do I feel safe in the work of my practice? Am I excessively aware of external realities such as insurance companies, licensing boards and ethical committees? Or am I grounded in the healthy directions of my own internal compass? Attending to these external organizations can be costly if you turn away from what's inside, while you are looking over your shoulder trying to protect yourself. It can be a huge loss.

I hope you find some of these notions useful—or even just one of them.

SOUL VS. INTELLECT

I promised in the brochure that I would rant, so now I want to complain about the insurance companies and their use of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual,* the DSM. Insurance reimbursement has driven support for an ever-increasing medicalization of our profession. The language of our profession is increasingly shaped by the diagnoses outlined in the DSM, which are the basis for third-party payments. It is important to understand that language always shapes thinking; and the way we think about our patients' difficulties ultimately shapes the treatment we offer them. So the language of the DSM affects more than whether payment is made.

On a more human level, I would like to talk about a patient I have treated for many years. According to DSM IV, my patient was afflicted with an illness described as "transvestic fetishism," #302.3. This was a fancy way of saying that this man, who had been in a successful heterosexual marriage for many years, secretly enjoyed dressing up in women's clothing as part of his sexual repertoire. You can read any number of theorists on how each of us develops our unique sexual tastes,

and the number of categories is dizzying. But the complex human story of this man's sexual preference goes like this (I have changed certain details to protect his privacy): As a young child he was raised in a war-torn part of Europe, and he was, on occasion, sent by his family, without warning or explanation, to live in an orphanage. In this orphanage, boys who misbehaved were punished by being dressed up in girls' clothing. He did not understand why he was there or when he would be able to go home; he lived in a world without meaning or explanation. This spirited little boy was often in trouble at the orphanage, and spent many nights crying himself to sleep, humiliated by being dressed in girls' clothing. He eventually came to cling to this clothing, rather than being ashamed of it. In effect, he became his own absent and longed-for mother, which did much to save his psychic life. Years later, the complicated expression of all this history came to rest as an aspect of his sexual preferences.

In time, with years of hard work in his own therapy and in couples' therapy with his wife, he began to live without holding this aspect of himself as a secret any more. He came to appreciate the importance of his history in this preference, and he and his wife learned to make space for this aspect of him in what otherwise was a more traditional sexual life. During a couples session with his wife, he confided that what he actually wanted for his birthday was a new set of golf clubs and some lace panties—and she was open to that. In addition to his wife's acceptance and growing sexual creativity, the women in his psychotherapy group slowly came to rely on him, in a playful way, for consultation on their wardrobes. In return, he invited and pushed them to talk about their own sexual appetites, which opened things up in the group in a phenomenal way. Happily, he came to be not so alone.

Thinking about this case now, I wonder how applying the diagnosis "transvestic fetishism" would have contributed anything to this man's unique story. As Alfred Korzybski, the semanticist and philosopher, famously said, "The map is not the territory." If we have to use a map, or a diagnostic category, in thinking

about my patient, maybe a name like "resourceful little boy" or "gifted sexual man" might be more fitting and bring us closer to the real territory.

But the problem of reductionist language is not just with the DSM. I think the problem is often with us. For example, recently a new and well-trained supervisee told me that his patient was obviously borderline because "The patient has extreme splits between the good breast and the bad breast, and is struggling with conflictual derivatives of object relationships, associated with relatively disassociated states, and has failed to negotiate the developmental hurdles associated with the rapprochement stage of 18 months of age."

Now, even at the age of 14 or 15, I knew there was no such thing as a bad breast! So I didn't know what this supervisee was telling me! But—to get back to the case—already in our initial meeting I knew that this supervisee must want to *kill* this patient, because I'm drowning in his language and wanting to kill *him*. I've learned in 40 years not to necessarily share that feeling in the first session—unless I'm working too many hours and want someone to go away. We all remember what it's like to want to win the approval of a supervisor, but there must be a better way. My point is that, while such language may say something about the patient's early background, it is of limited utility in helping us know how to do the work. It has been my experience that therapists who are most focused on theory regarding the patient may know little about what it takes to actually move the therapy along. It depends on whether the theoretical language is used by the therapist as an intellectual wall to create distance, or whether it informs the therapist how to more sensitively hold the patient or establish contact.

A great example of ducking the truth by using theoretical language relates to the famous falling out between Freud and Jung. In college I spent many hours studying this falling out, which concerned differences in their theories of sexuality. I met weekly with a professor, who was also an analyst, and we endlessly discussed these differences between the great men. Then, in 1982, Aldo Carotenuto

published their previously unknown letters to each other and to a woman named Sabina Spielrein, who was Jung's first analytic patient. She had entered therapy as a very disturbed 19-year-old. Over time she became not only Jung's patient, but also his lover. Freud and Jung corresponded frequently about her case. Their theoretical rift escalated some years later, just as the love affair exploded and this young woman—who was by then becoming a psychoanalyst—left Jung in Zurich to become part of Freud's analytic circle in Vienna. What had looked like a fight over theoretical differences—which I studied exhaustively—was actually a fight over ego, turf, and a girl.

While Freud was postulating a theory that sexual energy underlay everything else, Jung was postulating a narrow theory of sexuality, while also having a lot of sex! Leave it to the masters to inform us by example what may be dressed up under tons of erudition and verbiage. I wish now that my college hours spent reading about Freud and Jung's theoretical rift had been spent instead reading Homer's *Iliad,* which so beautifully describes the Achaeans war with the Trojans over the kidnapping of Queen Helen, who was a real babe. That would have been so much more to the point.

Clearly, I am drawn to literature rather than theory. I have read a lot of theory about the process of attachment, beginning with Bowlby's work, and about Jung's notions regarding separation and individuation. But Jung himself said, "Wherever I've been, poets have been there first." To highlight this truth, I'd like to share lines from two poems. The first is by Pablo Neruda. In Sonnet XVII of his *100 Hundred Love Songs*, Neruda writes:

> where *I* does not exist, nor *you,*
> so close that your hand on my chest is my hand.
> so close that your eyes close as I fall asleep.

If according to theory these lines of poetry are about codependency, get me some of that!

Mary Oliver's poem, "The Journey," which many of you know, talks about separation and individuation. Here is some particularly powerful language from this poem. *[Editor's note: The speaker quoted the poem, which speaks from the point of view of someone who leaves a familiar place, despite the pleading voices of others, and who walks alone through unfamiliar territory, and is gradually able to hear his/her own inner voice.]*

The lines from this poem, which I've shared with clients at times, capture the anguish and the exhilaration in certain critical moments where there are choices that must be made between attachment to another and attachment to one's deepest self. Poetry is the language that speaks to our soul rather than to our intellect. It pushes us to a deeper place from which we can meet our clients.

WHY AM I STILL HERE?

I'd like to conclude by answering that question: What am I still doing here? Each day as I sit in my chair I am, in effect, in a rich meditation. From this place,

I'm more aware than I am in my day-to-day living—by far. Additionally, I'm in a place where my heart is often wide open. It's intentional. It's thoughtful. It's consistent. My being so open to another person moves me to a more spiritual place and gets me out of myself. The opportunity to get closer to being my better self is precious to me. Frankly, I need the help. Sitting in the chair, it's clear to me that I am very anchored there.

It's impossible to do psychotherapy without being up against the uplifting truth of how fabulously different and unique we all are. At the same time, it's amazing how much the same we are. Day by day at work I am heartened by this truth. It's something I have an almost inexhaustible appetite for, and it has kept me at my work. As I have grown older and lost a lot of dear friends, the limitation of my own time is real to me, for the first time in my life. I am aware that every hour spent in the chair is an hour I am not someplace else. That's a powerful notion, a new notion for me. For now, I plan to remain close to the work, which has fed my well-being over the years, while also trying to hold on to this new perspective.

In preparing for this talk, I came across an article I wrote for *Voices* in 1979. I had forgotten about it—hadn't seen it for years. It was an Intervision response to someone who had written in with a question about burnout. When I saw it I immediately wanted to get into a debate with myself. "You're 32 years old, you've been in practice eight years. What do you know about burnout? Give me a break!" But then I read what I wrote and it was about change, which touched me. I described moving from my first office to a new office overlooking the Potomac, with a beautiful view of the river. I said, "From morning to morning I'm amazed at now much the color and current change. Rivers and men don't stand still for long…"

In some ways I have stayed in the same place for a long time; however, I feel like I have been powerfully on the move the entire time. The current of the work has moved me to places I never could have imagined, and I am very grateful for that. I am also very grateful to be in your company, as we are in the same deep waters, moved by the same deep currents. Thank you.

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